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Psychological Manipulation and Cluster-B Personality Traits of Cult Leaders

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Abstract

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MS, Colorado Technical University, 2015

BA, Regis University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Cults, thousands of which exist in the United States, present a societal problem due to
their ability to rob followers of free will, sever familial ties, and even incite violence,
such as the case of the Manson Family. Their leaders' manipulation of followers can be
dangerous, resulting in emotional and physical abuse. There is a lack of meaningful
literature on how personality traits may affect cult leaders' abilities to recruit and
maintain members. The purpose of this study was to examine how Cluster-B personality
traits (narcissism, borderline, antisocial, and histrionic) relate to cult leaders' abilities to
manipulate. The qualitative case study involved analysis of publicly available archival
data on six high-profile male cult leaders. Data were analyzed using interpretative
phenomenological analysis and viewed through the theoretical framework of trait theory.
The two key themes that were identified encompass (a) the fluidity of manipulation
tactics that cult leaders use when challenged and (b) the shift in manipulation tactics from
fostering a view of themselves as a prophet to claiming that they are a savior or messiah.
Leaders exhibited different five-factor personality traits when challenged. The findings
show that Cluster-B personality traits exist on a spectrum and are often used in tandem to
master manipulation tactics. Research on nonviolent cults is recommended. The study
may contribute to positive social change by improving experts' understanding of how cult
leaders work, which could enable experts to devise interventions to help potential cult
followers and their families.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to my family, who has constantly encouraged me to go further and try harder. I never would have been able to accomplish this task without them. Most importantly to my amazing fiancé Ben Kamer, whose continuous encouragement and motivation kept me going through this journey. Through the ups and downs, you always seemed to pick me up to see me through to the finish line. I cannot wait to marry you.

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Also, an acknowledgement to those friends and family members who stood by my side during many late-night school nights, homework assignments, and reading drafts upon drafts. I am forever grateful for your support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In this study, I examined the psychological manipulation tactics used by male cult leaders and the relationship those tactics have to Cluster-B personality traits, which include narcissism, antisocial, borderline, and histrionic personality traits. The impetus for conducting this study was the lack of existing literature on the trifecta relationship between tactics, cult leaders, and personality traits. The research may help educate and inform others about the dangers of cult leaders while also prompting more research regarding the topic at hand. Chapter 1 begins with an examination of the background of the problem and statements of the main problem and purpose of the study. Next, I will present the research question, followed by brief overviews of the theoretical framework and nature of the study. Relevant definitions are provided before the chapter concludes with a discussion of the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of this study.

Background

According to Henson (n.d.) there are a variety of cults that impact different sociological demographics. Regardless of this variety, cults raise social concerns about the potential for mass suicide, murder, and sexual assault. Joining a cult is also associated with other traumas. Mental anguish, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, or depression are common implications of cult membership, and some former cult members have difficulty adjusting to life after being in a cult (Henson, n.d.). Cult environments, whether violent or nonviolent, can mentally strain and affect individuals for a long time. Cult environments do not function like real-world societies; the followers are conditioned and

made to believe that they need to think, speak, and act a certain way—that they need to lose themselves to be a member. With their free will gone, followers now abide by the governance set forth by the cult leader.

Cult leaders come from different walks of life and have unique personalities. According to a California based therapist, Barnstein, who specializes in treating former cult members, there are three types of cult leaders: a narcissist, a martyr, or an egomaniac (Naftulin, 2020). Cult leaders are commonly described as pathologically narcissistic (Husten, 2012; Naftulin, 2020). The implications of these traits for cult leaders' leadership and governance over followers are the reason why cults are a societal problem. In a *Psychology Today* article by Husten (2012), a former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) special agent who spent time investigating cults in the United States, stated that prolific or dangerous cult leaders believe that they are special and are the answer to all problems. It can therefore be inferred that a cult leader's personality may affect their ability to manipulate their followers.

The research was needed because cults are a societal problem due to psychological ramifications for members, as indicated by the experiences of survivors of Jonestown and Waco (Pearson, 2018; Sherman & Wolochatiuk, 2007). Additionally, in some extreme cases, cult followers have died because of their devotion, such as the followers of Heaven's Gate and the People's Temple (Chua-Eoan & Cole, 1997; Kohl, 2017). In other cases, cult followers have committed murder, such as the Manson Family, who are known for the Tate–LaBianca murders (Sever, 2019). Survivors who escape cults often suffer extreme mental anguish, feel they have lost their way, and cannot cope

outside of the cult (Jenkinson, 2013). According to a cult expert and psychologist, Steve Eichel in 2023 the number of cults is close to 10,000 in the United States alone; of note, this number is lower than when cults were more prominent in the 1970s (LaRosa, 2018). However, cults are still in existence and therefore research is still important. According to Henson (n.d.), some cults are peaceful and nonviolent, whereas other cults, such as Aum Shinrikyo and the People of God, can commit acts of violence against their own members or others (Borowick, 2007; Lifton, 2004). Therefore, the potential physical and emotional pain cult followers face is high, making this area of study important, given the high associated risk.

Problem Statement

The literature on cult leaders is vast and covers a wide array of topics; however, research is lacking on the personality traits of cult leaders (in particular, as they exist on a spectrum) and address the traits influence the psychological manipulation tactics of cult leaders. According to Butts (2019), individuals who master psychological manipulation are often narcissists, a personality disorder that falls under Cluster-B in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; *DSM-5*; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). According to Ogden (2019), Cluster-B personality disorders, per the *DSM-5*, are often represented by erratic and dramatic behaviors by an individual in two or more areas such as "cognition, affectivity, interpersonal functioning, or impulse control" (p. 646). As cult leaders appear to have a strong desire for admiration and lack empathy for their followers, it would make sense that they possess traits of Cluster-B personality disorders (Butts, 2019). Burke (2006) suggested that cult leaders are more

than likely to meet the criteria for narcissistic personality disorder; however, it should not be discounted that cult leaders can exhibit traits of antisocial personality disorder. By understanding the different personality types of cult leaders, it may be possible to delineate types of common manipulation tactics the various leaders share. There remains a gap in the literature on how certain personality traits of cult leaders affect their tactics of psychological manipulation.

Purpose of the Study

Based on the risk of significant harm to others that cult leaders pose, there was a need to explore how Cluster-B personality traits of male cult leaders affected the psychological manipulation tactics they used. I sought to expound upon research of prolific cult leaders, by examining the presentation of Cluster-B personality traits in selected cases. The research included an examination of the psychological manipulation tactics used and how those may relate to Cluster-B personality traits.

Research Question

I sought to answer the following research question: How do tactics of psychological manipulation relate to specific Cluster-B personality traits? The importance of this question resides in its potential to expand understanding of how psychological manipulation tactics interact with and are related to Cluster-B personality traits. Psychological manipulation tactics are the efforts put forth by the cult leaders, and understanding those tactics may provide insight into the ability these male cult leaders embody. The research is critical to understanding the tactics used because it illuminates tactics that convince their followers to do the cult leaders' bidding. It is also imperative to

understand the manipulation process because it also highlights foundations used by these cult leaders when it comes to brainwashing. Cluster-B personality traits are frequently seen amongst cult leaders, and further analysis of these specific traits was warranted (Burke, 2006). I focused on Cluster-B traits because of the literature on cult leaders and those specific traits (e.g., Burke, 2006; Husten, 2012; Naftulin, 2020). As Butts (2019) noted, these personality traits might affect psychological manipulation tactics.

Theoretical Framework

Trait theory (Miller, 2019), originally developed by psychologist Gordon Allport in the 1930s, concerns the understanding of individual personalities. Trait theory, specifically the five-factor model (FFM) or the Big Five, uses five traits of human personality to establish a basis of understanding human characteristics: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion/introversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Lindsay et al., 2018; Miller, 2019). I used the FFM to understand and organize Cluster-B personality traits that are attributable to cult leaders. Factoring in neuroticism, low agreeability, and lack of conscientious by using the FFM was helpful in operationalizing the specific personality traits that cult leaders use to employ their manipulation tactics. The theory assisted in answering the research question of how personality traits affect psychological manipulation tactics.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative case study approach. By conducting a case study, I had flexibility in sampling and was able to achieve a thorough understanding of the common manipulative tactics used by cult leaders and how certain personality traits contribute to

successful manipulative abilities. By focusing on highly publicized cases of male cult leaders, whose cults resulted in extreme devastation including death to their followers and others, I was able to gain insights about these individuals that would not have been possible had I used quantitative methods. This case study of cult leaders includes information regarding prolific cult leaders, but most importantly provides examples of the devastation cults bring to their devotees and society. In studying the psychological manipulation tactics of cult leaders, I wanted to highlight the dangers of all cults, not just extreme cults. The method used for the case study involved the gathering and analysis of archival and public data. The cases that were selected were prolific cult leaders who had shown extreme violence and incited harm onto others. I collected data by reading academic journals, books, and other publications, and reviewing documentaries on the selected cult leaders. I used the data analysis tool, NVivo, to help identify themes.

Definitions

Brainwashing: The method of altering thought processes through conditioning and persuasion for control purposes (Hunter, 2016).

Cluster-B: A series of traits, often associated with a personality disorder, characterized by erratic, high emotions, or impulsive behaviors (Mayo Clinic, n.d.).

Congregation/followers: A religious organization's internal community or religious social institution (Chaves, 2004).

Cult: A new religious organization or movement that is often removed from the stigma of traditional religious organizations (e.g., Christianity, Islam, Judaism) and that operates with its own ideology (Lewis, 2014).

Cult leader: An individual who is in charge of a cult (García, 2018).

Enabling: A process where an individual assists another person to achieve a desired outcome (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Isolation: A condition of being kept away from or separated (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Personality disorder: A problem within a personality causing distress or impairment on a personal level (Newton-Howes, 2015).

Prolific leader: A leader of extreme importance and influence. For the purpose of the research, "prolific" will be used in the context of someone who reigns over a congregation.

Prophet: A designated religious leader who is to put forth religious doctrine from the divine commander (Bekker, 2010).

Psychological manipulation: The process of influence through mental and emotional mistreatment to gain control over an intended victim (Preston, 2015).

Traits: A set of determined characteristics developed within the early stages of life that is used to predict personality styles (Jordan, 2011).

Assumptions

I assumed that, by conducting a qualitative study, that I would have the ability to identify and address themes attributable to the research findings. An additional assumption was that the findings on male cult leaders would be based on accurate and truthful data. Accurate data was essential for achieving the purpose of the study.

Scope and Delimitations

I conducted this study to address the gap in the literature regarding how psychological manipulation tactics of male cult leaders relate to Cluster-B personality traits. Researchers have extensively analyzed cult leaders and Cluster-B personality traits and psychological manipulation, though they have focused on the phenomena independent of each other. The literature does not include examination of the relationship between personality trait and psychological manipulation. The gap was explored by examining prolific cult leaders with documented acts of violence. I included in the study cult leaders who influenced individuals to commit suicide, murder, and domestic terrorism. The study was restricted to a sample of prolific male cult leaders in the United States. It is important to note that due to the nature of qualitative studies, the research is not generalizable or transferable (Ali & Yusof, 2011).

Limitations

For the research, the threats to credibility are generalized results due to a case study approach and the inevitability of preconceptions in coding data (Schonfeld & Mazzola, 2012). The inevitability of preconceptions when handling prolific cult leaders presents a limitation because to have a succinct case study, bias needs to be removed. However, many of these individuals who are being assessed were, at some point in time, prevalent in modern history. For the case study to increase its credibility the research needs to include rich data and peer reviewed articles (Schonfeld & Mazzola, 2012). Additionally, having two rich data sources helps increase the reporting of commonalities to determine themes in the case study (Schonfeld & Mazzola, 2012). The rich data

sources will assist in increasing the credibility of the research at hand. I used NVivo for data analysis to ensure accuracy and to identify themes.

Additional limitations include the lack of transferability and personal bias. Regarding lack of transferability, the research was qualitative in nature and, therefore, its findings have limited transferability. The ability to apply the research to other contexts or settings and with other respondents is the premise of transferability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Although the research may support additional research, including research adjacent to the sampling provided, the ability to generalize from the study findings is limited beyond the focus of the current study. The third limitation was researcher bias. The research was centered on prolific cult leaders who are well known, making the development of researcher bias probable. To reduce the potential for personal bias, I used bracketing (see Chen & Zhang, 2020).

Significance

I addressed the gap in literature regarding the link between common psychological manipulation tactics and personality traits possessed by cult leaders. To do so, I used trait theory, specifically the FFM, to help understand how the personality traits of cult leaders affects the psychological manipulation tactics they use (see Miller, 2019). The research may bring attention to the danger cult leaders present to society based upon the characteristics of the manipulative tactics they use to harm their followers. The study has the potential to bring about social change by providing academics important insights that further their understanding of the commonalities of psychological manipulation tactics used by cult leaders.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the current gap in literature on the relationship between psychological manipulation and Cluster-B personality traits of cult leaders. The focus of the research question was on how tactics of psychological manipulation relate to specific Cluster-B personality traits. I used a qualitative case study approach to highlight commonalities between cult leader personality traits and psychological manipulation. I used the FFM to help understand human characteristics. The limitations of the study include threats to credibility, lack of transferability, and personal bias. The significance of this study is in its potential to show the societal dangers of cults, facilitate future research, and bring about social change through education regarding cults. In Chapter 2, I review literature regarding the theoretical foundation of the study, cults, personality traits, and psychological manipulation. The purpose of the next chapter is to provide a deep and thorough understanding of what cults, Cluster-B personality traits, and psychological manipulation are, and to highlight the current gaps in the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Cults are organizations or movements characterized by unique or unusual religious/spiritual beliefs or practices (Olsson, 2011; Walsh et al., 1995; Zablocki & Robbins, 2001). The environmental foundation of cults can span from religious, political, or psychotherapeutic (Dubrow-Marshall & Dubrow-Marshall, 2015; Leroy, 2004). Often the distinguishing mark of a cult is the presence of a charismatic authoritarian figure, an individual who uses their enigma to entice followers to devote their lives to the new religious movement (CEI, 2014; García, 2020; Pretorius, 2004; Walsh et al., 1995). As researchers (Evans, 1997; Freckelton, 1998; Galanter, 1996) have noted, cults offer followers a religion detached from the foundation of organized religions such as Christianity and Judaism. Of note, cults became more prevalent in globally at a time when the following of Christianity and Judaism began to decrease in the 1960s (Aronoff et al., 2000; Evans, 1997).

According to Cowan and Bromley (2015), some people believe cults represent everything dangerous about religious organizations because of the deviations in the practices. Walsh (1995) observed that cults are dangerous because of their use of "destructive persuasion" (p. 339). However, researchers have identified a portion of the population who see new religious movements, or cults, as new constructs of human behavior and beliefs (Cowan & Bromley, 2015; Galanter, 1996, 1999). The argument for whether cults are good or bad is charged with rationalization from both sides. However, it is important to delineate violent from nonviolent cults. Cowan and Bromley noted that

most new religious movements are not violent but given the attention violent cults

receive, nonviolent cults are often seen in a negative light as well.

Lalich (2009), a former cult member, separated violent cults from practicing new

religious moments or nonviolent cults. Not every cult is going to die by mass suicide, like

in Jonestown (Kohl, 2017), and not every cult leader is going to convince their followers

to commit murder, like Charles Manson (Heyman et al., 2017). However, the charismatic

leader, a prominent figure in cults, is often the master of manipulation who thrusts these

cults into violent acts. The acts of violence are a result of ideological extremism, which is

a manifestation of psychological manipulation and isolation (Aronoff et al., 2000;

Dubrow-Marshall & Dubrow-Marshall, 2015; Freckelton, 1998; Lalich, 2009).

According to Evans (1997), most cults abhor violent cults. The glaring difference

between violent and nonviolent cults is present in the actions of the cults. However, it is

important to note a similarity between the two entities. Violent cults and nonviolent cults

mimic similar belief systems, social constructs, societal behavioral norms, and devotion

to a higher authoritarian figure (Galanter, 1999). Research conducted by Dubrow-

Marshall and Dubrow-Marshall (2015) shows that members of cults often go through the

process of psychological manipulation. As Lifton (1961) and Singer (2003) noted that

common techniques often try to suppress behaviors and/or to train other behaviors in

people, are certain manipulation tactics. The key takeaway is that no matter if the cult is

violent or nonviolent, cult members will experience brainwashing. Furthermore, if a cult

is nonviolent that still does not mean they do not present a societal problem due to

psychological manipulation efforts used against their members. The psychological

ramifications are detrimental to one's health and can inhibit their ability to reacclimate

back into society upon deciding to leave the cult; this is a result of prolonged separation

from family and their own inability to think for themselves (Dubrow-Marshall &

Dubrow-Marshall, 2012).

The societal problems stemming from the impact of cult existence includes a wide

array of social issues. According to Hjelm (2013), societal problems of cults can include

"child abuse, criminal activity, financial irregularity, breaking up of families, sexual

perversion, and the employment of brainwashing techniques" (p. 198). Aronoff et al.

(2000) and Galanter (1999) noted that families often start noticing changes in their family

member who joined a cult, up to and including disavowing their family name or

committing suicide. This is a societal problem because a cult can fracture relationships

within families creating a void amongst the familial relationships.

Harmful effects extend beyond physical acts of violence and include mental

abuse, familial separation, and societal harassment against those who disagree with the

cult (Aronoff et al., 2000). As Dubrow-Marshall and Dubrow-Marshall (2015) noted, cult

members often experience mental abuse through psychological manipulation, also known

as brainwashing. The cult members' free will is essentially taken away (Coleman, 1984).

Many former cult members experience "significant adjustment difficulties" (p. 1) after

leaving the cult (Aronoff et al., 2000). Furthermore, in a sample of 75 past cult members,

Walsh et al. (1995) identified that those who are completely indoctrinated into the cult

develop high levels of neuroticism and often have difficulties returning to normalcy. In a

study of the cult family the Children of God, Freckelton (1998) detailed the harmful

effects most routinely seen within cult members that are a result of psychological manipulation. On the extreme end of harmful effects, the list includes mass suicide, like Jim Jones; murder, like that committed by the Manson Family; and the attempted Sarin attack in Tokyo by Aum Shinrikyo (Borowick, 2007; Heyman et al., 2017; Kohl, 2017; Lifton, 2004). Upon entering a cult, a member will see all the possibilities, but not necessarily recognize the long-lasting harm they may experience.

The purpose of this study was to address a gap in literature by identifying common tactics of psychological manipulation amongst cult leaders and the link to common Cluster-B personality traits. I sought to identify the role psychological manipulation and Cluster-B personality traits play amongst prolific cult leaders. I used a qualitative approach to identify unique tactics, characteristics, and themes amongst cult leaders, including Jim Jones, Charles Manson, Marshall Applewhite, Yahweh ben Yahweh, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, and David Koresh. Qualitative analysis provided an in-depth understanding and revealed any connections between psychological manipulation and Cluster-B personality traits. The approach was useful in highlighting essential and common themes amongst the different case studies. I explored how a cult leader's personality traits affect their use of psychological manipulation within their cults.

I begin this chapter by reviewing the literature search strategy I used. I then provide an in-depth review of the theoretical foundation. A review of the literature follows with an in-depth discussion of psychological manipulation including its origins and typologies. Next, the distinction between Cluster-B personality disorders and traits will be clarified and their relationship to antisocial behaviors explored. Additionally, a

review of the literature on cults, including classifications, is presented. This chapter

concludes with a broad summary of findings and a preview of Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

Based upon the gap in the literature regarding common manipulation tactics used

by cult leaders, a search of Walden University's library for articles related to cult leaders,

personality traits and disorders, and psychological manipulation was conducted. The

databases used to conduct the research are Walden University Library, Science Direct,

and Google Scholar. Key words used were *"Cluster-B," "Narcissism OR Borderline*

Personality Disorder OR Antisocial Personality Disorder OR Histrionic Personality

Disorder," "personality disorders," "personality traits," and *"Five-Factor Model".*

Term words used were *"prolific," "vulnerable," "introversion," "extroversion,",*

"extraversion," "anti-social," and *"borderline,".* Search strings were "*Cult Leaders*

AND Personality Disorders," "Psychological Manipulation AND Personality

Disorders," "Cult Leaders AND Psychological Manipulation".

Theoretical Foundation

Trait theory (Miller, 2019) was originally developed by psychologist Gordon

Allport in the 1930s and examines the understanding of individual personalities. Research

by McAdams (2000) identifies Allport's definition of personality as "the dynamic

organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his [or

her] unique adjustments to his [or her] environment" (p. 124). A critical component of

understanding trait theory is the associated component called the Big-5, which is

explained by Miller (2019), as the five-factor model of personality (FFM) which uses five

traits of human personality to establish a basis of understanding human characteristics.

