Exiles at Home: A Psychological Profile of Affiliates to Innovative New Religious Movements in Australia

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New Religious Movements (NRMs) are subcultures which do not share spiritual beliefs of the dominant culture, representing in innovative ways their cultures of origin. Eastern NRMs are *imported* from another culture, and are *innovative* in that they have evolved with and reacted to local Australian culture to such an extent that they no longer closely resemble parent religions of Hinduism or Buddhism (McIlwain, 1991a); yet they still express their cultures of origin in significant respects. Their belief systems are concerned with quite recognizably religious concerns; explanation and consolation, the scope of which extends beyond day to day events to ultimate issues encompassing: the meaning of suffering (particularly the types and patterns of suffering), the finality of death, and possible alternatives to a self-oriented, materialistic way of life. Yet the conception of the divine, the lifestyles promoted and relationships aspired to, are deemed "foreign" by local culture and seen by many as "occult" in nature. That their assumptions entail for example, action at a distance and super empirical causation, has perhaps led western social science researchers to overlook the potential these belief systems have for the resolution of suffering and the provision of guidance. It is to overlook the potential "appeal" of such beliefs (but see Snow & Machalek, 1984), since because of their embodiment of culturally exotic beliefs, these movements may draw to them a remarkably distinct subculture who tacitly subscribe to these beliefs, but who were, prior to movement contact, unrecognized within a dominant Western culture.

Turning Away from the Brainwashing Model

In contrast to the brainwashing model of coercive persuasion (see Conway & Siegelman, 1979; Melton & Moore, 1982, Chapter 3) which assumes that there are no features distinguishing those drawn to NRMs from those not so drawn, the present study explores whether there is a subculture with systematically different attributes pre-existing involvement with a particular movement.

Research suggests that there are differences between those becoming involved and those who are not interested in participation in these movements (Barker, 1981, 1986, 1989; Galanter, 1980, 1989; Galanter,

Rabkin, Rabkin, & Deutsch, 1979; Ullman, 1982, 1989). This study proposes that conversion is a rite of passage, or more correctly, a series of *rites de passage*, whereby people experience a period of disruption, find themselves alienated from roles they once held, somehow "cut loose" and experiencing a period of transition which, for a number of psychological reasons, they resolve in a spiritual manner. These proposals are empirically assessed, with specific emphasis on whether those drawn to Eastern NRMs are exiled at home, have experienced a relatively high level of recent life stress in an unsupported social context, motivating them to become involved in a remedial social agency. It is suggested that when strife occurs, those exiled from the dominant culture, who do not share its spiritual beliefs, will not avail themselves of the support afforded traditionally by orthodox religion and psychotherapy. Rather, they will be drawn to alternative solutions consonant with their beliefs, and at odds with the beliefs and aspirations of the general population in Australian society in the late 1980s.

There is a dual emphasis on life context and personal beliefs since the issue of differential openness to involvement in NRMs hinges on two simple questions: 1) Why does one person rather than another get involved? [Type One Involvement]; 2) Why does involvement occur with one genre of movement rather than another? [Type Two Involvement].

These simple questions have complex histories. The brainwashing account, at its most extreme, suggests "cults" create the very needs they then seek to satisfy, and anyone is potentially a recruit. Some research suggests that some groups are less than forthcoming about the nature of the organization they represent and use powerful emotional bombardment techniques to secure a person's involvement (Lofland, 1978). Others, like Galanter, Rabkin, Rabkin, & Deutsch (1979), Galanter (1980, 1989) and Barker (1981, 1989) in Britain and the U.S., show that if a person remains involved beyond a preliminary weekend workshop, the doctrinal element of group activities is quite explicit, and those who are uninterested by such details leave, with little or no pressure to stay, though there is often the complete withdrawal of what Lofland (1978) terms "love-bombing tactics." It may be quite a "social cold turkey" for those who leave, but many do. Recruitment is more seduction than capture, a viewpoint echoed by Ullman (1989), (if we look at the research literature, rather than single case studies in the form of telling one-person accounts). Those who stay are likely to be interested and willing participants, rating social contacts within the movement as superior to those they have available outside (Galanter, 1980). Reasons for this differential willingness to stay (or to make contact in the first place) on the part of some people and not others will be considered below.

Historically, brainwashing was conspicuously unsuccessful, since the "successes" were those already marginalized, but the role that disruption (of social groups, or beliefs) plays in promoting change has been

considered across a range of disciplines and concerns. The tripartite model inherent in Schein's (1957, 1961) work on brainwashing is of considerable interest since a similar three phases (disruption, transition and reincorporation) have been postulated in a number of realms of inquiry. In anthropology, Van Gennep (1908/1960) delineates three *rites de passage*; rituals orchestrated by communities at maturationally-defined social thresholds. James (1902/1960) details the disruption prior to conversion of those requiring a second "symbolic" birth, the twice born. Berger and Luckman (1967) explicitly demarcate three similar phases as essential elements of any experience of resocialization. Katz (1960) notes the importance of disruption of the explanatory effectiveness of attitudes as an important precursor to attitude change. McHugh (1972) makes creative use of three such stages in his article on prison rehabilitation, suggesting that disruption or randomization of patterns of affiliation must precede changes in values and behavior. A similar three phases are to be found, tacitly, in Lofland and Stark's (1965) model of "cult conversion."

