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Leaving ideological social groups behind: A grounded theory of psychological disengagement

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Running head: PSYCHOLOGICAL DISENGAGEMENT

Leaving Ideological Social Groups Behind: A Grounded Theory of

Psychological Disengagement

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ABSTRACT

Much of the current disengagement literature focuses on the causes of an individual leaving a radical social group with the intention of countering fundamentalism and violent extremism. However, the link between the cause and the decision to disengage is unclear as one cause may facilitate disengagement for one member and not another. Minimal empirical research exists on the individual's psychological experience of disengagement and the studies that have been done tend to focus on sole ideologies or group types. What is lacking in the field of disengagement is a broader understanding of the core psychological experience across a broad range of ideological social group types. The current research addressed this gap by including participants from a diverse range of ideological social groups, where the criterion that defined these social groups was the member's identification. The strength of identification to the group was to be sufficiently strong so that members were willing to jeopardise their wellbeing, or that of others, for the benefit of the group's objectives.

The current research sought to further the understanding of psychological disengagement and to construct a theory drawn from the experiences of those who have left ideological social groups. In-depth interviews were conducted with 27 former members of social groups with high levels of entitativity, such as one percent motorcycle clubs, military special operations forces, cults, white supremacy, and fundamental religious or political groups. Utilising a grounded theory methodology and analysis, the discrepancy between group membership and the self-concept was identified as the core theme in the disengagement experience. The grounded theory of psychological disengagement details the process of experiencing a threat relating to the self, identifying a self-concept discrepancy and subsequent methods to reduce this discrepancy, achieving physical disengagement and developing a post-exit identity.

The findings demonstrate that participants followed a consistent pattern of moving towards membership reappraisal and disengagement. This process began with a personal threat that was related to, or derived from, the social group, and ended with the reformation of the self as a former member. The group was perceived as inconsistent with the self-concept held by the

participant in four domains; (1) competence, (2) virtue, (3) power and (4) significance. The inconsistency and the psychological identification with such a group conflicted with personally held goals and values, and threatened the participants' psychological integrity. For the participants in the current study, this self-discrepancy was resolved by employing four self-concept management strategies to restore psychological integrity; (1) the forming of an atypical identity, (2) utilising adaptive preferences (3) using justifications and rationalisations, and (4) the making of amends. These self-concept strategies, applied in isolation or in combination, contributed to participants psychologically, as well as physically, disengaging from the group as a means of restoring consistency between their self-concept and social identity. The physical disengagement led to initial feelings of relief over the decision-making process and freedom over the removal of lifestyle restrictions. These positive emotions gave way to feelings of grief over the loss of positive in-group aspects and concerns for the future. A post exit identity was adopted when the group experience was embraced and personal reflections followed a more positive approach.

Implications for policy and specific areas where members may benefit from additional support are identified. This research contributes to the current understanding of disengagement, as well as group dependency and ideological attachment from a unique perspective. Directions for future research and implementations of the findings of the current research are discussed.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i)   incorporated without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Social groups that exist on the fringes of society are often categorised as deviant, radical, and/or criminal. Political authorities often emphasise this view to enforce a moral status quo, as well as expanding power and social controls (Ferrell & Sanders, 1995; Fuglsang, 2001; Horwitz, 1990; Sanders & Lyon, 1995). The conventional view is that these groups threaten the way of life for the majority and need to be contained, if not eradicated. Within the terrorism and extremism literature, much of the focus is on how to counter these groups and reduce their ideological influence on current and future members. Much of this literature (Gunaratna, & Bin Ali, 2009; Morris, Eberhard, Rivera, & Watsula, 2010; Rabasa, Noricks, 2009; Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2010) views the member's exit from these groups as the end-point of interest as the risk posed to society by that specific individual is perceived to have been reduced.

Limiting the focus based on a risk assessment typically ignores the subjective experiences of disengagement, as well as the psycho-social costs of leaving the group and the life-long impact of membership on the individual. A greater understanding of this experience can assist in the development and evaluation of effective deradicalisation programmes and assist support services in assisting members who are in transition. The current study aimed to further the understanding of exiting such ideological groups by exploring the personal experiences of those who have left; starting from the initial change in membership satisfaction, to the establishment of a 'former member' identity

Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the current study and describes the structure of the thesis. This chapter is divided into three sections, starting with an explanation of the distinctions between deradicalisation, disengagement and psychological disengagement. This provides insight into current perspectives of exiting from social groups and clarifies where the current study contributes to the field of disengagement and deradicalisation. Section two outlines the current study, including the research question and its significance. This

section discusses the research statement, which defines the aims and scope of the study. Finally, a thesis overview is provided with a brief summary of each of the following chapters.

Deradicalisation, Disengagement and Physical Disengagement

While deradicalisation and disengagement are terms often used interchangeably in the literature to explain the experience of exiting from extreme groups, they refer to different social and psychological processes. Deradicalisation requires the individual to experience a cognitive shift where the group's ideology and/or method is no longer viewed favourably, and the likelihood of engaging in ideologically motivated aggression is reduced significantly (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Horgan & Braddock, 2010). The cognitive shift initiating the deradicalisation process is often prompted by an experience of trauma, which causes the individual to challenge the group's ideology (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009). Characteristically, the traumatic event is sudden, unexpected as well as uncontrollable, and ranges from private events (for example, illness or victimisation) to mass events (such as war and natural disasters). This event can overwhelm the individual and threaten their ontological security (the security of the self-derived from continuity of experiences) or those they care for (Garfinkel, 2007). The traumatic event challenges the established world view and causes the individual to become increasingly receptive to alternative views. These cognitive and emotional openings provide a valuable opportunity for intervention through engaging with the disillusioned individual and providing persuasive alternatives. This intervention is often referred to by academics and government organisations as 'rehabilitation', 'resocialisation', or 'dialogue' (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009), and it is this cognitive change of belief systems that characterises deradicalisation.

Unlike deradicalisation, disengagement does not require a change in ideological perspective, instead it refers to behavioural changes; such as leaving a group completely or changing roles to minimise involvement in violent acts (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Bovenkerk, 2011; Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Johnston, 2009; The International Center for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), 2010). Disengagement can

occur without deradicalisation as individuals may physically disengage while still maintaining the group's values, and vice versa, individuals can remain within a social group while rejecting ideological aspects. However, the processes are often complementary and serve to initiate or strengthen each other – with disengagement linked to the moderation of extreme beliefs (Demant, Slootman, Buijs, & Tillie, 2008a, 2008b). While there is support for the weakening of ideological attachment in disengagement (Wright, 1987), there are exceptions such as Reinares (2011) study of individual disengagement from the Basque ethno-nationalist terrorist organisation ETA. Based on 35 interviews with former ETA members, Reinares revealed that members may leave after evaluating the viability of the organisation and the use of violence, but without rejecting the use of violence or terrorism in principle. As such, the assumption that disengagement reflects cognitive changes in values, attitudes and shared norms also needs to consider the alternative – an individual still harbours the group's beliefs but has replaced the group normative behaviours with other socially relevant behaviours (Horgan, 2008).

The current study aimed to explore the personal experiences of disengagement from ideological social groups. This goes beyond the behavioural change and observable stages as discussed in the current disengagement literature to also include the cognitive element of disidentification with the social group. What the current study adds to the disengagement and deradicalisation literature is the link between the physical disengagement and deradicalisation: the attachment to the group and ideology in relation to the decision making process which is inherent to the physical disengagement experience is explored. As such, the current study used the term "psychological disengagement" to describe the experience of constructing an alternative identity away from the group and use "physical disengagement" to refer to the physical withdrawal or exit from the social group.

The Current Study

The current study constructed a substantive grounded theory that describes and explains the individual experience of psychological

disengagement from ideological social groups. The research question guiding the current study was: "What is the individual experience of psychological disengagement from ideological social groups with high entitativity?" Entitativity represents distinctive social groups that share a common identity, goals, as well as clearly defined behavioural and social norms (greater discussion on the theoretical aspects of entitativity is further discussed in chapter 2).

For the current study to have relevance in the field of countering extremism and social psychology there needed to be a clearly defined participant sample that reflects the goals of the study. While many social groups include ideologies and entitativity, the following research statement serves to define the groups that were to be included and excluded from the current study:

> The *self-concept* derived from membership within a social group with
> high *entitativity* and strict adherence to *ideological* aspects becomes
> intrinsic to the self to the extent that members would jeopardise their
> *security*, or the security of others, to protect and enhance group
> status.

This research statement emphasises individual commitment to the group and defines the social groups from a psychological perspective. This psychological approach intends to avoid terminology that is pejorative and theoretically ambiguous, such as radical, extremist or criminal. While this terminology is used during the literature review to remain consistent with the authors' perspectives, the current study focused on the psychological aspects that define group identification rather than their social position. The intention was not to alienate or focus on dismantling these groups, but to increase awareness and understanding of the experience and issues associated with disengagement. From this perspective, groups of varying organisational and ideological foundations were included if membership was intrinsic to the self-concept to the extent of jeopardising security.

The current study explored the experience of psychological disengagement from a variety of ideological social groups; including one percent motorcycle clubs, military special operations forces, cults, fundamental religious and political groups, as well as white supremacists.

The current study utilised a qualitative methodology, which drew on retrospection from participants who have personally experienced disengagement. Grounded theory methodology was employed in the current study as little empirical knowledge exists on the psychological experiences of disengagement from diverse social groups, and it facilitated the construction of an overall 'theory of psychological disengagement'.