Before understanding the five different traits, it is important to understand the baseline of

why the FFM is foundational in understanding personality traits. The Diagnostic and

Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) was developed to assess maladaptive traits

within the personality disorder model (van Dijk et al., 2021). The FFM is synonymous

with understanding normative personality traits within five domains, which will be

expanded upon down below (van Dijk et al., 2021). The FFM argues that personality

traits exist on a spectrum versus using a categorical approach, such as that used in the

DSM, and this started with the philosophical principles of personalistics founded by

William Stern around 1935 (Amini et al., 2015; McCrae & Costa, 1987; Stern, 1935). To

sum up, personalistics is a system which theorizes people's character cannot be summed

up in a collection of attributes (McCrae & Costa, 2021; Stern, 1935). To expand on the

differences between FFM and DSM-5, Suzuki et al. (2017) breaks down that the DSM-5

is flawed using a categorical approach which explains the disconnection of functioning

personality traits. Within the same research, the FFM helps to understand and normalize

maladaptive personality traits (Suzuki et al., 2017). In research by Lamiell (2009), it is

believed that a person has identifiable characteristics as well as personality traits. Lamiell

(2009) believes the best way to understand traits, you need to understand the person not

population standards. The measurement of traits by a raw score is irrelevant, and must be

comprehended through interpersonal perspective (Lamiell, 2009; McCrae & Costa,

2021). McCrae and Costa (2021) highlight methods in which humans respond to

situations, personal code of ethics, morals and values, interests and dislikes, and

relationships. This understanding about differing factors is associated with the FFM, because traits are basic instincts responding to external factors which influence character modifications to increase functionality (McCrae & Costa, 2021). The development research has helped to identify that personality traits are dynamic and not static and understanding personality traits is also understanding character adaptations (Ashton & Lee, 2010; McCrae & Costa, 2021; Soto & John, 2017).

Furthermore, the FFM has been used in various studies to predict criminal behavior, of the five traits (agreeability, conscientiousness, extroversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience), agreeability and extroversion has been linked to criminal offending; the findings were collected through surveys provided by the researchers (Miller and Lyman, 2001; Wall et al., 2019; Wiebe, 2004). In the research by Wiebe (2004), the FFM was used to predict antisocial personality traits. A complication in detecting criminal behavior within the FFM of traits, is often those exhibiting criminal behavior try to hide their intentions (Wiebe, 2004). Blackburn and Coid (1998) collected data from 167 male inmates categorized as psychopathic, determined by the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-III Axis II disorders (SCID-II) and the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R), was used to clarify the relationship between those with psychopathic personality disorder and other personality disorders; most notably there was an indication psychopaths meet the criteria for ASPD, but a higher likelihood paranoid, histrionic, narcissistic, borderline, and passive-aggressive disorders. However, Blackburn and Coid (1998) also highlight the limitation of the studies due to the lack of comprehensive integration of the FFM and the fact data was collected through patient

files, not interviews. O'Riordan and O'Connell (2014) took a specific look at how the

FFM can be used to predict different outcomes because of personality, and the resulting

relationship to offending behavior. The information was gathered through the National

Child Development Study in Scotland and examined 17,634 people born in 1 week in the

month March 1958, examining different gender, social class, and education; a logistical

regression identified that high extraversion, low agreeableness, conscientiousness, in

conjunction with gender, emotional stability, and trouble in school, helps to predict

offending behavior (O'Riordan & O'Connell, 2014).

Jones et al. (2011) showcased that personality traits are predictors for criminal

offending through comprehensive research of empirical articles to highlight the FFM's

relationship to criminal behavior. The researchers conducted a meta-analytic study

review of 123 articles exploring facet level relationships between the FFM and

externalizing behaviors. (Jones et al., 2011). The research highlights the relationship that

neuroticism has a positive relationship (r=0.92) to the domains of aggression and anti-

social personality disorder, where agreeableness (r=-.31) and conscientiousness (-.23) has

a negative relationship. (Jones et al., 2011). The identified relationships help to establish

heterogeneity in effect sizes helping to quantify moderators, while highlighting criminal

propensity and the relationship to personality traits (Jones et al., 2011). Additional

research conducted by Keulen et al. (2016) found inmates with personality disorders

(antisocial, borderline, narcissistic, and paranoid personality disorders), are associated

with an increased risk to violence compared to inmates who do not have a personality

disorder. In a sampling of 95 males located at the Dutch multicenter randomized clinical

trial, Keulen et al. (2016) set out to examine violent behaviors by forensic patients. The premise of this research is that criminality originates from a progression of triggering feelings such as frustration, emptiness, or weakness, or other emotions that generate vulnerability. Once these triggers occur, these individual's tendency for impulsivity increases and they enter what is described as a "bully attack mode," becoming predatory and leads to their crimes (Keulen et al., 2016, p. 69). Those who are more likely to present manipulative behaviors would exhibit those traits prior to the crime beginning; however, impulsivity is the likely catalyst for the crime occurring (Keulen et al., 2016).

Skeem et al. (2005) highlighted how experts translated the PCL-R into terms of understanding the FFM and identifying predictors of violence. This was done through a study involving interviews of 769 registered hospital patients, who completed the NEO-FFI, a 60-item measure of personality (Skeem et al., 2005). The authors found a moderate positive relationship between personality and violence ($r=.37$); the relationship highlights a trait overlap between FFM and PCL-R (Skeem et al., 2005). To better understand the different traits and their correlation to criminal behavior, below is a more in depth look at each of the different traits.

Agreeability

Agreeability best characterized as someone who is "dependent and fawning, and agreeableness has its neurotic manifestation in Horney's self-effacing solution of moving toward people" (McCrae & Costa, 1987, p.88). For a clearer definition, Simha and Parboteeah (2020) described those who are agreeable as "kind, gentle, and trusting" (p.453) and Jones (2011) described agreeableness as "trust, modesty, and

tendermindedness" (p.332). The measure of agreeability is best assessed and understood

when compared to the counterpart of antagonism. McCrae and Costa (1987) distinguish

the two personalities by acknowledging that an antagonist (disagreeability pole) will

move away from people, are more power hungry, and are mistrustful and skeptical (p.88).

To that end, agreeability personality factors are the opposite of the antagonist. Hart et al

(2020) further detail antagonists as those who are capable of heartless manipulation of

others. In their research, Hart et al. (2020) detailed how antagonists within the FFM

present skills of Machiavellianism, are "deficient in social-cognitive skills," and exist in a

realm of high planning and antagonism (p. 4). The critical aspect of those who are

antagonists within the FFM, according to Hart et al. (2020) and Levin (2014), is that

those individuals do not need a high-level social cognition to manipulate, those

successful at manipulation capitalize on the generalization that most people are trusting.

Ireland and Ireland (2011) referenced Eysenck's theory of criminality and sought

to understand the relationship between agreeableness and psychoticism, extroversion, and

neuroticism. The research involved participants involved a sampling from two

demographics, 259 male prisoners in a high security prison and 183 selected male

prisoners to partake in the International Personality Item Pool Big-Five Factor Market

Survey; the hypothesis of this study was to validate personality structures amongst

inmates using the FFM (Ireland & Ireland, 2011). Through multiple regression examining

age, employment, time spent in prison, and experience in custody, the researchers were

able to determine there was no notable result attribution to extroversion or openness

(Ireland & Ireland, 2011). However, there were significant findings to agreeableness

(P=.03) and conscientiousness (P=.007) (Ireland & Ireland, 2011). The result of these

findings was more closely associated with older inmates who have developed emotional

stability; and the researchers deduced from their findings and previous research that

younger inmates are less emotionally stable. (Ireland & Ireland, 2011). In an additional

study from a sample of 113 male prisoners, average age 35, where researchers used the

FFM personality traits (Extraversion, Neuroticism, Openness, Agreeableness and

Conscientiousness), measured against the NEO-FFI personality inventory to determine

predictability for lawful sentencing. (Međedović et al., 2012). The results identified

agreeableness had a negative coefficient (β=-.18, r=-.11), identifying low agreeableness

as a predictor of criminal behavior (Međedović et al., 2012; Miller & Lynam, 2001; Le

Couff & Toupin, 2009).

Conscientiousness

Individuals routinely regulate their level of conscientiousness, as a personality

trait, it is reflective of individual behavior. McCrae and Costa (1987) describe

conscientiousness as "either governed by conscience" (p.88). The evaluation of this

personality trait is debatable, as some view it as a determination for proactivity in one's

life, where another argument is its impulsivity control (McCrae & Costa, 1987). It is

important to note, Wiebe (2004) used bivariate correlations and found consciousness was

negatively related to criminal offending (r=-0.3), meaning when consciousness decreases,

criminal offending increases. Additional findings from Miller and Lynam (2001) and Le

Couff and Toupin (2009) found a negative correlation between crime and

conscientiousness (r=–0.17; p<0.05), suggesting criminality is more closely attributable

to aggression (Međedović et al., 2012). In a study by Međedović et al (2015) which included a sample of 112 males (average age = 30), low agreeableness was predictive of criminal recidivism.y). The FFM suggests personality traits in aggression have a strong relationship with low conscientiousness, and the demonstration of aggression within low conscientiousness is relational or psychological aggression (Deason et al., 2019).

Extroversion

Extroverts are outgoing individuals who tend to be welcoming to almost all people (McCrae & Costa, 1987). According to Bech (2018) those who exhibit signs of introversion often do not like to be the center of attention, prefer limited personal interactions, and often quiet when around other individuals. With that, extroverts who exhibit high levels of "lively sociability" are more likely to be excited seeing people, not vice versa, meaning they can rub people the wrong way (McCrae & Costa, 1987, p. 88). Results from a study conducted by Yoyen (2017) suggested that the type of violence engaged in predicted the personality trait; for example, verbal aggression predicted extroversion. Extroverts can put themselves at risk by their social nature, especially if they are trying to build new relationships and establish rapport.

In contrast to extroverts, introverts are on the opposing pole of this spectrum, and it is important to discuss the distinguishing differences. Cuperman and Ickes (2009) identified introverts as being individuals who are more focused internally. Introverts project their energy inward and will have a high self-conscious state and will not be prominent in social situations (Cuperman & Ickes, 2009).

Neuroticism

Neuroticism can be addressed as "negative emotionality, the propensity to experience a variety of negative effects, such as anxiety, depression, anger, and embarrassment" (McCrae & Costa, 1987, p.87). Though this is a more aggressive explanation of the personality trait, it is agreed by researchers that neuroticism encapsulates negativity (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Furthermore, unlike conscientiousness which suggests impulse control, McCrae and Costa (1987) highlight that those with neuroticism often lack impulse control. Miller et al. (2003) also attributes traits such as instability and maladjustments, which includes neuroticism, have a small correlation to antisocial behaviors. Primarily, certain facets of neuroticism positively correlate to antisocial behavior such as anger and hostility ($r = 0.31$) and impulsiveness ($r = 0.17$) (Miller et al., 2003). The relationship represents high anger hostility and high impulsivity as consistent predictors in understanding neuroticism and the authors determined that 47% of neuroticism facets and antisocial behavior are substantial to hostility and impulsiveness (Miller et al., 2003). These findings were derived from a sampling of 481 participants, in which data was collected through a structured interview using school-based questionnaires over 4 years. (Miller et al., 2003). Participants in the study also completed the Revised NEO-Personality Inventory, which was used as a method of measurement in the completed study (Miller et al., 2003).

Openness to Experience

McCrae and Costa (1987) describe openness as "original, imaginative, broad interests, and daring" (p. 87). The interpretation of what openness to experience

highlights is a level of willingness. Individuals who possess the ability to be open to new experiences can be a vulnerable entity due to their personality of openness (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Cults or new religious movements present an opportunity to experience something that is beyond explanation. According to Stone (1987) "72% of the local church youth leaders chose religious experience as the most or one of the most important dimensions of religion" (p.125). The experiences that are being preached by cult leaders draws in the unsuspecting, especially those who are open to new experiences (Stone, 1987). Despite whether the cult is violent or non-violent, the promise to be closer to God, or the euphoria garnered by devotion, is enticing (Stone, 1987). The experiences being promised are the stimulus to entice followers, it is a method of manipulation (Stone, 1987).

Yoyen (2017) conducted research on 420 university students between 18-23 years of age, who volunteered to participate in a study with students in 1st through 4th year while at the university. The study took place in Turkey in 2016-2017 to determine the relationship between personality traits (using the FFM) and violence, the study utilized International Personality Inventory Short Form and Buss Perry Aggregate Scale. The researchers found types of violence, such as aggression, indirect aggression, verbal aggression, hostility, and emotional imbalance and personality types, such as extroversion (r =0.11) and openness (r =0.139), have a positive relationship (Yoyen, 2017). The significance of this study is understanding there is a positive relationship between violence and FFM personality traits extroversion and openness.

Currently, there are no studies linking the specific FFM traits to cult leader personality traits. The FFM has been referenced in two studies regarding serial killers (Egan et al., 1999 & Schafer, 2021) but is routinely used as a research method in understanding criminals, convicts, offenders, and predators, such as FFM and sexual aggression by Carvalho and Nobre (2019); personality structures of prisoners through the application of FFM by Ireland and Ireland (2011); and examining delinquent behavior and the FFM by Weibe (2004). The use of the FFM presents a baseline of understanding personality structures of criminality.

In conclusion, according to the FFM all individuals possess all five traits, with individuals varying in their intensity levels amongst the different traits. The information provided also shows that there are relationships between violence and the FFM personality traits. In a study composed of two sampling groups, sample group 1 was comprised of 347 participants which were 56% male; and sample group 2 was comprised of 873 participants, which were 40% male, the researchers were able to determine aggression was related to certain FFM traits (Bartlett & Anderson, 2012). Bartlett and Anderson (2012) were able to determine physical aggression had a positive relationship to extraversion (Sample Group 1: r=.09/ Sample Group 2: r=.09) and openness to new experience (Sample Group 1: r=.14/ Sample Group 2: r=.14) and a negative relationship to agreeableness (Sample Group 1: r=-.16/ Sample Group 2: r=-.16) and neuroticism (Sample Group 1: r=-.13/ Sample Group 2: r=-.13). Aggressive emotions had a positive relationship to neuroticism (Sample Group 1: r=.48/ Sample Group 2: r=.47) and a negative relationship to agreeableness (Sample Group 1: r=-.38/ Sample Group 2: r=-.27)

(Barlett & Anderson, 2012). Aggressive attitudes had a negative relationship to openness to new experience (Sample Group 1: r=-.18/ Sample Group 2: r=-.18) and agreeableness (Sample Group 1: r=-48/ Sample Group 2: r=-0.24). (Bartlett & Anderson, 2012). In the same research it was determined relationship openness (Sample Group 1: r=-.18/ Sample Group 2: r=-.17) and agreeableness (Sample Group 1: r=-.47/ Sample Group 2: r=-.25) in conjunction with aggressive attitudes had a positive relationship (r=.20) with violent behavior (Bartlett & Anderson, 2012). Understanding the FFM personality traits and the relationship to violence can help to develop a method to calculate human behavior.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Cults

According to reports from LaRosa (2018) and research conducted by Aronoff et al. (2000), the number of cults is close to exceeding 10,000 in the United States alone, of note, this number is lower than when cults were more prominent in the 1970's. According to Henson (n.d.), some cults are peaceful and non-violent, while other cults can commit acts of violence against its own members or others. Aronoff et al. (2000), in their research, identify cult sympathizers, those dedicated to educating others about how cults represent an alternative religious movement. In fact, Mark (2001) claims all cults are often siphoned into one negative category; he goes on to state that anti-cultists propagate cults as extremely dangerous, when in fact the dangers associated with cults are less severe. A review of the book *Odd Gods*, a list of criteria was developed to help determine a better understanding between violent and non-violent cults (Lewis, 2001). Non-violent cults are "any group of people that are intensely devoted to a person, place,

or thing, but there is an existing, deep relationship between followers and the leader, but is harmless (Bueno & Ragas, 2011, p. *xxii).* The criterion for a non-violent cult is as follows: have disregard for the law, leadership will dictate the lives of its members, develop contradictory guidelines members must follow but leaders do not, and finally, in the wake of an apocalypse, expect members to die or kill for the group (Mark, 2001). The existence of cults does not mean all cults are the existence of promoting violence, the understanding of cults is broad and not one dimensional.

As previously mentioned, cults are organizations or movements characterized by their unique or unusual religious/spiritual beliefs or practices (Olsson, 2011; Zablocki & Robbins, 2001). However, there is no single standard understanding of the word cult. For example, in research by Rousselet et al. (2017), there is no legal definition in France; however, this does not mean cults do not exist. French authorities assess cult like criteria without subjecting the group to a single definition. With that in mind it is safe to conclude that cults are an "organized group or a solitary person whose purpose is to dominate cult members by using psychological manipulation" (Rousselet et al., 2017, p.27). The research by Rousselet et al. (2017), highlights 31 former cult members who participated in a single-meeting, self-identifying questionnaire, which allowed for the researchers to determine factors associated with cult membership. Throughout the course of the semi-structured interview, it was documented that nearly half of the participants had an anxiety disorder and six former cult members suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (Rousselet et al., 2017). Of note, from the study, 54.8% of these former cult members identified humiliation was the tactic used for members who opposed the cult

(Rousselet et al., 2017). As previously mentioned by Lalich (2015) cult members will go through a form of psychological manipulation, this can include humiliation. The research provided by Rousselet et al. (2017) shows variables associated with cult characteristics helping to highlight some structural requirements of cultic operations. As mentioned above, the average cult cycle lasts about 9-years and, it is assessed, within those 9-years a process of manipulation likely occurs (Rousselet et al., 2017). Hassan (2020), through his BITE (behavioral, thought, emotion) model of mind control, highlights some manipulation elements to cults:

1. Strict behavioral control such as regulation of daily routines, dictates associations and relationships, maltreatment (sleep deprivation and food restriction), exploitation of person affects (finances or relationships).

2. Information control minimizes outside influence which includes deliberate deception of information, reduction in publicly available information systems (news, radio, books), implementing a monitoring program to control members.

3. Thought control by forcing the belief that cult life is reality, and reality is wrong, strategic use of thought-controlling language, use of hypnotic techniques (also known as thought-stopping techniques).

4. Fear to control members emotions by manipulating feelings, use of guilt, public confessions/public shaming's, and torment of shunning if someone thinks about leaving.

Along with the manipulation elements, Singer and Lalich (1995), identified three elements of dangerous cults: origins of the leader (traumatic past/traumatic childhood),

hierarchy/relationships with followers, and coordinated efforts of thought reform (brainwashing). FACT (n.d.) highlighted and outlined these three points when addressing the warning signs of a dangerous cult.

Dangerous cults present a danger to society, but how is it they recruit and retain members? Disinformation is a foundation of dangerous cults, being ambiguous and lying is a method of recruitment (FACT, n.d.). By not being forthcoming, new recruits are often misled into joining the cult, because there is no transparency about the group or the leader. Anyone can become a member of a dangerous cult because all humans have moments of vulnerability; it is the cult leader who has mastered identifying, isolating, and manipulating potential recruits (FACT, n.d.).

Those who join cults typically come from troubled pasts and have suffered from a form of psychological distress (Galanter, 1982, 1996). In further research by Galanter (1990), 30% of individuals who joined a cult sought professional help prior to joining a cult. Individuals can be characterized as socially or psychologically inadequate (Walsh, 1992). According to Sweets (2019), 67% of victims of gaslighting are associated with the poor or working/lower class. Those who are victimized by cult leaders may experience gender inequality, as most victims are women or someone perceived weaker than the cult leader, the victim is "feminized" (Sweets, 2019, p.854). Those who are victimized are often those who are aligned to a demographic that experiences institutional inequalities, and Sweets (2019) identified those who are poor, disabled, immigrants, or belonging to a specific minority group, Latino's being the most at-risk demographic, are more likely to be victims. Furthermore, the research comes to shows females are at higher risk and the

average age of those who succumb to gaslighting is 41 (Sweets, 2019). The treatment of these victims has long lasting negative outcomes such as increased irrationality, fear, or paranoia (Sweets, 2019). According to research from Jenkinson (2013) the psychological conditioning of promoting fear creates a heightened sense of fear for cult survivors. The long-term effects reflect timidness and a depleted sense of self-confidence and questioning common sense (Jenkinson, 2013).

Pignotti (2000), in her examination of Thought Field Therapy as a method to treat cult survivors, was able to identify through previously conducted surveys, cult victims reported signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, 75% experienced depression, 68% loneliness, and 68% anger (Conway & Seigelman, 1995). Moreover, 40% of female cult survivors reported sexual assault which impacted their ability to recover from their time in the cult (Pignotti, 2000). Although it has been reported that appropriate therapies can assist in recovery, cult survivors indicate that they are never able to fully recover (Pignotti, 2000).

Henson (n.d.) provided an overview of the different types of cult categories, such as Eastern, religious, political (racists or terrorist), psychotherapeutic, commercial, New Age, occult, family, and personality. The list shows that cults are dynamic, and each category represents a different cult movement or meaning. Some cults fall into religious categories such as Eastern cults, New Age, and religious cults, all of which engage in dedication to a higher deity; Eastern cults focus more on Buddhism or Hinduism, whereas religious cults are scripture based, as Henson noted. New Age Groups promote a philosophy of self-proclamations of divinity and suggest that knowledge and a desire to

learn is power. There are some cults who believe in a need to change society and rid the

world of evil forces. The cult leaders associated with this category believe that they are a

higher being, and those are categorized as political, racists, or terroristic cults. A similar

group is the commercial cult, due to the extravagant cult leader, who is motivated by

wealth and power. The final categories are ones that are not attributable to a specific

group but stand on their own. The first is psychotherapeutic cults which are cemented in

the foundation of self-discovery or personal transformations. The leaders are unique as

they are self-proclaimed great life coaches. The occult align with Satanists, and the leader

is a self-proclaimed reincarnated evil; these group are associated with animal sacrifice.

