Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects[1]

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A long tradition in social science explains recruitment to religious cults and sects on the basis of a congruence between the ideology of a group and the deprivations of those who join. A more recent approach to recruitment argues that interpersonal bonds between members and potential recruits are the essential element. In this paper we first show that these are complementary, not competing, approaches. Then, because the available evidential base for the role of interpersonal bonds is limited and qualitative, we present quantitative data pertaining to three quite different radical religious groups. In each case there is overwhelming support for the crucial role played by social networks in the formation and growth of such groups. Next we seek the boundaries of this phenomenon. Available studies suggest that not merely cult and sect recruitment, but commitment to conventional faiths as well, is supported by social networks. However, networks do not seem to play an important role in acceptance of mildly deviant occult beliefs. Belief in seances and tarot cards, for example, seems to spread via the mass media with little mediation by social networks. We discuss the implications of these findings for a theory of cult and sect recruitment.

For decades, social scientists have paid modest but steady attention to the process by which persons are recruited into exotic and unusual religious groups—those commonly designated as sects or cults. The result is a cumulative body of theory that has been subjected to a significant amount of empirical testing.

This paper attempts to synthesize better and to extend this body of knowledge. It begins by tracing the development of two competing but compatible emphases on the key elements in the recruitment process. The older of these focuses on the appeal of the ideology of various cults and sects and the needs of those who join them. It asks: What does this faith promise, and to whom do such promises most appeal? The more recent line of analysis puts interpersonal relations at the center of the recruitment

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process. It argues that faith constitutes conformity to the religious outlook of one's intimates—that membership spreads through social networks.

First we review the logical and empirical grounds for accepting both lines of analysis as necessary to account for recruitment to cults and sects and outline how they fit together. Subsequently, we give primary attention to the role of social networks, showing that interpersonal bonds between a religious group's members and potential recruits are essential. The reason for this emphasis is the present weakness of the empirical basis for the network component of recruitment theories. To assess the role of interpersonal bonds in recruiting members, we present quantitative data on three unusual religious groups.

Having evaluated these data, we next seek the boundaries of the network phenomenon. First we attempt to see whether it is unique to highly deviant religious groups or whether social networks play a significant role in undergirding even highly conventional religious commitment. Next we assess the importance of interpersonal bonds for acceptance of moderately deviant supernatural beliefs that are not anchored in a deviant religious organization. That is, do networks play any significant role in acceptance of the occult—are those who believe in such things as astrology and flying saucers more like an audience or more like a socially integrated subculture?

Finally, we reassess each of these issues to point toward a more comprehensive explanation of recruitment to religious movements.

Elsewhere (Stark and Bainbridge 1979) we have drawn a sharp conceptual distinction between cults and sects. Such a distinction is vital when attention is given to the way in which unusual or deviant religious groups *form*. However, once sects and cults are going operations there do not appear to be significant differences in how they gain membership. Therefore, in this paper we will not attempt to classify the three groups we examine as cults or sects. It is sufficient that each is an unusual group and that membership in each is somewhat socially stigmatizing.

DEPRIVATION-IDEOLOGICAL APPEAL

The long-established point of view on why people join cults and sects combines assessment of the particular appeals offered by a group's ideology with an analysis of the kinds of deprivations for which this ideology offers relief (Clark 1937; Linton 1943; Cohn 1957; Hobsbawm 1959; Wilson 1959; Smelser 1963; Glock and Stark 1965). Cults and sects, like other deviant social movements, tend to recruit people with a grievance, people who suffer from some variety of deprivation. To understand whom a particular group recruits, it is necessary to see to whom its ideology offers the most. Although it explains much, this line of analysis can be carried to extremes. And, by

the start of the 1960s, in combination with the then-popular mass society theories, it was carried too far.

Mass society theories postulated that modern urban life was inimical to human relations (Wirth 1938, 1940; Kornhauser 1959). While people in earlier times lived in intimate relations that firmly bound them to the moral order, in modern urban societies people were adrift in a Durkheimian sea of anomie. Lacking restraints, and seeking to belong, mass society residents were prone to respond impulsively to propaganda blitzes by social movements such as nazism, communism, or extremist religious movements which offered a pseudosense of community (Brown 1943; Almond 1954; Arendt 1958; Kornhauser 1959).

Later, of course, it was recognized that this view of urban life was faulty. Closer examinations of urban life found that many and perhaps most people remained deeply embedded in primary relationships (Whyte 1943; Gans 1962*a*, 1962*b;* Lewis 1965). Also, studies of the effects of the mass media discovered that their messages typically were mediated extensively by social networks through a "two-step flow of communications" (Lazersfeld and Katz 1955).

As credibility ebbed for the notion that social movements arouse a following by direct ideological appeals to atomized masses of people, it became obvious that the deprivation–ideological appeal explanation of cult and sect recruitment was incomplete. Granted that some people will find a particular ideology more appealing than will others. But what determines why only some of these ideologically suited people actually join a specific group?