Significance

The current study is significant because it provides insight into an area that is under researched and has the potential to impact the psychological wellbeing of ideological social group members. The findings contribute to the body of knowledge and make recommendations in both the psychology and security domains about the process of disengagement and the impact on the disengaging member, with implications for law enforcement and support services.

The current study is also unique in relation to previous disengagement studies in the following ways:

1. It combined the experiences of disengagement from various ideological groups rather than focusing on one group. This allows the theory to be transferable across a variety of ideologies and group structures.

2. It drew on the experiences of individuals from stigmatised groups (one percent motorcycle clubs, cults, fundamentalist groups and white supremacists) as well as from the socially accepted military special operations forces. This prevented the research from taking an antagonistic approach that focuses on dismantling groups that are stigmatised within mainstream society.

3. It explored the psychological experience of the individual beyond the current understanding of contextual factors such as the causes for disengagement or the descriptive analysis of the stages of disengagement. While these are incorporated into the model, the current study provides greater depth of the psychological aspects of the disengagement experience.

The grounded theory of psychological disengagement that emerged from the data describes and explains how, and why, participants disengaged. This has the potential to predict and/or facilitate disengagement in the experiences of others. Additionally, the theory may be useful to assess the effectiveness of disengagement and deradicalisation programmes currently in operation. For example; could the EXIT programmes applied to right-wing youth gangs in Scandinavia be applied to groups with differing organisational structures and beliefs. Also, there are implications for the use of theological debates within deradicalisation programmes. Furthermore, the findings provide a foundation for further research into understudied social groups of increasing public interest, such as those related to international violence and criminality.

<div align="center">**Thesis Outline (Chapters 2-12)**</div>

Chapter 2 – The Importance of Social Groups to Members

The following chapter describes the characteristics of the social groups included in the current study. This includes discussion of the significance of social group identification to the self-concept, as well as the role of ideology and group entitativity in establishing a secure sense of self. While the current study, in general, focused on disengagement from the social group, the second chapter takes case with the establishment and significance of ideological social groups to members' identity. Understanding the significance of group membership allows a greater appreciation of the complexities of leaving.

Chapter 3 – Disengagement Literature Review

Chapter three presents a review of the current disengagement literature. This body of literature focuses on the exit from extremism and terrorism; however, seminal works on religious fundamentalism and role exits are also considered in the review. While grounded theory methodology does not insist on a literature review prior to undertaking research, the literature review was conducted in accord with the requirements of a PhD as well as the preceding research proposal, and to establish what is currently known in the field of disengagement. While some of the literature review was

conducted prior to data collection and analysis, the rate of growth of literature in the field of countering violent extremism meant additional studies were taken into account after data collection. A constraint of the existing literature is the lack of primary data or research based studies as most sources provide descriptive reviews, or rely on the findings of previous studies; such as government of NGO reports.

The chapter establishes disengagement as a significant personal event; thus, establishing the case for exploring the individual psychological aspects. The review then discusses the processes and various stages of disengagement presented in the literature. The majority of literature available focuses on the potential causes for disengagement, wherein the classification systems of these causes are discussed. While there is ample research on the possible causes for disengagement, there is little explanatory power in determining which causes are influential for individual members. Additionally, barriers to disengagement and variables that can influence individual experiences are explored. The chapter concludes with a rationale for the current study, which highlights gaps in the current understanding of the disengagement experience.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

Chapter four describes and explains the grounded theory methodology used in the current study. The chapter begins with a discussion on the philosophical foundations of the study, emphasising a social constructionism epistemology and interpretative phenomenological theoretical perspective. The grounded theory methodology is described and then placed in the context of the current study. Finally, the research process is explained with detailed descriptions of participant recruitment methods as well as the characteristics of the sample employed; data collection and analysis; ethical considerations and the means of ensuring rigour.

Chapter 5 – A Grounded Theory of Psychological Disengagement

An overview and schematic model of the grounded theory of disengagement is presented in chapter five. The theory proposes that members of ideological social groups were exposed to a negative group-related trigger that threatens self-integrity and led members to engage self-

verification. This self-verification increased awareness of an existing discrepancy between the self and the group, which caused psychological distress. Motivated to reduce this distress, members used various psychological strategies that reshaped the self-concept in a way that reduced the salience of the group identity. These strategies encouraged the disidentification with the group and led members to seek alternatives, as well as physically disengage. After physically disengaging, the former member entered a period of relief and a sense of freedom before experiencing grief over their former involvement and loss of group-related benefits. The formation of the ex-identity, which represented an acceptance between the past and present self, helped ex members move forward. The individual experience of psychological disengagement varied in duration, preparedness, social networks, organisational involvement and ideological transformation.

Chapter 6 – Causal Factors

Chapter six describes and discusses the events that triggered the reappraisal of the group identity in relation to the self-concept and the awareness of the discrepancies between the two. Within the findings, two categories of threats were identified; intra-group and extra-group. The psychological processes initiated by the experience of these threats were similar as they both led to physically disengaging from the group; however, the extent of psychological disengagement varied depending on the type of threat. Those who experienced an intra-group threat (such as failed relationships, role conflict, failure in leadership and/or changing group dynamics) psychologically disengaged. Those who did not experience intra-group threat (2 of the 27 participants), but physically disengaged due to an extra-group threat (such as police pressure or family commitments), did not psychologically disengage and maintained positive attachment to their social group.

Chapter 7 – Core Psychological Experience

The core experience shared across participants psychologically, which was the distress over the discrepancy between the self and group membership, is described and explained in chapter seven. The chapter

begins by discussing the role of self-verification in validating the participants' self-concept and position within group relationships. The self-verification relied on social feedback, self-evaluation and the seeking of alternative information, which strengthened this incongruence.

This chapter then discusses the self-concept discrepancy with an emphasis on the types of discrepancies relevant to the participants (competence, significance, power and virtue). These incongruences resulted in psychological distress to the participants. Some participants described this experience as a physiological stress response while others described negative emotional responses. The participants' experiences of self-discrepancies are described and the impact of this experience on participants' certainty in their beliefs is explained.

Chapter 8 – Management of the Self-concept

Chapter eight describes and explains the management strategies employed by participants as a means to restoring self-integrity and psychological consistency. Four strategies were identified in the participants' experiences; (1) forming an atypical identity, (2) the use of adaptive preferences, (3) the use of justifications and rationalisations, and (4) making amends. These strategies reduced the personal identification with the social group and provided support for the disengagement process.

Following this is an explanation of how self-concept management strategies influenced participants' commitment to their social group and further reduced psychological dependency. This discrepancy, combined with the reduced psychological attachment to the group, reached a tipping point where participants could no longer manage the psychological distress associated with maintaining group membership and physically disengaged.

Chapter 9 – Physical Disengagement

In this chapter the participants' experiences of physically disengaging are discussed. The physical disengagement represented participants' exit from the group and termination of membership. There were three approaches participants used to end their membership; (1) fading away from the group, (2) a confrontational exit, and (3) covert exit. The exits varied based on participants' position within the group, the group's willingness to

allow their members to disengage, the fears associated with the rejection of the group and the desire to make their disillusionment known to other members.

Chapter 10 – Post Exit

Chapter 10 describes the participants' experiences after physically leaving their group, and hence, becoming a former member. The shared theme in the post exit experience was the initial feelings of relief and freedom immediately after the physical disengagement. The positive response was followed by grief which was described by the participants in two forms; those that were psycho-emotional (examples included the sense of longing, anxiety, shame and guilt, or resentment) and behavioural reactions. Behaviours included preoccupation with the group, avoidance of experiences, thoughts, and activities that may trigger distress and the replication of positive group elements. These behavioural reactions were used by participants to manage the psycho-emotional experiences of grief.

The chapter then discusses the formation of the ex-identity. These reflections included either a positive and/or negative outlook on their past involvement, considerations of the significance of the disengagement experience and the establishment of new identity. Participants transitioned into the ex-identity when the experience was accepted as a significant event that shaped their current identity and personal reflections took a more positive approach. The strength of feelings described during their grief period had greatly reduced.

Chapter 11 - Individual Differences in the Disengagement Experience

Following the detailed explanation of the grounded theory of psychological disengagement, given in chapters 6 to 10, chapter 11 describes and explains the characteristics that influenced the individual experiences. These variations included the duration of the disengagement process, the level of the group's participation in assisting, or counteracting, participants' physical disengagement, individual preparation for the exit, the effects of external social networks and the extent of ideological transformations. These characteristics are discussed in relation to their impact on the disengagement experience and how each characteristic may

enhance or hinder the disengagement process. While these differences influenced the individual experience, they did not detract from the proposed model of disengagement.

Chapter 12 – General Discussion and Conclusions

Chapter 12 concludes the thesis. It provides a summary of the current study's findings as well as the contributions to the knowledge of disengagement. Implications of the findings for policy and practice are then discussed. After discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the current study, recommendations and suggestions for future research are made.

Chapter Summary

This chapter established the case for the qualitative in-depth exploration of the psychological disengagement from ideological social groups with high entitativity. Distinguishing between deradicalisation and disengagement highlighted an apparent lack of understanding in relating these two processes. This suggests the need for greater understanding of psychological disengagement, which not only incorporates the physical exit from the group but also includes the psychological aspects of disidentification. Following this, the focus, significance, and uniqueness of the current study within the field of disengagement were introduced as well as emphasised. Psychological disengagement is a complex phenomenon that has been under-studied, particularly in reference to the social groups explored in the current study. Finally, the chapter presented the structure of this thesis with an overview of its chapters.