One-on-one cults are a group that believes in one individual only and is associated with

intimate partner violence, manipulation, and physical and mental abuse. Finally,

personality cults reveres the charismatic personality of a highly regarding leader.

Personality Traits

Personality is defined as "the dynamic organization of the psychological and

physical systems, underlie a person's patterns of actions, thoughts, and feelings" (Jordan,

2011, p.162). Traits are "consistent ways of thinking, behaving, and feeling across

situations" (Kern et al., 2019, p.1). Personality traits can easily be described as who we

are as people, it is our operational foundation. Cloninger (2009) states that personality

differences are a neurobiological reaction in which the brain predicts human behavior

(instinct). The examination of traits highlights the stability of traits over time, they are

different amongst individuals, and can influence behaviors (Villanueva, 2010). Regarding

predictability, personality traits are better aligned to predict positive traits vice negative

(Villaneuva, 2010). Personality traits previously discussed are agreeability, conscientiousness, extroversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience, which are associated with the FFM, and correlate to trait predictiveness (Miller, 2019; Villaneuva, 2010). The FFM helps to understand human characteristics or personality traits (Miller, 2019).

Personality disorders are dimensional and dynamic, the use of trait theory and FFM allows research to view personality disorders on a spectrum. The FFM examines human personality through examining opposing poles within human characteristics and utility across psychological domains (Suzuki et al., 2015). The FFM accommodates the requirements of the DSM-5 but encapsulates a broader understanding of personality scales. The DSM-5 approaches personality on a pathological approach and examines personality across maladaptive categories (Suzuki et al., 2015). According to Trull and Widiger (2013) the difference between the DSM-5 and the FFM, is the FFM is about when and where with personality traits, not whether based on meeting certain personality categories. Research shows that the DSM-5 will continue to maintain the personality assessment; however, will include personality assessment which aligns with the FFM (Suzuki et al., 2015; Trull & Widiger, 2013). Suzuki et al. (2015) concluded that DSM-5 alternative personality disorder model represents "maladaptive" or "extreme variants" (p.352) of a minimum of four defined normal personality traits.

It is important to clarify personality traits are stable over time and are patterns of thinking, whereas disorders are when the traits become maladaptive and interpersonal functionality is impaired (Skodol et al., 2019). Traits of personality disorders are

important to discuss because traits present a relationship to criminal behavior (Edwards et al., 2017). According to the Cleveland Clinic (2021) normal personality traits are behaviors and thought patterns and personality disorders are personality patterns have become too ridged and maladaptive. The ability to become violent or express violence can be relational to Cluster-B Personality disorder (Dellazizzo et al., 2018; Lowenstein et al., 2016). Research conducted by Dellazizzo et al. (2018) revealed a connection between violent behaviors (within inmates) with combinations of Cluster-B personality disorders. The study indicated that the most prominent diagnosis was Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD; 51%) and given the associated traits, presented more violent behaviors within the sampling. The findings regarding the connection between Cluster-B and violence involved a sampling of 728 male inmates (Dellazizzo et al., 2018).

According to research conducted by Dadashzadeh et al. (2016) Cluster-B Personality Disorder types shows overlapping similarities when it comes to "emotional instability, inappropriate or severe expression of emotions, poor control, and impulsivity" (p.23). The DSM-5 states Cluster-B Personality disorders include antisocial, borderline, histrionic, and narcissistic personality types. The following is an examination of different Cluster-B personality disorders (APA, 2013).

Narcissistic Personality Disorder

The DSM-5 defines narcissistic personality disorder by a "pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy" (APA, 2013, p.669). The personality disorder understood by the APA highlights the cognitive disconnect between the person and their self-identification. In additional research conducted by Miller et al. (2016) identifies

succinct understanding that there are two dimensions to narcissistic personality disorder:

vulnerable and grandiose. Vulnerable narcissism exhibits psychological problems in

which those who suffer from it attempt to regulate their emotions, often through

suppression, and might appear more depressive (Leonie et al., 2020). Grandiose

narcissism is where an individual has desires to be admired, they are more dominant,

arrogant, and has heightened self of entitlement (Malesza, 2018). According to the study

standard narcissism includes high levels of extroversion, but the research only identified

this trait in cases of grandiose, not vulnerable narcissism (Miller, 2016). To quantify the

study, the researchers took their sampling and applied their research through different

litmus tests to understand the characteristics of narcissism. Finally, Fox (2015) indicated

those who have narcissism are less likely to harm themselves but are more likely to harm

others.

As mentioned above, a grand sense of self is a pillar within narcissism, Lambe et

al. (2018), highlighted that the elevated self-enhancement is in fact a method to regulate

inadequate internal feelings. Through research it was revealed there is more likely to be a

show of aggression with someone who shows high self-esteem and high narcissism when

insulted (Bushman et al., 2009; Lambe et al., 2018). The research lends credence to the

notion that those with NPD are likely to become aggressive/violent when negatively

affected (Lambe et al., 2018). Despite there being limited studies surrounding narcissism

triggering violence, the following studies helped to solidify Novaco's (1976) cognitive

behavioral theory of anger, that violence is a response to an environmental event (Lambe

et al., 2018). As a result of the clinical studies, along with a review of 4,079 documents,

research identified there is a positive relationship between aggression/violence and narcissism (Beasley & Stoltenberg, 1992; Cale & Lilienfeld, 2006; Coid, 2002; Lambe et al., 2018; Svindseth, et al., 2008; Warrenet al., 2002; Wiehe, 2003). The collected research by Lambe et al. (2018) identified that narcissism is a predicator to violence, this was determined through Origin Ratio's (OR), and found that narcissism ranges from 1.2- and 11.5- fold increase in relation to being a predictor; the deviation in OR's is based on category of violence (1.2- moderate violence-11.5- extreme violence). Lambe et al. (2018) conducted a study that found a positive relationship (r=.22) between narcissism and aggression through multiple regression. The method examined 18 university students around the age of 18 measured through Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) to evaluate narcissism regarding aggression and violence while addressing narcissism through the scope of dissociation of grandiose sense of self and an unknown sense of inadequacy (Kernberg, 1975; Lambe et al., 2018).

An important element of the research provided by Burke (2006) is the discussion of personality disorder overlap, which occurs with NPD and ASPD; with that in mind "if a given individual meets criteria for two personality disorders, the appropriate diagnosis is one that includes both disorders" (p.392). To understand narcissism and personality, Dinić & Vujić (2019), conducted a study of 423 participants, in which they were administered the NPI. According to their findings the authoritarian traits associated with narcissism did not correlate with agreeableness but a positive correlated to extraversion, highlighting the adaptive narcissism component. However, when it comes to maladaptive narcissism, such self-entitlement, this was positively related with neuroticism (Dinić &

Vujić, 2019). The results highlight a relationship between narcissism and certain

components of the FFM. There are no current studies which identify the relationship

between narcissistic cult leaders and the FFM.

Antisocial Personality Disorder

Antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) is detailed by the DSM-5 as someone who

has the blatant disregard for rights of others, and a foundation of ASPD is deceit and

manipulation (APA, 2013, p. 659). In research conducted by Dunne et al. (2020),

historically, ASPD has had facets tied to aggression, but the connection has not been

empirically linked; in their new study the authors determined aggression predictability

within the ASPD facets. In a study of 208 male inmates, Dunne et al. (2020) were able to

determine that callousness, hostility, impulsivity, irresponsibility, and risk taking (criteria

of ASPD; APA, 2013) are attributable to past aggression, where withdrawal and

perseveration (criteria of psychopathic specifiers in the DSM-5; APA, 2013) are

significantly related with aggression. Ultimately the research identified that ASPD traits

of hostility, risk taking, and callousness are strong predictors of aggression history

(Dunne et al., 2020). In continuation, ASPD is associated with the homicidal triad which

includes harm to animals, bed wetting, and fire setting (Fox, 2015). The triad is the best

predictor for poor coping and development mechanisms in children; however, those with

ASPD have a diminished coping capacity and the triad is an indicator for significant

personality problems (Fox, 2015). Observing the tendencies associated with triad are

useful predictors for personality disorders associated with ASPD, while also delineating

the harm aspect of the disorder. According to Dellazizzo et al. (2018) violence is more

prevalent in ASPD and often includes a lack of remorse. In the findings presented by

Dellazizzo et al. (2018), through the three studies using 728 male inmates, those with a

diagnosis of ASPD had a 64.9% increase in the likelihood for aggression, 75.1%

likelihood for recklessness, 62.4% likelihood for impulsivity, and 83.7% likelihood for a

lack of remorse. An additional study of 122 Iranian prisoners, outpatients, and inpatients

recruited through prisons and hospitals highlights a corresponding connection between

ASPD, and extraversion and neuroticism based on the FFM (Amini et al., 2015). The

study of ASPD diagnosed individuals were evaluated against the structured clinical

interview for DSM-IV axis II disorders to determine alignment between ASPD and

personality traits (Amini et al., 2015). One of the results from Amini et al. (2015,)

regarding ASPD, reveals a positive but weak relationship between extraversion and

manipulativeness (r = 0.28, p < 0.01). The findings opened a discussion to highlight the

traits of ASPD are related to the FFM, specifically regarding extraversion, neuroticism,

and openness to new experience (Amini et al., 2015).

Borderline Personality Disorder

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) in individuals is often marked with frantic

desires to avoid abandonment (real or imagined), according to DSM-5, in addition to

instability within their own relationships and personal perceptions of oneself (APA, 2013,

p. 663). In addition to the diagnosis attributes of BPD, current research by Cavelti et al.

(2021) recognized the connection between BPD and psychotic symptoms. The

connection between the two symptoms relates back to DSM-III, when BPD was inducted

into the manual by being separated from schizotypal disorder; of note psychotic

symptoms were not included in the BPD diagnosis (Cavelti et al., 2021). The inclusion

of psychotic symptoms into the diagnosis of BPD intensifies the severity of the disorder.

Due to the complexity of the BPD in individuals, often their instability of personal

identification can lead to self-mutilation (Fox, 2015). The process leading up to self-

mutilation includes a level of devaluation of the environment and of oneself, and the self-

mutilation is a relief mechanism (Fox, 2015). Regarding comorbidity between BPD and

ASPD there is a pathological androgyny that combines externalizing and internalizing

traits exhibiting psychopathology (Howard, 2015). Furthermore, the comorbidity of BPD

and ASPD does not mean someone is suffering at a higher intensity level, but does

represent interpersonal emotional complexity that linked behaviors, but also traits and

symptoms (Howard, 2015).

The relationship between BPD and ASPD highlights the complexity of the

personality traits, and one could be further enhanced by examining BPD through the

FFM. Trull and Brown (2013) highlighted empirical evidence supporting the positive

relationship between BPD and neuroticism (r=0.59). The evidence also identifies a

negative relationship between BPD and agreeability (r=-.47) (Trull & Brown, 2013). The

inclusion of the FFM to understand of emotional instability allows for proper

understanding of BPD (Trull & Brown, 2013). There have been no studies regarding the

relationship between cult leaders with BPD.

In addition to self-harm, the DSM-5 identifies problematic behaviors those who

have BPD that would be considered reckless (e.g., substance abuse); these behaviors

range from occurring in a relationship and center around acts of impulsivity (APA, 2013,

p.663). Impulsivity is often the result of a "primitive defense mechanism" and can result

in splitting (Gagnon et al., 2016, p. 421). Originally observed through Kerberg (1992),

when someone implements splitting and suffers from BPD, they will often perceive

others as either good or bad, it is black and white assessment of individuals. Recent

studies corroborate the past findings and expand upon the notion. Splitting is an active

measure of defense, often ego driven and synonymous with lack of impulse control

(Gagnon et al., 2016; Koenigsberg et al., 2001). As a result of Gagnon et al. (2016) study

which included 225 volunteers, they were able to deduce that splitting can be used by

those who do not suffer from "a lack of integration in their self- and object

representations"; splitting occurs within normal control groups, not just BPD (p. 430).

The significance of splitting when someone suffers from BPD is the negative metal state

that results in lack of impulse control (Gagnon et al., 2016). Koenigsberg et al. (2001)

explained splitting is the difference between idealization and devaluation, which

determines how someone with BPD would treat others.

Histrionic Personality Disorder

The DSM-5 categorizes Histrionic personality disorder (HPD) as those who

behave in a manner to seek attention and often are unhappy if they are not "center of

attention" (APA, 2013, p.667). Fox (2015) highlights that narcissism is an element of

HPD, because of the need for attention. The five-criterion that needs to be met for

someone to have HPD, according to the DSM-5 (APA, 2013), circulates around

individual's desires to be admired to extensive degrees. Of note, according to Novais et

al. (2015) HPD is one of the more "ambiguous" of psychiatry disorders. Those with HPD

may not be at higher risk to harm others but are at risk for self-harm. According to Fox

(2015) "prone to manipulative, suicidal threats, gestures, or attempts" (p. 112); of note

these actions are typically used to manipulate others. Often manipulation is prevalent

when someone with HPD experiences rejection, their reaction is intensely

disproportionate, and the individual will go above and beyond to receive the recognition

that they feel they deserve (Fox, 2015). Fox (2015) indicated that HPD individuals will

test boundaries, more often with therapists, but they do this to seek validation. Fox (2015)

highlighted that those with HPD do not act out to inflict harm or with aggression but act

out in a way to be admired. The correlation between HPD and ASPD are present in "sex-

typed" behavior with underlying psychopathic tendencies and common symptoms but

different etiology (Cale & Lilienfeld, 2002).

Personality traits are individual characteristics, but are not inherently adaptive or

maladaptive, and are measurable and predictable within the FFM. Personality disorders

are when traits become pronounced that interpersonal functionality is impaired. The

examination and understanding of personality traits and disorder highlights specific

characteristics associated with Cluster-B types. Cluster-B involves a symptomology of

emotional instability, inappropriate or severe expression of emotions, poor control, and

impulsivity (Dadashzadeh et al., 2016). The above research highlights the link between

the FFM behaviors within Cluster-B, but more importantly the predictive factors that are

attributable to those characteristics. The links between the FFM behaviors within Cluster-

B shows how the opposing poles of personalities are critical in understanding

characteristics. This is relevant when understanding how the spectrum of personality

traits contribute to a person's behavior and when making the argument that traits should be seen on a spectrum and not categorical. Furthermore, the examination of Cluster-B personality disorders highlights the predictiveness or link to detectable criminal behavior. The review of personality traits also allows for the acknowledgement that Cluster-B, in connection with the FFM, can be connected to manipulation tactics.

Psychological Manipulation

Psychological manipulation, also known as brainwashing, historically attributed to communist China, where they would inflict psychological and physical cruelty upon individuals at varying intensities (Dubrow-Marshall & Dubrow-Marshall, 2012; Hunter, 2016). The method is a way someone gains control over another person, changes their ideology and belief system. According to Latson (2020) master manipulators are excellent at pushing boundaries to get someone to trust in them completely. In relation to trait theory and the FFM, those who are more agreeable are approached differently than someone who is conscientious (Miller, 2019). The FFM of approach is relevant when addressing how cult leaders interact and engage with society and potential members, and how they approach manipulation tactics. Considering the personalities of cult leaders, the FFM can highlight the stages of cult leaders. Personality traits exist on a spectrum and cult leaders move about those personality traits to successfully manipulate people. For example, the disagreeability pole of agreeableness emphasizes the capability of manipulation (Hart et al., 2020; McCrae & Costa, 1987). Cult leaders use the FFM traits to embolden their manipulation tactics, so they become masters. Master manipulators can tap into different personas to apprehend someone's mind.

In a publication in Psychological Today in response to the recent conviction of NXIVM cult leader, Latson (2020), highlights manipulators do not act quickly but take their time with their manipulation tactics. The same research discusses how those who have fallen victim to the master manipulator often do not know that they are being brainwashed (Latson, 2020). Individuals capable of manipulating are comfortable engaging in taboo behavior to effectively manipulate (Monaghan et al., 2020). Those capable of psychological manipulation may exhibit signs of Machiavellianism, which is someone "willing to do anything in the quest for power" (Brunello, 2019, p.1). Cult leaders are willing to break the boundaries of what is acceptable to convince individuals to devote themselves to the cult organization.

The most common manipulation tactic used by cult leaders includes physical isolation as a method to maintain control over their devotees (Kohl, 2017; Lalich, 2004; Luhrmann, 2018; O'Dell, 2019; Sherman & Wolochatiuk, 2007; Spencer, 2018). Additional research by O'Dell (2019) and Henson (n.d.) revealed cult leaders also use mind-altering drugs to manipulate their followers into believing the messages they were speaking. These manipulation processes used by cult leaders can be described as narcissistic, as it feeds into the cult leaders' grandiose sense of self while also being revered as a deity-like-being amongst their followers.

Cult leaders use psychological manipulation to retain and recruit members, and it is an essential method for the cult to be successful. A common method of manipulation used by cult leaders is preying upon the fears of their followers as well as their desires to be a part of something greater (Lalich, 2004; Latson, 2020; Monaghan et al., 2020).

Rauthmann and Will (2011) reported that manipulative personalities, specifically

Machiavellianism, see humanity in a negative light and view humanity as vulnerable.

However, because of this perception of humanity, these individuals feel justified in

manipulating and exploiting individuals (Monaghan et al., 2020; Rauthmann & Will,

2011). The chameleon like behavior of cult leaders is essential in developing their

psychological manipulation tactics; cult leaders are masters of making them appear a

certain way to a target audience (Lalich, 2004). Furthermore, once cult leaders are able

give an individual what they need (personally, emotionally, or spiritually) there is a

transformation of perception. For example, follower's admiration of the leader will allow

the cult leader to develop attributes that do not really exist but are believed in by the

follower (Galanter, 1999; Lalich, 2004). The false perceptions of cult leaders are where

dangers develop when the follower falls into a category of "uncritical obedience," and

that process is a transference of power in which the cult leader gains full control of the

follower (Lalich, 2004, p.1). The process of manipulation is methodical because cult

leaders also use their tactics to convince their followers that they have free will and free

thought (Coleman, 1984; Lalich, 2004). In the same research by Lalich (2004) cult

followers have difficulty separating from the cult environment due to the indoctrination

process of cult leaders changing their [the followers] abilities to think for themselves.

Coleman (1984) and Olsson (2011) expand upon the loss of free will by highlighting

those followers lose their individualism and therefore lose their resilience in not

becoming indoctrinated. According to Rousselet et al. (2017) cult leaders use

"narcissistic seduction" to entice cult commitment (p. 27). The process is

multidimensional, time consuming, and often circulates around the vulnerability of the individuals based upon emotions, isolation, propaganda, and inclusion within the organization (Rousselet et al., 2017). The result of this process is that the new cult member loses their ability to think freely, creating a high-level dependence on the cult leader (Rousselet et al., 2017). Exploring the foundation of these personality traits will help give insight into cult leadership and give credence to understanding their methodologies behind their actions, especially regarding psychological manipulation.

   Understanding which vulnerabilities to use against someone is critical for identifying the pathway to psychological manipulation. The framework of psychological manipulation includes teaching obedience, altering perceptions of reality, developing emotional dependency, the use of sex as control, consistent oversight, physical abuse, and complete control of daily decisions (Zimbardo, 2020). Beginning tactics of psychological manipulation is the increased use of flattery and charm, it is an initial move to lower an individual's guard (Grant, 2014). According to Zimbardo (2020) the personal care and consideration given is prominent for manipulation, it is also a method for developing true believers. Through this process the manipulator will emulate empathy so that the person being manipulated feels heard and felt, and in turn builds trust with the cult leader (Stark & Flaherty, 2004). The attitude of infatuation begins to transform as the grasp of control is initiated, and then the methods of manipulation become harder to detect (Grant, 2014). Once the trust was solidified between cult leader and follower, the methods would alter. The next phase of manipulation is when a manipulator encourages their followers to face their fears, thus identifying their vulnerabilities and weaknesses (Zimbardo, 2020). In

doing so, those fears would be used against them if they acted in way deemed disobedient (Zimbardo, 2020). The discussed process is also referred to as gaslighting, and often is most effective when there is an unbalance of power, specifically with "power-laden intimate relationships" (Sweet, 2019, p.852). Those relationships are reflective of the one's cult leaders have with their members. The methods of manipulation are extremely calculated and methodical and takes a certain personality type to execute the process effectively. Cult leaders exhibit a certain personality trait that is cataclysmic and captivating making psychological manipulation almost effortless to them.

Cult Leaders, Personality Traits, and Psychological Manipulation

Cult leaders have been described as charismatic, authoritarian male figures (García, 2018; Goldberg, 2012; Pretorius, 2004; Oakes, 1997; Olsson, 2011). The charisma is part of the allure cult leaders tend to use to draw in their following. In his revised doctoral dissertation, Oakes (1997), established a baseline of a psychological foundation surrounding charisma of cult leaders. Oakes (1997) and Olsson (2011) explained that charisma, from a psychological perspective, is predicated on the foundation of narcissism or narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). The understanding of NPD, when attributed to a charismatic leader, is there are two forms, and this goes beyond grandiose and vulnerable narcissism as previously discussed and can be termed messianic or charismatic narcissism (Oakes, 1997). To explain, a messianic narcissist will look to God as the savior and seek guidance through God; a charismatic narcissist often believes they are special and take on the role of the prophet (Deutsch, 1980; Oakes, 1997). An assessment of NPD having two components as well as a charismatic leader, it

is deduced that if a leader is messianic or charismatic, those traits are attributable to either grandiose or vulnerable NPD. Ultimately, regardless of the charismatic approach, the personality is the foundation between cult leaders and cult followers.