Type One Openness to Involvement: Disruption

All of the instances cited hinge on the assumed importance of social relationships in the maintenance of beliefs and values, and in maintaining a sense of enduring personal identity over time and changes in location, and the disruption that ensues when social relations change. If social supports are removed, and stressful life events occur which exceed an individual's coping resources, then a person becomes either vulnerable to outside influences offering solutions, or actively seeks other solutions in a group or individual form. Unless we assume that what Richardson and Stewart (1977) term the "opportunity structure" of social networks and media contact only provides one possible course of action, some account must be given of the differential appeal of solutions. If part of the problem is loneliness, then it is likely that social options appeal. Galanter (1980) showed that those drawn to NRMs deem their social ties inadequate, perhaps facilitating temporary departure, as Snow et al. (1980) also suggest. This first phase of the rites de passage model is a necessary bedrock of causal conditions but not sufficient for movement contact to occur. Whether any remedial action is taken, and the nature of the rite of passage depend on other factors fully considered elsewhere (McIlwain, 1990) and lightly sketched below. Such disruptions may mean group options prevail over individual solutions, but as Greil (1977) suggests, they are necessary but not sufficient precursors of resocialization, "a fission of values making new fusions possible, not inevitable" (p. 708). Disruptions may motivate a person to change, but, as Snow et al. (1980) observe, they do not make the tenets of a movement's ideology self-evident.

Type Two Openness to Involvement: Transition and the Role of Beliefs

Which type of movement appeals to a given individual, the rites de passage model suggests, is determined by a consonance between movement attributes and personal attributes. Without some consideration of the consonance of individual beliefs with those of the movement approached a full account cannot be given of what determines differential involvement in NRMs. I will now briefly outline some salient attributes of Eastern NRMs to anticipate the kinds of beliefs and personal attributes which might predispose a person to becoming involved. Some Eastern NRMs, particularly residential groups, are all-encompassing and unconventional life options which provide a holding environment, adjacent or alternative to dominant spiritual traditions and local culture. Since many Eastern NRMs are seen as socially non-normative, those drawn to them would be expected to be less traditional in their beliefs and lifestyle values. Eastern NRMs present accounts of spirituality which are innovative and address the concerns of a person who has recently come to feel marginal to a social group, who feels the need to change coping techniques. However, what may be a strong source of appeal for one person, might lead another to reject a movement as misguided. Eastern NRM belief systems are not uniformly appealing to everyone; their tenets are deemed implausible by many, and few are primarily socialized into them. However, they address issues pertinent to those for whom science and orthodox religions are found wanting, since their view of causation suggests how a person can act now to change his or her experience of stress, aloneness and suffering. They do not emphasize guilt and atonement, but an understanding of how certain actions influence suffering and spiritual development. One need not wait until an afterlife for transformation. The cause and effect of science is replaced by demand and response. In NRMs these demands may be made directly to the person of the leader, viewed as a personification of the divine, who interprets general principles for everyday action. There is the sense among the followers of having access to a timely, modern, relevant message, replacing perhaps a dimly felt sense of exile.

Method

Subjects

Experimental subjects were approached at point of first contact with 3 Eastern NRMs so that little conversion to that movement could have occurred, separating as far as possible the precursors of involvement in a particular movement from the sequelae of involvement in that movement. Some of those contacted had a history of transient involvement in

alternative groups prior to the group contacted at the time of this study. This involvement did not exceed 6 months for any subject, (most spoke in terms of weeks), and did not account for a large proportion of the total life span since the mean age across groups ranged from 19 in the student population to 37 in the therapy group.

The Experimental Groups

a) The Eastern Groups

All were primarily socialized into orthodox Western religions; Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian. All were Caucasian and resident in Australia.

1) *A residential eclectic Rebirthing group*: [E1 = the novice group [*N* =13], E2 = the graduate group [*N* = 16]]. The E1 group had just arrived to a group whose ideology powerfully emphasized the full expression and experiencing of feelings. The graduate group, E2, had three months of involvement and differences possibly reflect effects of group membership. Residential groups required more investment of time and money and a more complete withdrawal from existing social networks than did the other Eastern NRMs.
2) *A Yoga group* [E3 [*N* = 25]]: a weekend residential group.
3) *An eclectic Theosophist group* [E4 [*N* = 10]]: Subjects lived close to the centre and attended for short sessions.

b) The Western Group

4) *The Pentecostal Group* [W [*N* = 14]] It was not possible to contact a Pentecostal group at point of first contact; the leader permitted access to group members only. This group is therefore not comparable to the Eastern groups in status, and not central to comparisons drawn; emphasis rather is placed on differences between the Eastern groups and the control groups. The range of length of membership was 1 1/2 years to 15 years of involvement.

c) The Control groups

5) *The Active Control Group: A Gestalt therapy group* [T [*N* = 11]]. The Gestalt therapy group was run by a Methodist church but anyone could attend, and this group was drawn from the community. Participants had no psychiatric history. It was assumed that participants had experienced disruption which exceeded their own coping resources in the recent past, evidenced by their contacting a remedial social agency. Inclusion of this group permits the isolation of differences between those drawn to a relatively secular social agency and those drawn to a spiritual group.