The following chapter describes the characteristics of the social groups included in the current study. The chapter discusses the psychological aspects of social group identification, as well as the significance of ideological and entitativity groups on the self-concept of members. The chapter emphasises the importance of such social groups in the individual member's identity, which makes disengagement a complex and significant life event.

CHAPTER 2: THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL GROUPS TO MEMBERS

Chapter Overview

The previous chapter provided an introduction to the research area and an overview of the current study. This chapter discusses the theoretical aspects of group identification starting with the internalisation of group membership into the self-concept through social identification. The current study focuses on the psychological aspects that define group identification rather than the group's social position. Given the trend in security research to focus on how to disrupt membership in 'potentially dangerous' groups, the psychological context for the current study makes the disengagement experience from less marginalised groups relevant. The purpose of the current study was not to portray these groups as security threats, but to understand the personal experiences of disengagement. From this perspective, groups of varying organisational and ideological foundations, such as the one percent motorcycle club member or a military special operations forces soldier, can be included and experiences can be explored from a variety of perspectives.

The following section discusses the features of entitative social groups and how the characteristics of close proximity, similarity, shared fate and goals, as well as leadership structure increase adherence to the group's social norms and ideology. Next, the chapter discusses the significance of ideology to individuals' self-esteem and personal security. The final section of the chapter stresses that the social identity achieved through attachment to a group and its ideology can lead to personal sacrifices by individual members, the potential for demonising others and inter-group conflict. This chapter aims to provide a psychological explanation of the individual within the group as well as emphasise the personal significance group membership has for the self-concept.

Social Group Identification

To understand the experiences of disengagement, consideration must be given to the reasons why an individual identifies so strongly with their social group. The following section provides a theoretical understanding of

identification with social groups with the intent of demonstrating group dynamics in highly entitative and ideological social groups as psychologically meaningful to individual members. By drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the following section explains how people define themselves in relation to their social groups and provides an appreciation for the significance of intergroup relationships

The decision to employ a social psychological approach to the current study was particularly appropriate due to the inability to form a psychological profile of individual members across various groups; as well as the recognition in extremism and terrorism research that no adequate personality profile exists (Victoroff, 2005). Kruglanski and Fishman's (2009) review of individual, group and organisational factors in terrorism found empirical studies on the Basque ETA, the Italian Red Army Brigades, the German Red Army Faction and various Palestinian groups shared no consistent personality profiles. Additionally, Silke (2003) noted terrorists did not suffer from psychopathological issues, nor shared personality characteristics, but were influenced by external factors.

As such, the current study does not emphasise the following to explain the identification with groups that may be perceived as differing from the norm:

1. theories of personality types;
2. individual-level psychological processes directly resulting in fundamental group identification as a consequence of some single variable;
3. causality by a specific factor or state (for example; status frustration, low self-esteem, and/or positive or negative mood); or inherent flaws in an individual's cognitions, motivations or emotions (for example, the supposed over-simplification and over-generalisation of stereotyping).

Attempts at developing profiles and causality have not produced consistent results, and as such, the current study approached group membership as a rational and functional psychological reaction to the realities of social life.

Social Identity Theory and the Identification with Social Groups

Hogg, Sherman, Dierselhuis, Maitner, and Moffitt (2007) define social groups as three or more people who share the same social identity, and through group identification and interaction experience a sense of belonging. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains group membership and intergroup relations based on self-categorisation, social comparison and the construction of the self-concept in terms of in-group defining properties (Boros, 2008; Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued groups provide people with a source of pride and self-esteem, as well as a social identity that provides a sense of belonging in the world. This sense of belonging and need for respect can only be satisfied by other people, and as such, is dependent on a person's social environment (Maslow, 1999).

Vold's group conflict theory argues that conflict between groups is an essential social process as groups struggle to maintain, or improve, their own status in relation to those in which they interact (Vold, Bernard, & Snipes,1998). Similarly, social identity theory proposes that members attempt to maintain, or enhance, their self-image, by elevating the status of their group while maintaining prejudicial beliefs towards out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This leads to the exaggerated differences between groups, increased perceived homogeneity in the members of the out-group, stereotyping and attribution biases. Tajfel and Turner (1979) state people develop an 'us and them' perspective as a consequence of this social categorisation, which can lead to antagonism between groups.

At the basic level, the social identity of a person refers to the aspect of the self-concept that is derived from membership within personally significant social groups, which includes the internalisation of group characteristics (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Onorato & Turner, 2004; Sharma & Sharma, 2010). The self-concept is the mental representation that organises an individual's perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of his or herself as an object (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Reed II, 2002). The three main aspects of the self are reflexive consciousness (awareness of own thoughts and feelings); interpersonal being (relating to social interactions); and executive function

(self-efficacy through decision making and behaviour; Baumeister & Bushman, 2011).

The awareness of, and identification with, different social groups regulates social behaviours and membership provides individuals with a meaning for who he or she is (Stets & Burke, 2000; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). As such, social identity theory emphasises one's identification with a particular social group as meaningful to the self and establishes a representation of the self-concept in accordance with group identity. This is relevant to the current study as it is the experience of transforming the social identity as part of the self-concept, which is expected to occur during psychological disengagement.

Self and social-categorisation.

Identifying with social groups is normal human behaviour as the individual's social identity is forged by the knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category, or group of individuals, who identify themselves as members of the same social category (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Stets & Burke, 2000; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). Others belonging to the same social group and displaying similar characteristics become the in-group, while those who differ in characteristics central to the collective identity are categorised as the out-group. By distinguishing between those who form the in-group and those outside the social group, the individual engages in self-categorisation and social comparison (Stets & Burke, 2000; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

Self-categorisation involves recognising group prototypes that define how people will, and ought to, behave as well as interact with each other (Turner et al., 1987). By identifying with the group, the member's self-concept incorporates the associated value connotations and emotional significance derived from membership (Brannan, Esler, & Anders Strindberg, 2001; Turner, 1999). Brannan et al.'s study found the manipulation of participants' identity influenced their perspectives to national stereotypes. Participants who were in a salient social identity category displayed an increase in favourable views of the in-group as well as shared group stereotypes that influenced judgements and perspectives. The emphasis of

social categorisation was shown to influence attachment and the need for a positive perspective towards the in-group.

　　　The identity achieved through categorisation into social groups and roles is not fixed, but is subject to shifts back and forth between individual and varying social identities. In certain contexts one identity may be more salient and, hence, more readily activated than others (Kinnvall, 2004). When a certain social identity becomes salient there is an increase in commitment leading to that identity's domination over other aspects of the person's life (Stets & Burke, 2000). In the current study, the social groups of interest promoted a salient identity where group norms has to take precedence in their members' lives and has taken priority over other areas such as employment, social obligations and family.

　　　The categorisation of the self and others allows the individual to become part of, and belong to, the 'in-group'. Identifying with the in-group enforces group norms and encourages conformity in cognitive processes such as perceptions, inferences, feelings, behaviour and interpersonal interactions (Erikson, 1962; Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999; Hogg et al., 2007). The constant criticism of specific behaviours can instil habitual pattern of decision making and the repeated disapproval of behaviours deviating from group standards further strengthens behavioural controls and reaffirms cultural norms (Erikson, 1962). Thus, rather than acting as unique individuals, members act in accordance with the social and collective stereotypes which they perceive to be representative of their social group (Hogg & Turner, 1987; Turner et al., 1987).

　　　The notion central to social identity theory is that social comparisons between groups relevant to one's social identity produce pressures for intergroup differentiation with the objective of enhancing self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It argues individuals are motivated to self-categorise and evaluate themselves and their group favourably; subsequently, the superiority to comparison groups provides a positive distinctiveness from out-groups and informs the self-concept (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Kinnvall, 2004; Schmitt, Branscombe, Silvia, Garcia, & Spears, 2006; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The emphasis on similarities and differences between groups occur for all the attitudes,

beliefs and values, focal concerns, behavioural norms and stylistic properties correlated with the in-group (Hewstone 1990; Pettigrew, 1979; Stets & Burke, 2000). From this, attribution biases are made regarding the out-groups behaviour; consistent with ultimate attribution error (Pettigrew, 1979), the tendency is to make dispositional attributions to negative out-group behaviours. Self-esteem is enhanced when the individual evaluates the characteristics of the in-group in a positive manner while judging the out-group negatively; therefore, the social comparison between groups and the accentuation of in-group similarities and differences between members and outsiders result in positive outcomes for the individual (Hogg, 2005).

Social identity theory proposes the perceived differentiation of in and out-groups is a result of categorisation, fostering an 'us and them' mentality, that may lead to negative attitudes and animosity towards the 'other' (Griffiths & Nesdale, 2006; Onorato & Turner, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Pratkanis, Probasco, & Leve, 1992), as well as enhancing self-esteem through in-group favouritism (Houston & Andreopoulou, 2003). This can be seen, for example, through the self-made distinction of civilians and soldiers, Hells Angels M.C. and Bandidos M.C., as well as believers and non-believers.

In-group identification and intergroup discrimination occur to a greater extent when categorisation transpires during times of uncertainty – irrespective of how the uncertainty is caused. Hogg, Meehan, and Farquharson's (2010) study explored the relationship between uncertainty in a person's self-concept and radicalism. Hogg et al. manipulated university students' self-uncertainty and provided exposure to moderate or radical student advocacy groups via a video. The findings indicated that participants initially identified more strongly with the moderate group; however, when exposed to high self-uncertainty there was a significant increase in identification with the radical group. Studies (Grieve & Hogg, 1999; Hogg, 2000; Hogg et al., 2007) that explored uncertainty reduction through (1) inducing uncertainty, (2) manipulating the strength of categorisation, and (3) manipulating in-group properties, found self-reported group identification and intergroup discrimination increased when people were manipulated into uncertainty. Group identification and intergroup discrimination were

considered strongest when the focus of uncertainty was related to the social self; that is, uncertainty relating to the individual's social world and their place in it (Hogg, 2000; Hogg et al., 2007). The groups of interest to the current study were exposed to violent conflict, or perceived oppression through social policies, which can facilitate greater uncertainty and reinforce group identification.