INTERPERSONAL BONDS

In the early 1960s, John Lofland and Rodney Stark conducted a participant-observation study of the first group of American members of the Korean-based cult of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon—popularly known today as the Moonies (Lofland and Stark 1965; Lofland 1966, 1977). A close watch on recruitment as it occurred revealed the essential role played by interpersonal bonds between cult members and potential recruits. When such bonds did not exist and failed to develop, newcomers failed to join. When such bonds did exist or develop (and when they were stronger than bonds to others who opposed the individual's recruitment), people did join. Indeed, persons were sometimes drawn by their attachment to group members to move into the Moonie commune while still openly expressing rejection of the Moon ideology. Acceptance of the ideology, and the decision to become full-time cultists, often came only after a long period of day-to-day interaction with cult members. Rather than being drawn to the group because of the appeal of its ideology, people were drawn to the ideology

because of their ties to the group—"final conversion was coming to accept the opinions of one's friends" (Lofland and Stark 1965, p. 871).[2]

This field study also revealed that recruitment often moved through preexisting social networks. The great majority of members of the cult at that time had been mutually linked by long-standing relationships prior to any contact with Moon's movement. In fact, once Moon's missionary had made her first American convert, all subsequent members were drawn from this first recruit's immediate social network until the group uprooted itself from Eugene, Oregon, and moved to San Francisco. In San Francisco it was unable to grow for a considerable time because its members were strangers lacking social ties to potential new recruits. Indeed, some new recruits continued to come out of the original Eugene network. Only when the cult found ways to connect with other newcomers to San Francisco and develop serious relationships with them did recruitment resume. But in relying on befriending lonely newcomers, the Moonies were unable to grow rapidly. New members did not open new social networks through which the cult could then spread. Later in this paper we shall see how much more effective is the Mormon approach to recruitment, which produces recruits who lead on to others.

Following the publication of these findings, others began to report similar observations. When Bainbridge studied a Satanic cult from 1970 to 1976, he found that interpersonal bonds not only played the critical role in recruitment assigned them in the Lofland and Stark study, but also had been essential to the initial formation of the cult. This group originated with two defectors from Scientology who set up shop as psychotherapists in London in 1963. To develop a clientele, the male member of the couple solicited through his upper-middle-class friendship network. Individual therapy sessions soon gave way to group encounters. Participants' relations

[2] Many readers have assumed that the Lofland-Stark findings were based on observation of only 21 persons. However, this figure refers only to the total number of active members gained by the cult by mid-1963. The data base includes also a significant number of persons who failed to join. A number of these spent a substantial amount of time learning the Moonie message and interacting with members. It was possible, therefore, to obtain good data upon them and to establish that they lacked one or more of the elements in the recruitment model. Only with their inclusion does the dependent variable of the study (recruitment) vary. It would be impossible to test such a model on recruits alone. However, a large number of other persons who ought to be in the data base made only one fleeting visit to the Moonies. It was not often possible to learn much, if anything, about them—often they came and went during a time when no observer was present. It was obvious that some of them lacked elements postulated as necessary for recruitment. Some were devout members of another faith who left as soon as they realized they had been ensnared to hear a religious message. Others thought they were coming to pick up dates —having been invited over "to our place" by female missionaries who had not clarified the situation. In any event, the original paper should have contained a numerical presentation of the data in the field notes; that would have clarified the fact that several hundred cases were involved.

with one another began to take on a depth and uniqueness far beyond their relations with others outside the therapy group. Soon they were spending almost all their time in marathon sessions. This, of course, greatly weakened their ties outside the group. The result was a "social implosion." As ties within the group strengthened, external ties weakened until the group socially collapsed inward to engage exclusively in intragroup relations. It was in this imploded network that the first religious ideas began to grow. Soon the group left for a remote and unpopulated stretch of beach in Mexico where, in total isolation, they evolved their novel and exotic cult doctrines. From Mexico, the group reentered society seeking to recruit others. And, like the Moonies, they succeeded only with those with whom they *first* developed strong personal ties (Bainbridge 1978).

From 1967 to 1971, this Satanic cult wandered over Europe and North America, not staying long enough in most places to establish firm connections with established friendship networks. The people recruited were almost without exception social isolates, people whose prime deprivation was precisely a lack of social ties (cf. Phillips 1967). Many of these people apparently suffered from no other serious problems and were isolated social atoms merely because they were geographically mobile. Several were students in universities or professional schools who had recently left home and had not yet established a new set of social relationships. Others were recruited while on extended world tours or while attempting to set up residence in a new land—Americans in France, for example. Some recruits were teenage offspring of upper-class "jet-set" families who alternated between two or more residences, often in different countries, and were therefore low in social attachments to peers. Bainbridge noted that the crucial step in joining was the development of strong social ties with members and argued that deprivations and personal problems were facilitating factors, neither sufficient in themselves nor always necessary. Their contribution to the recruitment process was contingent upon a variety of conditions in the social environment and upon the recruitment strategies of the cult.

