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## Communities of Disrespect: What Happens When Personhood is Lost

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### Abstract

**O**ur aim in this paper is to argue that individuals join religious cults as persons, but lose their personhood as their position in the group is solidified, becoming simply humans. First, we will outline what constitutes personhood and how persons have a specific kind of value, or “dignity”, that renders them worthy of moral respect. This definition of personhood is drawn from the work of Harry Frankfurt (1988) and Bennett Helm (2017) and suggests that humans lack the *positive* freedom to choose what to do, what to care about, and hence who to be. We will then examine paradigmatic examples of religious cults to explicate how they purposefully recruit individuals who lack meaning in their lives, subject them to intense group experiences that create major personality change, and consistently deliver absolute truth claims that require uniform assent.

Additionally, we will examine how recruitment tactics induce a sense of estrangement from the world in prospective cult members, and why cult leaders shower their devotees with affection in order to acquire control. This will be explained in terms of emotion regulation, drawing from both psychology and neuroscience. We will also establish that cults speak to a “broadly Humean” understanding of the nature of practical reason. What this means is that if a reason can motivate someone to act, it must somehow also speak to *existing* desires or motivations.

Lastly, we will underscore how fear of social isolation and information control is used to undermine the cult devotee’s capacity for “rational control”, as it prevents one from deliberately arriving at a practical judgement that is fully theirs. We will conclude that we ought to consider the implications of this project for understanding moral responsibility, such that we can determine how cult members willingly abdicate their capacity for agency.

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### Personhood and Humanity

Recent philosophical work has argued that persons possess the capacity for rational self-reflection, thus enabling them to think critically about the content of their thoughts (Frankfurt, 1988; Helm, 2017). This implies that persons possess the *positive* freedom to choose what to do, what to care about, and hence whom to be, rather than simply a “negative” freedom from constraint. It is in this sense that personhood is directly linked to autonomy, as we cannot delegate the formation of our identities to external forces. Due to these capacities, persons are bound to moral norms that render them worthy of “dignity” or “respect.” If we accept this definition of personhood, it might seem that membership in a given community is irrelevant to understanding the importance of moral norms, as personhood is defined in largely individualistic terms. However, persons are held accountable to moral norms through sanctions imposed by fellow members of their community. This does not infringe upon their autonomy because they willfully enter these communities in the absence of coercion.

Nonetheless, one might ask, by what *authority* can others impose sanctions? To answer this question, one must view membership in a community as how one acquires autonomy (Helm, 2017). This view proposes that being morally responsible to one another is imperative to sociality itself. Still, an individualist definition of personhood creates tension between authority and responsibility. If others have the ability to shape one’s personhood by virtue of sanctions and joint responsibility, then how can their influence be anything other than a form of brainwashing? This tension is what differentiates cults from normative groups, as cult leaders do not recognize the authority of their devotees to *also* demand compliance with the norms (Helm, 2015). To constitute a legitimate claim over one’s personhood, responsibility and compliance must be two-sided. Furthermore, this points to a broader claim raised by Robert Brandom (1979), in which he suggested that freedom consists in rational constraint by *self-imposed* norms. It should be emphasized that these norms are self-imposed because their influence is conditional upon agents endorsing them. Without this exercise of autonomy, these norms

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would have no claim upon a person and therefore no claim upon how they hold others responsible.

Brandom's understanding of freedom and rational constraint is also shaped by a Kantian theory regarding "concepts." What this means is that persons must actively apply the norms they express rather than be forcefully compelled to employ them in a systematic way (Brandom, 2007). Consequently, persons acquire the responsibility to both act in agreement with a given norm and hold others accountable to following said norm. This is a *positive* conception of freedom because it underscores one's power to take action, namely to use concepts to commit to the norms they express. It is in this sense that behavior, not merely intellectual commitment, determines membership status (Brandom, 1979). In acknowledging this, it is important to highlight what Helm (2017) has called the "interpersonal rational structure" inherent to normative communities of respect. This implies that even if members hold different roles in a community and thereby acquire different responsibilities, they are still *bound* to the same communal norms. Without the bindingness of communal norms, personhood is lost.