While self-categorisation is important to the psyche, the extreme of self-categorisation can lead to ethnocentric attitudes and the dehumanisation of the 'other' (Bizumic, & Duckitt, 2012; Perreault, & Bourhis, 1999). This involves perceiving the out-group(s) as insignificant and culturally inferior, as well as less deserving of basic human rights, which can justify the use of violence (Stagner, 1977). The superiority of the in-group is a key feature of the social groups explored in the current study, and the out-group can be specific sub-groups or society as a whole. The one percent motorcycle clubs provide an example of conflict between sub-groups. For example, the conflict between the Comancheros and Bandidos motorcycle clubs culminated in the 1984 Milperra massacre, and the rivalry between the Finks (who have now merged with the United States based Mongols M.C.) and the Coffin Cheaters motorcycle club over the defection, and subsequent recruitment, of former Sergeant-At-Arms Troy Mercanti (Cox, 2011; Stephenson, 2007). Other groups have much broader distinctions; for example, religious groups that impose restrictions on interactions with non-believers.

Through the lack of recognition of their individuality, members engage in the depersonalisation and deindividuation of the self and come to think of themselves in terms of group values and expectations (Cliff, 2006). Theories of deindividuation argue the psychological state of reduced self-evaluation and decreased evaluation apprehension are related to anti-normative and disinhibited behaviours (Postmes & Spears, 1998). As the social group's identity becomes the salient identity for the individual, the group provides the necessary justification for actions without felt responsibility by the individual (Post, Sprinzak, & Denny, 2003). Therefore, if the group presents violent or alienating action as required and justified, then the individual will embrace this view; guilt or remorse are not experienced by the individual if the social group does or endorse such emotions.

Bandura's (1990) discussion of moral disengagement in terrorism and support for lethal means by the military proposed that the collective approach to violent acts diffuses the sense of responsibility for attacks. McAlister, Bandura, and Owen (2006) assert support for military intervention was bolstered when individual responsibility was diffused when the blame was ascribed to other members, through the act of simply following orders, or the distortion of the cause and effect relationship. In support of this, Cliff's (2006) thesis on disinhibition and terrorism argues under conditions where the member is not individuated within the group, there is likelihood for a reduction of inner constraints against certain behaviours and the amplification of overt expressions of group values and attitudes.

The social groups explored in the current study consider themselves distinct from mainstream society with clear boundaries. The group's cohesiveness, and the deindividuation of the self and others, can lead to the viewing of those in the out-group as prototypes that reflect their group membership rather than individuals (Stahelski, 2004). Sidanius and Pratto's (1999) book on social hierarchies argued that individuals who are sensitive to group boundaries and intergroup differences are more likely to discriminate in order to achieve or maintain group superiority. The distinction between the in-group and out-group allows for negative stereotyping, ethnocentrism and dehumanisation of out-group members. Ethnocentrism is described as holding an attitude of one's own cultural background as superior when compared to others' unfamiliar cultural characteristics, which are assumed to be immoral and inferior (LeVine & Campbell, 1972). As positive characteristics are attributed to the in-group (and those in the out-group are attributed with negative characteristics), ethnocentrism can have a positive effect on in-group identity and self-esteem (Tajfel, 1978). It should be noted that not all social groups engage in the differentiation and denigration of out-groups; however, the social groups of interest to the current study do emphasise the distinctiveness between the in-group and out-groups.

The in-group and out-group distinctions increase the cohesiveness between group members by encouraging the disinhibition of personal attitudes through conformity (Cliff, 2006). The assimilation of individuals' identities within groups enables the concept of 'group think', which tends to

be demonstrated to its extreme is socially cohesive societies (Tsintsadze-Maass & Maass, 2014). Indicators of group think include excessive risk taking and optimism, the assumption the group is of high moral character and invulnerable, illusions of unanimity, stereotyping, as well as the lack of tolerance for those in the out-group and those questioning the group's ideology (Cliff, 2006; Janis, 1982; Post, 1990). As a result of group think, groups are more susceptible to flawed decision making symptoms such as incomplete analysis of alternatives and the consequences of the preferred solution, as well as the selective bias in processing (Janis, 1982; Turner et al., 1992).

Within the current study, the self-categorisation is a primary factor in the social groups to be explored. Social groups emphasising the in and out-group distinctions and engaging ethnocentrism were researched due to the complex nature of the self-identity and their perceived threat to security and individual safety. While not all of the social groups included in the current study engage in direct violent confrontation with 'out-groups', they do share self-imposed social distancing from mainstream community, distinctiveness through group membership and displays of rigid ideological attachment. Participants included in the study self-identified themselves as members of these groups and expressed these qualities when asked to describe their group as well as their involvement.

Entitativity

Social groups with fundamental ideologies and expressions of high levels of entitativity provide members with a strengthened sense of identity and shared purpose. Entitativity is the degree to which members of a group are perceived as a single coherent social group (Hogg, 2005). The concept of entitativity, as proposed by Campbell (1958), was based on the Gestalt principles of proximity, similarity, organisation, and common fate. As such, social groups are considered to be highly entitative when the following characteristics are observed; internal homogeneity and behavioural consistency, frequent as well as intense interaction between members, significance of membership, clear internal structure, and shared fate and goals (Brewer, 1999; Hamilton, Sherman, & Rogers, 2004; Haslam,

Rothschild, & Ernst, 2004; Hogg, 2005; Spencer-Rodgers, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2007; Yzerbyt, Rogier, & Fiske, 1998). These facets increase in-group cohesiveness and resistance towards external threats, and research has shown the perception of a social group's entitativity is important in the processing of group-related information, causal attributions and evaluative judgements (Brewer, Weber, & Carini, 1995; Dasgupta, Banaji, & Abelson, 1999; Hamilton et al., 2004; Lickel et al., 2000; McConnell, Sherman, & Hamilton, 1997; Yzerbyt, Corneille, & Estrada, 2001; Yzerbyt et al., 1998). The following sections explain the individual principles in entitativity and how they serve to create a social group that influences individual members' perceptions and behaviour.

Proximity.

The principle of proximity reflects the social distance between individuals, which is the degree of relationships between two individuals or groups (Laumann, 1973; Shepard, 1962). People tend to gravitate towards others who are close to them in social space and likeness, helping to reinforce the sense of belonging within an in-group, and externally, can be observed as close together – both psychologically and in metric distance (Campbell, 1958). The social distance conceptualised by Bogardus (1933; Wark & Galliher, 2007) is measured in terms of social interaction, small social distance is characterised by interactions such as friendships and marriage, as opposed to interactions as co-workers, neighbours or acquaintances, or the attitudes held towards groups one is not associated with. Conformity to group norms is a method of reducing social distance as one does not want to be better or worse than others, but instead wants to be as much like them as possible to facilitate a reciprocal friendship and validate a sense of belonging (Akerlof, 1997).

Similarity.

The principle of similarity, or homogeneity, is a perceptual grouping of common attributes. Specifically, a group is perceived as highly entitative if many of its members display the same dynamic characteristics in terms of physical, emotional, cultural, or societal attributes, and groups with different

dynamic characteristics are segregated from each other (Read, Vanman, & Miller, 1997). The social groups can promote particular behaviours considered by their mainstream community as norm-violating and adopt a symbolic style in opposition to the dominant cultural ideal (Ferrell & Sanders, 1995; Miller, 1995). The symbols and artefacts are used for the presentation of self in terms of mood, attitude and identity, group membership and cultural relationships (Miller, 1995). Publicly displayed characteristics, such as language, appearance (fashion, hair styles, posture), music, automobiles and the like, are identified by Ferrell (1995) as the sub-cultural style grounded in the everyday practices of social life that shape the personal and group identity. Adopting a shared style, the group initiates a form of self and social categorisation (Ferrell, 1995). The shared style provides a message to both other members and outsiders of membership and belonging (Ferrell & Sanders, 1995). The significance of this style is the impact it has on intergroup interactions. When the individual's style draws responses from others, this individual will respond to their reactions; thus, creating a feedback loop that reinforces and reconstructs the meanings associated with interaction and identity for both the individual and the community (Ferrell, 1995). These characteristics are shared among groups and between people, developing meaning and cultural significance through collective behaviours (Ferrell, 1995).

The social structures within a group produce defined boundaries in which members share the same ideas of acceptable behaviours and experiences (Erikson, 1962). In-group homogeneity is stronger when there are no motivational forces existing to distinguish the self from others within the group, thus the process of deindividuation by the individual members serves to increase the perception of homogeneity and entitativity (Brewer, 1993; Simon, Pantaleo, & Mummendey, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000). It is the consistency of, and conformity to, these behaviours that shape the perception of similarity. However, if these qualities are seen as typical but with obvious individual differences in the manifestation of these traits, the perception of similarity and entitativity will be lower.

Shared fate/goals.

Common fate and goals, as components of entitativity, are defined by the successive observation of the elements, or individuals, moving together in the same direction (Campbell, 1958). This commonality in outcomes or fate can include battles against outsiders; whereby winning or losing can unite the group through the experience (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009). Victories provide members with shared pride, and losses can produced a shared hatred and bitterness against the common enemy. Having a common group goal, or sharing a threat, is a significant variable influencing group processes and effectiveness by enhancing intra-group solidarity and reducing the likelihood of internal factions occurring (Brewer, 1999).