Other research also has found that interpersonal bonds play an important role in cult membership. Lynch (1977, 1980) found social ties played an important role in providing converts for the Church of the Sun, a new cult movement in Southern California. Indeed, he discovered that members had virtually no social life apart from cult activities, even though this was not a communal group and members did not give up their regular jobs.

Several studies have suggested that interpersonal bonds also play an important role in conversion to *sects*. Richardson and Stewart (1977) found social networks were a critical factor in the Jesus Movement. Supportive quantitative findings were reported by Gaede (1976) in a study of Mennonites, which showed that interpersonal ties to other Mennonites strongly influenced retention of the orthodox tenets of that sect.

In 1966, Bryan R. Roberts (1968) studied two small Protestant groups in Guatemala City. At that time less than 5% of the Guatemalan population was Protestant, and the groups' neighbors treated them as strange, annoying intrusions in this overwhelmingly Catholic country. Prior to joining, the members had been especially weak in stable social ties, compared with their neighbors who remained Catholic. Roberts reported that the act of joining a Protestant group provided gratifying relationships, and through them the members acquired and maintained deviant beliefs.

CONVERGENCE

Acceptance of the thesis that social relations play an essential role in cult and sect recruitment does not imply that the deprivation–ideological appeal thesis was wrong. Indeed, recent research has rejuvenated interest in and support for this thesis (Balch and Taylor 1977; Anthony et al. 1977; Richardson and Stewart 1977; Lynch 1977, 1980). Moreover, when Lofland and Stark first introduced the interpersonal-bond component in recruitment theories, deprivation and ideological appeal components were not only retained but given considerable scope. Close observations of those who did and those who did not convert after a period of exposure to the Moonies made it evident that people did not join the cult unless something was bothering them. Lofland and Stark hypothesized that people must experience enduring and acutely felt tensions before they will join a cult. Those for whom life is going well continue to do as they have done and are unlikely to join. In addition, not everyone is ideologically suited to join a cult or a sect. Some minimal kind of ideological preparation or predisposition is needed. Hence, Lofland and Stark postulated that people will not join deviant religious groups unless they accept the plausibility of an active supernatural. Indeed, Moon's missionary was so aware of this lack in some potential candidates for recruitment that she sent them to spiritualist meetings in hopes that there they would find irrefutable proof of the existence of an active spirit world. She explained that once people could see for themselves the existence of "lower spirits," they would have need of a doctrine that could explain this. Finally, many people who accept the supernatural do not join cults or sects because they possess a satisfactory framework for these beliefs in an established religion. No matter what else may be required to produce a cult member, the process is greatly facilitated if a person has a problem, believes in the possibility of supernatural interpretations of that problem, and essentially is unchurched (also see Catton 1957; Dohrman 1958; De Santis 1927).

One important qualification of this line of argument must be noted here. In our future efforts to fashion a theory of recruitment, we shall argue (as Bainbridge [1978] has already done) that the importance of deprivation is

variable. That is, deprivation will be of greater significance in the recruitment process to the extent that the society in question is hostile toward deviant religious groups and thus makes it costly to join one. In the days of classical paganism, cults and sects were not regarded as especially deviant and it was not costly, in terms of social sanctions, to join one. At other times—in medieval Europe, for example—extreme costs were incurred by those detected in cult or sect activities. We suggest that the more costly it is to be religiously deviant, the greater are the countervailing pressures (or deprivations) required to motivate joining. However, in periods when established faiths are organizationally weak and when little disapproval is directed toward novel religious movements, many people lacking any noticeably acute deprivations may well be attracted to cults and sects. Indeed, one might argue that in some sections of the United States today (e.g., Southern California) the social environment of radical religious groups is nearly as benign as in pagan Rome.

There is nothing contradictory between the deprivation and ideological appeal line of analysis and that which stresses the importance of social networks. Both seem obvious requirements of any adequate theory. If deprivation alone explained recruitment to cults and sects, millions more people would become members than actually do. Recruits must not only suffer relevant deprivations and be open to a radical group's ideological appeal; they must also be placed in a situation where they will develop social bonds with existing members of the cult or sect.

Until now, the available evidence on the role of interpersonal bonds has been qualitative and insufficient to demonstrate their importance in determining which potential members will, in fact, join. To remedy this deficiency, the next three sections of this paper present quantitative data on three quite varied unusual religious groups.

THREE RELIGIOUS GROUPS

A Doomsday Group

In the early 1960s, Hardyck and Braden (1962) studied a radical religious group that retreated into underground shelters to survive a prophesied atomic Armageddon. As time passed, a trickle of defectors began. But most members of the group persisted until they received a new revelation that they should come out. God had been testing them, and they had passed the test with flying colors.