### **Literature Gap and Paradigmatic Examples**

The work of Bennett Helm (2017) has briefly posited that there are humans, such as those with severe mental handicaps, who are not persons. Similarly, it has suggested that there may be non-human creatures, such as robots, who are persons. However, it has not explored how specific communities, which we will call *communities of disrespect*, can lead to a loss of personhood. It has primarily identified normative groups, like sports teams and clubs, to show how we are always bound to multiple communities of respect simultaneously and why this matters for how we understand our place in the world (Helm, 2017). Additionally, the traditions or practices of said communities are not highlighted in Helm's work because these features are irrelevant to understanding their social structure. Our project will address this literature gap by expressing how religious cults are non-normative groups that thereby negate what it means to be a responsible agent. We argue that communities of disrespect are groups which instigate a loss of personhood by failing to implement an interpersonal ra-

tional structure and consequently target individuals who are psychologically vulnerable. This suggests that the necessary conditions for personhood are undermined through affiliation with a religious cult, leading to its eventual loss. To elucidate this claim, we will examine three non-controversial historical examples of religious cults: The Peoples Temple, the Unification Church, and Children of God. Their history, traditions, and practices will be explicated briefly, as this is central to understanding how they are communities of disrespect.

The Peoples Temple was a new religious movement that began in 1954 in Indianapolis, Indiana (Moore, 2000). The church's founder, Jim Jones, attracted a racially diverse flock due to his messages of social equality and racial harmony. Consequently, the church opened nursing homes and free restaurants, offered drug and alcohol counseling to addicts, and provided clothing and employment services to the local community. While the church originally espoused Christian ideologies, by the mid-1960s Jones had swiftly discarded Christianity for belief in his own psychic divinity. He then moved his flock to California and began collaborating with politicians to lobby for liberal causes, even going so far as to promote communism as the solution for society's ills. In 1977, after increasingly negative publicity, Jones fled the United States for Jonestown, Guyana. Members who followed Jones were told that the United States wanted to destroy them and that the only way to "protest the conditions of an inhumane world" was to collectively commit suicide (Jones, 1978). Despite its tragic end, The Peoples Temple did not initially resemble a community of disrespect. Rather, Jones manipulated his flock into losing personhood by gradually seizing their autonomy until the norms they expressed were solely a product of coercion, culminating in death. This tactic is made easier when members already display psychological vulnerabilities prior to affiliation.

The second religious cult we will examine is the Unification Church, colloquially known as the "Moonies." The church began in 1954 in South Korea by the Reverend Sun Myung Moon. As a teenager, Moon studied the Bible and allegedly had a vision in which Jesus commanded him to establish God's Kingdom on earth and bring peace to the world (Robbins, Anthony, Doucas, & Curtis, 1976). In the 1940s, Moon began promoting

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this religious belief and was arrested by the North Korean government on the grounds that he was spying for South Korea. After serving a five-year prison sentence, Moon returned to South Korea and established a formal religion. The result was a hybrid movement that borrowed teachings from Confucius and Christianity. Most notably, Moon emphasized the importance of marriage and instituted mass wedding ceremonies. In 2012, after the death of Moon, his youngest son established the Sanctuary Church. The Sanctuary Church has adopted the teachings of the “Moonies” and has encouraged members to bring semi-automatic rifles to mass wedding ceremonies as a symbol for one’s ability to protect their family. Similar to the Peoples Temple, the “Moonies” did not originally operate like a community of disrespect, as Moon’s teachings were akin to mainstream religious institutions. However, by slowly encouraging his followers to view “the family” and consequently Moon himself as their prime source of value, his followers lost their personhood.

