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Rhetoric and ethics: A Burkean analysis of modern cult (and anti-cult) tactics

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Rhetoric and Ethics:
A Burkean Analysis of Modern Cult (and Anti-Cult) Tactics

An Honors College Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

by Lydia Erickson

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Abstract

Cults are a unique aspect of modern and past society, and their study is driven by questions of persuasion and communication. One of the key critiques against cults is their use of coercion and persuasive messaging to recruit new members. This study examines the rhetorical methods used by two groups labeled as cults, the Twelve Tribes and Full Circle, and the Cult Information Centre, an anti-cult group, on their public website domains. These specific groups were chosen because they are understudied and lesser-known with few publications about their practices. This study uses a traditional Burkean analysis of rhetorical methods through an ethical lens. The study found that groups often share the same goal, but their motivation, ethical usage, and implementation of ethical strategies vary greatly. The implications of this study show that in ethical rhetorical methods must be motivated by good intentions, untarnished by coercion and groupthink, and based on sound logic and clarity of thought.

Keywords: Cult, Anti-Cult, Rhetoric, Ethics, Persuasion

Chapter 1: Introduction

Persuasive messages are present in all forms of human interaction. They are clearly recognizable in advertisements and publications, but many fail to realize they also pervade group interpersonal interactions. With the power of persuasive messaging comes the responsibility of using persuasion ethically. An excellent example of the ethical challenge persuasion presents is cults and the formation of social groups where free choice is removed. However, there is dispute over how to classify cults, and attempting to find the support that their tactics are truly unethical is difficult. Cults can often be confused as religious groups or high-performance groups, and determining the key differences between them assists with clear classification and understanding (Specter & Lane, 2007). While cults lay out persuasive messages about why members should join their group, anti-cult groups also use persuasive strategies to convince their audiences to stay away. Studying this topic is important because these outspoken groups are a significant part of culture today, with a widespread reach that connects them to many audiences. Being able to identify consistent tactics as well as unique identifiers in society will educate the public on a topic that is often completely avoided and provide valuable information that scholars need to understand cult and anti-cult messages more clearly. This study will use rhetorical methods to analyze the language used by three main groups: The Twelve Tribes, the Full Circle, and the anti-cult group Cult Information Centre. Their language and persuasive tactics will be explored for a fuller understanding of how three very different groups attempt to influence the same audiences.

Previous studies on cults have shown that unethical persuasion used by cults continues to be a problem. According to Young & Griffith (1992), coercive persuasion used by cults “leaves individuals without normal control of their own minds” (p. 90). Instead of the celebrated freedom

of religious expression in the United States being regularly practiced, any behaviors or beliefs associated with cults have been “challenged from the very beginning” (Young & Griffith, 1992, p. 90). Cults can also be extremely difficult to identify, and do not often present themselves like the stereotypes shown in the media. “They’re not freakish, otherworldly groups that set off your alarm bells right away... cults often feel like intensely hopeful and promising utopian communities that just might save the world” (McLaren, 2017, p. 3). Cults may seem blissful and auspicious to become involved in, but in reality, this is not the case, and the harmful impacts they create can last a lifetime, separate individuals from family members, and create severe physical and psychological changes (Clark, 1993). This shows the importance of examining cult rhetoric even when it may appear societally normal; persuasion is far more than initially meets the eye. This concept applies not just to cults, but also groups that directly oppose them. Anti-cult groups utilize similar strategies that still are not necessarily ethical, and can use negative tactics too. Comparing and contrasting their methods will provide further insight into how their persuasive strategies are both similar and different. Although some studies are beginning to analyze the effects and messaging of cults and anti-cults, there is still a significant gap regarding techniques, commonalities, differences in anti-cult rhetoric, and analysis of individual groups. This study will provide new research about two different cults and an anti-cult group and find varying and similar patterns to provide a new angle of examination.

This study is important because of the large number of cults still active in the United States today. The secrecy that often surrounds these groups causes dispute between researchers regarding this exact number; some argue there are between 2,000 and 5,000 groups, while some believe the number is slightly less than 1,000 (Clark, 1993). However, what researchers continually agree on is that the number of active groups in the United States is growing, not

shrinking (Maynard & Hutchens, 2000). Identifying the tactics and practices used by The Twelve Tribes and the Full Circle will encourage researchers to explore a studied topic in an understudied way, as well as note common patterns that apply on a larger scale. Additionally, persuasive communication tactics are used by anti-cult groups in direct opposition to cults, but some of the same strategies may be used in their language and methods. This applies on a broader scale because it can encourage groups to make sure they employ ethical tactics and do not use coercion or eliminate free will, as well as help outsiders recognize if they are being approached by a group that may be a cult. This is an issue in the United States that is growing, not fading away, and having clear research will lead to effective response strategies and prevention of potential harm and ethical misdeeds.

Literature Review

Research and publications on cults both globally and in the United States vary greatly. These studies vary from the certain aspects of cult recruitment, practices, and basic cult statistics scholars study and the connections and trends they seek to identify. Often before individual groups are studied themselves, many scholars focus on first defining what a cult truly is and how it should be used as terminology (Richardson, 1993). Usage of the term cult reflects a common trend of cult research: popularization and overuse that scholars argue can take away meaning (Richardson, 1993). An issue that quickly arises is the effects of being labeled as a cult, which scholars say instantly distances minority religious groups and can even “dehumanize” its members and their children (Olson, 2006). Previous research by scholars claims has found that the primary reasons for this negative association is due to the work of anti-cult groups, and the media using “sensationalism” to advertise negative cult stereotypes and graphic examples of the damage they have caused (Barker, 1989). A 1992 study by Bromley and Breschel showed that

over 60 percent of United States citizens believe that the FBI and federal government should closely monitor groups identified as cults, especially in their process of recruiting teenagers.

A predominant amount of research on cults often is the result of extreme events that draw media attention and news coverage. The amount of media publications about cults led to academic studies about trends present in these writings. Research found that extreme bias and negative perception of cults and religious groups existed in the vast majority of publications (Driel & Richardson, 1988). Key examples of more current bias in the media include Heaven's Gate and The People's Temple, in which both groups committed mass suicides that continue to be analyzed (Brigham, Harvell-Bowman, & Szendey, 2017). The severity of the actions of these groups and the publicity they drew led scholars to examine the progression of events and tactics that led the groups to their final act of committing suicide. While there were multiple studies on these specific events, very few turned specifically to their rhetorical methods, especially how rhetorical methods are utilized by cults generally (Garret, 1990). Additionally, most of these studies focus on interpersonal recruitment tactics after already making contact with individuals as opposed to analyzing the texts the groups publicly display on their websites. This leaves room for a study that focuses on public writings of the groups and the rhetorical strategies used before they even make contact with individuals personally. Additionally, comparison to the tactics used by anti-cult groups, which studies have shown are one of the key reasons for negative perceptions of cults, will provide even more insight. Finally, studying multiple groups as a whole, especially understudied groups without significant media coverage, will allow for more well-rounded research to build upon the foundation of academic study that already exists.

Rhetorical Method

This study will use three rhetorical methods to best analyze the selected texts. One method will be used for each group, chosen due to the style and nature of each group's writing. The Twelve Tribes will use metaphoric criticism because of the numerous metaphors used by the group to identify both themselves and external populations. This method will also apply to the numerous Biblical metaphors used by the Twelve Tribes to both attract and deter new members. When appropriate, this can also be connected to narrative criticism. The next rhetorical method to be used is consubstantiality for the Full Circle. Burke's ideas of identification and division provide insight into the type of new members being recruited, as well as who would find the Full Circle's messages attractive. Next, argument by definition will be used to analyze the Cult Information Centre to show how their definition and analyses of terms contribute to their message and persuasive effects. In the final chapter, comparisons will be drawn between all texts, groups, and methods.

This thesis is broken into five chapters. The first chapter has focused on introducing what this thesis will provide. The second chapter will focus on The Twelve Tribes, the first cult being analyzed. Background and history of the group will be provided, as well as information about their current demographics and practices. The texts being analyzed from this group are retrieved from public postings on their website, and provide self-written background on their culture, goals, and teachings. The specific texts are "A Brand New Culture," "We All Live Together," and "Manifesto." Notably, all of these texts avoid corporation-like titles often seen on professional websites, and instead take a more unique and personal approach of putting forth statements. The presentation of these texts as well as their content and messages will be analyzed

thoroughly, and supplemented with additional testimonials from current The Twelve Tribes members.

The third chapter of this study is centered on the Full Circle, another group that has been identified as a cult with major differences than The Twelve Tribes. Again, background on their practices, customs, and history will be provided. The texts analyzed are also from their publicly promoted website. The artifacts used for this chapter are framed much more traditionally and corporately, and are titled “About Us,” “Mission Statement,” “Values,” and the “Donation Page” greeting. The combination of these texts provides a holistic picture of Full Circle and its messaging practices. Additionally, this group features many more externally-written documents rather than personal drafts- a technique that will also be analyzed and supplemented with their primary texts.

The fourth chapter of this study analyzes the Cult Information Centre, an anti-cult group that provides educational materials on the dangers of cults and warnings to stay away. This chapter aims to create a contrast between the textual language cults and anti-cults use and look for both differences and similarities. The texts used to accomplish this are “About Us,” “Cult Concerns: An Overview,” “How Do I Avoid Cults?,” and “How Do I Help a Cult Member? The Dos and Don’ts.” The same rhetorical method will be used to compare how these texts relate to those of the groups they try to warn against. The fifth chapter will feature conclusions and implications of this research.

Chapter 2: The Twelve Tribes and Metaphoric Criticism

The first group that demonstrates key examples of rhetorical theory is the Twelve Tribes, a growing community of people in the United States and across the world. Their writings are publicly displayed on their website and will be studied using the method of metaphoric criticism to provide insight and uncover the rhetorical methods they employ. To accomplish this, their background and history will be explained, the method of metaphoric criticism will be presented, and finally their texts will be analyzed.

Background of the Twelve Tribes

The Twelve Tribes is a religious group founded by Eugene Spriggs in Chattanooga, Tennessee in 1972. The group went through numerous name changes including the Community Apostolic Order, Vine Christian Community Church, Northeast Kingdom Community Church, and the Messianic Communities before assuming their current title. The name Twelve Tribes is a biblical reference to the Twelve Tribes of Israel, named after the sons of Jacob, recognized as the people of God in the Old Testament. Communities of the Twelve Tribes are spread across the United States, and now comprise of additional locations in Australia, Canada, South America, and the United Kingdom.