The relationship between cult leaders and their followers is monumental, because it is the devotion of the followers that keep the cult in motion (Olsson, 2011). Cult leaders often bring about an "unhealthy form of dependency, spiritually and otherwise, by focusing on themes of submission and obedience to those in authority" (Irwin, 2002, p.272). Cult follower's dedication and blind passion to the cult leader can help enable the manipulation process. Through the understanding of Freud and his theory of transference, the process of manipulation allows a cult leader to be a father figure within the group (Galanter, 1996; Goldberg, 2011). According to Rosen (2014) and Deutsch (1980) the cult leader/follower relationship can be erratic and demoralizing, but also compassionate and loving. The confluence of behavior is best described by the work cited by Ochberg (2005) as Stockholm Syndrome, the captured begins empathizing and caring for the captor (Rosen, 2014). In continuation, cults are significantly traumatic and is directly correlated to a cult leader, because they necessitate trauma through guilt and shame and are destructive to personal well-being (Shaw, 2013; Rosen, 2014; Walsh, 1995).

The process of manipulation is time consuming and hinges on a strong ideological, repetitive, brainwashing process that extends over a period (Olsson, 2011). The arduous process, as described by Olsson (2011), degrades, and traumatizes the follower's psyche through "thought reform" (p. 8). The demoralizing treatment received can be described simply as abusive. When followers are being manipulated in a manner

like an abusive relationship, they can feel "stupid or crazy" (Sweet, 2019, p. 856). In

research by Kent (2004), he highlights the similarities between abusive relationships and

new religious movements, he states both are "somewhat detached from a society with

which they are at tension…and charismatically led. Intense relations, intimate face-to-

face interaction, social isolation, and a dynamic of powerful leaders and dependent

followers" (p. 102). Olsson (2011) states that unhealthy relationships with leaders enables

followers to develop one of three tendencies: dependent, fight or flight, or pairing. The

development of these traits increases the follower's inadequacies feeding their infatuation

with the leader because they are a convinced the leader will fight against external threats,

thus in turn the followers feed the cult leaders "malignant narcissism" (Olsson, 2011,

p.2). Ultimately, what is described by Olsson (2011) once the group is focused on the

needs of the cult leader, the leader(s) "return only self-absorbed, cruel, tyrannical, and

sadistic qualities" (p.2). The vicious cycles exhibit relational bounds of an abusive

relationship described above.

Sweet (2019) found in her research that there are patterns of manipulation traits

within abusive relationships. Psychological manipulation occurs within intimate partner

violence (IPV) because the abuser subjects the victim to dehumanization; this is a process

in which an abuser views their victims as less than human (Bastian, 2019). The use of

dehumanization by an abuser is to justify their treatment of a victim, diminishing the

victim's existence allows the abuser to act the way they do (Bastian, 2019). Bastian

(2019) and Rauthmann and Kolar (2013) stated that a narcissist, someone who has high

self-regard, uses emotional manipulation to convince their victims, that 1) they [the

abuser] are superior and 2) the victim is deserving of the abuse. The presence of an

abuser is critical when implementing manipulation strategies, the same thought process

can be applied to cult leaders and their manipulation of their followers.

Cult leaders' presence is essential in the foundation of cultic operations and their

impressions upon cult members. For instance, in a study of 31 former cult members

which focused on cult adhesion, retention, and departure, 22.6% of former cult members

claim seeing the cult leader every day, where 41.9% claim they never saw the leader at all

(Rousselet et al., 2017). The data point is important to highlight because it details the

different cult leader's typology and identifies a pattern between violent and non-violent

cults. Regarding cult leaders, 51.6% of members believed the leader held "supernatural,

paranormal, or magical abilities" and 54.8% believed the leaders knowledge was their

power (Rousselet et al., 2017, p.29). Though these statistics represent a data point, it is

also important to remember that the sampling is small and is not sufficient to quantify.

Often in these extremist cults the leaders would not only preach about an impending

apocalypse, but also that they (the leader), were the chosen ones to shepherd the

congregation to safety; in addition, these leaders will do whatever is in their power to

convince the members they are Gods (Coleman, 1984; Kohl, 2017; Lalich, 2004;

Luhrmann, 2018; O'Dell, 2019; Osman et al., 2019; Sherman & Wolochatiuk, 2007;

Spencer, 2018; Sumpter & Burroughs, 1994). The statistics give credence to methods

used to recruit members, control them, but also sustain that control; it is psychological

manipulation. Cult leaders master tactics in psychological manipulation to maintain

control over their followers. Pretorius (2004) explained the direct dangers of

psychological manipulation by cult leaders and how they gain control over their follower's minds by manipulating their free will against them to make costly errors in judgment (p. 612). Furthermore, the cult leaders will do anything within their power to solidify loyalty amongst members. In a statement by former cult member Lalich (2004) "...there is fusion between the ideal of personal freedom (as promised in the stated goal of the group or its ideology) and the demand for self-renunciation (as prescribed by the rules and norms)" (p. 20).

In findings by Olsson (2005) one cult leader in particular, Shoko Asahara, exhibited signs of several personality traits. The complexity of cult leader personality diagnosis helps to synthesize their thought process as an authoritarian, especially when it comes to psychological manipulation. With ASPD in mind, there is a critical element which encapsulates a cult leader personality trait. With ASPD there is more of a focus on oneself, and these individuals often seek out resources for personal gain (Burke, 2006, p.393; Khantzian, 1998). The identification of self-fulfillment regarding a personality is essential in understanding the diagnosis of cult leaders, because commonly cult leaders act in their own self-interests and needs. Considering previously mentioned statements of personality overlap, psychopaths will use people for their own personal needs, such as financial and emotional exploitation (Burke, 2006). The cult leader who exhibits signs of ASPD will also leverage the following as a cadre to ensure monumental authority over the congregation (Burke, 2006). Antisocial cult leaders are believed to echo the following notion: "Nothing is wrong in my world; I am in control of my surroundings, and I like the way things are" (Burke, 2006, p.6). Personalities traits of cult leaders are instrumental in

understanding psychological manipulation tactics. The reason why this is so important is because it highlights certain patterns of thinking within cult leaders, specific to their personality traits. Given cult leader's unique personalities, in relation to the FFM, they can exhibit multiple traits at varying levels, to be effective manipulators. It is important to stress the difference between personality traits and disorders, the most important is functionality. Understanding the personality traits of cult leaders is essential to this study, as it is foundational to recognizing how cult leaders' function.

For examination purposes, the below case study analysis on the cult NXIVM, will help to demonstrate known victim-offender relationships involving cult leaders and highlight the importance of needing to understand the personality traits of cult leaders. NXIVM marketed itself through its leader, Keith Raniere, and his enabler, Nancy Salzman, as a group for self-improvement and development; NXIVM is a place for self-actualization and transformation. (Raine, 2021). The group attracted a strong demographic including actresses, heiresses, and even descendants of royalty, Raniere knew how to market the organization to appeal to a wide audience. (Raine, 2021). Creating the Executive Success Program, Raniere created a platform for anyone who wanted to improve themselves to find success. (Raine, 2021). It is due to this marketing strategy that Raniere was able to draw in strong and smart women into the organization, but also into the secret society called *DOS* - Dominus Obsequious Sororium. (Bethune, 2021). The group, according to former member Sarah Edmonson, was presented as a secret society of pure feminine empowerment. (Bethune, 2021). NXIVM, via DOS, propagated modern feminization to draw in smart and successful women with the notion

of eliminating victimhood and catapulting self-actualization. (Bethune, 2021). The

relationship was sealed with bond, literally branded into these women. (Bethune, 2021;

Raine, 2021). To obtain this level of control, Raniere needed a foundation to facilitate

and sustain these relationships, it is the product of group thinking, not individualism.

In an interview, Dr. Peter McCullough, discussed mass psychosis, and the

evolution of group think, which may lead to horrific events, such as mass suicides

associated with cults (Rogan, 2021). In the same interview Dr. McCullough outlined four

pillars of control often seen in Nazi Germany: isolation, withdrawal of things taken away

from people, constant anxiety and fear, and a single solution offered by an entity in

authority. (Rogan, 2021). With those identified pillars, the relationship between cult

leader, Keith Raniere, and his followers can be succinctly broken down.

1. ***Isolation*** – Though members were not instructed to live in the same community,

    those fully invested in NXIVM, chose to live within the same neighborhood in

    Albany, NY. (Bethune, 2021; Raine, 2021). The female members of DOS

    experienced a level of isolation, where they were routinely kept near Raniere

    (Raine, 2021). The women were under constant surveillance and were forced to

    comply to regimented rules, restrictions, and regulations (Raine, 2021). These

    women were also stripped naked, blindfolded, and branded with a cauterizing pen,

    resembling the initials of Keith Raniere (Buhler et al., 2020 & Ranie, 2021).

2. ***Withdrawal of Things Taken Away from People*** – Members were indoctrinated

    with self-improvement and if something was holding one back, they were to get

    rid of it; this could mean family members (Grigoriadis, 2019; Raine, 2021).

During testimony it was revealed that part of the NXIVM curriculum states "there are no absolute sacrifices, so I will not become a victim;" Raniere enforced extreme alienation of his members in the pursuit of self-improvement (RTD, 2021, p.2). Additionally, the women of DOS were to only maintain a relationship with their master and Raniere; DOS was a life-long commitment to being a slave to Raniere (Moynihan, 2019).

3. ***Constant Anxiety and Fear –*** Becoming a member of NXIVM, specifically DOS, required one to submit collateral, something embarrassing or personal, to show commitment. (Moynihan, 2019). The men associated with NXIVM, were to provide some sort of financial collateral to show their commitment as well (Raine, 2021). The use of collateral was held over the members to generate a high level of fear amongst them to ensure their commitment (Raine, 2021). According to court documents, the collateral "should be so distasteful to break, that they'd rather die than break their vow" (United States of America v. Raniere, 2019, pp. 1653–1654).

4. ***Single Solution Offered by an Entity in Authority*** – Raniere labeled himself as 'Vanguard,' creating a God-like complex, promoting himself as the answer to self-enlightenment and betterment (Odato & Gish, 2012). Raniere's followers often referenced NXIVM objectives as Raniere's mission, and believed he was the answer to the problems of the world (Odato & Gish, 2012). Cult expert Rick Ross spoke with *The Union Times*, and detailed the curriculum used by NXIVM, developed by Raniere, and proclaimed followers were brainwashed, losing the

ability to think for themselves (Odato & Gish, 2012). From the exerts above

Raniere positioned himself to be the single solution for so many of his followers.

The relationship between cult leader Keith Raniere and his followers was a

symbiotic relationship; the relationship was beneficial to Raniere but often not the case

for his followers. Though Raniere may have full control over some of his followers, he

never obtained full control, and this is seen in the numerous members who left the cult

prior to him being arrested (Buhler et al., 2020). Those he did have full control over, he

was able to saturate them with his programming techniques to ensure that they would be

his dutiful marshals, such as Nancy Salzman and Allison Mack (Buhler et al, 2020). The

samplings that are going to be outlined in the upcoming research will help to solidify this

relationship amongst different cult leaders and their followers.

Summary and Conclusions

The research presented has identified that psychological manipulation is

synonymous with cults, whether violent or not. Cult leaders are often the catalyst to the

violence. The literature also annotates tactics of psychological manipulation correspond

with certain personality types. The research also showed that there are relationships

between criminal behavior and personality traits. Specifically, traits that governor self-

control, like conscientiousness or low agreeableness, have negative relationships to

criminality, whereas aggressive personality or ASPD positively relates to criminal

offending (Dellazizzo et al., 2018; Međedović et al., 2012). Past research has gathered

information of the abovementioned topics but has yet to solidify the connections. The

literature has not yet explored how Cluster-B personality traits of cult leaders influence

their tactics of psychological manipulation. This study aims to help close this gap and

provide knowledge on this topic. The next chapter will outline the research methodology

for this study, which will utilize a qualitative, case study design.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

There is a need for explanation and understanding as to how personality traits of cult leaders enable their ability to psychologically manipulate followers. Researchers have identified that cult leaders suffer from certain personality traits, often synonymous with Cluster-B personality disorders, including narcissism, antisocial personality disorder, or psychopathy (Burke, 2006; Butts, 2019). Psychological manipulation has been found to be common within cults, whether violent or nonviolent (Lalich, 2004). However, researchers have yet to provide a succinct understanding of the relationship between psychological manipulation, personality traits, and cult leaders.

The purpose of this study was to explore, in depth, how the personality traits of male cult leaders in highly publicized cases affects their use of psychological manipulation tactics. In this chapter, I provide the rationale for the case study research design, explain the role of the researcher, and describe the methodological approach chosen to support the research. I discuss instrumentation, literature saturation, and procedures for data collection. Issues of trustworthiness are addressed, including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures. Finally, I review the data analysis plan.

Research Design and Rationale

I used a qualitative case study research as the research method. By conducting a case study, a researcher can answer their research question by investigating specific entities, in this case cult leaders (see Gillham, 2000). A case study allowed for an

understanding of the common manipulative behaviors used by cult leaders and the

relationship between certain traits and manipulative abilities of the leaders. By using a

case study approach, I was better able to identify emerging dangerous cults, proactive

responses to member harm, and further education that might be offered to those affected

by cults. The comprehensive overview of previous cases helped to highlight documented

trends from cult leaders. Additionally, this study highlighted a need for further research

on this topic in the future. Gillham (2000) explained that a case study researcher

incorporates all evidence to answer the research questions and identify the best answers.

The research question I sought to answer was as follows: How do tactics of psychological

manipulation relate to specific Cluster-B personality traits in cult leaders?

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) defined case study research as "an in-depth

description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 37). A case study can be a combination

of phenomenological and explanatory research to identify the existence of a behavior

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Cult leaders were the boundary for this research and

represent the phenomenon that was explored throughout the case study. The context in

the research pertains to the personalities of cult leaders and how these traits affect their

manipulation tactics. When it is not possible to separate a phenomenon variable from the

context, a case study is a preferable method (Yin, 2014). In the past, case studies were not

highly regarded for qualitative research; however, the inclusion of rich data sources and

use of specific sampling, along with the potential "to develop and apply intervention

techniques" (p. 1), are now regarded as valuable attributes of this research design

(Kazdin, 1981).

One of the impetuses for the current research was to find processes that can prevent harm and injury to potential, current, or previous cult members and their families. A case study was appropriate in this regard because it is helpful in identifying and presenting solutions to substantial societal problems (Kazdin, 1981). Due to the research question and the identified literature gap, a case study was the necessary approach to present an informative investigation into a particular phenomenon. Ultimately, the results of the research provide a clearer understanding as to how cult leader personalities enable their ability to manipulate.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher involved collecting, analyzing, and reporting the data. The initial steps of the research were to gather sufficient evidence to support the main concept. This is done to provide a clear focus on the phenomenon because the research did not have personal experiences. The researcher was not part of an observation role given the fact that the phenomena in this study have since passed or are not obtainable for contact. The researcher did not work and has not worked in a role in which there is a personal or professional bias established. The cult leaders selected were based upon the archival data published and meeting a criteria threshold of destruction, which impacts society at large. To maintain continuity and alignment the researcher maintained a reflective journal to maintain focus on observations and trends, which will reduce bias against the data (Stake, 2010). Furthermore, the reflective journal was collated with the data matrix and analyzed using NVivo to ensure the proper themes are transcribed across all data sets.

Methodology

The research was a qualitative case study to study personality traits of infamous cult leaders to better understand how personality may relate to common manipulative tactics used. The type of data to be used is publicly available references, including archival, published, and legal materials. The use of archival data was the instrumentation of the research and validated through published data as supported sources. Archival data encompassed a variety of material, in this regard from cult leaders, to gain personal insight to their personality types, characteristics, and methodologies as a cult leader (Fischer & Parmentier, 2010). The use of published data helped to saturate the comparative analysis between the different cult leaders while highlighting personality traits. The research included the use of legal documents provided through public records to help support research findings. Public trials, such as Charles Manson identified an importance for the use of legal documents (FBI, n.d.); the availability of these documents was scarce and served as a tertiary data set.

Archival Data

Archival data was essential because it will give the best representation of the prolific cult leaders who have since passed. The archival data was the baseline of support for determining which personality traits impact cult leader's ability to manipulate. Archival data included historical or legal documents; these documents supported evidence, especially in cases of extreme misconduct. The archival data included passages, public statements, and notable statements from cult leaders.

Published Data

The published data included publicly available and published sermons, publications, and interviews from cult leaders. The dates of publication will be a wide array to cover the span of influence during each cult leader's time of operation. The personal publications of each cult leader establishes a baseline to understanding cult leader personality types. The research was conducted through the collection and analysis of archival data surrounding cult leaders. The examination of prolific cult leaders does not garner the opportunity for in person interviews due to majority of the individuals having died or prohibited access to the individuals. The research examined cult leaders Marshall Applewhite, Yahweh ben Yahweh, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Jim Jones, David Koresh, and Charles Manson. However, even though there are six identified case studies, research continued until data saturation was met. The purpose behind these cult leaders is that they are examples of extreme cults, the data collected on these leaders is abundant which helps to saturate the literature, and these leaders provide a broad spectrum of personality types and leadership. To narrow down the cult leaders the researcher focused on negative and sustaining impact to society, harm caused by their actions, and relevance to a societal problem that is still in existence. These cult leaders' typology will help provide an educational foundation to help bring awareness to the dangers of certain cult types. The types of data included academic journals providing background and historical information on identified cult leaders, literature documenting observations of cult leader behaviors through historical semi-structured interviews, previously conducted unstructured interviews documented in publications, documentaries regarding cult

leaders, published books about cult leaders, and previously published official documents to provide insight to emerging themes amongst cult leaders documented behaviors.

Legal Data

Finally, the use of legal documents, if available, aided in the development of the research. The sample for historical legal documents was small, however, it did support the research from a legal perspective of the societal problem at large. Overall, the above-mentioned data types are the best sources of data due to their ability to encapsulate all the elements of the research problem.

Data Analysis Plan

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used as the type of data analysis plan. The reason behind this data analysis plan is because an IPA allows for insight regarding an individual (in this case cult leaders) and context surrounding a phenomenon (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The analysis of the cult leaders helped to solidify which personality traits were most prevalent when it comes to psychological manipulation amongst cult leaders. Furthermore, the data analysis helped to develop a framework for which manipulation tactics are commonly used by cult leaders. The data collection matrix was used to organize the data in an attempt to identify themes amongst the research collected. The matrix allowed the research to provide a succinct overview of how cult leader personalities enable their ability to sufficiently manipulate. Additionally, the matrix will help to show commonalities between the different cult leaders' personalities. To understand the qualitative data, I used the data analysis tool NVivo.

I used NVivo to synthesize the literature to help construct themes. The software analysis used helped to serve as a repository of information in addition to assisting in coding different themes. The use of software enabled the researcher's ability to identify patterns amongst the different cult leaders that are being examined. By using NVivo, I was able to isolate traits or anomalies within the data to help answer the research question. Most importantly, NVivo was used to ensure accuracy by transforming large amounts of data and to overcome potential challenges, sustain alignment in the research, and overcome barriers due to the nature of the data set. With the expansive amount of data that existed pertaining to cult leaders and cults in general, NVivo was a useful repository for succinctly collating the collected data.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In this section, I discuss credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures pertaining to the study. For this case study the largest issue surrounding trustworthiness includes data saturation, single research collecting, and data analysis. The researcher planned to implement different strategies to help mitigate issues of trustworthiness.

Credibility

According to Yin (2017), internal validity is of high concern for explanatory case studies especially when the research is explaining the how and why between entities. Additionally, reliability is usually called into question when it comes to social sciences, because human behavior is never static (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). However, the threat to credibility is relevant with phenomenological case studies due to associated inferences

made by the researcher on their phenomenological sample (Yin, 2017). Furthermore, according to Kazdin (1981), case studies were discounted routinely because of the threat to internal validity based on the method of experimentation; this is because case studies are not necessarily experimental but can present information regarding treatments which are often the result of experimentation. For this case study an appropriate strategy to establish credibility is data saturation and reflexivity. According to Carter et al. (2014) to develop a thorough understanding of the phenomena one should use a variety of methods and sources to help substantiate validity of the research.

The proposed case study required a deep repository of archival data while also utilizing collected facts reported through multiple sources. The purpose behind this saturation is to ensure that all the necessary data is collected, reviewed, and processed accurately to answer the research question (Saunders et al., 2018). Without proper saturation of the data, the findings have the possibility of being inconclusive and therefore incomplete. Data saturation is critical in credibility because it helps develop the framework and the alignment for the research. Additionally, reflexivity is an essential step in data saturation because it is the role as the researcher to reflect on processes and critically assess efforts continuously, an effective method of this is through a reflective journal (May & Perry, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, to help solidify credibility, triangulation was used; Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomena (Carter et al., 2014).