Lastly, we will use the Children of God movement as a paradigmatic example of a religious cult. The Children of God movement originated in 1968 as a group of runaway teenagers and hippies who were encouraged by their leader, David Berg, to devote themselves to Jesus and engage in promiscuous sex. The group became known for their controversial method of evangelism, known as “flirty fishing.” The principle of flirty fishing is that sex is the most successful way to secure converts and show God’s love. Berg and his flock also believed that dead celebrities and politicians, like Marilyn Monroe, Richard Nixon, and Winston Churchill, were their spirit helpers who imparted them with vital knowledge. In recent years, the group has been subject to legal investigation for pedophilia, which is a principle of the flirty fishing method (David and Richardson, 1976). This group is most emblematic of how members of religious cults lack the *positive* freedom to choose what to do, as they are frequently manipulated to engage in activities that they would not otherwise do in the absence of coercion. If norms are developed through coercion by external forces, then they are not self-imposed.

### **Love-Bombing and Group Affiliation**

At this point, it is fair to say that we categorize religious groups as cults based on the degree to which the members relinquish their autonomy to a controlling and charismatic leader (Halperin, 1982). The issue is then how these individuals come to willingly lose their autonomy and ability for self-reflection. In this section, we will argue that cult recruiters engage with prospective members in a manner that directly attacks the foundation for individuality and personhood. By using emotion regulation to shift normative reasoning based on genuine desires, to instead goal-directed practical reasoning in persons, invokes a willingness to join the cult and indicates the moment that personhood is lost and the agent becomes just human.

To be a person is to have the ability for critical self-reflection such that an agent can act based on its genuine desires and intrinsic values (Helm, 2015). In this case, desires of this type are reasons that motivate an agent to act in accordance with what is worth living for. This type of reasoning differs from mere goal-directed practical reasoning, insofar that it is not motivating the agent to act in accordance for some particular end. Frankfurt (1988) elaborates on this distinction when he refers to desires and volitions; such that a desire is any reason to act and a volition is an agent wanting the respective reason to be its will, or have the ability to cause action. In the case of cults, the distinction is elaborated when members choose to join based on what they deem as values integral to the type of life they find worthwhile and provides the preservation of self-identity. This differs from becoming a member for the purpose of preventing the loneliness and stress that occasionally accompanies one's life. This would be acting based on genuine desires or a goal-directed end, respectively.

One might raise the issue that the distinction between acting based on genuine values and practical reasons is flawed; because genuine values could be reasons that cause the agent to act to achieve some particular end (Brandom, 1979). A response to elucidate the necessary distinction is elaborated through the reference of how we embrace our societal roles. One of the expected roles of a professor is to publish academic work. The by-product of providing this high-quality service involves a rise in prestige,

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as demonstrated by those who won the Nobel prize. Thus, in one instance the agent could be motivated to act for the purpose of achieving fame, or it could perceive its role as one involving the enrichment and distribution of knowledge. In the first case, the agent is acting based on rational goal-directed behavior. It wants to publish more articles for the purpose of gaining fame. However, in the latter instance, the agent takes a more holistic approach to its role and views all knowledge as valuable without putting emphasis on just those impactful enough to win a Nobel prize. An approach of this kind requires that the agent has intrinsic values motivating its actions, as indicated by the action not being tied to some other end.

If what it means to be a person involves the capacity to act based on genuine values, then this serves as a distinction between persons and humans, which many argue only display rationally goal-directed behavior (Helm, 2001). As such, prospective cult members are initially persons, but as they progress through the stages of recruitment they lose the objective quality of personhood until they become mere humans. Halperin (1982) indicated that the primary recruitment strategy is *love-bombing*, which is a technique that promotes the effusive and total approval of the prospective member's behavior. We argue that this technique works in conjunction with emotion regulation and as a form of social reinforcement for the foot-in-the-door phenomenon.