Eugene Spriggs, referred to as ‘Gene’ and ‘Yoneq,’ was born in 1937 and raised under the traditional protestant Christian doctrine. After joining the widely popular Jesus Movement of the 1970s, Spriggs disagreed with many Christian practices and moved to the Rocky Mountains where he met his wife, Marsha Duvall, a former atheist (Palmer, 2015). After moving back to Tennessee, the couple began mentoring numerous college students and young adults, which quickly developed into coffee shops and restaurants that led to church plants. Spriggs referred to himself as the “anointed one,” became well-known for his open criticism of traditional churches,

and cautioned his followers against their teachings. Critics of Spriggs claim he is racist, controlling, cruelly critical of others and promotes misguided practices as law (Newell, 2012).

The Twelve Tribes began as a coffee shop called “The Light Brigade” and a restaurant called “The Yellow Deli,” both locally founded in Tennessee while members attended the First Presbyterian Church (Smoot, 2018). When a weekly Sunday service was cancelled for the Super Bowl, Spriggs was outraged and formed a new church plant called the Vine Christian Community Church, which later went on to form multiple other churches and communal homes (Wilson, 2006). As criticism and suspicion against the group began to grow, particularly because of the issue of child labor, local authorities raided their homes and took 112 children into custody (Palmer, 2015). The children were all returned to their families within the same day, and the group referred to this event as “The Raid,” which they claimed had extreme spiritual significance. This led to changing their name to the Messianic Communities, and continued expansion and new locations for their communities (Palmer, 2015). During this time, the group spread internationally and renamed itself once again as the Twelve Tribes.

Doctrine and beliefs of the Twelve Tribes loosely fall under Christian fundamentalism, but they have their own clear and specific practices that cannot be attributed to any other religion or doctrine (Stephenson, 2000). They believe in Jesus, referred to as Yeshua, and “Three Eternal Destinies” that can result in either eternal condemnation for the wicked and an eternity of life for the righteous (Palmer, 2015). To achieve an eternity of life, one must “give up everything” and separate themselves from popular culture, which includes dietary restrictions, living with other members, and following all teaching of the leaders (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). Those who deviate from these beliefs are “shunned” (Newell, 2012). The group has a vast hierarchy of numerous leaders with overarching and local councils, with individual titles including teachers,

deacons, elders, and apostles (Smoot, 2018). The group also highly values children, stating that “everything belongs to them,” homeschooling them and instilling their practices in them from a young age (The Twelve Tribes, 2018).

Criticism against the Twelve Tribes has existed since the group was established, and primarily addresses their separation from society, unwillingness to listen to the beliefs of others, harsh punishments, and treatment of children. They also have been called racist and homophobic, and face significant criticism that directly calls the group a cult, even from “anti-cult” movements (Newell, 2012). Although members of the group sometimes respond to this opposition, they primarily focus on their life together and encouraging new people to join their communities. This controversial history has made them well-known and recognized in multiple countries for their beliefs, practices, and teachings.

Metaphoric Criticism

Both oral and written works contain literary devices that go far beyond simple wording and basic fact. One of the most common examples of this is the metaphor, a pattern of speech that uses symbolic imaging to create understanding for readers. As a result, scholars developed the method of metaphoric criticism, a tool that enables the reader to uniquely grasp the persuasive frames and messages metaphors create. To better understand metaphoric criticism, its history and development will be explained as well as examples, best practices, and connection to the Twelve Tribes.

Current scholarly knowledge of metaphoric criticism is a result of the work of numerous academic scholars beginning with the work of Kenneth Burke. Burke, a scholar and theorist known for his groundbreaking analyses of the deeper meaning and rhetorical usages of language, shaped scholarly rhetorical thinking in the 20th century and continues to color academic study

(Lyons, 1993). As Burke considered metaphors, he explained that at their essence, metaphors draw comparisons between unrelated things, often in vivid detail, to simplify comprehension (Henry & Burkholder, 2016). The resulting need to understand their rhetorical function led to the development of metaphoric criticism, a theory that requires careful textual analysis to ultimately be able to interpret their use (Henry & Burkholder, 2016). For Burke, metaphors were so significant that he included them as one of the four master tropes of rhetoric, the most foundational and impactful elements of rhetoric that exists (Burke, 1941). George Lakoff is another scholar who made significant continuations on Burke's work through numerous publications with other scholars that effectively apply this method in a variety of societal contexts ("George Lakoff," 2018). Metaphors are so heavily integrated into modern language that society is often affected by them subconsciously, and they are both intentionally and unintentionally used as a form of persuasion (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Other notable scholars who have used this theory include Henry Johnson, David Henry, and Thomas Burkholder. The work of all of these scholars represents a change in thinking; rather than metaphors simply being flowery, ornamental language, they are instead a core element of language and rhetoric with meaningful impacts.

Lakoff and other scholars are known for their use of metaphoric criticism in the field of politics, which continues to be one of the areas where metaphoric criticism is implemented the most. An example of this is an analysis of the metaphors in Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech by Henry and Burkholder in 2016. After analyzing this text, they identified both major (primary) and secondary metaphors. Following this, they pose the questions of what aspects of metaphors the rhetor intentionally includes, what affects audience cognition, its connection to the overall purpose of the message, and relationship with other

rhetorical elements in the text (Henry & Burkholder, 2016). After these questions have been resolved, only then can true evaluation begin.

Another example of the use of metaphoric criticism is McMillan and Cheney's 1996 critique of the metaphor "the student as consumer." Their study once again shows the prominence of metaphors in culture, and focuses on how a single metaphor has begun to affect perception of major education systems, even from within. The major steps used in their publication were studying the rise of the metaphor, identifying its limitations, and proposing alternatives (McMillan & Cheney, 1996). Ultimately, this article critiques both the mental and behavior pervasiveness that metaphors can create, and pushes readers to be more critically engaged with the language and imagery around them before blindly accepting it as fact.

Metaphoric criticism is also highly relevant in religious and spiritual contexts because of the prominence of metaphors within religious texts and their use in analyzing religious texts. Brigham, Harvell-Bowman, and Szendey (2017) note a prominent religious metaphor, being "in but not of the world," as it attempts to draw a connection between the church's engagement with and removal from society (Brigham, Harvell-Bowman, and Szendey, 2017). This directly points to the need for metaphoric criticism when analyzing other cult-like groups, in this case the Twelve Tribes, to examine the ethics and uncover more subtle uses of persuasion that still have potentially life-altering impacts. All three of these examples show some of the major spheres metaphors can impact: political, educational, and religious.

Metaphoric criticism is an appropriate method to use for the Twelve Tribes because of both the frequency and variety of metaphors present in their texts. This will prove to be particularly impactful because of the selected texts, which are the most publicly and prominently displayed to the world at large. These texts also claim to simply and clearly express the values

and mission of the group, indicating that the messages presented are likely also displayed in numerous other texts. Examples of categories of metaphors used within the texts include those related to water and nature, biblical metaphors, and family metaphors (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). These are just a few of the numerous genres of metaphors used, and analyzing their holistic purpose will provide deeper understanding.

The steps used to apply metaphoric criticism to the Twelve Tribes will begin with a close reading of all of the texts and noting the context in which they are presented. Next, the primary metaphors present will be identified, which will be easier to locate. The more subtle secondary metaphors will then be identified. This process include the vehicles, or metaphors themselves, that relate to the tenor, or the subject being explored, how they are being framed, what they call attention to, and what they ignore or hide. Following these steps, metaphors will be sorted into groups, allows for identification of similarities, patterns, and juxtapositions within the text. Finally, after the previous steps are completed, full analysis can begin to decipher how and why the metaphors are being used, and the intended effect they will create for the audience. These steps are based on research from multiple scholars about metaphoric criticism and effectively critiquing metaphors. This will be applied to the specific Twelve Tribes texts being utilized through using multiple metaphors to allow for a careful analysis, as well as identifying common patterns used multiple times within a single text and in more than one of the texts.

Analysis

Careful reading of the texts “We All Live Together,” “A Brand New Culture,” and “Manifesto” distributed by the Twelve Tribes revealed dozens of metaphors present in their writing. These texts are posted publicly on their websites that are used to recruit new members and promoted by current members. Some metaphors are portrayed clearly and prominently,

while others are more subtle and are used as supporting arguments. A common trend among these texts is the multi-faceted usage of metaphors; the same topics are used to present both positive and negative themes depending on the context. Another key theme is the prominence of metaphors related to nature and natural processes. Additionally, the presence of underlying biblical themes connected to metaphors was extremely common, where scripture was sometimes stated directly and sometimes more subtly woven into the texts. To analyze these metaphors, two key groups were identified, namely metaphors related to water and metaphors related to family. Identifying, sorting, and finding key patterns among the metaphors in each of these groups led to an analysis of both separately as well as the similarities and differences between the two groups of metaphors.

Water Metaphors

One of the most common categories of metaphors used in the texts of the Twelve Tribes are those related to water. Although nature is consistently featured throughout their writing, water is by far one of the most common subgroups. In popular culture, especially religious contexts, water often represents purification and cleansing, and is the symbol of baptism in Christian cultures (Brown & Smith, 1997). Both in religious and secular publications, water continues to be seen as a transformational, life-giving tool represented as favorable and desirable. The three most distinct water metaphors are all found in Manifesto, one of the most commonly linked documents on the Twelve Tribes' media platforms. These water metaphors focus on water's destructive elements through the loss of control, direct references to Homer's sirens, and the concepts of flooding and filling.

Sweeping and Flowing. The first water metaphor presented by the Twelve Tribes begins in the concluding paragraph of their manifesto. It states, "Humanity is currently being swept

downstream. It's heading for the waterfall of no return" (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). Two successive metaphors are utilized to create the full effect of these statements, beginning with humanity "swept downstream," resulting in their continued journey towards "the waterfall of no return." Together, these metaphors show a combined progression and movement. The subsequent sentences after these two metaphors assist in showing that they represent an unfavorable destination through quoting that "the moral foundations that support a good society are rapidly being destroyed" (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). Humanity as a whole is presented as the subject of these metaphors, rather than addressing an individual entity or the reader directly.

Analyzing the usage of this metaphor duo gives great insight into its significance. Firstly, the very subject of the metaphors is important in itself because it takes an indirect yet impactful approach through using the term "humanity." The reader is not directly confronted, but is undoubtedly included in this group. This reduces the abrasiveness of the statement while still presenting it as something that directly affects every individual reading the text, causing readers to pay attention without being openly offended.