6) *Student Control Group* [Cs [*N* = 35]]: a student sample from an undergraduate Psychology course at the University of Sydney. They were neither NRM members, nor psychotherapy attenders.
7) *Community Control Group*: a group from the community matched with the experimental groups for age and socio-economic status. [Cg [*N* = 12]] They were neither NRM members, nor psychotherapy attenders.

The Measures

Disruption

a. *Henderson, Byrne, and Duncan-Jones Interview Schedule for Social Interaction [ISSI]*: shortened version of this schedule modified by the author for self-report use, permitted the assessment of the availability and adequacy of social bonds of an intimate nature and at a community level. Cronbach's alphas are as follows: availability measure .70; adequacy measure .80; the test-retest reliability is .85 at 12 months follow-up (Henderson et al., 1981).
b. *A Recent Life Events Scale*. A modified version of the scale developed by Andrews and Tennant for an Australian population, in checklist form, permitted the assessment of the frequency of recent life events, and 10-point Likert impact scales used by Henderson et al., (1981) were included to assess the nature and extent of the impact of the disruption reported. An additional item was added by the author to assess the lingering emotional impact of life events. Test-retest reliability of incidence is .94 and of impact .89.

Transition-Congruence Between Individual and Movement Belief Systems

c. *Tellegen's (1982) Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire [MPQ]*: This assesses the relative level of traditionalism across the groups.
d. *Ray's Balanced F-Scale* (1971, 1972, 1979): The Submission to Authority subscale of this measure assessed deference to traditional moral authority.
e. *The Spiritual Orientation Scale [SOS]*: A scale was developed to study the degree to which those drawn to NRMs of an Eastern nature were already acculturated to Eastern spiritual beliefs. I developed a number of items which address some general, Eastern and Western spiritual tenets. The internal consistency of each subscale is very high; Cronbach's alphas are as follows: Eastern subscale .92; Western subscale .88; General subscale .98.

Hypotheses

Rites de Passage: Disruption

1. *Stress*: In keeping with the rites de passage model, it is suggested that disruption precedes any instance of resocialization. Therefore, it is hypothesized that those drawn to Eastern NRMs will have experienced more stress in the last 12 months than any other group in the study, particularly stress involving social involvements, and having more total impact than on any other group. Those involved in Psychotherapy will have elevated levels of stress, of a social nature and with greater impact than those not recently becoming involved in a remedial social agency (the control groups).
2. *Isolation and loneliness*: Those drawn to Eastern NRMs will have fewer bonds at an intimate and a community level; they will also rate those bonds as less adequate than do any of the other groups. However, it is predicted that those drawn to psychotherapy will also be similarly isolated and lonely, more so than the other groups, but less so than the Eastern NRM affiliates.

Rites de Passage: Transition

While it is suggested that disruption must occur before new affiliations are sought, the nature of that disruption can only promote a more or less social option. It cannot account for the nature of the new affiliation, be it secular or spiritual, Eastern or Western. Type Two Differential Openness to Involvement suggests that when personal attributes and beliefs are at odds with those of the dominant cultural context, when strife occurs, they render more salient and appealing "alternative" genres of movement embodying consonant beliefs and lifestyle practices.
3. *Traditionalism*: The Western group is predicted to be more traditional than any other group, and to embrace more fully traditional moral authority. Those drawn to Eastern NRMs will be less traditional than all other groups.
4. *Beliefs*: Consonance of the orientation of individual beliefs and group ideology is predicted. It is predicted that while those drawn to Eastern NRMs will accept general tenets of spirituality as readily as the Western NRM members, and more than any of the secular groups, they will favor Eastern spiritual tenets significantly *more* than Western tenets, and to a significantly greater level of endorsement than any other group. It is predicted that the members of the Western NRM will endorse Western spiritual tenets of the SOS more than Eastern spiritual tenets and more than any other group's level of endorsement.

Table 1. Marital Status and Previous Spiritual Involvements of the Participants

Group	*N*	% Single	% Marr.	% Separ.	%W. Involvement	%E. Involvement
Western NRM [W]	14	43	57	0	29	14
Student control [Cs]	32	100	0	0	31	6
Community control [Cg]	16	50	44	6	25	25
Therapy [T]	12	33	50	17	60	30
Novice rebirthing [E1]	16	60	15	25	6	41
Graduate rebirthing [E2]	17	41	18	41	—	—
Yoga [E3]	24	61	17	22	33	63
Theosophist [E4]	11	73	9	18	73	64

