



# Pathological Religious & Cultural Phenomena

Lecture 5  
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## Learning Objectives – Lecture 5

By the end of the lesson the learner should be able to:

- develop a scientific approach to some sampled religious and cultural phenomena;
- deal with shame and guilt, and culture shock in the therapeutic context;
- identify the psychological processes involved in cults: radicalisation and brainwashing;
- respond adequately to former members of satanic cults.

## 1. Shame and Guilt

- “Shame is a reaction to other people’s criticism, an acute personal chagrin at our failure to live up to our obligations and the expectations other have of us. In true shame oriented cultures, every person has a place and a duty in the society.
- Shame cannot be relieved, as guilt can be, by confession and atonement. Shame is removed and honor restored only when a person does what the society expects of him or her in the situation, including committing suicide”.

Hiebert, P. G. (1985). *Anthropological Insights For Missionaries*, pp.212-213.

## Shame Versus Guilt

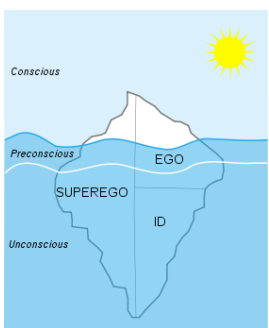
- “Guilt, on the other hand, is a feeling that arises when we violate the absolute standards of morality within us, when we violate our conscience. A person may suffer from guilt even though no one else knows of her or his misdeed; this feeling of guilt is relieved by confessing the misdeed and making restitution.
- Guilt cultures emphasize punishment and forgiveness as ways of restoring the moral order; shame cultures stress self-denial and humility as ways of restoring the social order”.

Hiebert, P. G. (1985). *Anthropological Insights For Missionaries*, pp.212-213.

## Psychoanalytic Perspective on Guilt

- Superego is the moral principle of the psyche;
- Moral order and ideals of society are internalised to form a superego – the moral watchdog.
- It is the source of guilt and shame.

## Freud: Structure of the Psyche



**Conscious**

**Preconscious**

**Unconscious**

**ID:** Pleasure principle; Irrational, impulsive component of personality: “I want this milk and I want it now”

**EGO:** Reality/Rational principle; Has the task of balancing between Id & Superego.

**SUPEREGO:** Moral principle; Moral order and ideals of society are internalised to form a superego – the moral watchdog.

## Freud: On the origin of religion

### Totem & Taboo (1918):

- In the beginning was the male leader of the primal horde; he keeps all the females for himself; the young men gang up > kill him > and incorporate his strength & wisdom by eating him; This is referred to as 'patricide'.
- Then they **feel guilty**.
- To deal with the guilt, they invent **taboos** (renouncing access to females of the horde/clan – incest taboo) and **totem** (the sacred animal that represents the slain father, normally not eaten, but eaten ritually once a year!
- These are early expressions of religion, for Freud!

## Religion Versus Shame and Guilt

- Most empirical studies show that the type of faith is important to consider in associating religion to shame and guilt.
- Allport's intrinsic & extrinsic religion is a useful conceptualisation in this.
- Guilt and shame are correlated with depression (Hood, 1992, p.112).

Hood, R. (1992). Sin and guilt in faith traditions: Issues of self-esteem. In J.F. Schumaker, Religion and mental health (pp.110-121). Oxford: OUP.

## Religion & Self-esteem

- It is only extrinsic religion (Allport's conceptualisation) that is associated with low self-esteem, whereas intrinsic religion is associated with positive self-esteem!

Hood, R. (1992). Sin and guilt in faith traditions: Issues of self-esteem. In J.F. Schumaker, Religion and mental health (pp.110-121). Oxford: OUP.

## Karen Horney (Psychoanalytic): Origin of Neurotic Guilt

**Faulty personality development in childhood:** as a result of interiorisation of the value placed upon a person by their parents or other significant persons, see themselves as others see them.

## Therapeutic Intervention dealing with neurotic guilt (Karen Horney)

- Focus not on what is the client feeling guilty for, rather, what functions may this exaggerated guilt have?
- Possible functions: seeking self-approval (I am not bad after all), warding off accusations from others, by feeling guilty.
- How could these functions be preserved while removing the guilt?