Next, the water metaphors themselves both use water in a negative context. Being "swept downstream" is presented as inherently negative rather than a neutral statement. This is because it represents a lack of control and helplessness that leads directly to its final destination, "the waterfall of no return." There is no hope of homecoming, no safety, and only a powerful force leading directly to death. The feeling of being helpless in the water is something that countless people would understand both as adults and children, and the gravity of its effects cause immediate fear. However, the concept of water's progression is presented more subtly in other texts by the Twelve Tribes through the use of the term "flow." In "We All Live Together," new members are presented as "a constant flow of guests drawn to the light of our love." In this

connotation, a flow is portrayed positively and represents that this action in and of itself is not always negative, but that it is the destination itself that matters. Through being drawn towards the “waterfall of no return” rather than “the light of love” the Twelve Tribes claims to possess, inevitable destruction follows, but turning to the Twelve Tribes offers a solution. Essentially, these metaphors indirectly confront every reader through usage of the term humanity, use metaphors that create fear and helplessness in any individual, and subtly juxtapose their wording in other texts through establishing a contrast between death and what the Twelve Tribes can offer.

The Siren Song. The next water metaphor utilized in the writing of the Twelve Tribes requires deeper analysis to discover its connection to water. It states, “mindlessly they follow along, mesmerized by the siren song of prosperity, ease, and pleasure” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). The siren song is a direct reference to Greek mythology, specifically Homer’s *Odyssey*, and represented creatures whose beautiful singing and music lured numerous sailors to their deaths (Mastin, 2009). The subject of this metaphor refers to “most people” who “seem strangely unaware of the consequences” that will result from following the paths of humanity (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). Immediately following this metaphor is a direct command to the audience, instructing them, “don’t be lulled to sleep!”

An analysis of the usage of this metaphor is complex because it first requires the reader to understand what the term “siren song” represents. After making the connection to Homer and mythology, the reader realizes they are being compared to a sailor on a voyage. This is significant because it implies there is a journey and a destination in mind, which reflects the path of someone’s life on Earth. Humanity, the entity emitting the siren’s call, offers “prosperity, ease, and pleasure” but this metaphor connects terms that are closely associated with death (The

Twelve Tribes, 2018). In this way, this text simultaneously encourages the reader to distance themselves from humanity while realizing the things culture values are destructive and harmful to those who seek them.

The sentence immediately following the siren song metaphor is significant because it presents an action item and a command through the statement “don’t be lulled to sleep!” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). Additionally, it is the first time that readers are directly addressed in the paragraph and identified as at risk themselves for the actions humanity follows. Choosing this metaphor as the gateway to direct commands demonstrates its significance, and through the wording of “mindlessly following along” portrays the actions of humanity in a way that is clearly negative and represents a lack of control and knowledge (The Twelve Tribes, 2018).

Flooding and Filling Society. The Manifesto of the Twelve Tribes concludes with a final metaphor related to water which instructs, “don’t be fooled by the politically correct propaganda that is flooding society” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). Unlike the previously used metaphors related to water, this is contained within a command statement that calls for immediate action from the audience. Additionally, this metaphor is contrasted by the metaphor of filling, a verb that of itself is similar to flooding, but utilized for very different purposes.

The statement immediately following this metaphor claims that “The destruction of the moral foundations in peoples' lives is destroying society, the earth, and God's very image in mankind” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). This connects flooding to a continued metaphor included throughout this text of “destroying moral foundations.” In this way, society, through flooding, is again portrayed as destructive and harming all that is good, affecting even the support system of culture. However, in their other texts, similar metaphors to flooding are shown to be positive. The text of A Brand New Culture ends with the chorus of a song regularly performed and sung

by the Twelve Tribes, which states, “We’ll love and keep on loving until it fills the Earth!...We’ll love and watch it fill the Universe! (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). The usage of the metaphors of filling and flooding are positive when associated with the actions of the Twelve Tribes, but negative when they are performed by the external society. This further isolates the group from the rest of the world and presents their actions as morally good and rejects politics and society as evil for the same deeds. This is another example of taking a neutral metaphor and using it to create two contrasting meanings that still ultimately claim the Twelve Tribes are correct.

Overall, the usage of water as a metaphor significant because it is something easily recognizable and relatable even for readers with no connection to the Twelve Tribes. Additionally, for readers who are familiar with the bible, water is also a common topic in many biblical passages they would recognize as well. Finally, water was an effective choice for a metaphor because it can represent positive and negative traits, allowing it to both distance and welcome readers, and was immediately familiar to all as a foundational aspect of nature.

Family Metaphors

The alternate major category of metaphors used by the Twelve Tribes is those related to family and the home. When describing their communities and relationships with one another, these metaphors and analogies are extremely common, and are used to describe their lifestyle and practices as well as represent their spirituality and religious beliefs. Three key metaphors give instructions regarding leaving family behind, finding a new family community with other Twelve Tribe members, and the children and generations to come.

Leaving Family Behind. Leaving family behind is a biblical metaphor that the Tribes quote in their text and then argue themselves. Taken directly from the bible, it reads, “No one

who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age, and in the age to come, eternal life.” After quoting the verse, the subsequent texts continue through stating that “the farmer was promised a hundred farms for the one he gave up. Those who gave up houses would receive a hundred in return” before finally repeating again that “all the people who were giving up parents, relatives and friends to be disciples would, in turn, live in those houses and receive an abundant social life with those hundreds of new brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers and children” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018).

This passage of scripture is widely used in literary theory as a metaphor for sacrificing personal desires for religious faith, but the Twelve Tribes utilize it in their texts as literal fact and a command to give up interpersonal family relationships. To continue this metaphor, their texts directly apply it to their own lifestyle of living in communities with one another and physically and emotionally leaving the homes and families they grew up in. This is one of the most life-changing commands they present in their texts, and as a result they are quick to connect the sacrifice this metaphor demands with a reward: an “abundant social life with hundreds of new [family members]” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). This concept is a metaphor in itself; the other members of the Twelve Tribes have no literal familial relationship to new members, but present themselves in this way to encourage them to join the Twelve Tribes.

The next sentence after the continuation of this metaphor is presented as a rhetorical question asking, “What else could the Master have meant by those words?” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). In case there was doubt or a differing interpretation of this metaphor, the group deliberately interprets and presents it in a singular way and then adds a final point that ends all dissention. This is significant because it shows how much the group wants to emphasize and

enforce these policies, and will use their interpretation of the bible as another authority to do it. In order to gain acceptance from their religion, individuals must choose separation from the world, especially those they love the most. As they share that their people have “walk[ed] away from their old lives,” they use metaphors to encourage others to follow this pattern, leaving their families behind, and find a new “family” within the Twelve Tribes communities (The Twelve Tribes, 2018).

Living as a Family. After instructing readers to leave their current families behind, the texts of the Twelve Tribes use a series of metaphors and a simile to describe the new family they will enter into. The concept itself is presented through the simile “We who wrote the articles on this web site actually live together like an extended family, sharing all things in common just as the first disciples did in the first century” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). Next, the metaphors continue with “we live for each other,” “we have a magnificent purpose that is always in our hearts and on our lips,” and being of “one heart and soul” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018).

The common trend with these metaphors is positive, welcoming, unified culture free of flaws and filled with reward. Again, they take biblical texts extremely literally and use their interpretation of its meaning as the laws for their culture. The key element connecting all of these metaphors is the concept of unity. While this is always carefully presented as positive and its beneficial aspects are highlighted, the negative aspects of complete unity cannot be ignored. Lack of freedom of expression, no personal property and the removal of free will and choice also result from these practices, and this shows the power of using figurative metaphors to present them. Their usage allows only one element of a multifaceted concept to be apparent, and allows questionable practices to become unassuming and beneficial.

As before, to continue to support their claims, this group of metaphors again uses quotes from the bible. In their publication, *We All Live Together*, they cite Acts 2:44, claiming “The Bible says plainly regarding the first church, “All who believed were together and shared all things in common” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). This text also anticipates the criticism that might arise from their analysis through the statement “Some people say this was only for back then, but we've been living this way for over 40 years” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). The significance here again results from blurring the lines between metaphor, interpretation, and fact which can be confusing for readers and is then furthered by anticipating criticism and using rhetorical questions to further emphasize what they believe a “family” should be. These metaphors ultimately use the concept of family to promote their culture in a positive way that is appealing and desirable to external parties.

Generational Families. Metaphors related to family do not end after leaving blood relatives and joining the Twelve Tribes family culture; the texts also emphasize their continuous and generational aspects. This is demonstrated in the metaphor, “And so the heart of one generation is passed on to the next, and to the next after them” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). In addition to the metaphorical heart of a generation being passed on, other portions of their texts use the metaphor that “the bonds between the generations are being restored and strengthened as one of the most essential aspects of our brand new culture” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). The result of this is “building a nation together” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018).

Analyzing the inclusion of this topic of family metaphors reveals the ultimate effects and goals of the Twelve Tribes: continuing and lasting generations of people following their teachings. The first metaphor of hearts being passed down, represents the very core and essence of an individual, including all of their dreams, passions, and emotions. When paired with using

the term bonds between generations, both terms seem favorably. However, an alternate definition of bonds once again illustrates a lack of freedom and free will. This shows linking metaphors and using them in a series can change their effect on an audience and the terms associated with it.

The concept of “building a nation together” is likely perceived by most as a figurative linguistic element that promotes the culture of the Twelve Tribes. However, their other messages and texts show that this could be a literal interpretation; their intent and long-term goal truly is to build a nation of Twelve Tribe members. This is supported by both metaphors related to family and water metaphors in the text, as shown through the phrase “we’ll keep on loving until it fills the Earth!” (The Twelve Tribes, 2018). Again, this makes the connection between “hearts” and love to the family the Twelve Tribes can offer. Additionally, using a comforting metaphor with biblical themes again presents the underlying message in a less controversial way; the element of control and ultimately pervading the world is dimmed through figurative language and the positive messages of family and love.

Ultimately, using family as a key metaphor choice is significant and powerful because of its ability to draw new members in through promises of connection and harmony while simultaneously encouraging them to redefine who and what their family should be. The group also uses a different rhetorical element to persuade their audiences; they subtly also use the term family in a way that causes audiences to forget its status as a metaphor and instead interpret and act on it literally. Drawing upon the group of people that are central to a person’s development and identity is a key way to keep their attention and promote community and attachment. This makes individuals, particularly those looking for people to be united with, drawn to the Twelve Tribes and what they promise they can offer.

Comparison and Conclusion

Comparing the overall usage of metaphors through the categories of water and family reveals common patterns of persuasion within the texts of the Twelve Tribes. First, both metaphor groups focus on subjects that are natural and pure. Water purifies and family edifies, and the Twelve Tribes' action of water and the family they offer are the ultimate, ideal form of these concepts. However, both water and families can have destructive elements as well. Water can damage both communities and individuals, and families can cause extreme pain within themselves. The Twelve Tribes claims that these effects are what external society causes, and turning away from their practices and removal from their culture is the solution. Ultimately, these metaphors are both life-giving and life-taking; according to these texts, the key difference in their power is whether their source comes from the Twelve Tribes or from external society. In this way, neutral objects that can cause both good and harm are used.