Transferability

In the context of qualitative research, the ability to apply the research to other contexts, with other respondents, or other settings is the premise behind transferability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). However, given the research is qualitive the research is non-transferable. For the proposed research, there are no active participants; however, the sampling is specific to prolific cult leaders who have caused harm to others. The criteria for cult leader selection are based on negative and sustaining impact to society using promoted violence, methodology of belief systems, harm caused by their actions, past lived traumas of the cult leaders which enabled their desire to a cult leader, and relevance to a societal problem that is still in existence. The basis of the research can be adjusted for additional research, or research adjacent to the sampling provided.

Dependability

The use of triangulation, peer examination, researcher's position, or an audit trail are just some examples of methods used to increase dependability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For the research, I used an audit trail, peer review, and the program NVivo to establish dependability. The use of an audit trail is to detail, in record, the steps conducted throughout the research from beginning to end to help synthesize findings (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004). The plan is to create an audit trail that includes all data compiled and organized through where the data was found, to understand when and where the data was collected from. The audit trail will help to ensure that the data collected is relevant and current while also providing significant background to develop a qualitative understanding of the data collected.

Conformability

The role of the researcher is dependent upon their ability to sustain objectivity throughout the research process. Conformability is the researcher's qualitative counterpart to objectivity (Darawsheh, 2014). A foundation for conformability is reflexivity and helps to ensure transparency through the research and analysis process of data collection (Darawsheh, 2014). To maintain focus and eliminate personal bias, reflexivity is a process to routinely reflect the data and maintain alignment and focus to the research. (Darawsheh, 2014). Maintaining objectivity is critical when assessing personality types of cult leaders, the elimination of bias is essential for this process to be credible. Finally, to ensure validity and to eliminate bias, bracketing should be implemented through the research process. Bracketing is the methodological process where the researcher sets aside personal assumptions, positions, or past knowledge from newly acquired information gained in the research process (Chen & Zhang, 2020). According to Tufford and Newman (2012), bracketing helps the researcher eliminate preconceived ideas or thoughts that would negatively impact the research process. Given the criteria of cult leaders selected, bracketing is essential to ensure that the data is processed without bias.

Ethical Procedures

All data is going to be stored on a digital hard drive with backup copies stored in a digital cloud. The digital cloud will be located on a password protected device which is associated to a private internet system, thus ensuring a secure system. The data will be processed through a personal research database and shall not be disseminated, unless

asked by peer reviewers who are aiding in the research process. Regarding proper handling of information, all data sets will be permanently deleted for protection of the information after it has been securely contained for a minimum of 5 years. The premise of the research should not infringe on any ethical considerations or issues. Furthermore, given the professional and personal status there are no conflicts of interest that may arise.

Due to the research being a case study, ethical procedures surrounding sampling privacy, interactions, and misrepresentations avoidance, are mitigated through the research strategy (Sanjari et al., 2014). According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) there are two ethical considerations that need to be considered for a case study, interpretations of narrative outside the context and potential exposing someone's identity who did not want to be exposed. The data collected to date does not risk exposing someone's identity and the measures put in place assist in assuring the interpretation of the data is aligned with the context of the research collected. Additionally, the research was approved by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (approval no. 06-14-22-0744940).

Summary

The foundation of chapter 3 provided insight into research design, methodology, data analysis plan, and documented the types of instrumentation that is to be sued. The research design gave insight into the types of data that is to be used and ultimately laid the groundwork for the type of data analysis needed. The outlined details above helped to define the use of the instruments needed to fulfill the detailed methodology.

The research design was qualitative because of the questions addressing *how* personality traits impact cult leaders and *how* it impacts their ability to manipulate. To

fully understand these results, the research was conducted as a case study. The case study will be a phenomenological approach because of the need to understand how personality traits of cult leaders (phenomenon) impacts their ability manipulate others (context). Chapter 3 further explored the rationale for understanding the phenomenological approach. The role of researcher was also discussed along with an overview of limitations being a single data collector throughout the process. The role of the researcher will gather and collect all pertinent and relevant data, compile, and analyze to help identify a common theme within the research. Also covered in Chapter 3 was the type of instruments, data collection methods, and data analysis plan. The implementation of an audit trail helped to manage issues of trustworthiness, including internal validity, dependability, transferability, and creditworthiness. Using all these resources made answering the research question feasible. In chapter 4, the researcher included a description of the research in further detail, along with key findings of personality traits, psychological manipulation, and cult leaders. In chapter 4, the researcher discusses the collected data, the procedures used to analyze the data discussed in chapter 3, and the results of the conducted study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of the data collection and analysis processes. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to address how tactics of psychological manipulation relate to Cluster-B personality traits. I used a qualitative case study approach. The chapter will include a description of the research setting, participant demographics, discussion of data collection and analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. The chapter concluded with the results of the study.

Setting

The setting for the case study did not influence this study, was conducted in a controlled environment at a home office settling. The study revolved around the collection of archival data and was thoroughly analyzed in an environment that would not be impacted by external influences. I collected the data by using Walden University Library databases and other resources and the search engine Google Scholar. The resources I found, including documentaries, were analyzed by me in my private office. No major events occurred that affected the setting; therefore, data collection and data analysis of this study aligned with the methodology outlined in Chapter 3.

Demographics

The demographics for this study included six male cult leaders, based in the United States, whose cult was associated with a significant negative event. The case samples were Bhagwan Rajneesh (hostile takeover of Antelope, Oregon, and intentional contamination of food supply), Charles Manson (Tate–LaBianca Murders), David Koresh

(siege at Waco), Jim Jones (Jonestown Massacre), Marhsall Applewhite (Heaven's Gate

mass suicide), and Yahweh ben Yahweh (murder, intimidation, racketeering; Ballantyne,

2018; Hughes, 2019; Lembi, 2018; Pearson, 2018; Youngman, 2017; Zimbardo, 2020).

The demographics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Sample

Subject no.	Race/ethnicity	Age at time of negative event	Year of negative event
1	White	32	1969
2	White	47	1978
3	White	33	1993
4	White	65	1997
5	Asian	55	1981
6	African American	54	1984

Data Collection

Data collection focused on document study and video observations of six

participants: Charles Manson (Subject 1), Jim Jones (Subject 2), David Koresh (Subject

3), Marshall Applewhite (Subject 4), Bhagwan Rajneesh (Subject 5), and Yahweh ben

Yahweh (Subject 6). For document study, I reviewed relevant academic journals,

documentaries, periodicals, and books for each subject, spending, on average, 10 hr per

subject. During this time, I entered relevant information from the data into excel

spreadsheets. The data were collected from multiple sources, as documented in Table 2

(see Appendix A for a list of specific documents used).

Table 2

Data Collection Sources

Cult leader	No. of academic journals	No. of documentaries	No. of periodicals	No. of books
Charles Manson	4	2	2	2
Jim Jones	5	2	2	1
David Koresh	3	2	2	1
Marshall Applewhite	2	2	1	2
Yahweh ben Yahweh	5	2	3	
Bhagwan Rajneesh	6	1	2	1

Using the sources shown in Table 2, I categorized the different personality traits and

tactics of each cult leader, as shown in Tables 3 and 4. In Table 3, I align the specific

manipulation tactics (under the broad categories of behavioral, cognitive, emotional) I

observed with each Cluster-B personality trait.

Table 3

Cluster-B Personality Traits Associated With Forms of Psychological Manipulation

| Personality Trait | Form of psychological manipulation | | |
	Behavioral	Cognitive	Emotional
Narcissism	Charismatic	Thinks highly of themselves	Superficial/exploitable relationships
	Obsessive	Grandiose sense of self	Need for admiration
	Magnetic Personality	Cannot do anything wrong	
Antisocial	Abusive/insulting Behavior	Hostility	Shouting/yelling/demanding
		Lacks empathy/remorse	Threats of violence/violent
Borderline	Erratic	Extreme moods	Anxiety/depression
Histrionic	Seductive	Impressionistic	Shifting/shallow emotions

In Table 4, I list specific tactics observed in the data sources with each of the three forms of psychological manipulation. Both tables provide insight on how the personality traits and psychological manipulation tactics were coded and used in data collection.

Table 4

Psychological Manipulation Tactics

Form of psychological manipulation	Tactic
Behavioral	Belief system (false prophet)
	Drug use
	Isolation/withdrawal of things taken away from people
Emotional	Single solution offered by an entity in authority
	Constant anxiety/fear
Physical	Sex
	Torture/beatings
	Physical punishments

There were no variations to the data collection plan presented in Chapter 3. The case study research followed an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) plan and allowed me to succinctly answer the research question. The use of archival data, legal documents, and documentaries allowed me to achieve saturation. Additionally, there were no unusual circumstances encountered in the data collection.

Data Analysis

I carried out an IPA on the collected data to identify emerging themes revolving around how tactics of psychological manipulation related to Cluster-B personality traits. The best approach to identify the relationship between tactics and traits was through comparative approach which allowed for comparing data forming categories, either establishing boundaries or assigning categories (Tesch, 1990, p.96). The comparative

process enabled the researcher to examine recurring words, phrases, and ideas highlighting similarities to help determine the proper coding system. The coding procedure consisted of continuous reading and comparison of the collected information, during which progressive themes started to emerge. Saturation was reached when there was significant data identifying recognized themes and when no new themes emerged (Saldaña, 2014).

I used NVivo 12 software to help categorize the information from the collected data. The data were uploaded as survey results and coded into suited categories. The codes and subcodes permitted the information to be collocated into a single area, further highlighting emerging themes and patterns. Organizing the data helped to identify relationships linked to the research question.

Key Words

There were recurring words in the data. The most common word used, outside of the cult leader's name and the word "cult" was "people", occurring 77 times. The second most used word, "charisma," occurred 60 times. For readers' awareness, the word frequency was queried using stemmed words, so the high frequency of the words includes their plural counterpart. Additionally, there were stop-words in place, such as the names of the cult leaders and the cults. The key words reflect commonalities within the data to further identify the relationship between psychological manipulation and Cluster-B personality traits of cult leaders. This information can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Most Frequently Used Relevant Words

Word	f	Weighted percentage
People	77	.82
Charisma	60	.64
Family	58	.62
Community	52	.56
God	51	.55
Member	44	.47
Group	42	.45
Leader	41	.44
Sex	39	.42
Heaven	33	.35
Personality	33	.35
Wanted	33	.35
Life	32	.34

The identification of the key words was important to understanding the themes of the research. The key words showed an interwoven relationship between the personality traits and manipulation tactics, and having a frequency of people, members, followers, family, and community within the key words solidifies these relationships. The acknowledgement of members outside of the cult leaders showed the impact these members had on the cult leaders, and their ability to institute manipulative tactics.

Based upon the identified key words, I broke down the specific codes for psychological manipulation into categories of emotional, behavioral, and physical. Subcodes included the categories of single solution by an entity in authority, constant anxiety and fear, belief system (false prophet), isolation/withdrawal from things taken away from people, drug use, and physical manipulation (sex, torture, and physical

punishments). Table 6 shows the frequency of prominent personality traits for each cult

leader.

Table 6

Frequency of Cult Leader Personality Traits

	Personality trait (*f*)			
Cult leader	Narcissism	Antisocial	Borderline	Histrionic
Charles Manson	24	14	2	4
Jim Jones	23	15	15	5
David Koresh	25	12	1	7
Marshall Applewhite	30	9	13	10
Yahweh ben Yahweh	28	20	-	1
Bhagwan Rajneesh	26	9	13	13

As Table 6 shows, the cult leaders in the sample exhibited narcissism, antisocial,

borderline, and histrionic personality traits. However, the data collected highlighted that

cult leader personalities often shift when they are faced with adversity. Table 7 shows the

data points of where cult leaders exist pre- and post-stressor.

Table 7

Evolution of Manipulation Tactics by Personality Traits of Cult Leaders

Cult leader characteristic	Pre-stressor point	Stressor	Post-stressor point
Personality trait	Grandiose sense of self (N) Charismatic (N) Magnetic personality (N) Superficial or exploitable Relationships (N) Seductive behavior (H)	Rejection Investigation Death	Obsessive (N) Superficial/exploitable relationships (N) Hostility (A) Shouting (A) Threats of violence (A) Erratic behavior (B)
Psychological manipulation	Belief system (false prophet) Drug use		Single solution Constant anxiety and fear

	Sex	Isolation
	Isolation	
FFM human	Agreeability	Neuroticism
personality trait	Openness	Introversion
	Extroversion	Conscientiousness
	Conscientiousness	

Note. The identification of conscientiousness within pre- and post-stressor point is based on the realization that although conscientiousness decreases when aggression increases, it is still present. N = narcissism; A = antisocial; B = borderline; H = histrionic; FFM = five-factor model.

It is essential to understand these documented instances to help develop the overarching themes of the research. Each of these instances is extremely important, because it not only shows how cult leaders exist on a spectrum of personality traits, but how the traits shift aggressively. At the conclusion of the data analysis there were no identified discrepancies in the cases. The information collected and analyzed did not present findings that would be considered alarming. All the results aligned with the findings of the studies, which helped to answer the research question. Tables 8 and 9 provide a visual illustration of how the coding schema allowed for conformability but also helped to identify core nodes within the collected data based on manipulation tactic and personality trait. Table 8 shows the most common manipulation tactics used by the subjects.

Table 8

Most Common Manipulation Tactics

Manipulation tactic	%
Isolation/withdrawal	2.20
Constant anxiety/fear	1.73
Belief system (false prophet)	1.44

Single solution	1.21
Sex	.99
Torture/violence	.89
Drug use	.32
Physical punishment	29

Table 9 shows the common personality traits of the subjects.

Table 9

Common Personality Traits

Personality trait	%
Superficial/exploitable relationship	1.12
Charismatic	.96
Seductive behavior	.83
Threats of violence	.83
Hostility	.80
Grandiose sense of self	.64
Thinks highly of themselves	.58
Magnetic personality	.51
Need for admiration	.51
Erratic behavior	.48
Lacks empathy and remorse	.48
Cannot do anything wrong	.42
Abusive or insulting behavior	.35
Extreme moods	.32
Victim mentality	.29
Obsessive	.29
Anxiety/depression	.22
Attention-seeking behavior	.22
Impressionistic	.22
Shouting/yelling	.10
Irrational	.06
Shifting and shallow emotions	.03

Once the most prominent tactics and traits were identified, the relationships

between how the different manipulation tactics and personality traits interacted become

transparent. These results as well as the overarching themes and subthemes which

emerged from the data during analysis are presented and examined in the next section.

Table 10 shows the relationship between personality trait, manipulation tactic used, and corresponding FFM model trait that is associated with the relationship.

Table 10

Correspondence of Subjects' Personality Traits and Manipulation Tactics to the Five-Factor Model of Behavior

Personality trait	Manipulation tactic used	Five-factor trait
Superficial/exploitable relationship	Constant Anxiety and Fear; Isolation and Withdrawal; Sex; Drugs; Belief System	Openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion/introversion, agreeability
Charismatic	Belief System; Sex; Single Solution	Agreeability, extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness
Seductive behavior	Sex; Isolation and Withdrawal	Agreeability, openness to experience, extroversion
Threats of violence	Torture/Beatings; Physical Punishments; Constant Anxiety and Fear	Conscientiousness, neuroticism
Hostility	Torture/Beatings; Physical Punishments; Constant Anxiety and Fear; Single Solution	Conscientiousness, neuroticism
Grandiose sense of self	Belief System; Single Solution; Sex	Conscientiousness, extroversion, openness to experience
Thinks highly of themselves	Belief System; Single Solution; Sex	Conscientiousness, introversion, openness to experience
Magnetic personality	Single Solution; Belief System; Isolation and Withdrawal; Sex	Agreeability, conscientiousness, extroversion, openness to experience
Need for admiration	Belief System; Sex	Agreeability, conscientiousness, extroversion, neuroticism, openness to experience

Personality trait	Manipulation tactic used	Five-factor trait
Erratic behavior	Torture/Beatings; Physical Punishments; Constant Anxiety and Fear	Conscientiousness, neuroticism
Lacks empathy and remorse	Single Solution; Belief System; Isolation and Withdrawal	Conscientiousness, introversion, neuroticism
Cannot do anything wrong	Single Solution; Constant Anxiety and Fear; Isolation and Withdrawal; Drugs; Sex; Torture/Beatings; Physical Punishments	Conscientiousness, openness to experience
Abusive or insulting behavior	Torture/Beatings; Physical Punishments; Constant Anxiety and Fear	Conscientiousness, neuroticism
Extreme moods	Single Solution; Constant Anxiety and Fear; Isolation and Withdrawal	Conscientiousness, neuroticism
Victim mentality	Belief System; Sex	Conscientiousness, introversion, neuroticism
Obsessive	Single Solution; Constant Anxiety and Fear; Isolation and Withdrawal; Belief System	Conscientiousness, introversion, neuroticism
Anxiety/depression	Constantly Anxiety and Fear; Isolation and Withdrawal	Conscientiousness, introversion, neuroticism
Attention-seeking behavior	Single Solution; Belief System; Isolation and Withdrawal	Conscientiousness, extroversion, openness to experience
Impressionistic	Single Solution; Belief System; Isolation and Withdrawal	Conscientiousness, openness to experience
Shouting/yelling	Constant Anxiety and Fear; Torture/Beatings; Physical Punishments	Conscientiousness, neuroticism
Irrational	Single Solution; Constant Anxiety and Fear; Isolation and Withdrawal	Conscientiousness, neuroticism
Shifting and shallow emotions	Constantly Anxiety and Fear; Isolation and Withdrawal; Sex; Drugs	Conscientiousness, neuroticism

Note. The personality traits are listed in the order of most common to least common trait.

FFM = five-factor model of personality.

   In relation to personality traits comes methods of manipulation and the purpose of the tactic is intracule to how the cult leader needed to continue to maintain control of their follower. That is seen through the lens of the FFM of human personality. Table 11 shows the tactics used and the corresponding FFM trait. The purpose of each tactic is also stated.

Table 11

Manipulation Tactics Used by Subjects and Corresponding Five-Factor Model of

Personality Trait

Tactic	Purpose of tactic	FFM corresponding trait
Single solution	To impress upon the followers that there is only one option for fulfillment	Neuroticism, introversion, conscientiousness
Constant anxiety/fear	Build up fear towards external influences, increasing the dependency on the cult leader	Neuroticism, introversion, conscientiousness
Belief system	Develop a God-like persona, something for the followers to believe in	Agreeability, extroversion, conscientiousness, openness
Isolation/withdrawal	Eliminating all outside influence, increasing the veracity of cult leader as their only savior	Agreeability, extroversion/introversion, conscientiousness, openness, neuroticism
Sex	To build up intimacy and trust, while also using it as a method of control	Agreeability, openness, extroversion/introversion, conscientiousness
Drugs	Decrease cognition, lower inhibition, creates a portal for exposing weaknesses and vulnerabilities	openness, extroversion/introversion, conscientiousness
Physical punishment	Purpose of restricting the idea of free will, while imposing	Neuroticism, introversion, conscientiousness

the ideation of complete
control from the cult leader

Note. FFM = five-factor model of personality.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

It is essential for researchers to address the evidence of Trustworthiness within their research. To ensure trustworthiness, specifically to increase credibility, dependability, and conformability, the researcher used a reflective journal and created an audit trail. The credibility in the research is addressed due to the clear evidence that cult leader personality traits impact their ability to psychologically manipulate their followers. This is seen in their intimate relationships to build trust and intimacy or in their fits of rage to drive of anxiety and fear. Each of the participants have defined examples of the relationship between personality trait and manipulation tactics, that the study's findings are accurate and correct. To identify credibility the researcher maintained a reflective journal to eliminate personal bias. The journal was used as a tool to reflect on specific data points collection, in which it had to answer the following questions: 1) does this statement answer the research question and how? 2) does this statement relate to the cult leader? If the questions could not be answered the data was not collected. If the data answered both questions, thoroughly, it was included in the data collection matrix.

Bracketing was also used on all cult leaders eliminating personal bias and increasing conformability. The use of bracketing ensured the data collected could be used to answer the research question. When isolating data points, the researcher would take the excerpt and ask how the specific quote, sentence, or clips answered the research question. Therefore, data, as it related to the research, eliminated personal biases which

helped to identify themes presented in the results. The use of Microsoft Excel also allowed bracketing to occur to ensure there was further elimination of personal bias (Chen & Zhang, 2020). Due to the inherent nature of qualitative studies, transferability is limited. However, results can be reasonably transferred to similar cases within the US.

Dependability of the research is demonstrated using an audit trail. The audit trail was kept in a centralized repository for the researcher to maintain a consistent application throughout the research. In the working data collection document, there were two instances in which the audit trail was recorded. A categorical list identifying where the data was found and where it was collected from and embedded with the associated data point within the working document. The audit trail was also separated out by corresponding cult leader, further allowing the researcher to isolate the findings based upon the different entities. By doing so, this allowed for the researcher to analyze the findings but also address the emerging themes amongst the data being collected.