Many commonly believe that the emotional state an agent is experiencing can cause actions of a specific kind to the extent that we can use behavior to efficiently judge what emotions the agent is feeling under a specific context (Churchland, 1985). As such, behavioral neuroscientists demonstrated that behaviors can be reduced to neuronal activity to the extent that manipulating the brain directly can give rise to the expected behaviors. Gobrogge et al. (2017) showed that two neurotransmitters, vasopressin and serotonin, modulate the aggressive and social behaviors in their model organism, the prairie voles. These animals form naturally occurring pair bonds with monogamous sexual partners, thus making them ideal to study the neural circuitry of pair bonding. The amygdala and hypothalamus are brain regions known to modulate emotions, and Gobrogge et al. (2017) recorded that significantly more serotonin is concentrated in the posterior dorsal medial

amygdala (MeAPD) and hypothalamus when the animals are naturally displaying social behaviors to their mate. In contrast, a significantly higher concentration of vasopressin was recorded in this area when the animals were naturally displaying aggressive behaviors towards other voles that were unaffiliated. The researchers also concluded that artificially raising the levels of serotonin or vasopressin can induce the animals to display social behavior to unaffiliated voles or attack their mate and offspring; both behaviors that would not naturally occur. These results suggest that emotional states, whether naturally or artificially induced, can be reduced to brain states and cause predictable action.

If we take the reductionist argument from behavioral neuroscience as valid, then we can pose that cult recruiters are manipulating the neuronal biological circuitry in prospective members, such that they have no other choice but to join the group. Much similar to the prairie voles having no other choice but to attack their mate in the presence of high concentrations of vasopressin in the MeAPD. An agent can defend against this argument by indicating that this level of analysis implicates a stimulus-response relationship that need not rely on personhood for the behavior to be actuated. Insofar that the agent is acting against its will or not caring to prefer one reason over the other to motivate action, then personhood is by consequence already lost. This is because the agent is not acting based on reasons (Helm, 2015; Frankfurt, 1988). This argument is therefore not an attack on the validity of our reasoning because the issue does not concern the action of persons who have the freedom of the will.

Although the argument does not concern persons with the respective freedoms and agency, if we take it as valid the reductionist argument does not hold with the neuroscientific evidence. If we change the operationalization of emotional experience from a behavioral response to shared experiences in correlation to brain states, we still do not observe a direct correlation between brain states and psychological states. By using the results from fMRI studies, some have argued that across the brain there are specific regions that are activated for religious experience, such as entering a trance (d'Aquili and Newberg, 1993). The limitations of these results are that there is no current method to ensure that the participants are paying attention to the relevant stimuli throughout

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the experiment. This ensures that the results are not skewed by mind-wandering. Secondly, the results do not take into account the subjectivity of human experiences, because although each brain might be activated differently, the conclusion is an average activation among all participants, thus reducing the validity of the effects of subjective experiences in shaping behavior. Furthermore, multiple stimuli can produce the same neuronal patterning. Insofar that this is happening independent of context, then we have to view religious experiences as no different from non-religious experiences (Cunningham, 2011). Contexts are essential for the interpretation of behavior and psychological states because in one instance I could be raising my right hand to ask a question while in the other I am attempting to stretch or reach for an object. Although the scenario involves the same behavior and neuronal activity, a reductionist argument does not provide the distinction and level of analysis as to how desires, reasons, and emotional states can work together to motivate action and shape intentionality (Davidson, 1963). The results providing support for a reductionist account of emotions in driving actions do not stand up to scrutiny and internal validity, thus a non-reductionist holistic account is better since it handles much of the limitations faced by a reductionist argument.

We argued that persons not only differ from mere humans in that agents with personhood can act from genuine values and have the freedom of will such that they can choose which reasons to motivate action. As a consequence of arguing against a reductionist view of the emotions, we propose that *love-bombing* manipulates emotion regulation in a manner that affects reasoning and agency; and is not identical to a stimulus-response interaction. The first step of the *love-bombing* technique involves the cult recruiters showering the prospective members with a sense of total approval and respect for them to have the belief that society's laws and structures have disappointed and caused them to feel alienated (Halperin, 1982). This sense of approval and respect for self-integrity causes the prospective members to have a desire to be a part of the recruiter's group because it provides a sense of community where there is no restriction on agency and personal values appear to be shared group values (Helm, 2001; Halperin, 1982). This desire is a type of reason that accompanies

the trust that the prospective member has toward the recruiter. Trust, in this case, we take to be a reactive attitude that involves a complementation of reasons and emotions driving the belief that we can hold an agent accountable to act according to some norm if they are to be a valid member of the group (Holton, 1994; Helm, 2015). In this case, the prospective member is forming a trust that he can fully express his identity in this religious cult; which is guided by the belief that he will be accepted by other members and the emotional desire to belong to a community.