Next, a common pattern among these texts was using neutral terms in a specific, angled way. Two key example were the term bonds and unity; when depicted in the larger context and connected with the words heart, love, and family, a favorable association was created with potentially controversial terms. This practice was further implemented by supporting these claims and associations with the group's interpretation of biblical texts that made disagreement more difficult. Using biblical language and metaphors as literal fact was another tool consistently used to support the Twelve Tribes' practices throughout their texts. However, they also contradicted many traditional scriptural themes. For example, water is often recognized as a symbol of rebirth and baptism, especially by religious groups like the Twelve Tribes. However, they use this symbol often in a destructive context, which is contradictory to many biblical symbols. This shows both how they aligned and contrasted their ideas with the bible. This

connects to another tool they utilize throughout their texts: enthymemes. Some of their premises and arguments are not clearly proposed, and can often be to intentionally keep certain parts of arguments hidden. The result of this was using metaphors to create favorable associations and less harsh perception of their instructions and commands before presenting them again as unerring, indisputable fact with no room for personal freedom.

In conclusion, a thorough analysis of the texts of the Twelve Tribes using metaphoric criticism has illuminated how they used metaphors as a tool to convince their audiences. The ability of metaphors to both conceal and reveal information, shape the tone of writing, and change the meaning of a term is consistently and prominently demonstrated. This significant level of impact and effect metaphors have in these texts supports Burke's claim that metaphors are truly one of the most impactful elements of rhetoric that exists, and that metaphors undoubtedly should be included as one of the four master tropes of rhetoric.

Chapter 3: Full Circle and Consubstantiality

The third chapter of this study will focus on Full Circle, another spiritual group that is still active today. To accomplish this, background of the group and its founder will be provided. Next, the method of analysis, consubstantiality, will be presented and explained, followed by an analysis of the methods employed in Full Circle's writing. A summation of findings will conclude the chapter.

Background of Full Circle

Full Circle was founded by Andrew Keegan in 2014 and based out of a single location Venice, California. Narratives regarding the purpose and function of Full Circle have been widely disputed, and the group has been referred to as a "spiritual movement," "community spiritual center," "advanced spirituality," "religion," and "cult" (Coughlan, 2016, Dodge & Wakefield, 2014). Although the group shut down in 2017 as noted in a letter from Keegan, they "regrouped" shortly afterward and maintain an active website and consistent social media posts with over 11,000 followers (The Full Circle, 2018). Their primary location, the "Rose Temple" in Venice has not changed, and the group regularly puts on numerous public events while partnering with local musicians and nearby spiritual groups (Coughlan, 2017).

Born in Los Angeles, California, Andrew Keegan is an American actor who is most widely known for starring as Joey in the popular film *10 Things I Hate about You*, produced in 1999. His other acting accreditations include *7th Heaven*, *The Broken Hearts Club* which won the GLAAD Best Picture of the year, and numerous other films and television shows. Throughout his career, Keegan has been frequently dubbed a "heartthrob" with widespread popularity among his viewers (Paiella, 2017). His long-term girlfriend, Arista Ilona have been partners since 2013,

and had a daughter together named Aiya Rose in 2016 (Lewis, 2016). At the age of 35, Keegan started Full Circle, and is now known as both the face and the “ultimate say in all things” (Dodge & Wakefield, 2014).

Due to the fame of its founder, this group has gotten the majority of its press and popularity since its beginnings due to celebrity news outlets and exclusive one-on-one journal interviews, and continues to be widely known without the need to spend significant funds on marketing efforts. The group quickly gained popularity and continues to be housed in its “111 year-old temple” (The Full Circle, 2018). After being open for three years, the group was shut down indefinitely by law enforcement for distributing kombucha, a tea that requires a license for distribution, in addition to low funding (Paiella, 2017). However, due to crowdfunding and donations from both internal and external parties, the group has raised the money it needs to reopen, and offered incentives such as bracelets and signed posters for donating money (Coughlan, 2016). Although the group rarely makes public statements about their status, they continue to function today after their temporary shutdown.

Full Circle offers “spiritually centered classes, mindfulness workshops, group meditations, music happenings, and art occasions” to anyone seeking community involvement (The Full Circle, 2018). Consistently across all of their publications, the group promotes unification of the communities around them and empowerment through meditation, reflection, and instruction. Outside parties identify the group as loosely following Hinduism, but ultimately creating their own practices that are difficult to clearly identify and characterize (Lesley, 2015). After explaining their values as “innovating spirituality, transforming lives, and co-creating spirit in community,” the group encourages everyone to get involved and join their movement (The Full Circle, 2018).

One of the key criticisms against Full Circle is its ambiguous nature and unclear practices that leave room for questions about what their intent and underlying practices are. Additionally, many say that the followers of the group are merely seeking after passing celebrity trends and Hollywood culture (Dodge & Wakefield, 2014). Instead of truly believing in the movement, critics suggest followers may just admire its leader. Utilization of the word “cult” directly is becoming more prominent, and is featured in articles stating, “Andrew Keegan’s Cult Will Live to See Another Day!” and “Andrew Keegan’s Cult is Going Broke, but You Can Buy Crystals to Help.” Most notably among these was a 2014 Vice article that “hint[ed] at cult-like practices” (Coughlan, 2016). Keegan’s response to these claims is that they are untrue and painful for himself and his followers, and in his own words, “we’re just a bunch of crazy kids doing our thing” (Coughlan, 2016).

Consubstantiality

One of the most foundational aspects of human nature is the desire to find community and relate to others. Scholars have increasingly found that the successful formation of relationships is heavily dependent on how we craft communities and sets of social interactions rhetorically, specifically through the concepts of identification, division, and consubstantiality. To understand this rhetorical method, the history of its development will be explained, as well as examples, effective use, and connections to Full Circle.

Kenneth Burke is credited for developing the method of identification and consubstantiality in 1950, which are excellent examples of the subconscious and unintentional uses of and responses to rhetoric (Burke, 1950). Additionally, Burke noted that the process of identification is a response that seeks to eliminate the division and separation that undoubtedly already exist. Although complete unification is impossible because human beings are separate

entities, they can become “part of a community of shared interests while remaining autonomous individuals” (Jasinski, 2001, p. 306). Hochmuth (1951) quickly built on this theory by showing the duality of identification as both a deliberate tool employed by the rhetor, but also a desire present in human beings that want to be identified with other people or groups. Later in 1983, Cheney identified three central strategies employed for identification, finding commonalities with others, uniting others against an antithesis, or mutual enemy, and the subtle use of transcendence, or using unifying terms to subconsciously further unite groups of people.

As this theory developed, a prominent example of its use is an analysis of John F. Kennedy’s Berlin Speeches by Fay and Kuypers in 1983. Drawing upon the tension present during the war, Kennedy used identification to persuade his primary audience (Fay & Kuypers, 1983). Fay and Kuypers note that Kennedy’s speech is an example of how identification can be used politically on both a national and global scale with wide-reaching effects for listeners, and can apply to multiple audiences. This shows how identification does not need to be used at separate occasions for individual people, but can often persuade many in a single event.

Another example of the use of identification is in organizational and corporate settings. In society today, companies are not just seen as removed and separate entities, but are instead expected to be integrated into society, responsible consumers, and even have social and political views and identities (Ewalt, 2018). Some of the ways organizations seek to accomplish this are the companies and public figures they endorse, the events they hold that are advertised publicly to the media, how they relate to and present their workers or volunteers, and the forms of writing and media they produce. Specific examples of this are the Prairie Festival hosted by the Land Institute which seeks to honor Native American agricultural traditions, and even more simply, companies such as Accenture, Estee Lauder, and more that are recognized by Forbes for best

recycling practices (Cortina, 2018; Ewalt, 2018). Through these strategies, companies identify with audiences that also value these traditions, and also often use these actions to unite themselves against companies who do not follow their promoted responsible practices. Ultimately, these examples show that identification is something that does not have to be employed merely by one individual, but is a tactic that entire companies and groups can use collectively to unite with their audiences, and is something that is highly present in the corporate world.

The reason this method is so effective is because of the prominence of consubstantiality, or the desire to be attached and united with others (Blakesley, 2002). Instead of being a method that can only apply to specific situations, Burke and other scholars have found that every human interaction contains elements of division and identification, making it one of the most applicable and wide-reaching rhetorical theories (Burke, 1950). Additionally, this theory is an exceptional example of the subconscious, unintentional, and traditional ways rhetoric affects every day lives, and also shows that identification is not just a tool employed by rhetoricians, but also something desired and sought after by individuals themselves (Hochmuth, 1952). As a result, this is an excellent way to understand human behavior, persuasion, and an element of interaction that is present in everyday life.

Unsurprisingly, the method of identification is a tool consistently employed by cults and similar groups because of its ability to draw others in. This applies especially in the case of Full Circle because it is a group that publicly and openly broadcasts its messages to as many people as possible. Founded by celebrities and widely published in popular media, its professional and corporate language directly models common language in Western society, even as simply as the titles of their pages “About Us,” “Mission Statement,” “Values.” Unlike other groups being

studied, Full Circle does not use language such as “beware” or in any way try to promote itself as radical or odd; instead, it seeks to identify with the general public through presentation of celebrities, marketing strategies, and language they can easily understand and relate to.

Analyzing Full Circle’s intentional use of consubstantiality and identification will help explain their rhetorical methods to draw others in.

The process and steps that will be used for this method will begin by locating and listing the ways identification is used by Full Circle. This can be further broken down into the strategies and tactics they are using, such as the ways they seek to establish common ground with their audiences, uses of transcendence through wording trends like “we” “us,” and “our.” Next, division will be identified and who or what is being excluded will be determined, as well as how openly obvious this is in the text. This can also be compared to common Western practices for what is expected from a company or religious group, and how they seek to maintain and uphold these traditions. Throughout this process, the question of why they seek to relate to audiences will also be kept in mind.

Analysis

Full Circle’s website is filled with the use of consubstantiality, particularly in their pages “About Us,” “Donate,” “Community,” “Involvement,” and “Press” (The Full Circle, 2018). The power of this usage of rhetoric creates an immediate and intentional connection with readers. This is accomplished through directly and quickly addressing the reader with collective inclusive language as already being a part of Full Circle, which is an example of Kuyper’s transcendence (Fay & Kuypers, 2012). Additionally, Full Circle promises that if an individual becomes invested and joined with their community, they will experience self-improvement that is impossible to

achieve on their own. To understand their methods, an analysis of their usage of identification will be presented, followed by their usage of division.