All the processes put into place also helped to ensure conformability of the research. Bracketing and the reflective journal allowed for confirmation and authenticity of results by providing the reflective results of the participants. For this study, confirmability was established by an audit trail by detailing in record all the steps conducted from the beginning to the end to synthesize findings (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004). The audit trail compiled was organized by where the data was found, to when and where the data was collected from. Additionally, the audit trail forced the researcher to thoroughly scrape the data through multiple vantage points to ensure the data was checked and rechecked throughout the data collection and analysis process. The process

was conducted by screening each cult leader individually and then was coded by the

manipulation tactics in their appropriate category prior to examining personality traits. In

transcripts, documentaries, journals, periodicals, archival data, and legal documents, the

researcher would highlight specific key words and instances related to the identified

manipulation tactics. Personality traits were coded by overall trait (narcissism, antisocial,

borderline, and histrionic) and then further coded by their identity structure. The same

audit trail system of documentation was in place to ensure that there was consistent

coding for each trait of the cult leaders.

Results

Based on the data analysis, the researcher was able to identify the following core

themes:

1. Manipulation tactics are fluid when the cult leaders are faced with a specific

   breaking point. The theme identified shifting emotions of the different cult leaders.

2. The most prominent shift within the manipulation tactics is that a cult leader

   shifting from a belief system (false prophet) to a single solution by an authority

   figure.

Table 12 lays out the identified themes and their corresponding subthemes as they relate

to cult leaders, manipulation tactics, and personality traits.

Table 12

Themes and Subthemes

Theme/subtheme	Description
Theme 1	Manipulation tactics are fluid when the cult leaders are faced with a specific breaking point. The theme identified shifting emotions of the different cult leaders.

Subtheme 1.1	When cult leaders are in complete control, they exhibited positive FFM traits such as openness to new experience, extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (low aggression).
Subtheme 1.2	When cult leaders are challenged their personalities shift negatively within the FFM such as introversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness (high aggression).
Theme 2	The most prominent shift within the manipulation tactics is that a cult leader shifting from a belief system (false prophet) to a single solution by an authority figure.
Subtheme 2.1	Cult leaders often promote themselves as a savior or messiah. They convince their followers they are the answer.
Subtheme 2.2	When cult leaders are tested, they dramatically shift to offering their followers a single solution.

These themes highlight the importance of what happens when these cult leaders lose control, and how their behavioral shift negatively affects their followers. Themes 1 and 2 draws to light how the FFM of human behavior must shift in accordance with the cult leader's personality traits during these challenging times. Regarding personality traits, it is important to note that thematically all the identified cult leaders exhibited high levels of the personality trait of narcissism; overall all the cult leaders exhibited signs of antisocial, borderline, and histrionic personality traits.

Theme 1: Fluidity of Manipulation Tactics

Theme 1 encompasses that manipulation tactics are fluid when cult leaders are faced with a specific breaking. This theme illustrates the shifting emotions of the different cult leaders. In relation to theme 1, it is important to note that prior to any challenges and when cult leaders are in the most control their personalities are essential to their existence. All six of the examined cult leaders experienced fluid manipulation tactics when faced with specific breaking points. This theme is common amongst the

different leaders, because even though they have similar behaviors, these are all different

individuals. The theme shows that no matter who the leader is, stressors will impact the

individual. Theme 1 is applied specifically to the cases of Bhagwan Rajneesh and

Marshall Applewhite whose personality traits are pivotal to their cults, but also how

quickly they shift with different breaking points. It is important to note that the other cult

leaders also can be applied to theme 1, however the shifts of Rajneesh and Applewhite

isolate the dangerous shifts that can happen. Additionally, it is important to show the

application of theme 1 to Rajneesh and Applewhite, because in one of the cases the

violence was directed external to the group (Rajneesh) and the other internal to the group

(Heaven's Gate). Both violently impactful actions but shows how the different cult

leaders react similarly to pressure. The first example of theme 1 is the case of cult leader

Bhagwan Rajneesh, who is a controversial religious leader who rejected institutional

religions. Rajneesh was controversial due to his progressive attitude towards sexuality,

which was a contentious in India, leading Rajneesh to immigrate to the United States

(Palmer, 1988). Rajneesh's second in command, Ma Anand Sheela, was able to identify a

location in Oregon, based in a small town called Antelope, where the group looked to

establish Rajneeshpuram (Palmer, 1988; Way & Way, 2018). The movement was met

with apprehension in Oregon, leading to numerous conflicts between the Rajneeshi's and

the local community (Way & Way, 2018). There was 3 years of building hostilities which

built up to the notorious incident in which the Rajneeshi's intentionally poisoned locals in

attempt to influence county elections; this is still the largest bioterrorist attack in the

United States (Way & Way, 2018).

In relation to theme 1, Rajneesh was all-encompassing of love and compassion and was known as the "sex guru" (Urban, 2016, p.335). In fact, Urban (2016) went on to highlight that the sexual freedom and neo-tantric views of Rajneesh became the institutional model in which the cult abided by. Rajneesh had considerable charisma with a dramatic flair, with uncanny ability to render his followers incoherent but provide them fulfillment (Palmer, 1988). The free love and spirituality that was being promoted of the Rajneeshi's was magnetic, however that all changed when the group relocated to Antelope, Oregon. A location was decided on for the establishment of the United States for Rajneeshpuram, but it was not welcomed by the local community, especially as the Rajneeshi's began increasing the population and presence in the town. Due to the response of the people of Antelope, the Rajneeshi's began to counter to locals. "Rajeeshi's started harassing people of Antelope…they were a very vindictive group of people" (Way & Way, 2018, 51:28). This was the first of many escalatory reactions by the Rajneeshi's. The more the people of Antelope pulled away from Rajneeshpuram, the harder the Rajneeshi's pushed back. All this culminated in 1984 in wake of upcoming election, Rajneeshi's sprinkled salmonella typhimurium on salad bars in 10 restaurants in Wasco County, poisoning over 700 people (Martin, 2011). The intent of the poisoning was to incapacitate those who were supposed to vote, so that the Rajneeshi candidate would win the county elections history (Way & Way, 2018). The sex guru and spiritual leader who was breaking down barriers of human intimacy, did not appear to be someone who would act so violently towards others. However, the personality dynamic shifted when a small town in Wasco County decided to put pressure on the cult leader. Though

there is speculation that his deputy Sheela was responsible for the attacks, it was documented by Palmer (1988) that despite Sheela's independence, Rajneesh always had the final word.

Similarly theme 1 can be seen in the case of Marshall Applewhite, as there was a high level of communal compassion and harmony with the Heaven's Gate cult. Applewhite was the known leader of Heaven's Gate, which became infamous for the mass suicide in 1997 (Tweel, 2020). Heaven's gate was a new age religious movement, but often characterized as the UFO religion (Tweel, 2020). The premise of the UFO group is that the followers had the ability to transform into extraterrestrial beings through rejection of their human nature (Tweel, 2020). Prior to the passing of Applewhite's close ally, Bonnie Lou Nettles, the ascension to Heaven was completed while members were alive while aboard the UFO (Tweel, 2020). However, once Nettles passed, ascension into Heaven meant that members had to shed their human vehicles, through death (Tweel, 2020). Once Applewhite heard the news of the Hale-Bop comet, he believed that it was Nettles signaling the time for the group to ascend (Tweel, 2020). On 25 March 1997, 39-members partook in ritualistic suicide which coincided with the closest approach of the Hale-Bop comet (Tweel, 2020).

Applewhite drew in people who thought similarly and made the followers feel welcomed and appreciated. Members expressed that Applewhite made people feel that he was speaking directly to each individual and had a positive effect on the members (Johnson, 2020). Applewhite used technology to reach followers, to send out his messages far and wide. In doing so, Applewhite "claimed that he can save his followers

from Luciferians, which are evil space aliens, who present themselves to Earthlings as "God" and conspire to keep humans from evolution" (Qiu, 2021, p.7). It was a unique way of thinking, but it was the communal approach to thinking within Heaven's Gate.

However, when Applewhite's rock, Nettles, died of cancer, his teachings and preaching changed from charismatic and moving, to obsessive and controlling. This is a clear marker from when Applewhite shifted from prominent narcissistic traits of charismatic to antisocial traits. An example of antisocial traits is when Applewhite would "embarrass members with deeper male voices to put them down" (Tweel, 2020; part 3, 9:57); this was part of the full control he implemented. Applewhite claimed that Nettles death happened because it was his time to take full control of the group (Tweel, 2020). Tweel (2020) exclaimed how without Nettles, Applewhite no longer had a support system and developed cognitive dissonance, thus becoming obsessed with control, and contradicting the foundation of Heaven's Gate.

Robinson (1997) documented that under Applewhite's ministry, he sought to eliminate the individuality of Heaven Gate members. This controlling obsession increased fear and anxiety within the group. Former members discussed how members were convinced that the US Government was waging a war against those who thought differently, and references to Ruby Ridge and Waco were used as examples (Tweel, 2020). As the anxiety and fear began to grow, Applewhite's ideation about departing earth grew significantly (Qiu, 2021). Former members indicated Applewhite made it out that "the collective suicide was believed to be necessary because one had to leave one's physical body behind in order to gain access to the Next Level" (Chryssides, 2012,

p.159). According to former members, once the news of the Hale-Bop comet began to increase within media outlets, Applewhite became obsessed with belief that it was Nettles sending a spaceship to collect the members (Tweel, 2020). Applewhite's decent into obsessive control aligns with the death of Nettles, who happened to be the person who accepted him for who he was. Applewhite became fixated on a single solution to get to the next level for Heaven's Gate, to be with Nettles once again, but it came at a great cost to those members who believed and followed him.

There are similarities and differences between the cases of Rajneesh and Applewhite. It is apparent that the two cults subscribed to a unique and independent way of thinking. Whether it be a sex cult that embraced sexual exploration, or a cult that was created off science and technology. The two cults were individualistic in their creation and their foundation. Where the cults begin to differ is control methodology. Rajneesh did not like outsiders trying to control what happened inside Rajneeshpuram; while there was control over the cult, retribution was projected outward. Applewhite, who also did not like others imposing a narrative on his cult, closed his grip on his followers and began to control Heaven's Gate members more aggressively. The ultimate difference between the two cults is the reaction to their stressors. Rajneesh was responsible for the largest bioterrorist attack in US history, outwardly impacting those negatively affecting his cult. Whereas Applewhite chose mass suicide as a solution to his stressor. Despite the differences in outcomes, the two cases show the fluidity of personality traits when the cult leader is faced with a challenge.

Subtheme 1.1: Positive Personality Traits When in Complete Control

Subtheme 1.1 encompasses that when cult leaders are in complete control, they exhibited positive FFM traits such as openness to new experience, extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (low aggression). Prior to a stress point, the personalities of cult leaders reflected positive FFM human personality traits: agreeability, extroversion, conscientiousness (low aggression). The cult leaders were focused on building and growing their communities, without societal pressure. Something that is common amongst all six of the cases examined, is that the cult leaders, when in complete control of their organization, exhibited positive FFM traits. Also within this subtheme was awareness of narcissistic traits. When things were not stressful, a cult leader's narcissistic traits allowed them to use these traits to attack and gain more followers. This is due in part to the behavioral node of charisma, which is attractive and alluring, and each cult leader possessed this trait. It is in this period that these cult leaders were most effective at influencing and mesmerizing members. When the cult leaders demonstrated this high level of positive FFM traits, members become so encapsulated with these leaders, that they blindly dedicated themselves to the organization. Two cases that are applicable to subtheme 1.1 is Jim Jones and David Koresh, for it was their outward facing positive FFM traits that enabled them to garner a devoted following. It is important to note that all the cult leaders are known for their positive FFM traits in the beginning, however Jones and Koresh are two leaders who were able to drive their followers to a violent end. The following and specifically their dedication for Jones and Koresh are why these two cult leaders are synonymous for subtheme 1.1. For example, Jim Jones in the

beginning had an allure to him, that drew people in, which is relational to subtheme 1.1. Jones was the magnetic cult leader of the People's Temple, an all-inclusive religious movement that saw past gender and race, pushing the boundaries of standard religious practices (Delarosa, 2018). Jones was someone who could easily persuade people through his teaching and his healing services, which made him appear to be God like (Delarosa, 2018). Jones moved his congregation from the mid-West to California, to expand his congregation, but also to escape a building bad reputation (Delarosa, 2018). However, Jones could not escape the bad press that he had started to receive. Coupled with questionable life choices that landed him in the crosshairs of law enforcement, Jones felt pressure to move his congregation somewhere he felt they could not be interfered with (Delarosa, 2018). The People's Temple relocated to Guyana, South America, and established Jonestown. Despite the intended escape from the mounting pressure in the United States, Jones was not able to completely escape from the negativity that circulated the People's Temple (Delarosa, 2018). By 1978, there was increased reports of human rights violations in Jonestown, which prompted an investigation by U.S. Congressman Leo Ryan; the delegation that came with Ryan offered members who were willing to leave a flight out of Jonestown (Delarosa, 2018). While Congressman Ryan, his delegation, and some of the People's Temple followers were boarding a flight, Jones' gunmen fired weapons killing Congressman Ryan and four others (Delarosa, 2018). The violent act that took place on the airstrip was the catalyst for what is to be known as one of the worst mass suicides in history (Delarosa, 2018). Jones implemented the call for revolutionary suicide in which if their members wanted to be saved, they needed to

consume a cyanide laced flavored drink. On 18 November 1978, 909 members of Jonestown died, over 300 were children (Khol, 2017).

Jones is an example of how when cult leaders are in complete control, they exhibited positive FFM traits such as openness to new experience, extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (low aggression). According to Guinn (2017, p.92) "Jim Jones's most effective means of persuasion – his personality." Khol (2017) documents the following excerpt from his followers:

Jim Jones appealed to the best in us and made us into an efficient, effective, and caring community—a wonderful family. He brought in the best friends and families so that we could share the work ahead. The people of Jonestown were the people you would choose for your family and the people you would love when you met up with them. This is the essence of Peoples Temple (p.11).

These were the examples of Jones prior to being investigated, prior to the pressure from the government investigation, and prior to his way of life being challenged. In the early stages, when Jones was in control, he exhibited signed of positive FFM personality traits as assessed by his behaviors. Jones exhibited the manipulation tactics of forming a belief system/becoming a false prophet. This was seen when his followers indicate that Jones became an "object of worship" (Delarosa, 2018, 47:16). These actions were conducted through the FFM traits of agreeability, extroversion, conscientiousness (low aggression), and openness to new experiences.

David Koresh, the leader of the Branch Davidians is another example of subtheme 1.1. Koresh was integral to the development and growth of the Davidians from 1987-

1994 (Parkinson, 2007). Koresh also strived for complete control and that was indicative when he competed for control of the group from former leader Benjamin Roden's son George (Parkinson, 2007). Koresh's leadership was met with controversy, as reports of polygamy and child sexual abuse arose in 1990 (Pearson & Pearson, 2018). However, it was the allegations of stockpiling weapons that lead to siege at Waco (Pearson & Pearson, 2018). After 51 days, the violence came to an end when the compound housing Koresh and his followers was engulfed in flames (Pearson & Pearson, 2018).

Despite the allegations, Koresh also had a unique charm about him in the beginning of the Branch Davidians. Koresh's charm was relational to his narcissistic traits that revolved around thinking highly of oneself, grandiose sense of self, cannot do anything wrong, and a need for admiration. Of note, Koresh's personality traits exist primarily in narcissism and antisocial, but given his promiscuity, had instances of histrionic traits. Koresh charmed and inspired his followers by his deep knowledge and readings from the bible, and his sermons drew people in (Russel, 2023). Due to his narcissistic traits which related to charisma, "Koresh quickly wins people's trust and is uncannily adept at manipulating and conning people" (Lacayo et al., 1993, p.34). Koresh was willing to make it known that he was God's spokesman and the one who was going to unveil God's divine plan outlined in the Book of Revelations (Howell & Wanasika, 2013). The Branch Davidians believed him, because of the way he carried and presented himself; members could not help but feel drawn to him (Howell & Wanasika, 2013). In fact, Howell and Wanasika (2013) documented those followers felt inspired by Koresh. It is because of the way Koresh acted during these beginning times, that he was able to

control his followers, and make them exist according to Koresh (Howell & WAnaskia, 2013). Ultimately, it was determined that Koresh lacked all consideration for the Davidians (Howell & Wanasika, 2013) and was a liar and a deceiver (Pearson & Pearson, 2018). The Branch Davidians were unaware of who Koresh truly was, largely due to the positive FFM traits that Koresh was exhibiting. "Koresh was described as a man equipped with both a creamy charm and cold-blooded willingness to manipulate those drawn to him…the charismatic leadership with a pathological edge." (de Vries, 2003, p.544). While in complete control, Koresh had the Branch Davidians in his hands and felt empowered and unstoppable. Koresh loved admiration more than anything else in the world, it was the only thing that mattered to him (Pearson & Pearson, 2018). Koresh, exhibiting antisocial traits and would stop at nothing to maintain that control, including having "members would be expelled when they refused to follow Koresh's rule" (Howell & Wanasika, 2013, p.246, p.243). Pearson and Pearson (2018) brought to light that Koresh never had the same attention as the kind of attention he got during the siege at Waco; Koresh wanted the world to pay attention to him, which is exactly what he got. The power that Koresh held over his followers, those beginning stages of manipulation imposed by the positive traits that were exuded by Koresh, is what lead the Davidians to their demise.

Jim Jones and David Koresh were comparable leaders and had a lot of the same personality traits. Both leaders loved the attention and did what they could to get more of it. Attention was almost like a drug to Jones and Koresh, and the more they got, the more they wanted (Delarosa, 2018; Pearson & Pearson, 2018). Jones and Koresh differ in how

they reacted to pressure; Jones became more reclusive and paranoid (Khol, 2007), where

Koresh stood his ground and fought back against law enforcement, Koresh wanted to get

his message out there and refused to give into the negotiators (Pearson & Pearson, 2018).

Despite having the same alluring charismatic charm, when their total control was

challenged one leader instituted the flight response (Jones) and the other fought (Koresh).

Subtheme 1.2: Negative Personality Traits When Challenged

Subtheme 1.2 encompasses that when cult leaders are challenged their

personalities shift negatively within the FFM such as introversion, neuroticism,

conscientiousness (high aggression). All six cases analyzed in this study demonstrated

that when challenged or questioned, the cult leaders' personalities shift, in attempt to

regrasp control. Specifically, when the cult leaders' control was challenged, their initial

use of openness, agreeability, extroversion, and conscientiousness (low aggression)

descend into negative FFM traits. The six identified cult leaders have this shifting period

between positive and negative FFM traits, however the two cases that can be applied to

subtheme 1.2 is that of Yahweh ben Yahweh and Charles Manson. These two cases are

prime for showing two individuals who do not respond well to rejection or criticism and

can shift rapidly to negative FFM traits. The first example of theme subtheme 1.2 was

Yahweh ben Yahweh, who became well known as the leader of a black separatist group,

The Nation of Yahweh (Haycox & Fine, 2001). A new religious movement that appealed

to black American devotees (Haycox & Fine, 2001). Yahweh's preaching included

discussions on how white devils were temporarily ruling over black people, his

preaching's were criticized for teaching hate (Haycox & Fine, 2001). In the early 1990's

Yahweh became under suspicion of law enforcement following more than dozen murders

of ex-followers (Haycox & Fine, 2001). Yahweh was convicted on conspiracy to commit

murder along with racketeering charges (Haycox & Fine, 2001).

In relation to subtheme 1.2, in the early stages of the Nation of Yahweh, Yahweh

was a beacon of hope for individuals who were disadvantaged (Haycox & Fine, 2001).

Hutchinson (2007) discussed that "Yahweh ben Yahweh offered the members of his

movement a vision of a more inclusive America and a way for each of them to be

personally involved in nurturing that goal to fruition." (p.111). Yahweh was a strong and

dedicated leader who appeared to be well put together, however it became clear that

Yahweh had his own breaking points. The FBI documents that public criticism was not

something that Yahweh tolerated (Haycox & Fine, 2001, 29:07). It was very clear

though that Yahweh liked his role and the power that he had, according to Amani (2003,

p.108) "he reigned supreme and anyone who criticized or questioned him had better

watch his back". Control is something Yahweh thrived for, and his actions were

questionable. Most notably, was the execution of Aston Green, a dissident in the eyes of

Yahweh. According to an informant, Green was a "threat because he questioned Yahweh

ben Yahweh's authority", Green was abducted and beaten, and then decapitated at the

orders of Yahweh (Haycox & Fine, 2001, 24:34). This act, along with many others, were

the catalyst for members of the Nation of Yahweh to go to law enforcement about

Yahweh. Yahweh's behavior shifted drastically, resulting in in Yahweh using

intimidation and murder as a method to silence others who try to speak out against him

(Haycox & Fine, 2001, 41:55). Yahweh exhibited these signs by utilizing the tactics of

physical punishments, restricting the idea of free will, while imposing the ideation of

complete control. This is done through the negative FFM trait of neuroticism,

introversion, and conscientiousness (high aggression). Additionally, the other

manipulation tactics that is used with the same FFM traits is constant anxiety and fear,

which is what Yahweh did to prevent others from speaking out against him.

   Charles Manson is another example of the dramatic shift from positive FFM traits

to negative FFM traits. Manson is probably one of the most infamous criminals in

modern day history. Manson was the cult leader of the Manson Family based in

California, known for his free spirit and love for music (Ballantyne, 2018). Manson spent

a good portion of his early life in and out of prison, however that did not prevent him

from growing his following in the late 1960's (Ballantyne, 2018). Manson's love for

music and songwriting is what lead him to form a relationship with Dennis Wilson of The

Beach Boys and record producer Terry Melcher (Ballantyne, 2018). A catalyst to a series

of murders committed by the family in the Los Angeles area, was when Manson tried to

secure a record contract through Melcher, but to no avail (Ballantyne, 2018). As a result,

the Manson Family committed what would become known as the Tate–LaBianca

murders (Ballantyne, 2018). Even though Manson did not commit the murders himself,

he was convicted of the murders based off the prosecutions findings that Manson ordered

the murders (Ballantyne, 2018).