Often related to the shared danger and common fate, members of highly entitative groups recognise other members as 'family' and willingly engage in acts of loyalty for each other (Cliff, 2006). This can be observed through the descriptions of military units as a band of brothers, the one percent motorcycle club brotherhood, and religious sects that refer to the group as a family with the leaders adopting a pseudo-parental relationship. Perceived threats to the in-group's interests and survival can increase the group's cohesiveness, which can lead to a lack of empathy and increased animus to out-groups. The cohesiveness, which can be increased by victories, and in some cases defeats, is a strong impediment to disengagement (Demant, Wagenaar, & van Donselaar, 2009).

Leadership structure.

Varying entitativity can be observed in any collective of individuals, ranging from those waiting in a line for concert tickets to a tight, coherent, and distinctive entity such as a cult group (Hogg, 2005). One of the fundamental assumptions of Gestalt psychology is that the whole of the perception is greater than the sum of its parts; that is, the structure and organisation of the group components is critical to how a group is perceived as a homogenous entity (Read et al., 1997). Groups that are thought of as a whole rather than a collection of individual members are perceived as highly entitative. One of the main differences between highly entitative social

groups and other collectives is the level of organisation and group structure. In some social groups there is a recognisable hierarchy and leadership structure, with various roles assumed within the hierarchy and clear division of tasks and responsibilities, and other groups possess an informal and somewhat implicit power base (Demant et al., 2008a; Victoroff, 2005).

For example, one percent motorcycle clubs have a consistent leadership hierarchy that spreads down from the national, region or state, and local tiers. Local and regional authorities are given a degree of autonomy, but can be overruled by decisions made at the national level. Individual clubs also present hierarchical structures (Dulaney, 2007; Grascia, 2004; Hill, 1980; Quinn & Koch, 2003; Scaramella, Brenzinger, & Miller, 1997; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2002, September). The President has absolute power over day-to-day chapter operations and is responsible for following orders from the national leadership. The Vice-President fully supports the President's decisions and takes authority in his absence. The Secretary attends to financial and organisational tasks of the chapter, as well as recording the minutes of club meetings and making any necessary drafts or changes to club by-laws. The Treasurer has the role of ensuring the chapter is financially viable and that there are sufficient funds to pay for members' bond releases. The Sergeant-at-Arms is responsible for maintaining the discipline within the chapter and at group events. In some clubs, the Sergeant-at-Arms is also responsible for obtaining weapons during times of warfare. Road Captains have the responsibility of organising runs for the chapter. Challenges to the leadership is reported differently within the literature with Quinn and Forsyth (2011) stating M.C.'s can be democratic, while law enforcement literature (Grascia, 2004; Scaramella et al., 1997) describe challenges by lower ranked members as resulting in extreme violence.

Victoroff's (2005) review of the literature on psychological factors in terrorism also found terrorist groups displayed leadership hierarchies. Victoroff identified three leadership typologies present within the terrorism literature;

1) the self-imagined idealist leader commits him or herself to a life reflecting the moral ideology;

2) the self-imagined messianic leader regards him or herself as destined to lead the strategic battle; however those leaders that promote violence against all out-groups may be motivated by ethnic or religious hostility rather than idealistic or messianic aspirations; and

3) the entrepreneurial leader can be driven by the same motivations as the other leaders; however, is primarily motivated by shallow and materialistic objectives.

Regardless of leadership type, the leaders are perceived by members as ethically and morally consistent with the group's goals and aims. However, perceived behavioural inconsistencies and the inability to maintain an exemplary role can cause dissonance and increase the likelihood of defection in lower ranking members.

Section summary.

Entitative social groups with strong ideological premises are more likely to encourage a salient group identity in a member that influences other self-aspects due to the level of affective commitment required and the imposed social norms. These groups emphasise their distinctiveness and impose boundaries between themselves and the mainstream, which enhance the strong connections between members and fosters the 'us and them' mentality. The group entitativity, derived from Gestalt principles of proximity, similarity, organisation, and shared fate, instils group norms through psychological processes and strengthens the social identity in the members (Campbell, 1958; Hogg & Reid, 2006). The cohesive nature of the groups in the current study ensured they are highly resistant to disruptive influences, whereby external pressures can actually serve to further consolidate the collective identity. The characteristics of entitativity, in combination with a collective ideology (see below), provide members with ontological security, that is, the sense of understanding the world and his or her place within it. The next section discusses the significance of an ideology to the individual and how a collective ideology can bolster group attachment.

Ideology

May (1991) argues the lack of myths in modern society contributes to individuals flocking to groups, which can provide meaning and relieve their anxieties. Collective ideologies, according to May, provide a sense of identity, endorse a set of moral values, encourage loyalty to communal groups, and provide meaning to existential issues. An ideology is an integrated system of congruent beliefs and values that provide explanations for everyday life (Hogg, 2005). A person operates on the basis of personal beliefs, or theories that he or she has about the self and others, situations, and his or her interactions with the world (Iannaccone & Berman, 2006). These beliefs form individual reference systems (ideologies) that give meaning to the world and personal experiences, as well as influence personal goals, emotions, attitudes and behaviour. This meaning system is characterised by stability, logic and political sophistication, which provide coherent and comprehensive explanations for the universe and one's existence in it (Iannaccone & Berman, 2006; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). Fundamentally, ideologies function as a lens through which reality is perceived and interpreted (Iannaccone & Berman, 2006).

An effective ideology provides security through structure and stability; it simplifies the perceptions of ambiguous environments and provides a framework for a person to interact with the world in a meaningful way. A successful ideology could provide self-esteem and a sense of self-efficacy for an individual. Epstein (1985) argues that ideologies fulfil four basic motives; (1) stability and coherence of a personal self-concept; (2) maintain a favourable balance of pleasure and pain over the foreseeable future; (3) maintain a favourable balance of self-esteem; and (4) provide a favourable relationship with significant others.

When there is uncertainty in beliefs to the extent that a person experiences a threat to the self, he or she is motivated to restore his or her ontological security. Giddens (1991) defines ontological security as a "person's fundamental sense of safety in the world that includes a basic trust of other people. Obtaining such trust becomes necessary in order for a person to maintain a sense of psychological wellbeing and avoid existential

anxiety" (Giddens, 1991, p. 38-39). As such, ontological security represents a security of "being" and a confidence as well as trust in the world being as it appears to be.

A robust ideology provides ontological security to an individual and can also be bolstered by drawing closer an ideological collective that is perceived as strengthening personal security (Iannaccone & Berman, 2006). A collective ideology provides a dynamic social system characterised by interdependence among members with shared beliefs. This collective environment fosters the social, temporal, attachment and moral aspects of group membership that present the ideology as an undisputed truth (Orsini, 2012). The confidence in which these beliefs are held makes alternative information, inconsistent ideas or changes difficult for members to comprehend (Iannaccone & Berman, 2006). Additionally, strong identification with, and attachment to, an in-group's ideology as well as associated practices can promote the belief of ideological and cultural superiority (Hogg, Adelman, & Blagg, 2010).

The current study sought to explore the experiences of disengagement from those who have left ideological social groups, in particular, groups that display a fundamentalist and dogmatic approach to their collective ideology. As a consequence, leaving the group and/or altering beliefs associated with the collective ideology were significant psychological experiences to the participants. Research has shown individuals with fundamental approaches to an ideology interpret information about existential issues differently to those with low fundamentalism (Hunsberger, Alisat, Pancer, & Pratt, 1996; Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 1994). Hunsberger et al. (1996) argue that fundamentalists tend to think "convergently" (p. 218), and as such, are more likely to restructure or incorporate information into their existing ideological schema in such a way that reinforces their original beliefs. In contrast, those low in fundamentalism were more likely to adapt or change beliefs in response to new information and doubts. As such, a fundamentalist approach to any ideology presents certainty that one's beliefs are correct, and subsequently, a change to the ideology is a significant and challenging personal experience.

Fundamentalism has been associated with political and religious violent extremism, and the term *Islamic fundamentalism* has become common place in this context (Simbar, 2010). However, the link between violence and fundamentalism is tenuous and the label has often been used to devalue religious groups and their beliefs (Barkun, 2003). Komonchak, Collins, and Lane's (1993, p. 411) text on theology provides an explanation of fundamentalism from three perspectives that are devoid from the negative connotations. These are;

1) A cognitive perspective of fundamentalism that emphasises a closed personality type that expresses exclusivity, particularity, literality and moral rigour;

2) a cultural theological interpretation presents fundamentalism as in opposition to religious and cultural liberalism in defence of orthodoxy and religious traditions; and,

3) from a social movement perspective, fundamentalism implies organisational and ideological uniqueness from other types of movements.

This is supported by Munson (2008) who described fundamentalism, through the comparison of multiple religions, as the strict adherence to a sacred text or ideology and the moral code that is derived from such a belief system. As such, fundamentalism as an operational definition is the literal interpretation and strict adherence to the group's doctrine.

In the current study, the approach to fundamentalism incorporates all three of Komonchak et al. (1993) perspectives as each contributes to increased ideological commitment to a social group. The cognitive and social movement perspectives also provide a unique identity that is distinct from other movements and mainstream society based on group identity. This uniqueness and the ideological aspects were considered in the selection of participant groups that were explored in the current study.