Halperin (1982) suggests that as prospective members make the decision to join a cult, they are welcomed and placed through a type of ritual that engages them to commit to minor acts, such as playing a game with constantly changing arbitrary rules, to major events like sharing intimate details about their life to the group. We argue that this method is no different than the psychological effects of the foot-in-the-door phenomenon because both move from a small request to the agent forming a larger commitment to action. The effect is more pronounced when there are social reinforcement methods employed, as suggested by Crano and Sivacek's (1982) results, where they concluded that participants who received a positive reward in the initial induction were more altruistic when engaging in future tasks, in contrast to controls and those punished in the initial induction. In the case of cults, the reinforcement for engaging in the small inductive tasks is the fact that initiates have the strong desire to be members of this community as a way of preventing the feeling of neglect and isolation from the dominant society. The need for acceptance goes to the extent that the agent can agree to larger inductive tasks, such as engaging in promiscuous sex. Insofar that members are frequently engaged in activities that cause them to act not based on their genuine desires, but instead on practical reasoning to prevent some negative end, then it indicates the transitory period where the agent loses personhood and becomes simply human. Once this transition is complete, the agent is now totally willing to act in accordance with any group idea because they have a sole desire for self-preservation and the cult provides that security. Self-preservation, in this case, transcends the biological definition to promote the persistence of life, for we are taking the term to suggest a perseverance and commitment to beliefs, even if that

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means committing suicide in order to prove one's loyalty to the group. If this form of self-preservation was merely biological, then members would not commit acts resulting in death. However, since this form of self-preservation is tied to group identity, then members will do anything that this group identity requires.

### **Social Isolation and Information Control**

Although love-bombing is a vital recruitment tactic, religious cults also speak to a "broadly Humean" understanding of the nature of practical reason. What this means is that if a reason can motivate someone to act, it must somehow also speak to *existing* desires or motivations. Given this understanding of practical reason and motivation, others have the ability to affect what is rational for person *X* to do in so far as their values or motivations are all a part of the world to which person *X* responds in acting (Helm, 2017). An action cannot be conceived of as rational unless it conforms to one's existing desires. Consequently, cult leaders specifically look to individuals who are seeking meaning, come from dysfunctional families, or are suffering severe psychological distress because they know they will respond to their absolute truth claims and promises of security. We can see this phenomenon when examining The Peoples Temple, as Jones specifically targeted impoverished communities, drug addicts, and the homeless (Hall, 1987).

Past studies have provided support for this claim by finding that cult members report a high prevalence of psychiatric and addictive disorders during the year preceding affiliation with a group (Galanter, 1982; Spero, 1982; Rousselet, Duretete, Hardouin, & Grall-Bronnec, 2017). Additionally, Rousselet et al. (2017) found that cult members frequently report life dissatisfaction as a primary factor for joining the group. Similar to those afflicted with addictive disorders, cult members report the existence of problematic familial relationships, which render them vulnerable to commitment (Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002; Buxant, Saroglou, Casalfiore, & Christians, 2007). If the family network is a vulnerability factor, then this also suggests that it can become a protective factor if family members promote leaving the cultic group by speaking to existing desires or motivations. Nonetheless, for some individuals, cult membership can lead to a decrease

in depressive disorders, as it can become a coping strategy (Rousselet et al., 2017).