Results

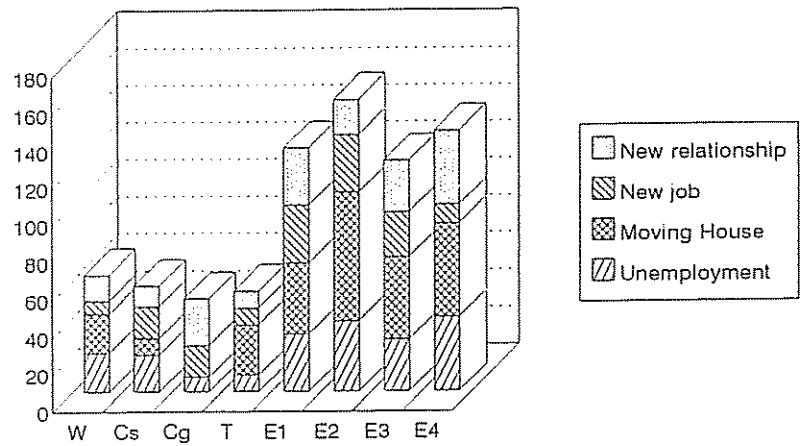
Disruption: Type One Differential Openness to Movement Involvement

Descriptive Data As can be seen from Table 1, those drawn to Eastern NRMs were predominantly single or separated, in contrast to the therapy group and the community control group [Cg] of the same age. About 20% had been in contact with other NRMs that were Western in orientation, and about 40-64% had attended briefly Eastern NRMs other than the present affiliation. So, while those drawn to Eastern NRMs have been assessed at point of first contact with this particular movement, they have a history of contact with such movements.

As can be seen from Table 2, a large proportion of the Eastern affiliates had lost a lover or friend in the last 12 months. Figure 1 reveals that many had experienced unemployment and had moved house in that time frame. The descriptive data support the first hypothesis indicating that there is more stress in the lives of those drawn to Eastern NRMs than in the lives of those drawn to any other group.

There was an elevated incidence of stressful life events for those in the Eastern NRMs over the last twelve months (see Figure 2), significantly higher than the control groups (Cs; $p<.01$; Cg; $p<.001$), and significantly higher than the therapy group ($p<.05$) providing support for the first hypothesis (Statistical analysis involved one way ANOVAs with a priori planned contrasts, permitting the pinpointing of theoretically meaningful comparisons. All differences reported here are based on Scheffé's *F*-test,

Figure 1. Descriptive Indices of Recent Life Change (In the Previous 12 Months)



and are one-tailed tests, unless the difference was not in the predicted direction). Most troubled in this regard were those who had sought residential involvement in an NRM. The novice NRM group is extremely high in terms of recent stress experienced, while the graduate NRM group is somewhat less extreme.

These life events were more frequent in occurrence for those drawn to the Eastern spiritual groups, and were also experienced as having more psychological impact in terms of emotional and life adjustment, as Figure 3 shows. This provides additional support for the first hypothesis.

The more impact of stressful life events, the more intensive the solution sought. The residential rebirthing groups experienced life events as having more impact than the other eastern groups. Impact was assessed by having people place a mark on a ten point scale relating to emotions like anger, anxiety, states like depression, effects like disruption and so on.

Examining the nature of the events which had occurred for the eastern groups; their valence, and the types of events involved, I found it was uniquely negative social events which had occurred at a higher frequency and which distinguished them significantly from the control groups ($p<.001$). The Eastern NRM had experienced significantly more such events than the Western NRM but did not differ from the therapy group in this regard (see Figure 4). Thus only partial support is given to the first hypothesis, underscoring the importance of including such a group to reveal which attributes are shared by those drawn to social agencies which differ in secular/spiritual orientation.

Table 2. Recent Loss of Partners, Friends, and Significant Others

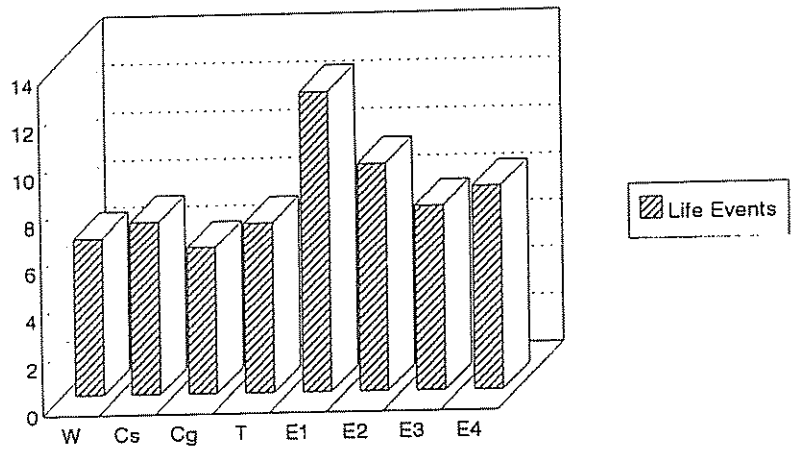
Group	*N*	% Death (sign. other)	% Partner loss	% Friend loss
Western NRM	14	7	21	50
Student control	35	3	11	49
Community control	12	17	16	33
Therapy	11	0	18	27
Novice rebirthing	13	0	46	46
Graduate rebirthing	16	0	38	50
Yoga	25	0	30	40
Theosophist	10	10	40	50

Results concerning community-level bonds supported the second hypothesis. As Figure 5 shows, those drawn to Eastern NRMs rate community level bonds as significantly less available and less adequate than do the control groups and the Western NRM members. Those drawn to Eastern NRMs are not more isolated from acquaintances than the therapy group. Both types of group conform to the requirements for Type One Openness to Movement Involvement, in that both are likely to find appealing a *social* option.