Security

The final feature of the criteria for the social groups in the current study was the salient social identity that becomes intrinsic to the self to the

extent that members would risk their wellbeing, or that of others, to enhance or maintain the group's cause. Common occurrences that emphasise the personal sacrifices for group benefit and commitment include;

1. the risk of restrictions on personal freedoms;
2. inter-group conflict with a propensity for violence; and,
3. social alienation through demonising the out-group

The restrictions on personal freedoms can occur internally with the strict adherence to group norms and punishment for any behavioural deviation. Restrictions can also be imposed externally through marginalisation of members based on group affiliation or group activities, such as imprisonment for group related crimes. Inter-group conflict puts members at risk of violence and denigration; direct violence can be seen between militant and military groups (Elizur & Yishay-Krien, 2009), one percent motorcycle club rivalries (Bucci, 2013) or inter-racial conflict (Vanhanen, 2012). Social alienation is a product of the social groups enforced distinctiveness and exclusivity (Hopper & Moore, 2007), as well as their demonization of the out-group. This can be observed through the symbolic language used, such as religious groups referring to non-believers as satanic (Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999), and through behavioural restrictions preventing interactions between members and non-members (Tonts, 2001). Members of these social groups accept the sacrifices and risks associated with membership as the group is central to their identity. Additionally, failing to make such sacrifices would see negative repercussions and threaten their position within the group.

Chapter Summary

Participation in these entitative and ideological social groups involves psychological processes enabling members to conform to group values and objectives. When exposed to common goals or a shared threat, intra-group solidarity is enhanced and the group is less subject to the formation of internal factions (Brewer, 1999). Increases in personal uncertainty can cause individuals to gravitate to highly entitative groups, increase identification with these groups, and/or transform existing in-groups to have greater entitativity. Personal uncertainty may lead people to construct, or gravitate towards,

highly entitative groups as they have more immediate effects on one's group-related behaviours and provide concrete prototypes to guide social perceptions and behaviour. Social groups with propagated as well as enforced ideologies and expressions of high levels of entitativity provide members with a strong sense of identity and shared purpose.

The social groups included in the current study had high levels of entitativity which serve to depersonalise members and reinforce the groups' identity as part of the members' self-concept. It is the centrality of this social identity and the significance of group membership to the self-concept that make disengagement a complex phenomenon psychologically. The shift in central identity requires a multi-faceted reformation of the self-concept, which can overlap other areas of members' lives. The significance of this psychological reformation is understudied in the context of disengagement from ideological and entitative social groups and the current study sought to develop a greater understanding of the experience. The following chapter discusses the current literature on disengagement, which at present, focuses more on the factors triggering the disengagement experience and the process of physically disengaging rather than the psychological experience involved.

CHAPTER 3: DISENGAGEMENT LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Overview

In exploring the experiences of psychological disengagement from ideological social groups, it is imperative to first gain insight into the current disengagement literature. This chapter reviews the literature on disengagement from violent extremism, gangs, religious groups and more extreme social roles. The review of current literature on the disengagement process identified four key stages; (1) the crisis causing disengagement, (2) the individual's response to these crises, (3) the physical exit from the group, and (4) the formation of the ex-identity. The literature focuses primarily on identifying causes for, rather than the experiences of, disengagement; however, a few studies in religious defection and role-exit do provide insight into the psychological experience. Barriers that impede the disengagement process through their negative impact on the individual are also discussed. The final section discusses the factors that influence the individual experiences from a role-exit perspective. It must be noted that there are only a few research-based studies in individual disengagement, and as such, there is a significant reliance on these few studies. Finally, the chapter concludes with the rationale for the current study.

Disengagement as a Process of Group Exit

Disengagement and deradicalisation are terms that are embraced in the extremism and terrorism domain; however, the phenomenon of exiting ideological social groups has been explored in different contexts and with varying terms, such as; defection (Skonovd, 1979; Wright, 1984, 1987), deconversion (Jacobs, 1987), disaffiliation (Brinkerhoff & Burke, 1980), desistance (Caldwell & Altschuler, 2001), role-exiting (Ebaugh, 1988), and inter-group relations (Allen & Meyer, 1990; De Cremer & van Dijk, 2002; Dechesne, Janssen, & van Knippenberg, 2000; Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986; Wiener, 1982). The experience of disengaging can vary according to individual contexts and the different types of organisations studied as each group has its own complexities, uniqueness and nuances (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009, p. 2). However, while political and ideological frameworks may vary

between groups, social and psychological processes may be comparable. Reviews on disengagement from religious groups, cults, gangs and criminal organisations indicate similar factors contribute to the desire to disengage despite the differing ideologies (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Fink & Hearne, 2008; Johnston, 2009). Furthermore, Ebaugh's (1988) study has shown that the process of disengagement from social roles, such as relinquishing the role of being a mother, walking away from employment or relationships, as well as abandoning behaviours such as drug abuse or criminality, is consistent among the various identities previously held.

Commitment to membership status can be subjected to interruptions causing prior socialisation to be impaired, such as invalidating experiences or perceptions causing disillusionment and invoking dissonance and dissatisfaction. It is the member's inability to integrate these inconsistencies with their existing schemas that negatively impact both the processes that endorse the group's ideology and the individual's level of commitment as a member. As such, these groups lose their influence on the individual and the likelihood of disengagement increases. Many ex-members experienced a crisis, stress and/or disillusionment causing a 'cognitive opening', which allowed doubts to arise and the evaluation of maintaining membership (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Bromley, 1998; Coates, 2013; Mellis, 2007; Mushtaq, 2009; Wright, 1987). The cognitive opening begins the psychological process for possible disengagement via a breakdown in the isolation from the outside world. The interactions with outsiders can allow alternative viewpoints to be considered and may increase the willingness of the individual to be receptive to alternative lifestyles. This process significantly accelerates disengagement, particularly when combined with social and economic support, education and counselling.

Resilient groups are effective in reducing the impact and occurrence of interruptions by employing socialisation mechanisms and presenting barriers that prevent members from departing the group (Taylor, 1988). However, the current literature review focuses on the process of disengagement from the experience of the exiting member rather than the mechanisms of the social group (socialisation and psychological attachment were discussed in Chapter 2).

The following processes of disengagement are described by researchers from the perspective of leaving fundamentalist religious and sectarian organisations, extremist movements, as well as forming an ex-identity to a socially constructed role; for example, criminal or alcoholic. Minimal empirical research has been conducted on the individual experience and psychological process of disengaging from highly entitative and ideological social groups. However, it is important to explore the process of psychological disengagement to understand the individual experience and impact that each stage has on the success or failure of disengaging and to better inform support programmes. This section of the literature review describes the processes identified in the research, and explores their relevance to the social groups of this study.

The Crisis Triggering Membership Doubts

Initially, the individual experiences doubts, usually as a response to a significant event, and begins to question their role commitment (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Ebaugh, 1988; Rabasa et al., 2010; Skonovd, 1981; Wright, 1987). The disengagement process is initiated by internal and external conflicts that cause dissonance within the individual's social identity, lifestyle or worldview (Rabasa et al., 2010; Skonovd, 1979, April). Skonovd (1981) argued that fundamental religious groups are vulnerable to the slightest incongruence due to their "all or nothing" approach of commitment and the absolute nature of the advocated reality.

There are numerous reasons for members to come to doubt their membership within social groups; however, these reasons appear to be significant to some individuals and not others. The various academic fields drawing from criminology, political science, psychology, religious studies and security have identified various factors contributing to disillusionment and have suggested models of the disengagement process, but have been unable to identify why some events are only relevant and threatening to certain people, while not to others.

An empirical study by Wright (1984, 1987) of the defection from religious groups provides insight into the reasons for physically disengaging. The study emphasised the need to explore the exiting process from voluntary

exiters rather than those who were extracted by anti-cult organisations and deprogrammed. This adds strength to the study as it provides insight to factors that cause individuals to question their involvement without the influence of anti-cult organisations and their emphasis on brainwashing as well as mind control. Drawing on the 45 in-depth interviews from voluntary defectors, (as well as 45 current members) from three controversial religious movements, namely the Unification Church, the Children of God and Hare Krishna in 1980, Wright (1984, 1987) identified four key causes for the initiation of the voluntary disengagement process:

1.   A breakdown in the insulation from the outside world; the prolonged separation of the member from the group was considered the most influential factor in regards to the breakdown in social insulation as there were no reality-supporting measures from the group. This meant doubts and uncertainties experienced by members could not be regulated or addressed adequately.

2.   The development of unofficial and unregulated dyadic relationships. As the intimacy intensifies within a romantic relationship between group members or with partners outside the group, other relationships are weakened and commitment to group obligations can be affected. Additionally, Wright (1987) found the exit of one partner is likely to influence the other to do the same.

3.   The perceived lack of success in achieving social change through group means. The lack of success can impact on the members' view that the commitment of time, labour and lifestyle is so desperately required. As the group's goals appear more remote the perceived necessity for individual sacrifices is reduced.

4.   Perceived inconsistencies between the leaders' actions and the ideals they promote. As leaders are expected to be 'exemplary' and on the path of salvation, their behaviour has to be consistent with the group's ideals and goals. When actions are perceived as morally inconsistent, or members encounter invalidating experiences with leaders, the likelihood of disengagement increases.

Wright (1987) only used participants who had voluntarily left the religious movements, arguing extracted and deprogrammed individuals tended to adopt the anti-cult organisations as a reference group, and consequently, adopted conspiracy assumptions of mind control as well as brain-washing. Wright's (1987) study provides an invaluable insight into the personal experiences of religious defection through interviews; as such, the literature on disengagement has often utilised both Wright's (1987) and other secondary sources to explain the disengagement experience.