Collective Language

One of the clearest examples of the use of identification by Full Circle is the inclusive language they use to address the reader, particularly in their “About Us” and “Donation” pages of their website. Consubstantiality is a powerful tool because it can be used very subtly within texts and persuade the reader subconsciously (Jasinski, 2001). Instead of using divisive words, they aim to use collective language that acts as an invitation for readers to see themselves as part of the Full Circle community (The Full Circle, 2018). As Fay and Kuypers (2012) note, as this language is used and continues to be repeated, it achieves transcendence, or goes beyond the literal meaning into a symbolic construct that evokes both emotional attachment and superiority. This results in the reader being initially addressed as a member of the Full Circle community, and then pushed to continue the spirit of unity their group promotes.

United with the Community. The first key way that collective language is used is when discussing the Full Circle community. Their donation page proudly begins with an emphasized and bold quote, “Help us innovate spirituality! Invest in YOUR community” (The Full Circle, 2018). Through this statement, the reader is already being portrayed as a member of the group and a recipient of the connections it offers. This continues through the mission statement itself of Full Circle: “to activate community through a curation of heart-centered, spirited programming that creates space for authentic connection” (The Full Circle, 2018). In this way, identification is clearly used to persuade readers. The most explicit quote identifying who they wish to welcome into their community concludes the “About Us” page and states they wish to “create a vibrant

culture...that welcomes all and knows no borders. In co-creation, we align our unique individual talents to accomplish more together than we ever could by acting alone” (The Full Circle, 2018).

Acting as a Community Member. In addition to beliefs, the next major example of use of identification is through behavior and practices, not just compatible mindsets. This is demonstrated on their “Donation” page through stating, “by donating to Full Circle Venice, you receive back in community what you give in currency” (The Full Circle, 2018). Although this may sound heartwarming, it also can be interpreted as that in order to be accepted by the group, you must donate financially to the group. As shown through previous quote, by referring to the group as their community already, all practices and actions that apply to current Full Circle members are also being mandated to any new readers. Essentially, the group instructs that as a member of Full Circle, a clear duty applies to behave like one. Examples of these practices include empowerment circles, breath workshops, sound healings and more (The Full Circle, 2018).

Ultimately, unifying language that prompts both mindset and action changes for any reader is a clear example of identification employed by Full Circle. The clear expectations of how members both must think and act are presented clearly without room for dissent. Through capitalizing on the human desire to be attached and united with others, Full Circle promises a positive, beneficial, unified community that dictates a collective way of life and thought.

Self-Improvement

The next major way Full Circle demonstrates usage of identification is through the promise of self-improvement through attachment with their community. This allows for both mental enlightenment and peace and becoming the best self an individual can be. These promises are particularly attractive to those seeking growth and peace, but their undoubtedly beneficial

offer appeals to the majority of readers. This clear example of identification promises that as new members engage and connect with the Full Circle community, they will achieve personal growth.

Inner Growth. The first aspect of self-improvement offered by Full Circle is inner growth. Throughout their writing and specifically in their “About Us” page, Full Circle continually reminds readers that they offer “space for those seeking inner growth and community connection” (The Full Circle, 2018). This initial promotion of what they can offer is the first step of a three-pronged progression they create regarding self-improvement in their writing. The next step of this progression is distinguishing why their version of inner growth is superior to any other. Claiming they “provide an innovative approach to inner-growth” and a “vibrant culture that knows no borders,” the group separates and elevates their practices from the rest (The Full Circle, 2018). The final step of this progression is summarizing how this growth is achieved in the quote, “Full Circle recognizes that the most important revolution is the transformation that happens inside because inner-growth equals social progress” (The Full Circle, 2018). This statement creates a pairing and relationship that is a clear example of identification. If an individual connects to the community Full Circle offers, they will achieve inner growth. According to their texts, unity with members of Full Circle is the key to improve any individual’s internal balance.

The Highest Potential. Another unifying promise made by Full Circle is the opportunity to achieve the highest form of potential and growth possible. This use of language does not require deduction; their texts frequently and literally say they will help individuals reach their maximum potential. Their “About Us” page provides an example of this through one of their three key purpose statements: “empowering individuals to discover their highest self” (The Full Circle, 2018). Another example of this in the same text is the group again stating they are

“empowering people from all beliefs and backgrounds to be the brightest versions of themselves” (The Full Circle, 2018). This is again an example of transcendence, or a deeper purpose and meaning that supersedes what is literally being said. However, this does not replace the need for careful examination of what the texts are truly saying. Throughout all of these statements, the underlying message is the same: reaching one’s full potential is not something they can achieve alone; it requires empowerment from Full Circle. This message is furthered through more generalized statements scattered throughout their texts, including that “when people are empowered, progress can occur” (The Full Circle, 2018). Although this sounds motivational and powerful, it creates a clear dependence on external entities to achieve personal growth, leaving readers with a need to both identify with and receive strength from Full Circle.

Elements of Division

The texts of Full Circle are an excellent example of how division is often unstated, and requires careful examination to reveal its presence. Although their language seems to be extremely inclusive, it has multiple elements of division that separate out several groups of people and schools of thought. The first group is anyone who does not immediately conform to the mindset and practices of Full Circle. A consistent theme throughout their texts is the minimization of individuality. Readers who are just learning about Full Circle’s practices and community and still have a desire to think for themselves are not welcomed; in order to be accepted, they must think and behave like a true community member. Additionally, the group boasts that they have a “fresh approach to spiritual practices,” which divides out individuals who follow any other religious beliefs and practices (The Full Circle, 2018). Members of traditional religious groups who are content with their practices or follow a spiritual text such as the bible are cut off; in order to be included, they must transform their religious beliefs. Similarly, any

individual who has a desire to not practice religion is immediately divided out by this language as well.

In addition to dividing out thought patterns and behavior of new members, Full Circle also uses division against external groups that claims they can help with inner growth and personal improvement. The same statements that boast about their practices as “innovative” and “unique,” subtly show that they believe themselves to be superior. Their text states, “the most transformational tools are always being taught at our temple (The Full Circle, 2018). This claims that anyone else offering assistance would have inferior methods without the same impact Full Circle can provide. Nowhere in their texts are the religious texts, mission statements, or even simply the names of any other similar organizations presented; instead, only Full Circle’s promises of how they can help are portrayed. Secondly, Full Circle divides out any organizations who claim there are other ways to achieve inner growth besides forming a community with their group. As they note on their “About Us” page, “Full Circle is a spiritual community center...that offers a curation of activates that bring together like-minded people” (The Full Circle, 2018). This concept of like-minded people is unifying to those who conform to its meaning, but divides out anyone who not only practices different actions, but dares even to think differently. Immediately, readers are subtly reminded that they can find a welcoming place within Full Circle, but only if they fully embrace the mindset and practices being promoted.

Ultimately, the unifying language and claims of self-improvement employed by Full Circle at first seems to fully be merely an example of identification. However, the clear expectations of how members must both think and behave eliminate anyone who might disagree or desire to express themselves separately, as well as any other group offering assistance.

Essentially, Full Circle promises a positive, beneficial community- but leaves no room for dispute or individuality in the process.

Comparison and Conclusion

Overall, utilizing the method of consubstantiality, broken into identification and division, to analyze the texts of Full Circle reveals common patterns in their writing. The first key message being presented is that individuals should unite with the community and become a part of Full Circle. They do this from the beginning of their writing through the use of collective language and portraying the reader as already being a member of the community. Because the reader is already identified as a member of Full Circle, the next key message relates to the results being a Full Circle member will present, as well as what the obligations and commitments are as a Full Circle member. These results that they claim will come out of this process are both internal and external. Firstly, individuals will improve themselves internally and find growth, peace and improved knowledge. Next, this growth will result in external benefits such as empowerment and living up to one's highest potential, which they claim is directly tied to social progress. These claims are undoubtedly appealing to many; they are already welcomed as a community member and patterns of growth and improvement are identified. This clear and consistent use of identification is present and repeated throughout the writing of Full Circle, and prompt action and connection from all readers.

Although individuals are viewed as community members, the requirements for joining the group are not clearly identified. There are promises of growth and encouragement to connect with Full Circle members, but no definition of what this entails. New members cannot fully know if this requires living within the community, attending events, financial donation or separation from the rest of society, and are not presented with either the option or the

information to make an informed decision about joining the group. This directly leads into a key element of consubstantiality that is subtly present in all of their writing: division. Although direct opposition or attack on other groups is not present, Full Circle elevates themselves above the rest. This elevation divides out two groups of people, namely individuals who propose alternate ways to achieve growth and community, and the other communities or groups that claim they can help others improve themselves. This shows how the very concept of identification, something that seemingly is the definition of unity, can be divisive in itself.

In conclusion, Full Circle is a group that promises growth through community, found through identification with its members. However, the requirements for what community is are never made clear, and only the positive aspects are highlighted. This leads to exemplifying transcendence, or claiming that the group offers impact beyond the literal meaning of a physical community. However, division is still present in their writing; those who want to achieve on their own or find help elsewhere are not given a place within the group. Their overall method of persuasion relates back to their founder Andrew Keegan's remark about the group being merely "crazy kids" because of their consistent method of reducing the offensiveness of their language (Coughlan, 2016). A united family of people presented as innocent children who are just having fun is comforting and unifying for readers, but at the same time still subtly excludes anyone not in the family or those who may disagree. This common theme and practice throughout their texts ultimately shows the prominence of consubstantiality and demonstrates how Full Circle uses rhetoric to persuade their audiences to join their community.

Chapter 4: The Cult Information Centre and Argument by Definition

A truly well-rounded look at cult rhetoric requires comparison against texts produced by other groups that are not classified as cults. In fact, looking at the rhetoric of a group that directly opposes them will provide even further insight. This chapter focuses on the Cult Information Centre, an “anti-cult” group with a mission to work against cults. Just like cults, this group uses methods of persuasion to convince audiences that their practices are harmful and deceitful. Looking at similarities and differences in their tactics provides a more balanced way to evaluate ethics. The specific choice of the Cult Information Centre is due to its popularity and publicity, numerous awards, and the services it provides. To understand its rhetorical methods, background of the group will be provided, followed by an explanation of argument by definition, the rhetorical method being utilized. An analysis of their tactics will be provided, and the chapter will conclude with a summation of findings.

Background of the Cult Information Centre

The Cult Information Centre is a British organization founded in 1987 by Ian Haworth. Self-classified since its founding as a “charity organization,” the group became officially recognized as a charity in 1992 (The Cult Information Centre, 2018). The organization has an office in South London and depends heavily on donations from external parties wishing to support their efforts. The primary goal of the charity is to educate the population at large on the damage cults can cause to individuals, and “focus[es] critical concern on the harmful methods of the cults” (The Cult Information Centre, 2018).