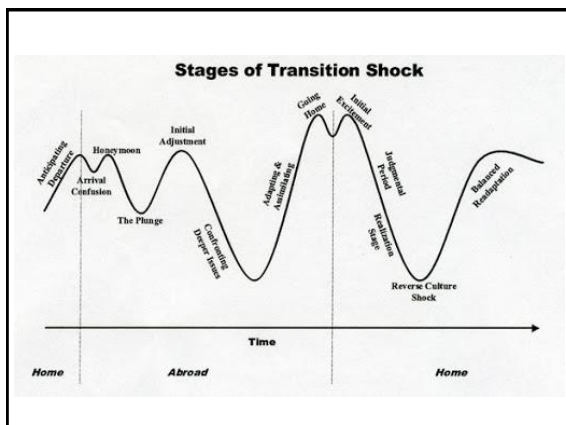
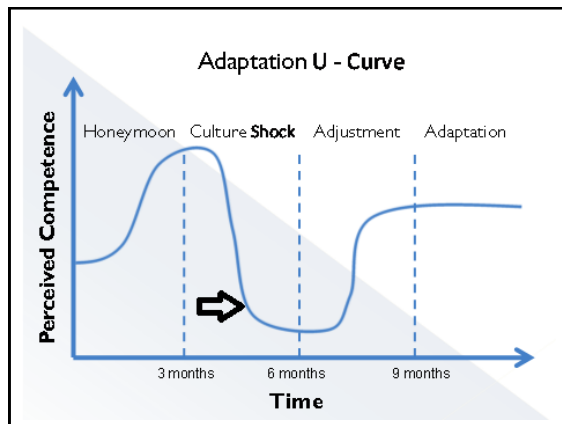
Horney, K. (1937). *Neurotic personality of our time*.

## 2. Culture Shock

- More and more people travel across the world; they interact with cultures not their own; and people live in cultures where they were not born.
- Interaction with cultures might play a role in some mental disorders and wellbeing.
- We focus on culture shock.

### Symptoms of culture shock: similar to PTSD

- Excessive concern over cleanliness
- Feelings of helplessness and withdrawal
- Irritability
- Anger
- Mood swings
- Glazed stare
- Desire for home and old friends
- Physiological stress reactions
- Homesickness
- Boredom
- Withdrawal
- Getting "stuck" on one thing
- Suicidal or fatalistic thoughts
- Excessive sleep
- Compulsive eating/drinking/weight gain
- Stereotyping host nationals
- Hostility towards host national



### Intervention strategy

- Previous history of depression? No.
- Medical intervention needed? No.
- What is the client's schema about the culture of origin & culture of insertion?
- Are they unwilling to change their schema?
- Could there be a wisdom when the new experience could be integrated into the schema?

### 3. Cults

#### Characteristics of a cult:

- Great or excessive devotion to a charismatic leader, idea, or thing;
- Uses thought-reform programme (brain-washing) to persuade, control and socialise members;
- Systematically induces states of psychological dependency in members;
- Impedes psychological functioning of members in their social/familial milieu;

Langone, M.D. (1993). *Recovery from cults: Help for victims of psychological and spiritual abuse.*

### Sect & New Religious Movements

- A sect is generally viewed as a separate, exclusive entity, with abstract ideas, existing within another, larger religious organisation;
- A new religious movement refers "to religious faith or an ethical, spiritual or philosophical movement of recent origin that is not part of an established faith tradition"

Cook, et al. (2009). P.257.

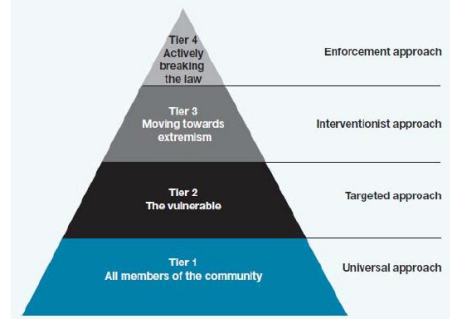
## Radicalisation

“Radicalisation is best viewed as a process of change, a personal and political transformation from one condition to another (taking up an extreme position in opposition to the present world order).