Intimate Bonds: While Eastern NRMs did not differ significantly from the other groups in terms of the availability of close bonds (providing no support for the second hypothesis), in that they rated themselves as having access to similar numbers, the more psychologically oriented measure of how *adequate* they found intimate bonds tells a darker story. The Eastern affiliates certainly found bonds to be much less adequate than did other groups, as Figure 6 shows. This provides strong support for the second hypothesis. Adequacy is assessed by whether a person says *yes* or *no* to whether s/he would like deeper intimacy with those friends s/he does have, and to whether s/he would like additional people in a given capacity, e.g., "someone who will cuddle you," will "be happy just because you are" and so on. If they say "yes, I want more," the adequacy rating drops.

Whether those involved in Eastern NRMs rate friends as less adequate (though not less available) than do the other groups, due to a

Figure 2. Differential Incidence of Life Events in the Previous 12 Months

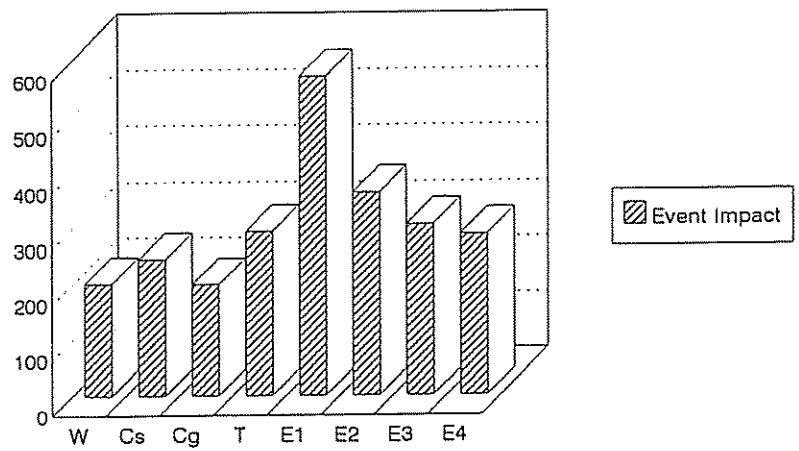


failure of friends to provide necessary provisions of social support (Weiss, 1973, 1974), or to an elevated level of need on the part of Eastern affiliates due to the relatively traumatic recent past, cannot be answered on the basis of these data. It is interesting to note that the graduate rebirthing group, back in the world after an intensive three-month residential course, while still rating friends as less than adequate, is significantly more satisfied than the novice group. It seems possible that needs were assuaged by group participation, though they appear to have less adequate acquaintances (see Figure 5) which may be due to the "time out" from their normal social circle.

Transition: Type Two Differential Openness to Movement Involvement

Traditionalism It was predicted that those drawn to unconventional social options within the community would be much less traditional regarding lifestyle values. There is partial support for the third hypothesis in that those drawn to Eastern NRMs were significantly less traditional than either of the control groups (Cs and Cg; $p<.001$), though not less traditional than the therapy group, see Figure 7). They were significantly less traditional than the Western NRM ($p<.001$) who were significantly more traditional than the community control group ($p<.001$). This provides support for the third hypothesis.

Figure 3. Differential Impact of Recent Life Events



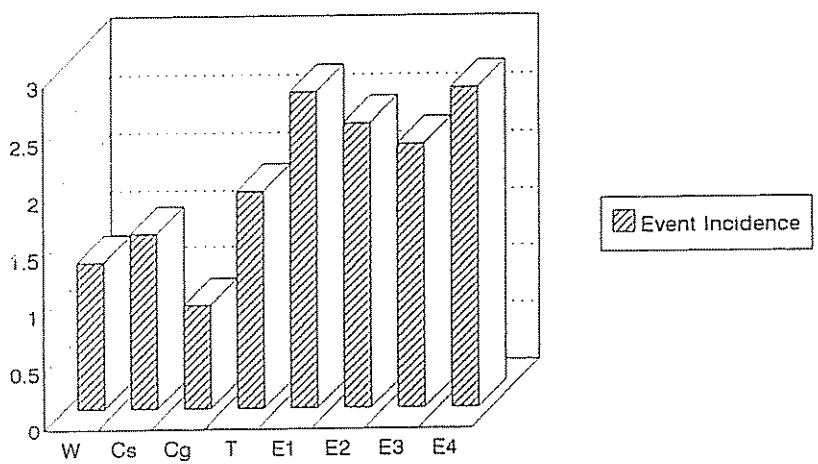
Submission to Traditional Moral Authority

The Jonestown incident made me want to discover whether those drawn to NRMs were more submissive to authority. It is considered unlikely that a higher level of submission to authority would be discovered in affiliates who are drawn to unconventional groups. The test items refer to a very traditional type of authority, and it has been shown that affiliates of Eastern NRMs are highly untraditional. It is not surprising then, that Figure 8 reveals that the Eastern groups are significantly less submissive to traditional moral authority than the Western group ($p<.001$), than the control groups ($p<.05$) and did not differ in this regard from the therapy group. There is thus partial support for the third hypothesis, but members of the Western NRM were not more submissive to authority than the general population.

