I. Cults

A. Definition: relatively small group that is highly organized around unconventional beliefs and engages in deviant practices.

B. Negative connotation

1. Brainwashing

2. Bizarre rituals (usually sexual)

3. Appeal: psychologically weak individuals

4. Deprogramming

C. Examples

a. Heaven’s Gate

b. People’s Temple Christian Church

c. Branch Davidians

d. Falun Gong

e. Scientology, Christian Identity, Christian Zionists, Ku Klux Klan

D. Labeling and power

1. Dominant religion

a. Roman Empire – Christianity

b. Church of England-Puritans

c. Protestantism-Mormons

2. Media

a. Exaggerates deviant behavior

b. “Experts”: Scientology

3. Government

a. deviance as a threat

b. Example: Branch Davidians

i. Formerly: Seventh Day Adventists

ii. David Koresh: “sinful messiah”

iii. bizarre sexual practices

iv. Mt Carmel: “bunker”

E. Characteristics

1. Charismatic Leader

a. Personal crisis

b. Identifies a crisis

c. Divine

d. Buddha, Jesus of Nazareth

2. “Story”: ultimate concern

a. Manichean world

i. Good vs evil

ii. Evil is present

b. Apocalypticism

i. Corrupt world

ii. Armageddon ( Identity is “race war’)

c. Promise: salvation or utopia

d. Demand: act now

e. Sacrifice: work, friend, family, life, lives

f. Sources: Biblical, social theories, myths

3. Rituals

a. reinforce emotional solidarity

b. draw the lines

4. Strict behavioral norms: clothes, eating, interactions, sex, language

5. Outside contact: limited and controlled

1. Can be institutionalized: Christianity
2. Members
   1. Disillusioned
   2. Searching for meaning

c. Belonging (community)

II. Heaven’s Gate

A. Charismatic leader

1. Marshall Herff Applegate (Bo and Do)

2. Bonnie Lu Nettles (Peep and Ti)

3. Bo

a. Divine

b. identifies a crisis (offers solutions)

B. Members

1. men and women: avg 47 years of age (20-72)

2. class, race, gender

C. Story

1. Evolutionary Levels (Earth is Human Level)

2. Heaven’s Gate refers to leaving human for higher level

“Kingdom of Heaven”

3. Jesus: higher level

4. Life on earth

a. preparation

b. boarding pass

5. Luciferians

a. evil space aliens

b hide truth

c. killed Jesus

c. entrap us: conventional norms

6. Do is from higher plane

1. must follow him or wait
2. race to develop

7. Comet is brief window of opportunity to higher level

8. Holy text: “How and When Heaven’s Gate May Be Entered”

D. Behavioral norms

1. clothes, eating, haircuts, shoes

2. group activity

3. interpersonal social interactions

4. space age vocabulary

5. rejection of materialism

6. celibacy, abstinence from beer and alcohol

7. no or limited outside contact, but fans of Star Trek and X Files

E. Sacrifice: suicide (39 in 1997)

III. People’s Temple Christian Church

A. Charismatic leader: Jim Jones

1. religious family

2. preacher

3. faith healer

4. social work

B. People’s Temple (early)

1. San Francisco,

a. Black community early 70s

b. Social Gospel

i. Poverty

ii. Racial inequality

iii. Free health care, social services

2. Membership

3. Problems

1. fake healing
2. controlling
3. corruptions

C. Progressive community to cult

1. Failure of social justice

a. limits to civil rights movement

b. Kerner Report

2. utopian society

3. Story

a. religion + politics

i. Gospel: compassion towards others, esp poor

ii. Socialism: equality

iii. Sources: social gospel, Bible, utopianism, socialism

iv. Guyana

b. Jonestown: “promised land”

4. Strict behavioral norms

a. No dissent

b. Coercive work

c. Loyalty tests

iv. guards

v. punishment: verbal abuse and physical

d. Continual indoctrination

i. loudspeakers

ii. “father”

e. Limited or no contact with outsiders, include family

f. Coercive sex

g. Investigation

5. Sacrifice: mass suicide

a. Fear: lose everything

b. Willingness to die

c. Suicide, murder (1978-900)