Prior to starting the Cult Information Centre, Ian Haworth was a member of a cult himself. This began when he met a woman who asked him to fill out a survey, invited him to a luncheon, and then offered to help him quit smoking (Wray, 2014). After these interactions, he

left his job and friends behind and joined the group. After the group was attacked in the media for their unethical practices and mind control attempts, he left the group and “went through 11 months of critical withdrawal” (Wray, 2014). Haworth began studying and researching cults in 1979, and applied his knowledge in legal, political, religious, and other settings. After briefly living in Canada, Haworth returned to the United Kingdom and worked with the Cult Information Centre as the main representative and general secretary (The Cult Information Centre, 2018).

The Cult Information Centre describes their mission through presenting two key concerns they wish to address, namely cults using deceptive and manipulative methods to persuade others, and their effects on individuals and their families (The Cult Information Centre, 2018). As a result, they seek to “gather and disseminate accurate information on cultism” (The Cult Information Centre, 2018). The practices they employ to meet this goal are public education, interviews with the media, assisting families of a cult member, assisting ex-cult members, and providing research and information assistance. The group puts a consistent focus on preventing mind control and redefining the traditional mindset that the mentally unstable are the key victims for cults. Instead, they argue that intelligent, questioning minds of psychologically stable people are often the victims, and works to educate them against cult-like practices as well, often in university settings (The Cult Information Centre, 2018).

Criticism and attacks against the Cult Information Centre are multifaceted. Because the nature of their work requires openly opposing groups that are quick to defend themselves, they have experienced direct controversial media statements from groups including Scientology and the Jesus Army saying their messages are untrue (Wray, 2014). Haworth himself has directly faced “character assassination, lawsuits, bankruptcy, and death threats,” and more recently the

group almost lost its status as a charitable organization (Doward, 2012). The Centre was critiqued for claiming to be educational but in reality having extreme bias and not presenting with neutrality. However, this complaint was not maintained and the organization was able to continue operations (Doward, 2012).

Argument by Definition

Without meaning and comprehension, communication and functional life in society would be impossible. Comprehension and meaning rely on knowledge and understanding of the concepts and terms being presented. This is aided by definition, or the denotation of meaning. However, definitions are not objective or neutral statements. They are instead built by numerous factors such as who defines them, linked concepts, opposing concepts, and bias of the rhetor. Argument by definition seeks to explain this process and its persuasive effects. This method will be explained through presenting its history, examples, best practices, relationship to The Cult Information Centre, and the process of using this theory effectively.

Charles L. Stevenson (1944) explained that by their nature, definitions can be persuasive and convincing by themselves. According to Stevenson, a “persuasive definition” maintains positive connotations with a term while simultaneously changing its specific meaning. This shows the power of connotation, or connections of terms and concepts. Perelman and Olbrechts (1969) developed this research by explaining dissociation, or the breaking of links between concepts, as the opposite of connotation. Their research proved that the words and ideas associated or disconnected from a definition directly affect perception of the definition itself. In later research, Zarefsky, Miller-Tutzauer, and Tutzauer (1984) focused on redefinition, where the term in question begins to have a different meaning than its original explanation. Their research showed that “successive redefinitions” can alter perceptions about its term and have lasting

persuasive effects. Sonja Foss (2009) expanded on this by noting that the traditional perceptions and understanding of a term can be changed and expanded. Ultimately, the rhetors themselves can control persuasive effects through altering and shaping a term's connotations, dissociations, definitions, and redefinitions. Triski (2018) continued the development of this theory by showing that explaining context and facts of a conversation alone is not what creates definitions, but instead, they are ideational, and serve to propose new meaning.

An example of argument by definition is found in former president Lyndon B. Johnson's 1965 speech at Howard University. During a critical time in the history of racial tension and affirmative action, Johnson's speech to an African-American majority student body had great significance (Zarefsky, 1980). Through his speech, Johnson redefined the term "equal opportunity" that was becoming prevalent in American culture through dissociation. He argued that legal freedom and legal equality is not the same as true equal opportunity, and continued by stating that this traditional definition is no longer adequate (Zarefsky, 1980). In this way, Johnson demonstrated that new meanings for popular buzzwords can be extremely effective both in associations and dissociations created.

Argument by definition was also exemplified by former president Ronald Reagan during his campaign in 1980. The trending issue at the time of his presidency and campaign was big government, spending, and economic issues America was facing (Zarefsky, Miller-Tutzauer, & Tutzauer, 1984). He began by using the dissociation with the term "truly needy" through dividing it into two categories, need that is apparent and need that is true. This is an example of how figures can separate themselves from untrue need that was only for appearances and publicity, and argue his strategy for the economy met these needs (Zarefsky et al., 1984). Reagan continued utilization of this theory by moving onto the term "social safety net." This was an

example of categorizing and dividing audiences based on the criteria the speaker provides. This connected both of his definitions and also was able to bring both those who opposed and supported him into agreement (Zarefsky et al., 1984). This showed another example of how argument by definition can affect larger-scale social issues faced by an entire nation, and are not limited merely to interpersonal discussion or smaller gatherings.

This method is an excellent fit when analyzing texts from The Cult Information Centre because there is still not a universally agreed upon definition of what a cult truly is. The Centre openly offers multiple arguments against cults, but all of them are based on their own provided definition of what a cult is. Additionally, all of the questions and answers posed are based on their own writing without drawing in outside sources. The terms are frequently redefined, and dissociation is shown by drawing a harsh gap between cults and anything that is good, which is modeled by the statement “loss of choice and free will” (Cult Information Centre, 2018).

The process that will be used to analyze texts from the Cult Information Centre with argument by definition will begin with locating the relevant terms defined and explained in their writing. Examples of these terms include their definition of “cult,” “cult victims,” “harmful,” and “coercion.” Next, traditional definitions of the terms will be identified, and compared to how they are defined by the Cult Information Centre. Then, the text will be examined for redefinitions, whether they are multiple or include just one. Additionally, both the connotations and dissociations used to define the terms will be identified. After these steps have been completed, an analysis of its effects can begin.

Analysis

The very name of the Cult Information Centre suggests that explanations and definitions will be provided in their writing. One of the key ways they structure their information is through sections posed as questions and then answered in their writing. Three examples of these are included in the texts of this study, “What is a Cult?,” “How Do You Avoid Cults?,” and “How Do I Help a Cult Member?” (The Cult Information Centre, 2018). The other texts used are “About Us” and “Cult Concerns,” all of which provide definitions and answers appropriate for analysis with argument by definition.

Key Definitions

There are several key terms being defined in the texts of the Cult Information Centre that have multifaceted interpretations. The most notable of these is defining what a cult truly is, followed by the definition of a victim and the definition of coercion. These terms all are also the objects of dissociation, or the breaking of links between concepts. These definitions are the foundation of the rest of the Cult Information Centre’s strategies for argument by definition. A serious question of ethos arises because the group does not use external sources, and instead encourages and persuades readers to base all assumptions off of their writing. They even acknowledge that they will not be “held liable for any loss or damages resulting from any inaccuracies or misinformation that may inadvertently be published here” (Cult Information Centre, 2018). This shows that considering their rhetorical tactics and credibility is just as important and valid as analyzing that of the cults themselves. As an informational Centre, understanding these definitions they provide are foundational to their entire mission. However, through these initial definitions, dissociations are being created, and later the group redefines what a cult, a victim, and coercion truly are.

Cult. The first key term defined throughout the Cult Information Centre's texts is what a cult is. According to their texts, there are five key characteristics of a cult they incorporate into a single definition. They explain that cults use "psychological coercion" in every step of finding and keeping members, claim they form an "elitist totalitarian society," have a charming and self-appointed leader, justifies unethical methods in recruitment and does not use profits to help members. The group also focuses on explaining the location and prominence of cults throughout both the United Kingdom and the United States; they claim to have identified over 500 cults in the U.K. alone, and the U.S. has similar numbers per capita. In addition to these figures, the group lists 26 practices that cult members are known to conduct (The Cult Information Centre, 2018). These texts also use successive redefinitions in their writing through later going back and separating the term cult even further. They break it down into religious cults and therapy cults, each of which have different practices and strategies.

Although this definition may seem to be purely informational, examining their usage of dissociation reveals other underlying methods. The key distinction being drawn here is between cults and other communities of people such as religious groups or nonprofits. A clear textual example of this is found in their overview on the methods of cults which states, "most cults register with the government as religious organizations or simply charities of one form or another...people are being deceived and then psychologically coerced into association with the cults... the cult problem becomes a human rights issue (The Cult Information Centre, 2018). This creates the dissociation between what a cult does and promotes as opposed to the services of any other community of people. Building relationships and community with others can be healthy, but the Cult Information Centre argues in this way that cults are never healthy, and they are in fact something that takes away the rights of individuals. Each fact listed about cults are

those related to the negative and harmful effects cults have caused, and while they may be true and even more representative of what cults do, they represent only one point of view that is biased and undoubtedly negative. Essentially, this example of dissociation is significant because it redefines the term cult and shows that its usage is not merely a factual piece of information as they present it, but is instead a persuasive argument.

Understanding the definition of cults matters specifically in the context of the Cult Information Centre and their self-identified explanations. A majority of organizations choose their names based on positive, favorable connotations and references, which is often an expectation new readers have who are unfamiliar with their writings and services. By following this title with “Information,” they are also making a claim about what type of writing they are presenting. However, in the case of the Cult Information Centre, both of these common practices prove to be false, and two key understandings can be drawn through analysis. First, the Cult Information Center clearly opposes cults, as seen in both the facts that are provided and dissociation present. Second, they do not provide merely factual, informative writing; they are clearly making an argument that cults are wrong and unethical.

Victim. Another key term defined by the Cult Information Centre is what a cult victim is, including their characteristics and tendencies as well as how they are recruited. They depict victims as intelligent people who come from stable backgrounds, are well-educated and enjoy discussing new ideas (The Cult Information Centre, 2018). The group also emphasizes that the tactics cults employ can work on any victim; there is not a specific class or gender that is more at risk or fault. In addition to discussing the victims themselves, the Centre also includes information about another affected group of people: the families of victims. A textual example of the picture they depict is found in their “Caring for the Families of Cult Victims” article. The text

states that each person who becomes a victim of a cult has three or more other family members, also referred to as victims, created. These family members are defined as “the anguished family and friends of the cult member, who are left in shock and confusion watching helplessly on the sidelines” (The Cult Information Centre, 2018). This expands the population they are addressing widely, which creates further association with readers. This definition and defined population of a victim is effective because it is easily relatable to a wide variety of people, and eliminates the mindset that victims are weak, different, or socially outcast from the general public.