Hardyck and Braden did not attempt to explain recruitment or defection, because these topics were beyond the scope of the original study. However, during a conversation with Stark, Hardyck (now Piliavin) remarked that the group was essentially a large, extended family. She consulted her field notes and identified each of the 60 adult members in terms of kinship ties

to the group's leader and her two lieutenants. She computed that 45 out of 60 adults who went underground were members of an extended kinship structure linking them to the three leaders. That is, 75% of the group formed a single and obvious social network based on kinship. And nearly all the other members were longtime friends of those in the kinship network. Clearly, this group formed by spreading along well-established interpersonal bonds.

In addition to furnishing us with this kinship count, Hardyck gave us table 1, which offers dramatic quantitative data on the power of interpersonal bonds to shape religious faith. The obverse of recruitment is defection. If social ties pull people into cults and sects, it follows that the absence of such ties should influence defections. In this case a very unambiguous measure of defection was available: those who quit awaiting the holocaust and went above ground. All told, 18 of the 60 adult members defected in this fashion. Table 1 shows the percentages of defectors by three degrees of relationship to the group's leaders.

Among members who were direct kin of the leaders, only 14% quit. Of those who were related to kin of the leaders, but not directly to the leaders (e.g., in-laws), 25% defected. But of those who had no relatives in the group, two-thirds left prematurely. For those who had to abandon their families as well as their faith, defection was rare. But for those without familial ties to the group, defection was the rule!

This does not suggest that theology played no role in the recruitment and maintenance of this group. But it surely does suggest that blood is thicker than attitudes.

Ananda: A Mystical Commune

Ananda, a rural commune near Nevada City, California, was studied recently by Ted A. Nordquist (1978). It was founded in 1967 by Swami Kriyananda, an American who had been baptized in the Episcopalian faith as James Donald Walters. While living in Los Angeles, Walters became a follower of Swami Paramahansa Yogananda, an Indian who attracted a

TABLE 1

KINSHIP BONDS AND DEFECTION FROM A DOOMSDAY CULT

Degree of Kinship	Percent Who Defected	Total *N* in Each Group
Related to cult leaders	14	29
Related to others, but not to leaders	25	16
Not related to another group member	67	15

SOURCE.—Data were given us by J. A. Hardyck.

following in California during the 1940s and 1950s. Having adopted an Indian name, Kriyananda specialized in self-realization teaching and gained sufficient backing to open a commune, Ananda Cooperative Village.

Nordquist (1978) administered a questionnaire to 28 Ananda members. A number of the items were meant to disclose their social situations prior to coming to the village. Overwhelmingly, they were characterized by "social withdrawal or introversion" prior to joining Ananda (Nordquist 1978, p. 87). For example, 82% reported they never or hardly ever attended parties, social gatherings, and the like.

These findings speak to several points about recruitment. First, these people did not have social bonds that could have *restrained* them from joining a cult. Second, such people were very open to forming social bonds within the Ananda group. Presumably, social isolation was one of the deprivations that caused these people to seek a religious answer. And, indeed, when asked by Nordquist what single factor was most important in keeping them in Ananda, 61% chose "fellowship with other devotees," while an additional 25% chose their relationship with Swami Kriyananda. In expressing interpersonal bonds as the prime factor keeping them in the cult, these members noticeably ignored the special qualities of the life-style, the religious exercises, or ideology. Nordquist noted: "Undoubtedly, joining Ananda provided the individual with companionship unavailable in the large society" (1978, p. 87).

These concerns with interpersonal bonds also show up clearly in table 2. Ananda members were given a list of 18 "instrumental values" developed by Rokeach (1973). They were asked to rank these values in terms of personal preferences. The table shows the top seven values in the rankings by Ananda members. For comparison the top seven values in ratings made by undergraduates at Michigan State University are shown on the left of the

TABLE 2

TOP SEVEN CHOICES ON ROKEACH'S (1973) LIST OF 18 INSTRUMENTAL VALUES

Michigan State Students	Ranking among Ananda Cultists	Ananda Cultists	Ranking among Michigan State Students
1. Honest	2	1. Loving	5
2. Responsible	8	2. Honest	1
3. Broadminded	7	3. Forgiving	11
4. Ambitious	13	4. Helpful	13
5. Loving	1	5. Cheerful	14
6. Independent	10	6. Self-controlled	8
7. Courageous	9	7. Broadminded	3

SOURCE.—Adapted from Nordquist (1978).

table. The differences are clear and easily characterized. The Michigan State students gave the highest ratings to values related to personal competency. In contrast, the Anandans gave the highest ratings to values pertinent to stable interpersonal relations. Over time many persons who were prepared to accept mysticism drifted through the Ananda village. Those who remained were those who formed interpersonal ties.