Consonance between Individual Beliefs and Movement Ideology

The Spiritual Orientation Scale–[The SOS] This multi-dimensional scale was developed by the author to assess the spiritual orientation of those drawn to NRMs. The scale has three factors: Eastern, Western and General Spiritual Tenets. The Eastern and Western factors are uncorrelated ($r = .06$) and when varimax rotation was applied, present a clear factor structure accounting for 53% of the variance. General spiritual items were analyzed separately as they could not be included in the same factor analysis as they

Figure 4. Differential Incidence of Negative Social Events in the Previous 12 Months

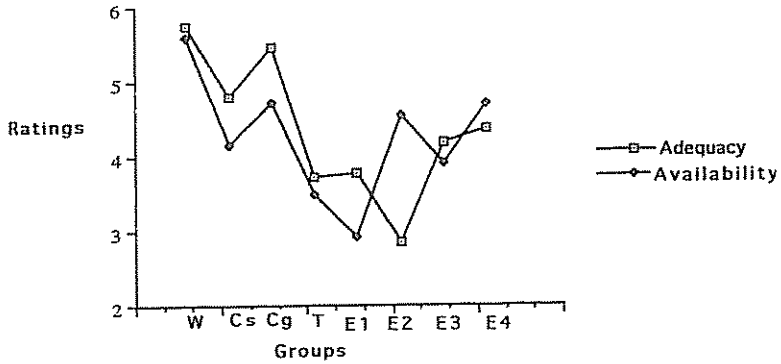


caused an ill-conditioned factor-matrix. A single factor emerged from a separate analysis of the general spiritual items which might be said to characterize any spiritual world view. The resulting subscales had very high internal consistency (Cronbach's α: Eastern = .92, Western = .88, General = .98). Combining items which make up these three subscales results in a scale called the Spiritual Orientation Scale [the SOS]. For a fuller account, see McIlwain (1990). For each of the scales lower scores refer to greater assent.

General Spiritual Beliefs Are those drawn to NRMs more spiritually intense? In a word, yes. As predicted in the fourth hypothesis, both Eastern affiliates and Western members were significantly more religious than any other group in terms of their assent to general spiritual tenets of the SOS (which are central to any spiritual world view regardless of specific orientation). As Figure 9 shows, there was no difference between those drawn to Eastern NRMs and the Western NRM. Both groups differed significantly from the control groups on this variable. This provides support for the fourth hypothesis.

When we consider the Eastern subscale of the SOS, those drawn to Eastern NRMs really stand out from the other groups. They differ significantly from all other groups, as Figure 9 shows. They believe that gurus (Eastern holy men, who are believed to have special spiritual or "enlightened" status) can communicate to their followers via dreams, they

Figure 5. Differential Adequacy and Availability of Acquaintances (Previous 12 Months)



believe in super-empirical forces, and action at a distance. They believe that life events have a karmic meaning for them, which if correctly understood might signal how they might change their lives to avoid further suffering, and avoid rebirth. The specific content of these beliefs sets apart those who believe them from the dominant secular and spiritual culture in Australia.

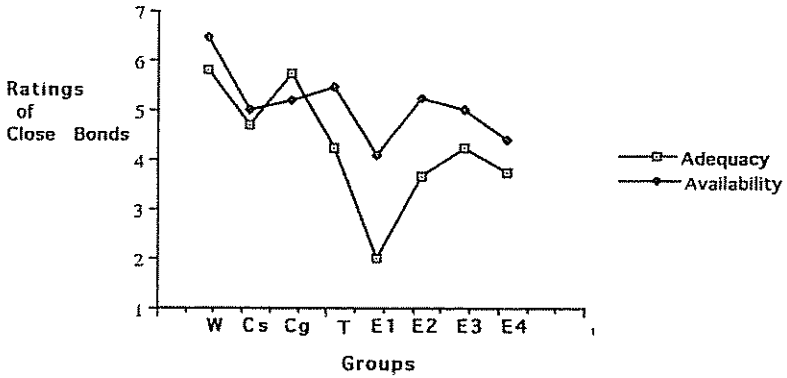
The consonance of individual beliefs with the Eastern orientation of the movement approached was overwhelming. Those so drawn believed with significantly greater intensity in beliefs of an Eastern spiritual nature than any other group. This provides strong support for the fourth hypothesis, and accounts, at least in part, for Type Two Openness to Involvement.

Note that the lower the score the more intensely did the individual belief match the most quintessentially credulous position with regard to Eastern belief. The remoteness of the Western group from these belief items can be seen in Figure 9. The Eastern groups differed significantly from the control groups and the Western NRM ($p<.001$), and from the therapy group ($p<.001$), and had much higher level of belief in these items than any of the groups. This is the first parameter to distinguish the Eastern NRM affiliates from the Therapy group.

While they turn towards the East, they have not completely broken with Western spiritual beliefs. They believe in Western spiritual tenets with greater intensity that do the control groups as Figure 9 shows. It seems that they adhere to a range of beliefs, though the predominant emphasis is on beliefs of an Eastern orientation.