The term victim creates dissociation because it fully replaces any other term that could be used to refer to someone recruited into the cult. It dissociates a recruited cult member with an individual who is bad, malicious, or even responsible for their own actions. In this way, the word victim does not simply replace a vocabulary term, it replaces an entire concept. The blame of being recruited into a cult is fully taken away from the individual and placed onto the group. This is a continuation of the fault and case being built against cults themselves through the Cult Information Centre; they are defined as malicious themselves, and then the populations or victims they affect are clearly established to continue the argument against them. Additionally, external parties are less likely to place blame on a person that has been defined as just like them. Ultimately, association is created through highlighting the positive traits of victims that many readers can relate to, and dissociation is created between a person recruited into a cult and anyone responsible or guilty themselves.

Coercion. In addition to discussing the attributes of cults themselves and the populations they affect, the Cult Information Centre also clearly defines the process of being recruited into a cult through the term coercion. It is primarily shown through the list of 26 practices the Centre claims coercion by cults includes, ranging from hypnosis, change of diet, isolation, sleep

deprivation and dress codes to emotions of guilt and fear. They claim that these practices result in “breaking down” an individual and making them “highly vulnerable to suggestion” (The Cult Information Centre, 2018). Because of this, members being recruited have their freedom and personal choice taken away and are left to the control of the cult. This is an example of argument by definition because the practices they define undoubtedly strike fear in any reader and recruitment is redefined and established as something that eliminates free will, and is in fact not the choice of the victim to join the cult at all.

The dissociation present in this portion of the Cult Information Centre’s texts is through dissociating the process of being recruited into a cult from free choice. Free choice implies the desire and goal of being involved in a cult, which could be a legitimate reason why external individuals would choose to abstain from assisting their friends or family members. It finalizes the concept of being a victim and prompts action because the person is unable to take it themselves. In a majority of countries such as the United States and Europe where the Cult Information Centre is located, freedom is highly valued and fought for when it is taken away. This is a dissociation that is intentionally shocking and goes against the values many readers would hold, prompting them to take action and further be offended and opposed to the practices of cults.

Comparison and Conclusion

Utilizing the method of argument by definition and its associations and dissociations to analyze the texts of the Cult Information Centre unveils several key arguments and messages present under the surface. Firstly, a cult is defined as something that is always bad and malicious, completely different from a religious group or organization. Second, someone who joins a cult is defined as a completely innocent party who is not responsible for their actions. Third, the

practice of recruiting cult members is defined as the use of psychological coercion that removes free will. The first benefit this creates for their message creating a perception of cults in society as negative entities that always produce harmful results. This immediately sets up readers to, at the very least, be cautious and wary of cults. As the Centre continues in their writing to more and more graphic descriptions of cults, readers are further distanced from identifying with these groups and preconditioned to oppose their actions. The second benefit this creates is the perception that victims are extremely common and readers or people they love are vulnerable to the attacks of a cult. This association builds upon their already negative perceptions of cults and makes them even more defensive because of a personal connection and need for safety. This leads into the third benefit: taking action against cults. A logical step-by-step transition is created through this method and strategy because knowledge leads to association and a personal association which leads to the need for action. Even in their texts, this pattern can be seen through their usage of the term “consequently;” they claim that as a result of their belief that cults are dangerous, they “see the need for gathering and disseminating accurate information on cultism” (The Cult Information Centre, 2018). This also directly shows that a group that claims to be merely an informational centre still has bias and intention behind their writing beyond simply spreading knowledge; they want to spark action against cults.

The Cult Information Centre provides an excellent example of the power of argument by definition, and how the framing and information shared about a term has the power to change its entire meaning. Additionally, within a definition more is explained than just the single term itself because of the associations created and the dissociations that can both polarize and draw concepts together. This comprehension and understanding does not have to stop with knowledge, it also can directly lead to action. Overall, the Cult Information Centre demonstrates defining

numerous terms in a supposedly neutral way that turns out to model their direct opposition of
cults and encourage others to do and feel the same.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Implications

Analyzing Twelve Tribes, Full Circle, and the Cult Information Centre reveals key similarities between the groups that can help identify how a cult should be defined. However, major differences in the practices and beliefs of these groups makes a singular definition difficult to achieve. This calls into question what a cult truly is and how it can be defined generally. The question therefore arises of the benefits and limitations of definitions themselves, as well as if they are truly influential in the understanding of groups that are believed to be or proclaim themselves to be cults. To understand this process and analysis of similarities and differences between all three groups will be provided, followed by potential definitions and classifications of a cult while keeping in mind the limitations and benefits definition provides.

Similarities

A key similarity between all three groups is a self-proclaimed goal of providing information and presenting facts. The most direct example of this is the Cult Information Centre which clearly states they will provide facts and data, but is also more subtly included in the texts of Twelve Tribes and Full Circle as they describe their history and practices. Primarily in the texts describing their culture and the testimonies included from members of their group, Twelve Tribes and Full Circle seek to present factual information about their practices. Examples of this are shown by the Twelve Tribes stating “find out more about this amazing life” before linking to numerous self-written articles, and by the Full Circle’s “About Us” page with information about their goals and practices (Full Circle, 2018; Twelve Tribes, 2018). This is a demonstration of logical rational rhetoric, or *logos*, to support an argument which matches the Cult Information Centre’s premise of informational material. However, all three of these groups also show that *logos* is not an objective, neutral rhetorical strategy. None of the groups offer information that is

contrary to their own practices and beliefs, and only details that support their individual missions are offered. Omission, in and of itself, is a rhetorical tactic employed by these groups that ultimately allows them to be represented more favorably. The overarching goal of creating understanding, therefore, is only allowable within the confines of information each group chooses to present, not a range of opinions that might contradict their beliefs and practices.

Another key similarity between all groups being analyzed is a focus on the importance of community and how cults relate to this aspect of everyday life. In the case of the Twelve Tribes, they promote their community as separated and removed from society, a place where they build one another up and share their possessions (Twelve Tribes, 2018). This has an openly stated purpose of attempting to persuade others to join their community, even at the cost of leaving communities an individual is already a part of. Full Circle also promotes their community directly through an open invitation to readers stating the group “yearn[s] for your involvement” (Full Circle, 2018). This also is a way to connect with readers and visitors and make sure they know the community that exists within the group. In this way, both Twelve Tribes and Full Circle focus on community in the context of inviting others to join, and promoting the concept of community as favorable and good. However, the Cult Information Centre contrasts this even while still focusing on community as a concept. Instead of inviting visitors to get involved, it cautions readers to resist involvement in cult communities. Furthermore, the Centre purports that instead of creating community, cults pull you away from community. They support this through saying the joining of cult causes the “exclusion of all else” and becomes a “living bereavement” (Cult Information Centre, 2018). These examples show that all three groups highly value community and its role in an individual’s everyday life, and present it as something that should be sought after and prioritized. While Twelve Tribes and Full Circle claim that they key to

pursuing community is found through joining their groups, the Cult Information Centre says that the way to retain community is to never become involved with a cult in the first place.

Differences

While all three groups shared key similarities, there are also notable differences between the rhetorical tactics they employ. The first key difference between the groups is the tone and types of language they use to persuade their audiences. Twelve Tribes embraces the figurative tone frequent usage of metaphors provides. The vibrant imagery they use both to describe their own group and the opposing world around them is the primary way they relate to audiences rather than presenting literal facts or seeking to boost their credibility. This is most closely linked to the tactic of pathos, or emotional appeals (Herrick, 2005). An example of their use of this strategy can even be found in direct command to readers, as shown through their statement “don’t be lulled to sleep!” (Twelve Tribes, 2018). This strikes emotion in the mind of a reader; they have potential to be the victim of manipulation and involuntary loss of control, which quickly makes them want to become defensive against those who might oppose Twelve Tribes. Relating to the senses and dictating the emotions of readers is the main overarching category of rhetoric Twelve Tribes employs.

A distinct contrast from the utilization of emotional appeals is the Cult Information Centre’s implementation of logos, or the use of logical proof to make an argument (Burke, 1969). One key example of this is their usage of facts and statistics, often numerical, to bolster their argument. They describe the presence of cults in the U.K. as “Figures quoted for the UK usually indicate 500+ cults in operation here” which they describe immediately afterwards as a “problem” (Cult Information Centre, 2018). This is a clear example of how a literal fact is worked into a rhetorical argument that can support a specific viewpoint. This method of logos is

perpetuated by the question-and-answer format of the majority of the Centre's texts; they pose a question and then answer it themselves. For readers who are just beginning to learn about cults, this would increase the effectiveness of their tactics and present their argument in a manner that appears to be more objective and factual. The Cult Information Centre's arguments are not an emotional experience for a reader; rather they attempt to increase their effectiveness by presenting themselves as logical, level-headed, and a factual resource for people seeking objective information.

The primary rhetorical proof Full Circle employs is different from both Twelve Tribes and the Cult Information Centre. Instead of seeking an emotional response or attempting to persuade readers with facts and statistics, they focus on ethos, or the credibility of the group. For Full Circle, this is divided into two major categories. First, they seek to establish their goodwill and character to boost their own personal credibility (Herrick, 2005). They focus on their mission of "building up the spirit," helping others "discover [their] highest self," and an overarching goal of "creat[ing] a better world" (Full Circle, 2018). By presenting the group as pursuing these values and only having the best of intentions and reputable character, they seek to persuade others that they should unify with the group. In addition to this, they also attempt to increase their credibility through celebrities and popular organizations with their own level of credibility. Popular news channels and media outlets as well as pictures of celebrities and the founder himself known for his acting all tie together in their attempt to use ethos to persuade individuals to join their community.

In addition to primarily using different rhetorical proofs, there are subtler differences between the groups. Twelve Tribes and Full Circle are similar in their usage of pictures and welcoming websites that openly encourage visitors to contact them. The Cult Information Centre

is less appealing and is much more straightforward with their texts. Additionally, although all three groups claim they have a goal of the well-being of the reader, they promise this differently; Twelve Tribes and Full Circle claims fulfillment comes from joining their groups, while the Cult Information Centre says the only way to be safe is avoiding and leaving cults entirely. This shows how even the same topic or purported goal can have very different intentions and action strategies to accomplish their objectives.

Benefits and Limitations of Definition

After consideration of the rhetorical tactics each of these groups employ, the question still remains: what insight do their rhetorical practices give into a standard, overarching definition of what a cult is? How does anti-cult rhetoric differ from groups that repeatedly are classified as cults? Where does the ethics of rhetoric fit into the tactics of these groups? The very nature of these questions as a whole call into question the concept of definition and meaning, specifically for defining a cult and defining ethical practices used by cult and anti-cult groups. Attempting to achieve standard definitions for these terms has both benefits and limitations

Benefits. Popular culture demand simple and easily accessible definitions of terms used in a variety of spheres, including academia, mass media outlets, and even interpersonal conversations. The reason this is so attractive is because of the ability to create clarity out of a vague and unfamiliar concept, in this case what a cult truly is. If there was universal agreement on what a cult was, there would be no debate over which groups, in this case Twelve Tribes and Full Circle, fit under this category. Additionally, if ethics and ethical practices were clearly defined, there would be no question if their recruitment tactics, ceremonies, and member relationships were permissible or malicious. The Cult Information Centre would not need to rhetorically persuade readers that their claims of what cults are and that their practices are

harmful are true because there would already be widespread agreement. Arguably, if the terms cult and ethical practices were universally defined, the majority of the services organizations like the Cult Information Centre provide would not need to exist. The tactics of confusion and blurring the lines of ethics that cults employ would become less effective, and coercive power could potentially lessen.