The Mormons

The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints is one of the oldest and most successful of novel American religious movements. Indeed, in the state of Utah, Mormonism is the dominant religious tradition. However, despite growth and success, the church remains intensely conversionist and each year sends thousands of young men on two-year missionary forays around the world (see table 3). Furthermore, in the areas where these missionaries work and where the bulk of recruits join, Mormonism remains a highly deviant religious movement.[3]

By now the Mormons have been seeking recruits under these circumstances for well over 100 years. Their mission efforts are a model of efficient administration based on detailed record keeping and the careful evaluation

TABLE 3

MORMON CHURCH GROWTH, 1900–1978

Year	Total Membership	Number of Full-Time Missionaries
1900	268,331	796
1925	613,653	2,500
1947	1,016,170	4,132
1957	1,488,314	6,616
1967	2,614,340	13,147
1978	4,180,000	27,399

SOURCE.—*Church News* 49 (January 6, 1979): 5.

[3] Some might argue that Mormonism no longer labors under a public definition as a deviant religion. Yet recent data reported by Gallup in 1977 showed that Americans were *five times* as prone to say they disliked Mormons as they were to indicate dislike of Methodists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians, and almost twice as likely to dislike Mormons as Jews. It is true enough that it is not deviant to be a Mormon in Utah. But it is also true that one easily overhears harsh stereotypes applied to Mormons by non-Mormons in Utah. Indeed, the authors have often heard professional sociologists in all parts of the country freely express deeply held prejudices against Mormons in remarks that would have led to scandal and ostracism had they been directed against blacks or Jews. Furthermore, it ought to be kept in mind that few recruitments to Mormonism take place in Utah. Instead, they occur in communities where Mormons are a tiny minority. Recruitment, therefore, takes place where substantial stigma attaches to Mormonism and where potential recruits may encounter strong pressures from family and friends not to join.

of recruitment techniques. This wealth of experience offers data virtually of the quality of carefully controlled field experiments. That is, the Mormon missions have tried a variety of methods for gaining members and have kept scrupulous accounts of the results of each.

We were fortunate enough to be provided the data shown in table 4. These statistics are for all missionaries in the state of Washington during the year 1976–77. We were reliably informed that these data are typical of results reported for other states as well as for foreign missions. While no frequencies were available, competent sources told us that the number of cases in each cell was very large and thus there are no grounds to suspect any substantial amount of random fluctuation.

Mormon missionaries seek recruits through a variety of means. The church has long recognized the immense importance of social networks in recruitment. Therefore they work through such networks whenever possible. Frequently, however, to fill the time of the many available missionaries, approaches are made with little, if any, network support. Table 4 breaks down contacts between Mormon missionaries and potential recruits according to the degree to which they were mediated or facilitated by a Mormon friend or relative. The results offer dramatic testimony for the role of interpersonal bonds. When Mormon missionaries merely go from door to door without the aid of social bonds, the success rate is only 0.1%. At the other extreme, if a Mormon friend or relative provides his home as the place where missionary contact occurs, the odds of success reach 50%.

Another way of looking at these findings is that missionaries do not serve

TABLE 4

INTERPERSONAL BONDS AND CONVERSION TO MORMONISM
(State of Washington, 1976–77)

Degree to Which a Mormon Friend or Relative Took Part in the Recruitment Process	Percent of All Missionary Contacts That Resulted in Successful Recruitment
None (door-to-door canvas by missionaries)	.1
Covert referral (name of Mormon who suggested contact is *not* used)	7
Overt referral (name of Mormon who suggested contact *is* used)	8
Set up an appointment with missionaries	34
Contact with missionaries took place in the home of Mormon friend or relative	50

NOTE.—Entirely by coincidence, the figures in this table add up to approximately 100%. That is not the correct way to read them. Each figure reports the percentage of recruitment attempts in each category which succeeded.

as the primary instrument of recruitment to the Mormon faith. Instead, recruitment is accomplished primarily by the rank and file of the church as they construct intimate interpersonal ties with non-Mormons and thus link them into a Mormon social network.

Mormon leaders are acutely aware that this is the case. In consequence, they give considerable attention to developing an explicit network strategy among rank-and-file members. All social scientists interested in religious recruitment could learn much from a detailed, 13-step set of instructions published in June 1974 in the *Ensign*, an official church magazine widely circulated among members. Written by Ernest Eberhard, president of the Oregon mission, the article constitutes a practical guide to enable church members to bring their faith to their neighbors and acquaintances in order to fulfill the goal that each member should help bring one new person into the church each year.

The important thing about the instructions is that they are directed toward building close personal ties and at many points specifically admonish Mormons to avoid or downplay discussion of religion. That is, from experience Mormons ratify the point made by observational studies—that interpersonal bonds come first, theology subsequently, not the reverse.