More recently, Horgan's (2009a, 2009b) analysis of available literature on disengagement from extremist groups and interviews with 29 former terrorists identified five factors facilitating disillusionment with extremist groups. These are;

1. Disillusionment arising from incongruence between the motivations to join, plus the initial ideals that initiated engagement, and their subsequent experiences as well as the reality of group membership.
2. Disillusionment due to disagreements over tactical issues.
3. Disillusionment due to strategic, political or ideological differences.
4. Burn out.
5. Changes in personal priorities.

While the groups examined varied, the causes shared similarities in the personal priorities and relationships, the ability to achieve success and the ideological consistency within the group. The analyses of causes by Wright (1987) and Horgan (2009a, 2009b) provided similar themes in the reasons cited by former members in relation to changes in relationships and personal priorities, tactics and success, as well as ideological inconsistencies (particularly with leadership). These factors are commonly identified in the literature as causes for leaving criminal, religious and political groups; however, the influence of each cause can be both overemphasised and/or underemphasised in the disengagement as the experience varies between individuals. As a result, attempts have been made to categorise causes into typologies that can be used within the broader deradicalisation field. The following section of the chapter will describe in greater depth the categories

and subsequent causes of disillusionment, which have led to former members disengaging from ideological social groups. While individual causes can vary, both Wright (1987) and Horgan's (2009b) causes for disengagement are dominant themes within literature exploring the dissatisfaction with fundamental and extremist groups.

Categorising the Causes of Disengagement

Disengagement is an inherently complex, multi-layered process. It is influenced by multiple issues and an amalgamation of personal as well as social factors that influence the member's response to the source of disillusionment. Skonovd (1981), Wright (1987), and Horgan (2009a) all acknowledged that the contributing factors to disillusionment are varied and can occur many times throughout the membership period without necessarily resulting in disengagement. However, this catalyst to the process is the most researched area within the disengagement domain. These factors which cause cognitive openings and initiate the physical disengagement process are arranged as sub-categories depending on the intra-group or extra-group motivation (Bjørgo, 2002, June, 2009), or attributes of the disillusioning variable (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Demant et al., 2009; Klandermans, 2005). Bjørgo's (2002, 2005, 2009) interviews with former right wing extremists revealed that the causes of disengagement could be explained in terms of 'push' and 'pull' factors – where both include consequences for the member that can be intended or accidental (see Table 1). The former consists of factors, which make membership unattractive, pushing the individual from the group and towards an alternative; such as, disillusionment with group organisation and/or methodology, stress and exhaustion, as well as negative social sanctions. Pull factors attract the individual to a more satisfying alternative, such as longing for a perceived "normal" life (this can include wanting to be like others and living without the stigma associated with the group or group-imposed restrictions) out-growing the group, and the development of dyadic relationships (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Demant et al., 2009). As noted by Bjørgo (2005), the effects of push factors are difficult to predict as negative sanctions may facilitate disengagement with certain members, or conversely, increase the group's solidarity and cohesiveness;

Table 1.

Push and Pull Factors Contributing to Disengagement

Push factors:	Pull factors:
Loss of faith in ideology	Longing for a 'normal' life
Self-doubt in beliefs and methodology	Feeling 'too old' for way-of-life
Mutual completion, contempt & distrust between members	Maturation / youth adopt more adult roles and identities
Losing status, confidence, position in group	Desire to engage in employment outside the group
Group not focused on ideological goals	No longer obtain excitement from group
Social isolation by prosecution/harassment	Development of dyadic/familial relationships
Disillusionment in group politics	Membership no longer viewed as meaningful
Frustration with group dynamics	New role model or social group
Disloyalty between members	Other changing priorities
Challenges by less experienced or newer members	
Negative social sanctions	
Experiences of stigmatisation	
Frustration at lack of success	
Violence from oppositional groups	

however, the likelihood of disengagement increases when the sanctions are matched with positive incentives.

Pull factors are more easily influenced by the barriers to disengagement; such as the concerns about time and effort previously invested, fear of reprisals, and the loss of intra-group relationships and identity. The push and pull factors are measured in a cost-benefit evaluation of membership. Only when the push and/or pull factors are considered more influential than the costs of giving up membership, will the member be likely to disengage.

The push and pull approach to disengagement does have its limitations. Demant et al. (2009) noted that the influences causing an individual to disengage from a highly entitative and ideological social group involve complex psychological processes that rarely operate in isolation. This allows both push and pull factors to co-exist, thus exacerbating the difficulties with measuring the impact of each factor. As an alternative to Bjørgo's work, Klandermans (2005) and Demant et al. (2008a, 2008b), categorise the contributing factors into organisational, ideological and practical. These categorisations accord with earlier literature (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002) focusing on the psychological

states of organisational commitment. They argue that all categories are influential in the decision to disengage and enhance the likelihood of doing so successfully. The current study sought to clarify which types of factors have facilitated both psychological disengagement and the exit from the social group.

The use of organisational psychology in disengagement is supported by Skonovd's (1981) findings of religious defection being initiated by either internal factors (social and affective, and interpersonal conflicts) or external factors (career and education, affective pulls and physical removal), as well as those initiating a religious crisis (conflict between doctrine and experiences). Klandermans (2005) and Demant et al. (2008a, 2008b) compartmentalise individual disengagement factors into three components – normative (ideological), affective (organisational), and continuance (practical). See Table 2 for examples of each of these categories.

Table 2.

Normative, Affective and Continuance Factors Contributing to Disengagement

Normative:	Affective:	Continuance:
Ideology is no longer appealing	Disappointment in movement	Longing for 'ordinary' life
Rejection of violent action	Frustration with group dynamics	Negative social sanctions
Desired future is not achievable	Disloyalty between members	Competing social relationships
Change in individual's viewpoint	Mutual competition, contempt and distrust between members	Cost of membership
	Failing leadership	

By classifying the factors contributing to disengagement, there is the expectation that the influence of groups can be objectively measured and used as an indicator of commitment. When all three forms of commitment are satisfied, it is expected that members will remain with the social group as various aspects of their personal life have become entwined with the group (Rabasa et al., 2010). Conversely, if the normative, affective and continuance aspects are not satisfied, the commitment to the social group is expected to weaken and the likelihood of disengagement to increase. Understanding the influence of these forms of commitment, as well as how

they interact, may facilitate the profiling of members who are likely to disengage. However, the lack of existing knowledge of how triggers influence different members limits the applicability of such profiles

The normative factors shape the individual's personal values in a manner that meets the group's goals as well as interests, and membership becomes viewed as a moral obligation (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Boros, 2008; Klandermans, 1997). This component of commitment is influenced by experiences both prior to membership (such as familial and cultural socialisation) and after admission (organisational socialisation), and the group's expectations of loyalty (Wiener, 1982). The greater the consistency between the member and group's values as well as ideology, the stronger the normative attachment will be. As such, groups are motivated to instil conformity to the ideology.

The affective factors are the social and organisational aspects facilitating or impeding the emotional attachment to the group. This form of attachment incorporates the psychological investment in the group, the emotional attachment to the group's goals and values, as well as the individual's role in relation to the group's goals (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Boros, 2008). Meyer et al.'s (2002) meta-analysis of the normative, affective and continuance aspects of commitment revealed that affective attachment had the strongest positive correlation with group interaction, performance and adherence to group norms. Conversely, disappointing experiences with intra-group relationships and interactions can weaken the affective commitment and willingness to participate (Demant et al., 2008a; Klandermans, 1997).

Continuance commitment is the awareness of the consequences and personal costs associated with leaving the group and are those linked to the practical life circumstances which make group involvement either attractive or unattractive (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Klandermans, 1997). Two factors influence the strength of continuance commitment; the degree of investment to the role and group, as well as the perceived lack of viable alternatives. The greater the extent to which the individual has developed skills specific to maintaining group membership, the greater the cost in departing the role (Becker, 1960; Klandermans, 1997). The individual perceives a profit associated with maintaining participation with the group and a cost

associated with leaving. Any changes to the social identity are viewed through the knowledge of negative consequences for the change.

In short, strong affective commitment allows members to stay because they *want* to, strong continuance commitment encourages members to stay because they *need* to, and strong normative commitment causes members to stay because they feel they *ought* to (Allen & Meyer, 1990). To effectively influence these three psychological aspects, the commitment factors should be considered as components of a broader disengagement model, rather than isolated influences. Demant et al. (2008a) found that in most instances, all three types of factors are involved in the disengagement and deradicalisation process. They used interviews and existing literature to examine the factors relating to both collective and individual disengagement from historical cases of radical Moluccans (1970's), the Squatters movement (1980's) and right-wing centre parties (1980-90's). The purpose of the analysis was to compare these non-religious groups with Islamic deradicalisation programmes and provide the most extensive discussion on the triggers for disengagement. In the following part of this chapter, the reasons for disillusionment are discussed in greater depth and within the framework of the disengagement factors: normative, affective and continuance.

Disillusionment

Disillusionment that breaks down the insulation from the outside world is the first stage in the disengagement process and occurs when the individual's expectations do not correlate with the reality of membership. A member's initial ideals and fantasies that facilitated group attachment become incongruent with reality and this causes membership to become less meaningful (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Dechesne et al., 2000; Demant et al., 2008b). This decline in the romanticised view of group involvement is caused by a variety of experiences; for example, disagreements within the group in terms of strategic, political or ideological differences, group dynamics, or the loss of personal significance. The disillusionment may be gradual or there can be a singular catalytic event that precipitates psychological disengagement.