These data surprised me (regarding hypothesis 4), in that I had not expected the Eastern groups to endorse Western spiritual items more than the control groups. If, as Jacob Needleman suggests, these groups are disaffected with Western religion and seeking an alternative, they may be

Figure 6. Differential Adequacy and Availability of Close Bonds (Last 12 Months)



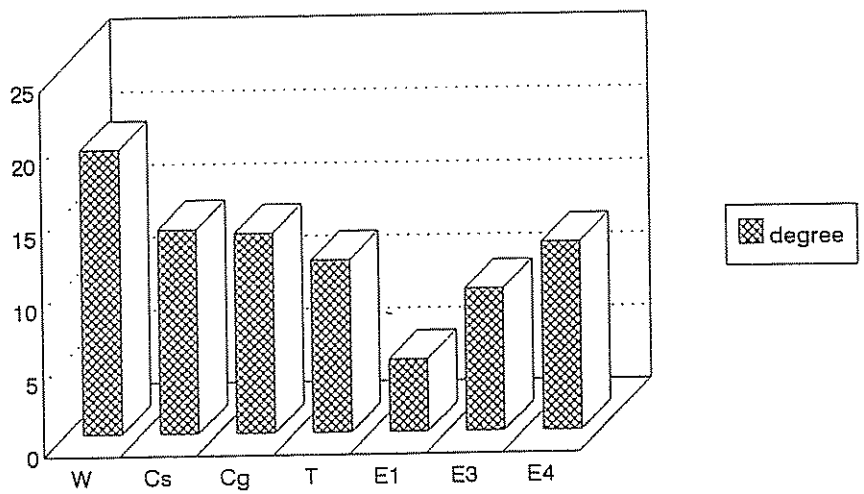
disaffected with the form of observance and practice, (they are certainly unwilling to claim any orthodox faith as their denomination) but they retain an interest and belief in Western spiritual beliefs. Yet they are relatively more drawn to Eastern spiritual tenets than to Western tenets, supporting the fourth hypothesis.

Further support is provided for this hypothesis by the remarkable endorsement of the Western spiritual tenets by those drawn to the Western NRM as Figure 9 shows. This demonstrates the discriminant validity of the SOS Western subscale. This position on the graph of the Western NRM is actually a group average and it shows little deviation from the most intense position of belief which would be a score of 6.75. So, the fourth hypothesis is strongly supported. Individuals are drawn to movements which embody the orientation of beliefs which they predominantly favor. Only in the Western member group was endorsement of items of a particular orientation combined with strong rejection (relative to the control groups) of items of a different orientation. This may be a reflection of their membership. Eastern affiliates showed a much greater degree of eclecticism than the Western group.

Discussion

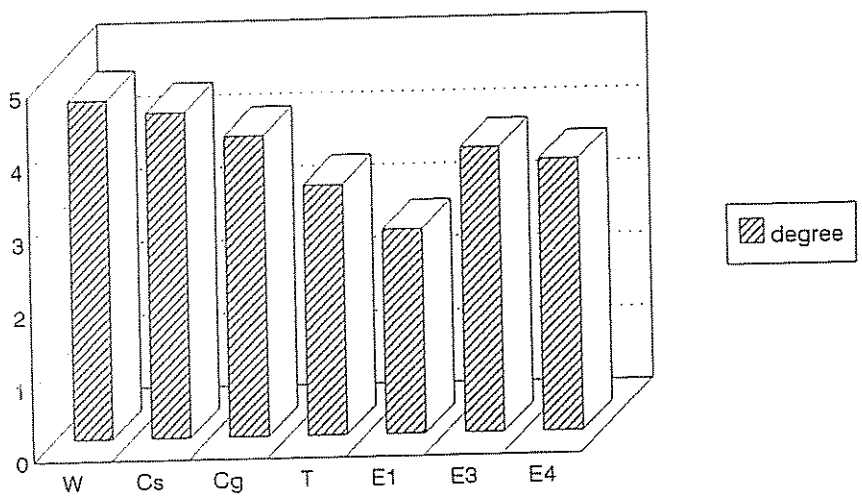
This profile of differences suggests that these Eastern affiliates are distinct from the culture in which they find themselves, forming a hidden subculture in Australia. They are exiles at home. They do not share with the wider culture traditional beliefs or values about lifestyle. These untraditional people are unwilling or unable to avail themselves of the support of the wider community when strife occurs. They endorse explanatory and consolatory spiritual parameters markedly at odds with