The first step in the instructions advises Mormons how to select a family for potential recruitment. People who express concerns about raising their children effectively in a modern, urban environment might be a good choice because of the centrality of strong families in Mormonism. Another ideal choice would be a family "who have just moved into the neighborhood and thus have no strong ties of friendship in the neighborhood." Mormons are also candidly admonished that their friendship network ought to include non-Mormons—"Don't be exclusive."

Step two discusses strategies for getting acquainted. Mormons are advised to be sure to learn each person's name quickly, to be cheerful, to be good listeners, to learn the interests of the members of the neighbor family and to focus interaction on them. And they are advised, "Do something for each person. Is he just moving into his house? Offer to help him, do his laundry. . . . Is he planting or weeding his lawn? Get your edger. You can learn a lot working side by side. Does a couple need a baby sitter? Be available. Are you driving your children to school? Offer to take theirs also. . . . "

Step three discusses effective ways to invite potential recruits into Mormon homes. Step four concerns arranging to "go out together." Only in step five does religion enter the picture, and then to defuse rather than ignite the subject—"Step Five: Inform them you are a Mormon." Considerable discussion and many examples are provided here to advise members how to indicate in a casual fashion that they are Mormons. One suggestion is to refer to a letter just received from a nephew who is doing

his missionary stint in Texas; another is to mention volunteer work at the church welfare farm, or to make some other reference that will convey to the neighbor the information that one is a Mormon. But emphasis is placed on keeping this a very low-key information exchange. "Avoid deep subjects. Deep subjects or intense personal spiritual experiences, such as the concept of the three stages of glory or stories involving visions, should not be discussed at this early stage. . . . "

In step six it is suggested that the neighbor might now be given something to read in the way of church publications. But these are not to be religious tracts. Perhaps the neighbor has expressed "a desire to stop smoking," in which case it might be appropriate to provide a Word of Wisdom pamphlet published by the church on that subject. Or it might be appropriate to provide the pamphlet "These Are the Mormons," which is designed to provide a popular account of Mormons and their faith. Again, great discretion is advised.

In step seven, Mormons are encouraged to invite the neighbor family to attend a session of one of the most significant Mormon customs—the family home evening. Once a week each practicing Mormon family gathers in its own living room. Together they study a church lesson and, more important, consider and attempt to resolve any family problems according to procedures instituted by the church. It is suggested that the neighbor family not be invited to the regular family evening (which is usually on Monday) when a doctrinal discussion ordinarily occurs. Instead, the family should set up a special evening focused almost wholly on family problem solving as a demonstration for the potential recruit family. Again, religion is downplayed and social relations are played up. "Show them a strong family." "Be considerate." "Let them tell you about their family." Finally, "Avoid church questions"—those involving doctrine. "Instead, let the lesson or discussion demonstrate a sound, basic principle of need and value to the family or to young people."

In steps eight and nine, the potential recruits are exposed to Mormon groups, but not to religious services. They are to be invited to some of the many church-sponsored clubs and activities such as scouts, homemaking sessions, and the like. It is also suggested that the adult couple be invited to share a "fireside"—a regular informal discussion gathering held in the ward's social center. Again, care is to be taken against premature exposure to too much religion: "Check to make sure that no deep discussions or 'gospel debates' are likely to occur. The fireside committee will probably be happy to make the fireside especially appropriate for your non-member guest, if you give them time to coordinate it."

In step ten the neighbor family is invited to a Sunday service. Since the unique and more sacred ritual aspects of Mormonism occur only in a

regional temple, Sunday services are quite informal and would not strike persons with a Christian background as particularly unusual.

In step eleven the member is advised it is now time to give personal testimony to faith. "Your testimony is the climax. Your previous efforts have been building toward sharing your own testimony. Do not fear it: it won't be difficult, because by the time the [potential recruit] family has progressed this far they will be eager to hear your personal feelings. . . . " However, restraint is still the rule. "Do not include deeply spiritual experiences or manifestations. They are yours and are not for touching tender spirits that are just learning about the gospel."

Step twelve covers raising the possibility that the person ought to investigate Mormonism more deeply. Suggested lead-ins are: "Have you ever wondered why we use the Book of Mormon in our church?" or "If you knew there was a living prophet on the earth today, would you be interested in finding out if he is a true prophet?"

If the first attempt does not produce a sufficiently interested response, the Mormon is advised to "try again. If they don't wish to learn about the Church now, keep their friendship alive and preserve the opportunity for teaching again, so long as any interest remains."

When interest is shown, the final step has been reached. It is now time to arrange for the missionaries "to teach them in your home." And the data in table 4 show that if this step is achieved, successful recruitment is the result half of the time.

If we can assume the Mormons know what they are doing—and the fact that they are the most rapidly growing, large religious movement in the United States suggests they surely do—there seems compelling reason for sociologists to accept the theory that interpersonal bonds are the fundamental support for recruitment.