Limitations. Although achieving a clear definition of what a cult is and what ethical practices has many positive aspects, it also has notable limitations. Within academic literature, popular media, and personal blogs and posts there is dispute about what types of groups can be classified as cults. An example of this is the claim that cults are as simple as systems of social control; they require following the leader and meeting community objectives above all else (Marzoni, 2018). Based on this definition, other major categories of popular culture, or academia in the United States as Marzoni suggests, also classify as cults. Although Marzoni extensively illustrates and provides examples for his particular argument, this leads into another resulting limitation definitions can present: the ability to make terms commonplace. If definitions become so broad and vague that almost anything can be categorized beneath them, they lose their meaning.

Additionally, definitions do not have the ability to indicate intention, or the motivation and purpose behind the usage of a term. This can apply even within a single group or organization itself, as shown by Twelve Tribes' multi-faceted usage of the metaphor of water to both promote their own practices and scare others out of popular cultural practices they routinely engage in (Twelve Tribes, 2018). Just because a term can be agreed upon and associated with a certain meaning, it can still be used subjectively with rhetorical motives. This shows that

although definitions might help create a conceptual framework, they do not take away bias and the meaning of a term can change based on time and context.

Key Findings

This study reveals findings about cult and anti-cult rhetoric that can be applied on a broader scale. Firstly, just because groups are classified under the same category, it does not mean their rhetorical strategies will be the same. A key example of this is Twelve Tribes and Full Circle, both described as cults, but who use distinctly different rhetorical strategies even though they share the same goal. Heavily shaped by religious undertones and dependent on imagery, metaphor, and emotional response, Twelve Tribes has distinct differences from the popular media-centered, corporate, celebrity-endorsed, ethos-focused methods of the Full Circle. Another key finding is that although these two groups are in the same classification as cults, this does not mean their rhetorical methods vary greatly from those of the Cult Information Centre. The key lesson to draw here is that even when the positions of groups directly oppose one another, convincing people of the truth can be pursued in the same way. Although the groups want different end results, they have the same motivation: convincing others their position is correct and using rhetoric to prove it. Another major lesson to be learned is that rhetorical strategies can often reflect the persona and character of the group implementing them. This is demonstrated through the Cult Information Center's primary use of logos as an informational center, the use of emotional appeals by Twelve Tribes as a religious, imagery-based group, and Full Circle as a celebrity-endorsed, popular culture-reflecting business. If Full Circle had employed tactics such as logos with consistent statistical facts, it would contradict the persona they have created as a group that motivates others to join.

Although identifying a singular definition is difficult, there are three major common trends from the groups studied that are integral to understanding modern-day cults. These findings are drawn from practices displayed by Twelve Tribes and Full Circle as well as by incorporating the literature of the Cult Information Centre. This is not an exhaustive list that can necessarily apply to all groups classified as cults; however, trends like these are arguably some of the first steps away from ethical practices and toward coercion and harm towards members, so understanding their patterns is important.

Firstly, cults identify themselves as superior to anything other groups or individual parties can offer. This is demonstrated by the Twelve Tribes clearly stating that they “live as closely as possible to the way humans were meant to live” and claiming that “we who are gathered together have found the way out” (Twelve Tribes, 2018). Full Circle’s implementation of this is less direct, but is still an underlying theme as demonstrated by “Full Circle is the organizational heartbeat of an emerging culture;” essentially, they claim they are literally and figuratively what keeps society around them alive (Full Circle, 2018). These claims of superiority reflect the Cult Information Centre’s statement that cults form an “elitist totalitarian society” and believe that they alone have found ultimate truth (Cult Information Centre, 2018).

Second, cults promote separation from the rest of the world. Twelve Tribe’s continued warnings against the dangers of popular culture and the evil it causes are a bold and integral part of their mission that again points back to their superiority (Twelve Tribes, 2018). Full Circle advocates for a “seismic shift” that “[ties] them together as one community” that overcomes the challenges the world presents (Full Circle, 2018). The Cult Information Centre shares data showing that cults often require their members to “leave society’s workforce” in order to promote true unification and commitment to their mission.

Third, cults engage in a constant process of recruitment. Prominently displayed on the websites of both Twelve Tribes and Full Circle are messages encouraging others to join their group, or at the very least learn more about their practices. On a single website page alone, both groups invite individuals to join them over five times, and this is not a practice with any indication that efforts will ever end (Twelve Tribes, 2018) (Full Circle, 2018). The majority of pages on their websites in some way point back to their seemingly ultimate mission: getting others to join them. An interesting trend to note, however, is that what this process involves is often left unclear. Although a welcome message is clear, what is expected from those who do choose to visit the groups is vague and ambiguous. The Cult Information Centre warns against this, describing how they use “psychological coercion to recruit, indoctrinate and retain members... and believes the ends justify the means to solicit funds and recruit people” (Cult Information Centre, 2018). Overall, these three trends present among Full Circle and Twelve Tribes and warned about by the Cult Information Centre are some key patterns that may help identify and locate a cult.

Implications

In addition to findings that can assist in the identification of cults, this study reveals significant insights into persuasive messaging as a whole. Although common trends are most clearly seen in the messages of the two cults studied, they can also be seen demonstrated by the Cult Information Centre. As a result, these findings apply to groups fully outside of this study, even those not classified as cults. Overall, three key points arise from focusing on the implications of persuasive messages: the question of indisputable fact, the power of groupthink, and the fundamental underlying need for ethical persuasion.

Indisputable Fact. One of the key questions that arises from comparing these groups is that of objectivity. Are there truly no objective facts any of these groups can agree on? Why are they so heavily polarized? The reason for this can be explained by Aristotle's depiction of natural truths as opposed to contingent knowledge. Some facts are accepted as indisputable truths, such as basic scientific and mathematical principles, but some are heavily tainted by opinion (Herrick, 2005). In the context of these three groups, what they present as fact is instead contingent knowledge where multiple sides could be taken on the issues they discuss. One of the key concepts this arises from is what the rhetorician finds virtuous or commendable, and how they choose to define their terms and shape their argument themselves (Burke, 1950). Opinion leads to action and argument, not just basic fact. Essentially, there can be a deficit of knowledge presented because of an individual or group's worldview. Twelve Tribes, Full Circle, and the Cult Information Centre all had the same motivation of presenting their truth, but their worldview, definitions, and opinions all vary, which literally shapes what an "objective fact" means to them. This polarizes them from other groups of society and drives their need to further present their claims as true. Understanding that the truth of one group is not synonymous with objective fact provides a resolution for why they continue to oppose one another and are unable to share common ground. This concept applies far outside of the three groups studied; acknowledgement that not all of the information readily available is natural and literal truth creates more engaged and informed citizens.

Groupthink. The defense of individual truth and constant opposition from other groups directly connects to the concept of groupthink. Polarization from others creates more unity within a group, which already is vulnerable to group mentality. At its core, groupthink signifies the desire for unity and harmony outweighing the pursuit of realism and truth (Janis, 1971). An

effect this has is forming ideas and opinions that are far more extreme than their original claims, and the encouragement of independent thought is eliminated (Janis, 1971). A concept that explains this is the echo chamber effect, often directly linked to social media, where people engage in communication within a closed system that provides reinforcement and agreement rather than challenging ideals (Sunstein, 2012). Groups are careful to present information only to those who support them. However, when groups with this mentality are challenged, instead of getting weaker, their beliefs actually grow even stronger and are more heavily defended (Sunstein, 2012). This shows the power of being united with a larger community, and the importance of sharing messages with diverse groups who may disagree, and then actually listening to their criticism and feedback. This reduces bias and increases well-rounded, fully developed arguments.

Ethical Persuasion. From each of these three groups, overarching lessons can be learned about ethics. Richard M. Weaver identified two key principles of ethical rhetoric (1953). He claimed firstly that arguments need to be based on sound logic combined with experience and clarity of thought. Secondly, rhetorical arguments need to push people towards good when mere facts alone cannot suffice (Weaver, 1953). This shows that if the practice of coercion is demonstrated by a cult, they are not using ethical rhetoric. Additionally, the loss of a “clear mind” that can come from group mentality and practices such as limiting food and sleep do not allow for free choice that ethical rhetoric requires. Similarly, in accordance with Weaver’s second criteria, motivation toward good rather than evil needs to be established. As a result, when questionable practices are in place that harm people psychologically, physically, emotionally, and relationally, ethical rhetoric is not being demonstrated. Ultimately, the standard for ethical rhetoric can be broken not just by cults, but by any individual, group, or organization

seeking acceptance of their argument. Balancing rhetorical strategies in the pursuit of persuasion, ensuring free choice, seeking clarity and creating well-rounded arguments motivated by good intentions are the keys to ethical rhetoric that every group, regardless of their status as a cult, must employ.

Based on the findings of this study, there needs to be an increased level of discernment and analysis when reading persuasive messaging. Actively engaged members of society are able to look for ethical messaging and not be persuaded by untrue claims, and will carefully weigh arguments before making a decision. Even becoming aware that messages presented by groups are not always literal fact and are shaped by underlying motives will protect and develop the minds of observers. For groups that do not wish to be classified as cults and are striving after ethical practices, they must utilize sound logic that seeks the good, not ill, of those they seek to persuade.

Further research on this topic could begin with interviewing and personal dialogue with these groups directly rather than just reading their texts. One of the first questions that could be asked is if they even mind the classification of a cult, if they believe their practices are truly ethical, and why they implement the tactics that they do. Interviews with people who have both left the group and are currently happy members of the group can provide more insight into debate over their practices and ethics. Additionally, studying the recruitment process of cults in person rather than just the texts they put on their own websites will create even deeper understanding. Other proposed research ideas are comparing the methods of more than one anti-cult groups that oppose cults and compare their rhetorical practices. Letting cults respond directly to the claims against them is another way to see rhetorical responses, not just initial persuasive messaging. Ultimately, the world of cults and anti-cults is extremely understudied,

and deeper examination into their rhetorical practice will provide even more insight. The development of organizational success and the support of others with sound moral arguments is a challenge that must be ethically balanced to achieve true rhetorical success.

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