Religious cults also use fear of social isolation to motivate members into remaining; thereby altering what is rational for them to do. This process begins when cult members are forced to sever ties with their original social environment, such that they remain detached from outside influence (Rousselet et al., 2017). Once the cult member is removed from their original social environment, they have nowhere to turn but to their charismatic leader, who will swiftly dismiss them if they fail to obey. When Rousselet et al. (2017) interviewed former cult members regarding the factors that motivated them to stay in the group, they found that one's relationship with a cult leader and ultimately one's dependence on the group for identity formation was the most cited factor. This form of manipulation may lead to the development of a dependent personality disorder (Burke and Permanente, 2006). It also induces anxiety in some cult members, as they regularly fear being disassociated from other members. They ultimately may fear rejection or abuse resulting from the constraints imposed by the cult leader.

Additionally, Rousselet et al.'s (2017) study identified that many cult members abandon their education or quit their jobs at the request of their leader. This tactic is exemplified by the "Moonies", as Moon frequently recruited on college campuses, while later encouraging students to drop out. Jim Jones also encouraged his followers to sell their homes and give all their wages to the collective good of the Temple (Galanter, 1982). Without the support of family, friends, and one's career, many cult members find it difficult to consider departing the group even when they no longer believe in its teachings. It is in this sense that they have relinquished their personhood and become mere humans, for they lack the freedom to choose what to do and who to be according to rationality.

Coupled with fear of social isolation is information control, which cult leaders use in order to prevent their devotees from mentally confronting information that may motivate their departure. This undermines one's capacity for "rational control", as it prevents one from deliberately arriving at a practical judgement that is fully theirs (Helm, 2001). Furthermore, if cult members

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were free to view content denouncing the teachings of their group, then perhaps they would be emboldened to leave or at least possess the desire to leave. One may contest that even normative groups, like mainstream religious institutions, are not happy when their followers deliberately seek information criticizing the group's teachings. However, it is the possibility for retribution that distinguishes cults from normative groups. Whether cult members are emboldened to seek this information or merely stumble upon it, the group's leader punishes them accordingly.

Additionally, an interpersonal rational structure is not established since cult leaders do not recognize the authority of their devotees to *also* demand compliance with the norms (Helm, 2017). For example, even though Jones' followers sold their homes and donated copious amounts of money to the collective good of the Temple, he used these funds for lavish personal vacations (Lucky, 2017). If The Peoples Temple operated within an interpersonal rational structure, where members and leaders are subjected to the same communal norms, then Jones' followers would be able to demand that he also donate his money to the collective good of the Temple. Again, we can see this discrepancy between cults and normative groups when examining the Children of God group. During an interview with BBC, a former Children of God member expressed that there were severe consequences if someone asked questions or brought bad publicity to the group by failing to appropriately answer outsiders questions (Lucky, 2017). Nonetheless, the group's leader brought negative publicity to the group when he came under investigation for allegations of sexual abuse (Goodstein, 2005). One may contest to this claim by pointing to examples of hypocrisy in mainstream religious institutions. However, it is the level of hypocrisy and its ability to work in consort with other manipulative factors that distinguishes cults from normative groups, thereby leading to a loss of personhood. A mainstream religious group may resemble a cult in some aspects but not others, or may weakly fit the definition we have posited in this paper. However, this does not definitively make it a cult.

### **Synthesis and Implications for Moral Responsibility**

This paper provides a framework in which personhood is lost, by using the generally accepted notions of how genuine values and rationally goal-directed practical reasoning serves to distinguish persons from humans. We focused on how cult recruiters target a specific group of individuals that lack a sense of meaning and acceptance in their life. The primary tactic used is love-bombing, which subjugates the initiates to group activities that dissolve the foundation of agency and decision-making by following the same psychological principles implicated in the foot-in-the-door phenomenon. We also argued that the structure of cults, information control, and the need for self-preservation that transcends the biological life all serve as factors that promote a willingness to remain in the group.

In some cases, however, we argue that members want to prevent the sense of social isolation, and so this is enough reason to stay even if they are encouraged to act contrary to their intrinsic values. The issue then becomes who should be responsible for the moral actions perpetrated by the group. In one case, we can blame the leader for purposefully implicating the recruitment tactic based on some personal goal. However, we could also pose the argument that prospective members joined the cult because of their already existing desires to feel accepted in a community where they can fully express their identity.