   Manson is another example of subtheme 1.2, as Manson had a clear charisma

about him, and he knew how to manipulate situations to get whatever it was that he

desired. Baer and Connelly (2017) identified that Manson had a personality full of

charisma, and to his followers he became an object to worship. Ballantyne (2018) highlights that any room that Manson walked into a room, he would command with his electric personality. However, this all changed when Terry Melcher fell through on what Manson perceived as a promise to publish his music, to Manson, Melcher was a liar (Baer & Connelly, 2017). It was clear that "due to rejection, Hollywood became the enemy, and Manson's pattern of thinking and living changes" (Ballantyne, 2018, 19:26). The initial positive FFM traits, dramatically shift to negative FFM traits, neuroticism, introversion, conscientiousness (high aggression). During the time leading up to the Tate–LaBianca Murders, Manson started showing an increase in violent thinking, rage and hatred toward society, and crazy thinking (Ballantyne, 2018; Baer & Connelly, 2017; Bugliosi & Gentry, 2014). Manson became obsessive and erratic and soon his commune in which he created, was now preparing for an impending race war (Ballantyne, 2018).

Yahweh and Manson are extremely similar in many different regards. Although the types of followers they were trying to attract were vastly different, their approach to appeal to their followers was the same. Both Yahweh and Manson knew how to message effectively and use their charisma in such a way. Yahweh would do so through preaching "you got to love me, if you don't love me, you are lying hypocrite, you're a snake" (Dipersio, 2019, 24:46). Yahweh saying these words would make members give into him more, it's appealing to their need to belong, while needing a savior. Whereas Manson "broke down the family member inhibitions, used sex to control the members (Ballantyne, 2019, 10:30). However, both individuals react to extremes when they are challenged. Yahwah and Manson both propagated a race war to an extent, Yahweh

instructing his members to kill the "white devils" (Haycox & Fine, 2001) and Manson

preaching about a race war between whites and blacks called Helter Skelter (Ballantyne,

2018); it was a messaging campaign they used to exert immediate control using fear.

Interestingly, both Yahweh and Manson did not commit the crimes themselves, but

instead had their most devoted followers commit crimes for them (Ballantyne, 2018;

Dipersio, 2019). Yahweh and Manson are prime examples of how the shift from positive

FFM traits to negative FFM traits occur when the leader is challenged. They are both an

example of how these leaders used negative FFM traits with fear and anxiety which

became a catalyst for the most devote to act unconditional to the will of their leaders.

Theme 2 - The most prominent shift within the manipulation tactics is that a cult leader

shifting from a belief system (false prophet) to a single solution by an authority figure.

Theme 2: The Offering of a Single Solution to Followers

Theme 2 encompasses that the most prominent shift within the manipulation

tactics is that a cult leader shifting from a belief system (false prophet) to a single

solution by an authority figure. Theme 2 addresses the most prominent shift within the

manipulation tactics, which is a shift from belief system (false prophet) to a single

solution by an authority figure. All the six cult leaders examined exhibited this shift in

manipulation tactics. In the beginning phases of the identified cults, the cult leaders

present themselves in such a way that they are thought of as God like. A powerful

example of the application theme 2 would be the case study of David Koresh and Jim

Jones. These cases show how powerful a cult leader can be when they have convinced

their followers they are a false prophet. Most importantly, it shows how far these

followers will go for their false prophets when offered a single solution. The first

example of theme 2 is that of Koresh and the Branch Davidians. Koresh has been talked

about for his charisma, it is a characteristic trait that the FBI underestimated (Pearson &

Pearson, 2018). Koresh had the ability to dismantle people's beliefs system, with an

"uncommonly powerful capacity to manipulate people, and instantaneously decay souls"

(Pearson & Pearson, 2018, 1:19:20). David Koresh "was an authoritarian directive leader

who allowed no variation from his rules" (Howell & Wanasika, 2013, p. 246).

Furthermore, Koresh called himself the "sinful messiah" and believed that he was sent to

earth by God, because only a sinful messiah could understand the sins of man (Pearson &

Pearson, 2018). The Branch Davidians believed this messaging, they could only

comprehend Koresh as the savior they were seeking (Howell, & Wanasika, 2013; Rusell,

2023). Koresh implemented other manipulation tactics to enforce his rule over his

followers, including isolation and withdrawal and constant anxiety and fear. Koresh

wanted absolute control over everything that happens at Mt. Carmel, and that is why in

an instant his whole foundation shifted. On 19 April 1994, the world stopped and

watched the devastation of the Waco siege, which ended in a ball of fire; 76 Branch

Davidians killed, including their messiah, Koresh. Fifty-one days prior to the fatal fire,

law enforcement approached Mt. Carmel in preparations for a siege to confiscate illegal

weapons the Branch Davidians were stockpiling (Parkinson, 2007; Russell, 2023). The

first day was met with confrontation resulting in the death of four federal law

enforcement officers (Russell, 2023). In the meantime, Koresh and other Davidians

remained locked inside the compound, refusing to leave, and causing more frustration for

law enforcement. Little progress was made over the 7-week standoff, and on that fateful

day, Koresh relied on his ability to manipulate situations, forcing others to be solely

dependent on him (Rifkind & Harper, 1994). Thus, the only solution Koresh provided the

Davidians, was that the Branch Davidians had die together, and so they did. According to

witnesses, the fires started to break out in three different locations within the house,

indicating that the fires were premediated and set simultaneously (Pearson & Pearson,

2018; Russell, 2023). Despite everything that Koresh had preached and taught, in a

moment when he felt like he was not in total control, he took back complete control by

offering a single solution to the Branch Davidians.

The most well documented account of a prominent shift within manipulation

tactics is that a cult leader shifting from a belief system (false prophet) to a single

solution by an authority figure, is that case of what happened in Jonestown. Jim Jones

had a large following, a massive congregation that not only believed in what he was

preaching, but believe in him so much, they moved to Guyana, South America (Nelson,

2006). In the beginning stages of the People's Temple, Jones was preaching that he was

the reincarnation of Jesus Christ (Reiterman, 2008). To reaffirm who he was as this belief

system (false prophet), Jones performed miracles, later documented as fake healings, but

these acts to make people believe that he was God (Klippensein, 2015). Khol (2017)

noted how Jones "loved gaining everyone's sympathy and then showing how he

overcame fabricated obstacles" (p.3). These actions are the embodiment of narcissistic

traits in which Jones has a high desire for admiration, so he acts out in grandeur.

However, once Jones started getting in trouble for his sexual deviances when he was

caught soliciting sex from an undercover officer and questionable practices within his cult, he began to shift to a single solution (Khol, 2017). Once in Guyana, in Jonestown, Jones became neurotic and obsessed, and the idea of revolutionary suicide became more prolific as they days went by (Delarosa, 2018). Once the investigations started, Jones prioritized revolutionary suicide. According to Khol (2017) "Jim had ranted and coerced people into drinking the poison, saying that it was "revolutionary suicide". He proposed that the people of Jonestown should be proud to kill themselves rather than be misused and abused by the government" (p.9). Jones was obsessed with revolutionary suicide, and he instituted practice drills, testing his follower's faith in him (Chidester, 1991). Revolutionary suicide became the single solution offered by an authority figure. This instance of erratic behavior and extreme mood with over-the-top control issues is the most clear and distinguishable evidence of borderline personality traits. According to Lys (2005), "Jones' growing irrationality and his ability to manipulate followers by misattributing revolution as a reason for suicide made him a dangerous and violent leader". Jones exhibited signs of depression or in Jones' case "defeat" when he couldn't convince a family to stay in Jonestown after the congressional visit concluded (Delarosa, 2018, 25:00). When Congressman Leo Ryan's was murdered, Jones had no other solution but to ask the people of Jonestown to believe in him one last time. This single solution resulted in a death toll of 909 members of the People's Temple, making it the largest mass suicide in history (Chidester, 1991; Delrosa, 2018; Nelson, 2008).

There is insurmountable evidence of the similarities between Jones and Koresh. The most prolific is their willingness to expend the lives of their followers. The two

leaders chose willingly to lead their followers to their demise. Jones and Koresh are examples of the negative FFM trait of conscientiousness (high aggression). Jones and Koresh knew what they were doing, and no matter the outcome there was going to be an execution on their solution, it did not matter how many lives it would cost, it was the only way Jones and Koresh saw fit (Delrosa, 2018; Pearson & Pearson, 2018). The overall analysis of Jim Jones' personality is that Jim Jones had a higher spike in narcissism, some personality traits were antisocial and borderline, with lower examples of histrionic traits – specially his seductive behavior.

Subtheme 2.1: Effective Promotion of Themselves as Saviors or Messiahs

Subtheme 2.1 encompasses that cult leaders often promote themselves as a savior or messiah. They convince their followers they are the answer. All six of the cult leaders were masterful at promoting themselves as a Messiah; in fact, they were all revered as God-like amongst their followers. The behavioral manipulation sub-code identified as belief system (false prophet) enabled each of the cult leaders to present themselves highly and convinced members they were God. This image of how the cult leaders made themselves out to be was a method to lure people in. This is because being a savior or a Messiah gave individuals hope for their own salvation. The two cases most applicable to subtheme 2.1 is that of Yahweh ben Yahweh and Marshall Applewhite, as their followers truly believed the leaders were Messiahs. All the cult leaders relate to subtheme 2.1, but in the cases of Yahweh and Applewhite shows how their influence was applied to different social classes within the United States. To begin, Yahweh ben Yahweh, who's original name was Hulon Mitchell, changed his name to something that means "God, Son

of God" (Haycox & Fine, 2001, 11:55). Smith (1998) details in his writing that "Yahweh ben Yahweh members viewed him as the Messiah" (p.539). Haycox and Fine (2001) identified cases that Yahweh started calling himself the true Messiah, and that member started preaching that Yahweh was the Messiah. The personification that Yahweh built up amongst his followers made them to believe that he was in fact the Son of God and their savior (Dipersio, 2019). Yahweh ben Yahweh did this in the early stages of his following; he appealed to a community that needed a savior (Dipersio, 2019). Yahweh did this through positive FFM traits by exuberating openness and agreeability, by becoming a parental figure that some members did not have, creating a vision of a more inclusive America, and allowing for each of the members to be personally involved in nurturing that goal to fruition (Hughes, 2019). This was done through the promotion of the manipulation tactic of a false prophet through narcissistic charismatic traits by exploiting relationships.

In the beginning times of Heaven's Gate, members claimed that Marshall Applewhite made "members feel Euphoric" (Tweel, 2020, 12:00). According to Johnson (2022, 13:42), members believed that Applewhite is basically their "God". The belief system or false prophet of Marshall Applewhite was done "by creating such a belief that cannot be proven or disproven, the members of Heaven's Gate embrace an explanation to the position of human beings in the universe and commit to Applewhite's all-consuming vision" (Qiu, 2021, p.8). Marshall Applewhite created a God-like persona, something for the followers to believe in which was executed through agreeability, extroversion, conscientiousness (low aggression), and openness to new experiences.

Yahweh ben Yahweh and Marhsall Applewhite both used similar FFM traits to promote their image as a Messiah for their followers. Their approach to manipulation may have been done through different avenues, but at the core come down to basic principles of manipulation through a belief system, implemented through positive FFM traits of agreeability, conscientiousness (low aggression), and extroversion, and carried out by narcissistic traits of exploitable and superficial relationships. Public declarations of being God or Jesus Christ filled these followers with hope, that they were face-to-face with their savior. However, these messages of being Jesus Christ can only occur if the followers are free from societal influence, and that is why isolation is critical to psychological manipulation (Dipersio, 2019; Tweel, 2020).

Subtheme 2.2: Quick Shifting of Tactics to Maintain Control

Subtheme 2.2 encompasses that when cult leaders are tested, they dramatically shift to offering their followers a single solution. The importance of sub-theme 2.2 is because it addresses the critical shift that turns cult from violent to non-violent and it highlights how quickly a cult leader can shift their manipulation tactics when they are challenged. All the cult leaders that were examined showed they will quickly change when faced with adversity. It is extremely important to note the overlapping manipulation tactics that were used amongst all the cult leaders throughout their different stages of existence. Isolation is the most common method of manipulation and in each of the cult leader cases they had their own communes, Spahn Ranch, Jonestown, Mt. Carmel, mansion in Rancho Sante Fe, the Yahweh compounds in Florida, and Antelope, Oregon for the Rajneeshpurum (Ballantyne, 2018; Chua-Eoan & Cole, 1997; Goldman, 2009;

Pearson & Pearson, 2018; Sever, 2019; Sherman & Wolochatiuk, 2007). Each of the cults

used isolation to remove their followers from society and conformed to the cult. Heaven's

Gate members were told to "say good-bye to your life and leave" (Tweel, 2020, 13:30)

while the Yahwehs were told "to get rid of their natural born families" (*Dipersio, 2018*,

36:04). Also, cult member used physical manipulation in the form of sex, torture,

beatings, or physical punishment. As for physical manipulation, the most common and

most impactful tactic, each male cult leader used sex to their advantage. Charles Manson

liked to use the women in his family to lure men in (Ballantyne, 2018, 9:00). To Jim

Jones, "sex was a form of manifesting power, not pleasure, but dominance" (Delarosa,

2018, 21:55). To further his control over his following, Koresh became skilled at splitting

up married couples and convinced them that only he could procreate (Rifkin & Harper,

1994, p.4). Physical violence was common amongst the cults, this manipulation trait

becomes more prevalent as aggression in the cult leader arises. Koresh would use a cadre

to "discipline and beat his followers" (Parkinson, 2008, 21:03). Jim Jones was a staunch

believer in "public beatings and public humiliations" (Nelson, 2006, 40:00). It is

extremely important to understand that the manipulation tactics are interwoven and work

with one another. Though the above is just some of the examples of psychological

manipulation tactics used, they foreshadow the extreme conditions in which the cult

leaders operate.

The single-solution tactic is used to impress upon the followers that there is only

one option for fulfillment. Whatever that fulfillment might be, as each cult leader had a

different identified end state. However, implementation of a single solution is conducted

through the FFM traits of neuroticism, introversion, and conscientiousness (high

aggression). There are two cases that are most notable for subtheme 2.2 and those are the

cases of Charles Manson and Bhagwan Rajneesh. The reason why these two cases are

applicable to subtheme 2.2 is because even though Manson and Rajneesh are both cult

leaders, their personality types and cult followings were dramatically different. However,

when both the cult leaders were tested, their single solution was to harm external factors

that were posing a threat to themselves and their way of life. Prior to Terry Melcher

rejecting Charles Manson, there was a certain aura surrounding Manson that drew his

followers in; "Charles Manson had a charismatic personality that became an object of

worship to his followers" (Baer & Connelly, 2017, 41:36). Manson was charismatic, and

magnetic, and followers often referred to him as their savior, living up to being a false

prophet; according to Tex Watson, Charles Manson was Jesus, "he was my messiah, my

savior, my soul" (Atchison & Heide, 2011, p. 791). The ability for Manson to convince

his followers that he is Christ, is an example of Manson's narcissistic traits resolved

around thinking highly of oneself (implying he is Jesus Christ) and a need for admiration

(Ballantyne, 2018). However, in the face of rejection by Terry Melcher, Charles Manson

becomes enraged, believing that Melcher was a liar (Baer & Connelly, 2017, 28:53).

Charles Manson used constant anxiety after he was rejected by Terry Melcher, Charles

Manson went from being "God Like" (Atchison & Heide, 2011, p.791) to becoming

obsessed "with the impending race war, Helter Skelter" (Ballantyne, 2018, 34:30). In this

fit of fury, Manson's fixation on the impending race war "Helter Skelter" metastasized

uncontrollably, so Manson shifted from being a false prophet to only having a single

solution to his problems (Ballantyne, 2018). In this same timeframe, Charles Manson

shifted from narcissistic behaviors to exhibiting borderline personality trait of erratic

behavior often with "increasing paranoia, fear of the race war, and the end of world"

(Ballantyne. 2018, 32:46). Prior to the erratic behavior, members claimed that Manson

had an extremely charismatic personality, it was how he attracted members into the group

(Ballantyne, 2018). However, once the shift happened Manson developed a "passive-

aggressive personality with paranoid tendencies" (Bugliosi & Gentry, 2014, p.656).

Manson deeply believed that the Manson Family was going to catalyst the race war, so

became the beginning of the Tate–LaBianca murders (Baer & Connelly, 2021).

Conversely to Manson, but another example of this shift, is the case of Rajneesh.

Rajneesh built a spiritual organization that up until the incidents in Antelope, Oregon,

had been nothing but peaceful (Lembi, 2018). The collision that occurred was the inherit

belief that Rajneeshi's would be accepted anywhere they chose to settle, this was not the

case for what happened in Antelope, Oregon (Lembi, 2018). "From the moment

sannyasins settled in Oregon, they challenged established laws and customs, generating a

range of opposition throughout the state" (Goldman, 2009, p.314). Due to the opposition

that raised in Antelope, the Rajneeshi's became consumed with retaliation against the

townspeople, it became their only focus, it became the single solution from an authority

figure (Lembi, 2018). The mounting tensions increased the pressure on Rajneeshpuram,

and it became so contentious, that there was only one thing left to do for the Rajneeshi's

to get their way – this became the decision resulted in the largest biological attack in US

history (Lembi, 2018). This was an instance where Bhagwan was challenged by an

exterior force and was going to do whatever means possible to continue his religious

practice (Lembi, 2018).

Manson and Bhagwan collectively responded in the same manner when

challenged; they offered up a single solution. Though it cannot be deduced that the

biological attack in Wasco County was intended to kill anyone, the attack was to send a

strong message from the Rajneeshi's. Manson ultimately made the decision to murder

individuals and to him it was the only solution for his followers to abide by. Charles

Manson's most prominent personality trait was narcissism, with components of

antisocial, borderline, and histrionic. Whereas Bhagwan Rajneesh had the highest

documented instances of histrionic traits, and this included instances outside of seductive

behavior. Bhagwan Rajneesh had higher instances of attention seeking behavior and

being impressionistic. Both Bhagwan and Manson did not want to take responsibility for

their actions, however both were convicted for their crimes. This is another instance,

where the leaders themselves did not commit the crime, but were so masterful in their

manipulation tactics, that their followers executed their directives.

Overall, after thorough examination of the data, the common narcissistic traits

revolved around thinking highly of oneself, grandiose sense of self, cannot do anything

wrong, and a need for admiration. The most common personality trait is a cognitive

narcissistic trait, superficial or exploitable relationships. Amongst the different cult

leaders, they demonstrate this personality trait in their ability to implement the primary

manipulation tactic of isolation and withdrawal. These relationships can be seen

interchangeably between the various personality traits and manipulation tactics. Each of

the cult leaders above shows how the different personality traits feed the egos of the cult

leaders. These traits are critical in understanding how cult leaders can lure members in

and keep a grasp on them. However, equally important is the traits that the cult leaders

use in times of adversity. Cult leaders did not only exist on the narcissistic spectrum but

emulated other personality traits, with cult leaders displaying Antisocial, Borderline, and

Histrionic traits, as those instances were documented in the themes. Each of the cult

leaders was able to manipulate their followers into believing they were a deity. However,

once pressure was applied to the cult leader, they offered their followers a single solution,

whether that was mass suicide or murder, it depended on the cult leader and their current

state of mind.

As a result of the collected data and the identified themes, it became clear that cult

leaders presented themselves a certain way: charming and alluring, it is what drew in

followers and kept followers around. When challenged or facing adversity, these cult

leaders shifted their personalities and manipulation tactics, often for the worse. The

dramatic shift took the cult from living in a euphoric state of being, devoting oneself to

the cult leader, living in a perceived paradise, to death, destruction, and despair. Each of

the identified cult leaders had pressure applied to them, pressure that questioned their

way of life/purpose. The pressure increased hostility and aggressiveness, which lead to

these groups committing murder and suicide. These leaders utilize their ability to

maneuver through personality traits to manipulate their followers; however, once

pressure was applied, their traits shift to self-preservation with an attempt to regain

complete control over their operations.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how psychological manipulation tactics relate to specific Cluster-B personality traits. Chapter 4 included a presentation of results from IPA of archival data, documentaries, and legal documents surrounding six prolific male cult leaders. The analysis reveals two central themes. First, manipulation tactics are fluid when the cult leaders are faced with a specific breaking point. The theme identified shifting emotions of the different cult leaders. Second, the most prominent shift within the manipulation tactics is that a cult leader shifting from a belief system (false prophet) to a single solution by an authority figure. These themes helped to identify a pattern of behavior circulating cult leaders and their ability to manipulate. The themes also bring to light the impacts of outside influences that can change their course of behaviors.