NETWORKS AND CONVENTIONAL FAITHS

We have seen a considerably expanded empirical basis for claiming that interpersonal bonds play a vital role in recruitment of cults and sects. We now seek the boundaries of this phenomenon. Must recruitment be sustained by social relations only in order to shield the individual from sanctions against deviant behavior, while no such shield is necessary for commitment to conventional faiths? Or is the role of interpersonal influence much more general—is all religion sustained by social networks?

We can only begin to assess the boundaries here. But a variety of evidence suggests that all faiths rest on network influences. In a forthcoming paper, Kevin Welch assesses the role of interpersonal bonds in sustaining commitment to orthodox beliefs among members of mainline Christian denomi-

nations in the United States. He has found strong positive correlations between various measures of orthodoxy and the proportion of one's best friends who are members of one's own religious congregation or parish. He has also found that the greater the number of memberships in nonchurch organizations and clubs, the lower the orthodoxy. These relationships remain strong despite controls for education, occupation, denomination, and age. It would appear that even in such low-tension faiths as Episcopalianism and Methodism, belief is firmest among those whose social network and religious affiliation are coterminous.

Similarly, Stark's study of the effects of social contexts upon religious experience (moments when the individual believes he or she has had a personal encounter with the supernatural) found that in Christian groups ranging from the lowest-tension denominations to the highest-tension sects, such experiences were highly concentrated among those who chose their closest friends from among their coreligionists (Stark 1965).

Several recent studies of the spread of the Charismatic movement among American Roman Catholics also have found that interpersonal bonds played a quite significant role. Harrison (1974) found this among a sample of students at two Catholic universities, as did Heirich (1977) among students and other adults in the Ann Arbor area. The study by Heirich is especially interesting because he carefully assessed the relative significance of deprivation, prior socialization, and social influence in determining recruitment. While he feels that other factors not identified by any of these approaches may also be important, his detailed analysis shows that social ties had a powerful effect. "It is clear that members of the movement, when recruiting, turn to previous friends and to persons they meet at daily Mass. It is also clear that introduction to Catholic Pentecostalism by a trusted person, together with positive inputs from others while exploring its claims produces fairly positive outcomes" (Heirich 1977, p. 667).

NETWORKS AND THE OCCULT MILIEU

Recently there has been a considerable resurgence in the popularity of occult and pseudoscience beliefs in the United States. In 1977 Gallup reported that 27% of Americans believe in astrology. Millions of others daily consult their biorhythm charts in the daily press. Others meditate or attend lectures by a whole host of traveling mystics. This constellation of mildly deviant supernatural beliefs and activities has been identified as the *occult milieu,* and specific interest groups within it constitute what we have called "audience cults" (Stark and Bainbridge 1979). Some students of cult recruitment suspect that participation in the occult milieu plays a vital preparatory role leading to membership in organized cult movements (Wuthnow 1976, 1978; Balch and Taylor 1977; Lynch 1977). Since these

beliefs are mildly deviant, experimentation with them may help to disconnect people from conventional religious affiliations while preparing them to consider novel religious doctrines.

However, although considerable research has been conducted on how people are recruited into cults, little or nothing is known about how people enter the occult milieu. On the one hand, persons may take up occult interests as a result of membership in a social network where such interests prevail. If so, the occult can be characterized as a true subculture—a distinctive set of cultural elements that flourish as the property of a distinctive social group. On the other hand, occult interests may reflect a much more superficial phenomenon. Participation in such interests could be more like being a member of a theater audience—a transitory and relatively private amusement that is not supported by significant social relations. If the former is the case, entry into the occult milieu is quite plausibly interpreted as a significant symptom of potential recruitment to a deviant religious group. If the latter, consumption of occult teachings may be little more than a minor exercise of idiosyncratic taste having little meaning for future religious actions.

Recently we conducted research on the importance of social networks for the acceptance of occult doctrines (Bainbridge and Stark, forthcoming). Our sample consisted of 424 *pairs* of close friends selected from the student body of the University of Washington. All students completed identical questionnaires; thus it was possible to examine the degree of concordance between members of pairs on a whole range of attitudes, preferences, tastes, and activities.

High concordances between friends were found on conventional religious beliefs and practices; they were especially high among evangelical Protestants. That is, "born again" students were very likely to have "born again" friends and both members of such pairs were likely to exhibit high levels of religiousness. But among persons of liberal Protestant backgrounds concordances on religious commitment were low.

When we examined concordances on a number of occult items (belief in ESP, tarot cards, seances, psychic healing, and astrology, or a liking for occult literature), some low, but significant, concordances were found. However, further analysis revealed that these were produced almost entirely by high levels of mutual rejection of these occult items by the "born again" pairs. Among other student pairs only minute levels of concordance existed on occult items.