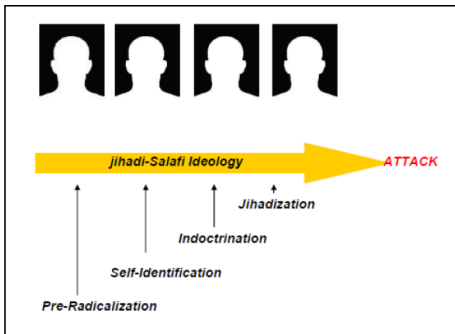
“Recent scholars argue that becoming radicalised is, for most people, a gradual process and one that requires a progression through distinct stages and happens neither quickly nor easily.”

This slide and the following two are from: Youth Justice Board (2012). Preventing Religious Radicalisation and Violent Extremism. UK: Youth Justice Board.

## Pyramid Model of Radicalisation



## Four steps in Salafi-Jihadism (violence)



## Dynamics of Brainwashing (in cults & in radicalisation)

- **Milieu control:** control of information – selective reading of literature, selective access to information;
- **Mystical manipulation:** experiences are orchestrated and planned to appear beyond ordinary;
- **Demand for purity:** the world is viewed as black and white; only the cult is in the right;
- **Confession of sins** (as defined by the group) are confessed to the leader or in public;

## Dynamics of Brainwashing (in cults & in radicalisation)

- **Sacred science:** the truth held by the group is held ultimate, beyond criticism or questioning;
- **Peculiar language** and expressions;
- **Doctrine over person:** member’s personal experience is sub-ordinated;
- **Dispensing of existence:** the group decides who has the right to exist and who has not.

Cook, et al. (2009). p.261.

## Hypothetical comments about some ‘Satanic’ cults in Kenya

**Lack of scientific research or impossibility to carry out such studies call only for some hypothetical assumptions:**

- Most of them may be non-existent as a universal umbrella group;
- Most of them may be just criminal gangs:
  - Using ‘spirit-world discourse’ to ward off legal action, to exert fear in the vulnerable African psyche;
  - Using ‘ritualistic discourse’ to groom young members to the gang – making them insensitive to moral values – able to do what is asked of them;
- ‘Prayerful response’ might be actually playing to their tune!

### Adolescent Needs Met by Satanic Cults

- **Sense of belonging:** Teenage involvement in Satanism has been termed an immediate antidote for loneliness (Curran, 1989) and a possible solution to alienation and neglect.
- **Mastery and structure.** Adolescents require structure, order, and limits, which Satanism provides.
- **Power and Control.** Satanism is purported by its users to be a source of great power, one that offers a "quick fix" to their problems.
- **Rebellion.** Satanism represents a hostile and extreme form of rebellion.

### Adolescent Needs Met by Satanic Cults

- **Curiosity and relief from boredom.** Teenagers are fascinated with magic and the supernatural.
- **Self-esteem.** Many adolescents join cults at a time when their self-esteem is low,
- **Validation of anger and violence.** Since a sense of alienation may foster feelings of anger and hostility, Satanism, by advocating revenge, encourages rage and the attainment of power through violent means.

Lancaster, K. (1994). Do Role-Playing Games Promote Crime, Satanism and Suicide among Players as Critics Claim?. *Journal Of Popular Culture*, 28(2), 67-79.

### Warning Signs

- bitter hatred toward family and family religion;
- drastic drop in grades from A's and B's to D's and F's;
- cut marks on the body;
- little or middle fingernail on left hand painted black (left is evil, right is good)
- involvement with alcohol or illegal drugs
- use of a Satanic nickname
- use of various alphabets such as Egyptian, witches or one of their own creation.

Roleff, T.L. (2002). Satanism. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press. p. 12

### Therapeutic Intervention for former cult member

- Focus therapy on the psychosocial needs being met rather than on attempting to understand the intricate details of the Satanic practice itself. Issues such as self-esteem, sense of belonging, and the need for structure (Clark, 1992).
- It is useful to ask when the cult activity began because it is almost always preceded by a significant event.
- Involving the family is often effective, but this depends on the individual case.
- Therapy must include helping the teen develop reliable and healthy alternatives to both his participation in Satanism and probable substance abuse.
- Occasionally an adolescent is so disturbed that medical intervention or hospitalization is required.

Lancaster, K. (1994).