Figure 7. Differential Level of Traditionalism Across Groups



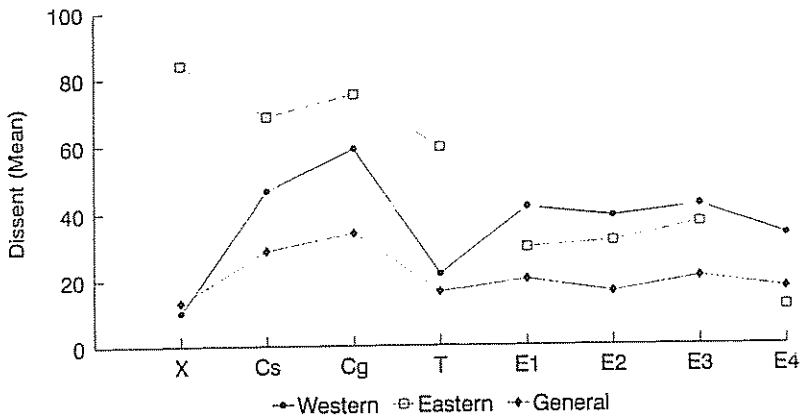
the dominant culture. Needleman's (1975) suggestion that those drawn to NRMs are those disaffected with Western orthodox religions has only partial support from this study. They retain many of the beliefs which Glock and Stark (1965) deem central to such religions. Nock (1933) observed that in pre-Christian Greece of the Hellenistic period adhesion was the order of the day; the adding on of new beliefs to an already engagé religious life, rather than conversion to the exclusive belief systems of a more jealous god. There is a modern echo in these relatively eclectic believers. The balance in the orientation of their spiritual beliefs makes it likely that they will approach an Eastern NRM. Whether they are sojourners, or migrants to another culture's explanatory and consolatory spiritual world view, could only be addressed by longitudinal study.

Figure 8. Differential Levels of Submission of Traditional Moral Authority



However, as Snow et al. (1980) note, being sympathetic to movement beliefs and aims is not enough. The timing of contact seemed to be influenced by a tremendous amount of disruption. There is support for Ullman's (1982, 1989) suggestion that those who are drawn to new religious movements have experienced considerable stress and tension, which set them on a path of self transformation. While the Eastern affiliates have in common with the therapy group a high level of stress and a low level of social support, they are quite distinguishable from the therapy group in terms of beliefs. The similarities that do exist justify the comparative context chosen for the NRMs in that it does seem that, like psychotherapy, new religious movements are seen as social agencies of personal change. The distinction made here between Type One and Type Two Openness to Involvement is a crucial one.

Figure 9. Differential Dissent from Eastern Spiritual Items [Possible Range: 5.9-121.75], Western Spiritual Items [Possible Range: 6.25-111.25], and General Spiritual Items [Possible Range: 3-56.75]



Type One is supported in that both the Eastern groups and the therapy group are predisposed to a social option since the disruption they have recently experienced particularly concerns their social environments. This brings to mind Thoits' (1982) careful reminder of the confound that exists in most scales assessing the role of social supports on the weathering of stress, since social exit items form a large proportion of many life events scales, including the one used here. The effect of this is to inflate the link between life stress incidence/impact and lack of social support which gives spurious support to the buffer hypothesis. Whether social supports act as a buffer, or as an independent positive input, the recent loss of friends and lovers/partners, and a sense of the inadequacy of social bonds at a community and an intimate level are all features of a person's life experience prior to movement contact. It is suggested these act to threaten a person's sense of personal identity. The fact that adequacy measures consistently differentiate those drawn to Eastern NRMs while the availability measures only do so for acquaintance level bonds, show the importance of exploring psychological features (as well as structural features) of a person's life situation to distinguish those drawn to Eastern NRMs. While such life situations may also be a precursor of involvement in Western NRMs, the data here concern those who were already members, and cannot contribute to this aspect of the discussion.

These data challenge a purely brainwashing account of movement involvement, in that there are systematic differences at point of first contact

between those drawn to Eastern NRMs and those from the community, therapy and Western NRM. The challenge presented to the brainwashing model is tempered by the fact that the life histories of these people reveal their interest in Eastern and Western alternative spiritual movements. This is in part due to the inclusion of a graduate Eastern group which has already had 3 months training in beliefs and practices of the movements. Past involvement in spiritual movements was transient, but may have begun the acculturative process leading to a subcultural seeker status explored here.

Those drawn to Eastern NRMs were untraditional and lacked submission to traditional moral authority, yet they undeniably set great store by their leader's pronouncements. A measure of vulnerability to charismatic authority needs to be developed. Weston La Barre in his book *Culture in Context* (1980) provides some succinct observations on charisma, suggesting that the uncanny quality of the charismatic leader's message, and the sense of its being directed to "you and only you," derives from the leader giving voice to longings already prepotent in the follower, be s/he ever so unaware of it (see also McIlwain, 1991b).

Provided the influences of social support and personality were considered, the SOS may usefully assess and predict likelihood of NRM involvement since the items are general enough to be answered by non-members, yet specific enough to address the utility or appeal of such beliefs in explaining and providing solutions for stress and suffering.

The case for the existence of a profile of a seeker is quite strong (for a fuller account see McIlwain, 1990). Eastern affiliates share very similar recent life histories, have psychological attributes in common, and are a subcultural group with regard to the eastern beliefs they hold. They share some of the features of the plight of newly arrived refugees, in that they have recently undergone much stress, and lack adequate bonds of community and of an intimate nature, but their exile is not readily recognized. They are open or vulnerable to movement appeal and involvement. The differential appeal of NRMs hinges on the beliefs and assumptions entailed in their promises of change, and whether that seems to potential affiliates, the most credible and appealing solution to the life difficulties they face.

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Part III

Values