Henrich (2015) argues that humans have the drive to follow the command of those we deem to be prestigious because of the evolutionary benefits it had in prolonging the life of our species. He continues to suggest that by siding with a prestigious leader, our hunter-gatherer ancestors could more easily learn the necessary actions needed to survive instead of using the slow process of trial and error learning. If we apply this definition of prestige to cult leaders, then we can see that members also perceive the cult leader as an integral figure necessary for their survival (Halperin, 1982). Furthermore, the results from Milgram's (1964) experiment suggests that participants are more willing to act in accordance with someone they perceive as prestigious, even if this means they must act against their reasons. In this experiment, a significant proportion of the participants were willing to shock the other at a deadly voltage without questioning the com-

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mand from the researcher they perceived to know what is best. In this case, we could conclude that members of a cult are not responsible for their morally repulsive actions because they are brainwashed to behave accordingly by their leader.

If we accept that the leader's commands are more influential than the group's reasons to act, then we would be arguing contrary to evidence suggesting that much of the cult's structure and behavior is maintained as a result of member dynamics instead of the leader's commands. The results from Asch's (1951) experiment suggests that participants were more willing to side with the majority of the group, even if the choice was contrary to the agent's perception and beliefs. In this experiment, the extent to which social pressure from a majority could induce conformity was assessed by having participants judge the length of multiple lines. Results indicated that even though many participants knew their responses were wrong, they sided with the majority to prevent a feeling of isolation. Halperin (1982) provides evidence supporting the claim that much of the implementation of atrocious actions are done by members of the cult who are most loyal to the leader. To some extent, this vindicates the leader from much of the responsibility since he is not directly engaged in the action. Insofar that cult members show their compliance and loyalty by signaling through action, then they should be responsible for their choices because they are displaying loyalty to the group, not directly to the charismatic leader.

If we accept that personhood is dependent on the agent acting based on genuine values, then we can also propose a framework in which personhood is lost independent of religious cults. This will enable us to evaluate the process through which persons can adopt goal-directed reasons that motivate action and consequently how we can hold those agents morally responsible. A particular example of this is Stockholm Syndrome, as it can cause one to act contrary to their intrinsic values. Specifically, Stockholm Syndrome is a psychological response in which hostages begin to identify with their captors ideas and beliefs as a biological survival strategy (Alexander & Klein, 2009). The actions resulting from cult membership and agents suffering from Stockholm Syndrome should be treated as a distinct but related phenomena. They are similar in that personhood is lost because

the agents are acting based on goal-directed reasons, but the process is different. In the case of Stockholm Syndrome, agents lose their personhood and identity forcefully, normally through capture and torture techniques by an enemy force. By identifying with their captor, their sole desire is to prolong survival. However, cult members willingly abdicate their agency and personhood because of their need for acceptance and desire to preserve the group's ideas, which is amplified through love-bombing. It is in this sense that cult members do not care if they die, as the idea will prevail even if they die. Future researchers should focus on the process leading to a loss of personhood, for this will dictate how we should hold agents morally responsible for their actions.

We should also consider the implications of this project for understanding how normative groups can quickly become communities of disrespect when the leaders decide to implement tactics that directly attack the foundation for agency based on genuine values. This is reinforced by the susceptibility of prospective members, who can easily be subjugated to the group's beliefs. To maintain communities of respect, we should ensure that members and leaders are held equally accountable for their actions and behave in accordance with self-imposed communal norms. By failing to apply retribution, we would be encouraging members that it is appropriate to accept a leader's hypocritical behavior toward their group, thus setting the precursors for relinquishing authority and promoting the dissolution of personhood. Insofar that there is no mutual respect, then the bindingness of norms is lost and members who choose to join and remain in the group are acting contrary to the normativity of rationality. Thus, they are acting contrary to what persons ought to do.

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