From these data we concluded that religious and mystical beliefs are salient for interpersonal relations only to the extent that they are undergirded by vigorous social organizations. Cults, sects, and strong churches can make their ideologies so salient that they will be reflected in friendship patterns. In the absence of an organizational base such ideologies do not

shape friendships. Thus the occult milieu resembles a mass audience more than a real subcultural phenomenon. It does not appear to spread through or be sustained by social networks. It may still be true that cult movements find the occult milieu a useful source of recruits. But, since occult beliefs seem not to spread through social networks, finding a recruit on the basis of his or her prior dabbling in the occult does not give a cult group access to a social network of people similarly predisposed.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have attempted to use a variety of data to make firmer the evidential base for the thesis that social networks play an essential role in recruitment to cults and sects. The data on a doomsday group revealed the centrality of kinship in the structure of the group and in preventing defection. Data on the Ananda commune revealed that interpersonal ties were far more effective than ideology in sustaining commitment. Finally, data on Mormon recruitment showed that it is lay members building bonds of friendship and trust with non-Mormons that lies at the center of the great success in gaining new adherents to the church.

We have also seen that there is evidence that conventional religions too depend heavily on networks. On the other hand, the evidence suggests that some popular occult beliefs are not sustained by a socially connected subculture. To entertain such beliefs is not to take up membership in an organized religion, deviant or otherwise. It appears that such beliefs stem from idiosyncratic responses to mass communications rather than being the result of early stages in recruitment to a radical religious movement.

While the thrust of this paper has been to establish and chart more adequately the impact of interpersonal bonds on religious recruitment, that process does not lead to rejection of the complementary ideological appeal–deprivation position. Any complete theory of recruitment to cults and sects will need to include these elements.

However, deprivation and ideological compatibility seem unable to serve as more than very general contributory conditions in any satisfactory theory of recruitment. Although they do limit the pool of persons available for recruitment, they do not limit it very much in relation to the relatively small numbers of such persons who actually join. That is, many people are deprived and are ideologically predisposed to accept a cult or a sect's message. But in explaining why so few of them actually join, it is necessary to examine a number of situational variables. For one thing, limited numbers of people actually encounter missionaries from cults and sects. For another, a group's effectiveness in gaining recruits depends heavily on the extent to which its members belong to or can enter social networks outside the group. Thus, groups with procedures that tend to recruit members who

were social isolates prior to forming bonds with group members will have a very slow growth rate. The new members do not provide the group with entrée to new social networks through which the group may then spread. On the other hand, cults and sects that tend to recruit entire nuclear families (as is often the case in Mormon recruitment) may make rapid growth as they spread on through friends and relatives of the new members. Interpersonal bonds appear to be a crucial situational element for any theory of recruitment.

This paper is but a preliminary step toward such a theory. Here we shall conclude by drawing attention to a major element that must be included in such a theory and has been missing from previous work. Moreover, this missing element helps to link more closely the deprivational and network elements of recruitment discussed in the paper.

This missing element consists of the significant *direct rewards* available to members of religious movements. Previous discussions of the importance of deprivations in creating recruits for cults and sects have focused on how the ideologies of such groups function to make deprivations more bearable. Thus, for example, a doctrine that the poor will stand first in heaven offers balm against present poverty, but it does not reduce poverty. However, as ongoing social organizations, sects and cults generate and exchange a great array of rewards which can serve directly to *reduce* various kinds of deprivations. While observing the Moonies, Stark noted quite remarkable improvements in the ability of some members to manage interpersonal relations. They came to the group suffering greatly from low self-esteem and lack of confidence that disrupted their interactions with others. For example, one man routinely whispered and looked only at his toes when he talked with others. Forging strong affective ties to other group members quite noticeably raised the self-esteem of new recruits. Indeed, the man just described "recovered" to the extent that he was able to preach in the streets after a period with the group.

Moreover, direct rewards available to cult and sect members are not limited to affection. Groups such as the Hare Krishnas and the Moonies offer specific material inducement—they clothe, feed, and shelter adherents. Indeed, they offer them a *career* that, at least within the group, enjoys considerable prestige. Having joined such a group, members no longer must wonder what to do in life or explain why they were not doing very well. Furthermore, there is considerable scope for ambition within cults and sects. Some members can rise to positions of considerable status and power. Bainbridge found that the original core members of The Power lived in considerable luxury and exercised great authority over newer members (including sexual access).

Indeed, examination of the 13-step Mormon program for gaining new recruits reveals the priority given to showering tangible rewards upon

potential new members. The notion of showing people how rewarding it is to be a Mormon is not meant metaphorically or in only a theological sense.

Religious movements do not rely solely upon otherworldly solutions to people's problems. Whatever else they may be, religious organizations also are worldly organizations and have at their disposal resources to reward many members. Indeed, the affective bonds that constitute social networks, which we have featured in this paper, are direct rewards. Humans desire interpersonal bonds, and they will try to protect them from rupture even if that may mean accepting a new religious faith.

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