The following chapter will provide a precise summary of the results, as well as an evaluation and interpretation of the findings. Chapter 5 will also include a discussion of the study implications, concluding with a discussion of recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine research related to psychological manipulation tactics of prolific male cult leaders based in the United States and how those tactics relate to Cluster-B personality traits. I sought to highlight the societal problem posed by cult leaders in which followers are robbed of their free will while potentially experiencing mental anguish, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, or depression (Henson, n.d.); the severing of familial ties; and even the inciting of violence. These adverse impacts are directly related to cult leaders' leadership and governance practices that affect followers and society at large. I expanded upon previous research by examining the relationships between tactics of psychological manipulation, Cluster-B personality traits, and identified cult leaders. The guiding research question was, How do psychological manipulation tactics relate to specific Cluster-B personality traits?

The first theme that emerged was that manipulation tactics are fluid when the cult leaders are faced with a specific breaking point. The theme identified shifting emotions of the different cult leaders. Theme 1 had two subthemes. First, when cult leaders are in complete control, they exhibited positive FFM traits such as openness to new experience, extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (low aggression). Second, when cult leaders are challenged their personalities shift negatively within the FFM such as introversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness (high aggression). The second theme was that the most prominent shift within the manipulation tactics is that a cult leader shifting from a belief system (false prophet) to a single solution by an authority figure. Theme 2

also had two subthemes. First, cult leaders often promote themselves as a savior or messiah. They convince their followers they are the answer. Second, when cult leaders are tested, they dramatically shift to offering their followers a single solution.

The information utilized for this study was based on archival/historical data, legal documents, and documentaries. The researcher conducted an in-depth analysis of the information collected. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) revealed manipulation tactics are fluid when the cult leaders are faced with a specific breaking point. To further explain, the tactic shifts when a stressor impacts the cult leaders. Interestingly, prior to the breaking point, cult leaders exhibited positive FFM traits such as openness to new experience, extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (low aggression). However, post breaking point, cult leader personalities shifted negatively within the FFM such as introversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness (high aggression). Additionally, the IPA revealed the most prominent shift in manipulation tactics happen between the tactic of belief system (false prophet) to a single solution by an authority figure. The research showed cult leaders often promoted themselves as a savior or messiah to their followers. This belief system changed very drastically when the cult leaders were tested, because their frame of mind shifted from a belief system to offering a single solution for salvation. It is extremely important to note that this shift goes hand-in-hand with one another. The cult leader would not be able to promote a single solution presented by an authority figure, without first becoming a false prophet.

This chapter includes a discussion of the study results. I offer recommendations for further examination of cult leaders, personality traits, and psychological manipulation.

Future academics may be able use the insights from this study to develop a better understanding of cult leaders and their influence. Finally, the study's potential implications for social change will be presented. The chapter ends with a conclusion to the study.

Interpretation of the Findings

The study's results highlight how psychological manipulation relates to certain Cluster-B personality traits of cult leaders based upon the key themes that were identified. The results show that manipulation tactics are fluid when cult leaders are faced with a specific breaking point; the most prominent shift within the manipulation tactics is that a cult leader changed from a belief system (false prophet) to a single solution by an authority figure. These themes encompass the realization that cult leaders may use different psychological manipulation tactics based on their present personality traits. The findings were based on data collected from the case studies of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Charles Manson, David Koresh, Jim Jones, Marshall Applewhite, and Yahweh ben Yahweh. Each leader founded their own individual cult, but each have similarities in how they operated their cults. The research corroborates previously discussed information in Chapter 2 by Hassan (2020), which found that cults function by the following guidelines: strict behavioral control such as regulation of daily routines, dictates associations and relationships, maltreatment (sleep deprivation and food restriction), and exploitation of personal affects (finances or relationships).

In each of the six cases, strict behavioral controls were a dimension of religion and the promise that the cult would bring the members close to God (see Stone, 1987).

The strict controls were promised to entice followers but capitalized on the vulnerability of the followers who were willing to try something new in attempt to be saved (McCrae & Costa, 1987). The findings align to research documented in Chapter 2, which exposed how cult members go through cycles of psychological manipulation, one of which is the suppression of certain behaviors (Dubrow-Marshall & Dubrow-Marshall, 2015; Lifton, 1961; Singer, 2003). Behavior suppression is essential to breaking down cult members because it degrades critical thinking and free thought about the difference between wrong and right. The implementation of these controls is done in a very strategic moment in the grooming of the cult member; it is usually once the follower has devoted and promised themselves to the cult that these restrictions are implemented.

In continuation, the research highlights the use of information control, which was used to minimize outside influence. This includes deliberate deception with an intentional reduction in publicly available information systems (e.g., news, radio, books) and the implementation of a monitoring program to control members. A critical aspect of each of the cult leaders was the use of isolation to control their followers. I was able to identify that all six of the cult leaders not only isolated their followers but controlled the flow of information to their congregations. For example, Bugliosi (1976) highlighted that Charles Manson "used isolation; there were no newspapers at Spahn Ranch, no clocks. Cut off from the rest of society, he created in this timeless land a tight little society of his own, with its own value system" (p. 639). Similar conditions were implemented on the People's Temple: "Followers didn't have books, radios, telephones, no way to communicate, cannot eat with family or anyone; cannot make eye contact with anyone"

(Delarosa, 2018, 36:35). These are just a few examples of the type of isolation that was used, but the removal from society is consistent amongst the cult leaders. The research highlights the significance between cult leaders and corresponding personality traits.

Theme 1 discussed how manipulation tactics are fluid when the cult leaders are faced with a specific breaking point. The theme identified shifting emotions of the different cult leaders. As mentioned in Chapter 4, cult leaders often present themselves in a certain way, prior to a stressing point. As it relates to theme 1, cult leaders used initially use positive FFM traits to gain the trust of potential members while building a control on members. This is done because cult leaders needed to build up their communes', so the use of agreeability and openness to new experience is used to convince members to follow the cult leader due to their gentle and kind nature (Simha & Parboteeah, 2020). The two positive FFM traits are used along with conscientiousness (low aggression), because these cult leaders are cognitively aware of what they are doing. These leaders are using these positive FFM traits precisely, to the point that members are not aware of the manipulation that is occurring. However, once the beginning stages of positive FFM personality traits dwindled down, an increase in negative FFM traits has begun to occur. The shift between the positive traits to negative traits are fluid because the shift occurs between the differing poles of those traits. Chapter 2 highlighted the negative poles of certain FFM traits, most notable for this case scenario is the opposing pole of agreeability, which is antagonism. Agreeability is used to draw people in, this stage is when the cult leader is wanting to grow and build their commune; however, antagonism (disagreeability pole) will move away from people, are more power hungry, and are

mistrustful and skeptical (McCrae & Costa, 1987, p.88). Additionally, within this fluid

shift of FFM traits is the opposing pole of extroversion, which is introversion. The cult

leaders, prior to their stressor, are expressing levels of extroversion, because they are

focused externally to draw more people in. The opposing pole of that is introversion,

where there is an internal fixation and a projection of energy inward with high self-

conscious state excluding themselves publicly (Cuperman & Ickes, 2009). The

interpretation of findings can be visualized with a lemniscate outlined in Appendix B.

The opposing sides of the lemniscate are positive and negative FFM traits, with

conscientiousness in the center. On the positive end of the lemniscate, cult leaders will

cycle through agreeability, extroversion, and openness cyclically until a stressor occurs.

Once the stressor occurs their personality will shift to the negative poles of antagonism,

neuroticism, and introversion. This is a representation of when the cult leaders are tested,

their personality shift along the spectrum of the lemniscate, fluidly, while

conscientiousness stays constant in the center, with the aggression levels fluctuating. It is

important to note that when positive or negative FFM traits are being utilized, it does not

mean there is a complete absence of the opposing traits, it is an indication that there are

dominant FFM traits throughout the manipulation cycle. Cult leaders who are in complete

control of their congregations will have dominate positive FFM traits, as detailed by

subtheme 1.1.

Subtheme 1.1 examined how when cult leaders are in complete control, they

exhibited positive FFM traits such as openness to new experience, extroversion,

agreeableness, and conscientiousness (low aggression). This phase the followers

experience what can be summed up into the honeymoon phase. According to the

Cleveland Clinic (2022), this psychological phase, of any relationship, is when lust and

attraction are highest with an increase state of euphoria, and this phase can last days,

weeks, and sometimes years. In this phase, the cult leader must present themselves as

trusting, modest, kind, and gentle, by doing this the cult leader becomes an answer to the

potential members problems (Jones, 2011; Parboteeah, 2020). As previously discussed in

Chapter 4, this phase was to enable the cult leaders to build their communes removed

from societal influence. During this phase the cult leaders used their narcissistic traits

through the lens of positive FFM traits to promote their charisma and magnetic

personalities. This action is an example of mind control, and representative of the FFM

trait of Openness to Experience outlined in Chapter 2; it is a different, imaginative, and

interpretive way of thinking, it is the willingness to try something new (McCrae & Costa,

1987). This personality implementation was to attract more followers through addicting

persuasion. Rusell (2023) in an interview with former cult member Janja Lalich,

highlighted that people often join cults because they are looking for a simple solution or

answer to their problems. Cult leaders become that answer by utilizing positive FFM

traits through exploiting vulnerabilities, thus enabling potential members to gravitate

towards them. However, it is important to note that for this process to be effective, the

cult leader feels they are acting autonomously, their actions are not questioned, and are

receiving the admiration they desire. During this timeframe, the needs of the cult leader

and the cult members are being met simultaneously, due to that an intimate connection

has developed. However, all that will change when the cult leader is no longer in absolute control.

With that, this leads into subtheme 1.2, which identifies when cult leaders are challenged their personalities shift negatively within the FFM such as introversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness (high aggression). FACT (n.d.) provided concepts uncovered was the importance of stressors amongst each of the different cult leaders. No one stressor was more extreme, but it was something adversarial to challenge the different cult leaders. When each of the cult leaders experienced a certain stress point in their lives, their manipulation tactics aggressively shifted, and so their FFM traits turn negatively. A prime example of subtheme 1.2 and this behavior is seen with Jim Jones. In the early days of his congregation, people flocked to his services. Jones was breaking down barriers with his fellowship and had a magnetic power that could not only invigorate his congregation, but that influenced the outward growth of his organization (Reiterman, 2008). There was a lot of hype and buildup of what Jones was creating, however, it would not last long. Societal concerns about Jones' legitimacy and ethics increased, which increased his paranoia and obsessiveness. Resulting in the congregation following Jones to Guyana, South America. At this point the pressure was on Jones, in which at Jonestown, Jones was no longer concerned with being a prophet or Deity but obsessed with a single solution for his own salvation. This pattern of behavior can be attributable to all the six case studies, and all the cult leader's pattern of behavior lead to the identification of theme 2.

Theme 2 identified that the most prominent shift within the manipulation tactics is that a cult leader shifting from a belief system (false prophet) to a single solution by an authority figure. The results of this study indicated that there was a similar pattern for all the cult leaders, and that is the shift between belief system and single solution. The beginning stages of the cult were nothing short of miraculous; it was those initial stages that these cults grew, and the followers became invested in these different cults. It was during these times that the cult leaders ingrained their God-like status. However, it was when the stressor hits and a drastic shift occurred that completely ended the beginning nostalgia of what the cult once was. In the researched instances, these cults dissolved into violence, outward violence towards those threatening the cult, or internal violence through suicide. The research identified similar trends and patterns when it comes to the lifespan of the six cults, specifically in relation to the shift that leads to the beginning of the end of the cult. Another reason why each of these leaders was able to sustain control is because they had built themselves up as a messiah or savior.

With this comes the findings related to subtheme 2.1, which discussed how cult leaders often promote themselves as a savior or messiah. They convince their followers they are the answer or a solution to their problems. The type of method of controlling the follower's thoughts was critical to the cult leader. Becoming a savior or messiah enabled thought control by forcing the belief that cult leader is God and cult life is reality; despite the reality being wrong, this is an example of the strategic use of thought-controlling language, use of hypnotic techniques (also known as thought-stopping techniques) to engrain the belief that the cult leader is a messiah or savior. Cult leaders would also use

fear to control members emotions by manipulating feelings, use of guilt, public confessions/public shaming's, and torment of shunning if someone thinks about leaving. Ultimately, the culmination of all the manipulation tactics is used for thought control, and for the followers to abide by a strict belief system. Once this phase is complete the cult leader has the ability to influence their congregation how they see fit.

This brings up the findings associated with subtheme 2.2, which when cult leaders are tested, they dramatically shift to offering their followers a single solution. For the cult leaders to dramatically shift they had to implement strategic manipulation upon the followers to get them to believe that they are a prophet; that the solution the cult leader provides is the only answer to their problems. Throughout the cycle of manipulation, the cult leaders also had the tendency to implement high levels of constant fear and anxiety to control their followers, making them more dependent on the cult leader. This fear perpetuated a need for answers for salvation, which the cult leader would provide. When inundated with intense fear and the cult leader is faced with their stressor, the cult leader will provide a single solution for salvation. The cult leaders all provided a single solution for their congregation when they were faced with their breaking point. In each of these cases, there was a violent end that was the ultimate solution, however, these solutions were the only answer the cult leaders saw fit. Each of these cases show a trending theme of how the cult leaders act and then react to different situations.

To close, there is research identifying that non-violent cults have the same belief systems in place with a similar process of psychological manipulation (Dubrow-Marshall & Dubrow-Marshall, 2015; Galanter, 1999), and therefore, based on the pattern of

behavior, the dissolution of a non-violent cult has similarities to violent cults. Finally, it is important to note that the research highlighted that the FFM personality trait continuously used, was conscientiousness; these cult leaders never did anything without strategic planning and thought.

Limitations of the Study

As discussed in Chapter 1, the study's primary limitation is preconceptions in coding data (Schonfeld & Mazzola, 2012). The inevitability of preconceptions when handling prolific cult leaders presents a limitation based upon preconceived personal bias. The limitation proved accurate due to the nature of the data collection based on archival data. The ability to develop personal bias becomes a limitation based on the slant of the information being recorded. The sampling was based on American male cult leaders associated with a horrific event. Immediately creating a bias due to the aspect of including a horrific event. However, bracketing (Chen & Zhang, 2020) was implemented to remove personal bias, allowing the researcher to focus only on the specific data, personality traits, and psychological manipulation, thus eliminating personal bias. By bracketing, the researcher was allowed to isolate the specific event surrounding the phenomenon in the research. Bracketing allowed for specific themes and sub-themes to emerge free from personal bias. An additional limitation was that of the data sources, as the results of the study are based on data collected from books and documentaries. Any inaccuracies in the biographies and reports would have a direct impact on the results of this research. A final limitation is the lack of transferability of this study, as this is an inherent limitation to qualitative research in general.

Recommendations

The findings provided many options for future research. The recommendation for the next steps with the information is to examine the findings through non-violent cult leaders. How does the research reflect manipulation tactics and personality traits of non-violent cults? How are they similar, and what are the differences? The life expectancy of any cult is approximately 9 years (Rousselet et al., 2017) for both violent and non-violent cults.

Continued research should look to examine non-violent and violent cults through their manipulation tactics and personality traits. The research should be aimed at identifying decision points and how those impact manipulation tactics within non-violent cult leaders. Non-violent cult leaders may function differently than violent cult leaders, and the research should look at examining the baseline of prominent personality traits in their respective categories.

Implications

The implication of the research for positive social change is present in continued research to educate the public about the dangers of cults and how cult leaders lure and control members. Continued research should involve the study of non-violent cults in relation to psychological manipulation of their members. Ongoing and persistent research on the topic at hand will enable academia to provide a succinct understanding of cult leader manipulation processes based on personality traits. The impact for positive social change can be seen at the individual, familial, and organizational level. As discussed above, the research impacts academic organizations by providing educational insights

towards the understanding the commonalities of psychological manipulation tactics used

by cult leaders. Individuals and families are tangentially impacted by this research by

making the content of the study published outside of an academic journal. The research

should be used as an educational resource for those who may have experienced

psychological manipulation, or a family member has witnessed a loved one go through

the cycle of manipulation. The implications for social change are viable within the

construct of the research. The intended research is not designed to prevent or dissuade

cult activity or prevent future catastrophic events.

Through the continued methodological approach of interpretive

phenomenological analysis, the research can bring greater attention to the negative

ramifications of all cult leaders and associated manipulation tactics. The purpose of the

IPA methodological approach is to further examine the phenomenon associated with cults

writ large. Furthermore, this should result in continued positive impacts within academia

via research. The recommendation for practice should be further construct of assumptions

and hypotheses from the information. The present study did not look at the similarities to

non-violent cults. Comparative analysis can identify and understand the commonalities

between violent and non-violent cults. Future research can focus on the impacts on

surviving followers to determine the recovery process and self-esteem and its

implications on psychological behavior and welfare.

Conclusion

This chapter consisted of a discussion of the study findings. Results were

compared to the literature and examined for implications, limitations, and

recommendations for future studies. Data collected through archival resources and legal documents identify a relationship between psychological manipulation and Cluster-B personality traits of cult leaders. The information shows the varying ways cult leaders shift through their traits to be the most effective manipulator for their cults. Cult leaders exemplify positive human traits to build up their congregation and followers. However, when the different cult leaders face a significant traumatic event, their personality traits shift to negative human traits and enforce extreme measures on their followers.

The finalized research helped to identify a pattern of behaviors that able to be qualitatively examined. The research identified that Cluster-B personality traits exist on a spectrum and are often used in tandem to master manipulation tactics. As a result of the finalized research the recommended next steps would be to examine the research through the lens of non-violent cults. The methodology would remain the same, as the research would still examine the phenomena associated with non-violent cults.

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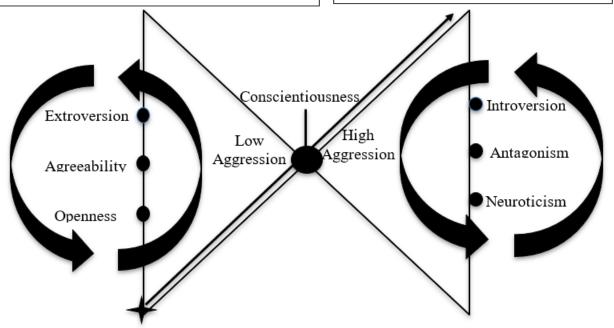
Appendix A: Data Collection Sources

Cult leader	Source			
	Academic journal	Documentary	Periodical	Book
Bhagwan Rajneesh	Charisma and Abdication: A Study of the Leadership of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh Encyclopedia of World Religions Feelings after the Fall Historical Dictionary of New Religious Movements The SAGE Encyclopedia of Terrorism Zorba the Buddha	Wild, Wild Country	Averting Apocalypse at Rajneeshpuram Prophet and Losses	Cults: Rattlesnake Heaven
Charles Manson	Charles Manson Biography Charles Manson and the Family Charles Manson: Psychological Assessment The Devil Inside	Inside the Manson Cult Truth and Lies: The Family Manson	Charles Manson's Youngest Cult Follower, Dianne Lake, Goes Public Death of a Madman	Helter Skelter The Life and Times of Charles Manson
David Koresh	The Branch Davidians and the Politics of Power and Intimidation	David Koresh Truth and Lies: Waco	David Koresh: In the Grip of a Psychopath	Snapshot of Great Leadership

Cult leader	Source			
	Academic journal	Documentary	Periodical	Book
	Dysfunctional Gifted Students and Counseling: Jim Jones and David Koresh The Spirituality of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Groups		Time Magazine: Cult of Death	
Jim Jones	A New Map for Understanding the People's Temple and Jim Jones The Road to Jonestown: How Orwell's 1984 has influenced Rev Jim Jones to dominate and then Destroy his Followers. Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, The People's Temple, and Jonestown The Violence of Jim Jones: A Biopsychosocial Explanation	Jonestown: Life and Death of People's Temple Truth and Lies: Jonestown	Jones on Jesus: Who is the Messiah? The Peoples Press: The Evolution of the Media's Treatment of Jim Jones and the People's Temple	Raven: The Untold Story of the Rev. Jim Jones and his People
Marshall Applewhite	Extraterrestrial Biblical Hermeneutics and the Making of Heaven's Gate Historical Dictionary of New	Cult of Cults (4-part series) The Cult Next Door	Cults: Inside the World's Most Notorious Groups and Understanding the People who Joined them	Cult: A Landscape of Power and Language Red Alert

Cult leader	Source			
	Academic journal	Documentary	Periodical	Book
	Religious Movements			
Yahweh ben Yahweh	Antiquity and Social Reform: Religious Experience in the Unification Church, Feminist Wicca, and the Nation of Yahweh	The Murderous Cult of Nation of Yahweh	Ghetto Religiosity III: If You Don't Know, Now You Know!	Bring me the Head
		Uncovered: The cult of Yahweh ben Yahweh	Positive Steps of Becoming Less Vulnerable to Influence and Authority	
	Black Religious Nationalism and the Politics of Transcendence			
	The Intersection of Women's Lives and Resistance			
	Millennial Violence: Past, Present, and Future			
	Rebirth of a Nation			

Appendix B: Cycle of Manipulation

Prior to the stress point, positive FFM traits will be the primary personality traits used in a cyclic process of manipulation.

After the stress point has occurred, cult leaders will begin a cycle of negative FFM traits for manipulation.

Extroversion

Agreeability

Openness

Conscientiousness

Low Aggression

High Aggression

Introversion

Antagonism

Neuroticism

The stress point is the moment cult leaders shift from positive FFM trait as the dominate traits to their negative FFM traits.