Normative factors leading to disillusionment

The normative factors are those associated with the groups' ability to maintain commitment through the ideology. The group's ideological premise maintains commitment and frames membership as a moral obligation (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Klandermans, 1997). The ideology provides a constructed model of beliefs, aims and ideas to direct members' goals, expectations and actions. It offers a set of ideals, principles or symbols to explain how society should function, and for ideological social groups, it combines a collectively defined grievance with a clear definition of those responsible – producing an 'us against them' mentality and fostering moral outrage (Klandermans, 1997). As an alternative ideology, the adopted beliefs can instigate collective action to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing power system to uphold ideological values (Dechesne et al., 2000; Demant et al., 2008a).

The alignment between individual and group ideologies is positively correlated with normative attachment, and corresponding disengagement is an indication of failings in the group's ideology that make membership and world-view unattractive (Demant et al., 2008b). When the group no longer provides a satisfying world-view, meaning to the existing order, a desirable future or a means to achieve this future, the member has an increased susceptibility to alternative options (Demant et al., 2008a). However, while the changes to the individual's perception and acceptance of the group's ideological basis can lead to the rejection of fundamentalist views, it is more common for the changes in belief and value systems to occur after disengaging from the group (Horgan, 2005).

Lose faith in ideology.

As the group's ideology underpins interpretations of the current order, the experience of self-doubt in aspects of the group's ideology and goals can result in member's perceiving the group as morally or politically wrong (Demant et al., 2008a, 2008b; Horgan, 2005). The group's failure to provide meaning or a response to the member's concerns can cause further doubts in the group's relevance, as can its perceived failure to achieve ideologically stated goals. A study of the radical Moluccans, the squatters movement and

extreme right groups by Demant et al. (2008a) unveiled causes for the loss of faith in group ideologies; changes in the ideological interpretation by the group, inconsistencies between ideological aims and ideals between members, and the inability to implement a sufficiently radical political ideology for extreme members. As the movement's political influence evolves, the radical ideological beliefs previously imposed on members may be compromised to capture greater community support. Conflicting interpretations and objectives may splinter a group into two factions; for example, the splintering of the IRA created the Real Irish Republican Army during a period of political negotiations (Cronin, 2006). Consequently, members who find that the ideological impetus for radical acts no longer exists or may view the group as 'selling out' may engage with an alternative radical group (Noricks, 2009). Kruglanski and Fishman (2009) also argue that members who distance themselves and question the group's ideology can prompt others to reconsider the group's radical ideals.

      Rommelspacher's (2006) interviews with German right-wing extremists exposed interactions that by disrupting the group's world view, and providing alternative and 'attractive' explanations, can significantly influence the disengagement process. These interactions may involve people who do not comply with the group's ideology or existing stereotypes. The result of the inconsistencies between ideology and personal experience can alter the view of society or a segment of it as the enemy. For right-wing extremists, it may be a member of the 'enemy' who acts without prejudice or someone who accepts the member on individual merit. For example, Johnny Clarry, the ex-Grand Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan refers to the meetings with African-American Reverend Wade Watts in an interview on an Australian television show *Enough Rope with Andrew Denton*. He acknowledges his expectations of the 'enemy' were shattered, "and then when Reverend Wade Watts was being kind to me - and he outsmarted me in that debate, I started realising that maybe not all white people were superior to black people" (Denton & Jacoby, 2005). Despite attempts to demonise Watts, Clarry notes the conflict between the expectations of African-Americans and his experiences as a trigger for questioning the Ku Klux Klan's ideology. This was also supported by Garfinkel's (2007) six case

studies of personal transformations from violence to peace where ethnocentric beliefs were challenged by the compassion from the despised out-group, which conflicted with the ideologically shaped stereotypes held by the extremists. However, as conveyed by Garfinkel (2007), the expression of compassion from one side will not suffice without receptivity from the other, which in turn relies on the humility and courage involved in accepting that previously held beliefs may be flawed.

The self-doubt in the group's ideology can lead to a member questioning the group's validity; if the group is unable to address these concerns through dialogue or attempts to change the grievance, that member may disengage. However, while the normative factors may be perceived as deficient, interaction may be maintained due to affective and continuance factors, as revealed by Photiadis' (1965) study of Mormon commitment and conformity. Participation on a social level provided greater influence on commitment and conformity to group norms, independent of individual ideological differences.

Frustration at lack of success.

Experiences of disappointment with the group, when the ideology is manifested in the member's principles, can cause self-doubts in the achievability of its upheld goals. The realisation that the desired future is not achievable through the actions promoted by the social group can produce a demotivating effect and cause uncertainty regarding the group's methods (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Demant et al., 2008a; Kassimeris, 2011; Reinares, 2011). Bjørgo (2011) emphasises that disillusionment is greater for those high in ideological or political motivation when they realise the struggle does not further their cause, or provide positive results for those they are fighting for. This disillusionment is often initiated by a failed attempt to alter the status quo, and the realisation that despite the personal sacrifice of group commitment and extreme actions, the desired goal is no closer. The failure to achieve ideological success can lead to a diminished sense of urgency and to doubts regarding the extreme personal sacrifices required for the movement. The realisation of initial aspirations and hopes associated with membership are removed from the day-to-day responsibilities of the adopted

role and the requirement for continuing and repeated investment can have a demoralising effect on the member (Horgan, 2005). When the individual determines that their investment has been substantial, yet the goal remains distant, the probability of defection is heightened (Brockner & Rubin, 1985; Wright, 1987).

The effects of failure on group identification in mainstream contexts can be relevant to analysing disengagement in other social contexts. Snyder, Lassegard, and Ford's (1986) study of successful and unsuccessful university groups highlighted that participants in groups who were led to believe they had failed a given task displayed less interest in participating in future group activities than their successful counterparts, and were less inclined to self-identify with the group. The social distance between the individual and the group failure serves as a strategy to avoid negative evaluation and protects self-esteem. However, De Cremer and van Dijk's (2002) study into the impact of group success and failure on the individual found that when negative feedback on group performance was provided, only those with salient personal identities (as opposed to collective identities) reduced their contribution to the group. While the study employed university students in a classroom experiment, it suggests that group failure may only be a precursor to disillusionment and disengagement for individuals who do not hold a salient group identity.

The attempt to distance oneself from the social group after failure or poor performance can be viewed as a lack of commitment or disloyalty to the group (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). When observed by members who have a strong attachment to the group, the distancing is viewed as an attempt to restore the personal identity at the group's expense. At such point, members with salient personal identities behave with greater self-interest, and are more likely to be rejected and/or expelled from the group by members with greater salient collective identities (Branscombe et al., 1999).

Highly entitative and ideological social groups demand a high level of commitment from their members and the socialisation process enforces a collective identity whereby the group's ideology and goals are fused with the individual's identity (Post et al., 2003). Consequently, the inability to

distinguish between group and individual goals means that success or failure is taken personally and the person may experience emotional reactions such as shame and guilt (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). The group's inability to influence and achieve goals can cause the member to become disappointed in its overall capability and may disengage and deradicalise, or search for a more extreme organisation. As previously stated in regards to losing faith in the ideology, the group's inability to successfully initiate change may compromise attachment to the group-imposed ideological beliefs (Cronin, 2006; Noricks, 2009). Accordingly, the member may find that the ideological impetus for commitment no longer exists, or may view the group as 'selling out' and seek an alternative group to engage.

Confronted with violence.

Arguably, the most common reason for leaving is the personal or indirect experiences of violence due to extremist ideologies and hatred (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Horgan, 2005; Noricks, 2009). The underlying reasons for the rejection of violence can be of an ideological, strategic or organisational nature (Demant et al., 2008a). The rejection of violence on ideological grounds includes the individual's attitudes and morals surrounding violence, such as that violence is inherently bad or that violence creates undesired animosity. Engaging in such behaviours that contradict the individual's beliefs can result in cognitive dissonance for the member resulting in the person questioning both the group's ideology and choice of methods (Bjørgo, 2011). Strategically, violence may no longer be seen by the member as a successful method to achieving desired outcomes. Additionally, the influence of violence on the organisation, such as in-group violence, can result in fragmentation of the group. These violent stresses can lead to rejections of violence and the social group, causing disillusionment and an increased propensity for disengagement. While disengaging does not determine the violent behaviours of individuals, the rejection of violence as a means to achieve ideological aims is considered part of the deradicalisation process.

Husain (2007) describes the personal horror experienced with the death of an innocent life and the realisation that he had helped create this

violent situation. The religious group endorsed the belief the life of a non-believer, (a kafir) is inconsequential in accomplishing Muslim dominance and Husain experienced anxiety over adopting violence. Rommelspacher's (2006; as cited in Demant et al., 2008a) study into German right-wing extremists also found confrontation with violence caused some of the movement's members to rethink involvement because of the view 'it was taken too far'. This was also supported by the findings of Demant et al. (2008a) in the Moluccan and Squatter's movements and Decker and van Winkle's (1996) analysis of youth street gangs, whereby the personal confrontation with violence contributed considerably to the decline of group membership. Decker and Van Winkle's (1996) found that the period immediately after the violent confrontation was the most susceptible to cognitive shifts; however, intervention needed to be swift to prevent the solidarity imposed by the gang's favourable interpretation of this violence.

Affective factors leading to disillusionment

The organisation and social facilitation of the group is central to an individual's propensity to remain with a group, even when ideological differences are present (Photiadis, 1965). It is the emotional attachment of belonging to the group that makes membership favourable. The affective components causing disillusionment can appear in the group's internal relationships, as well as its activities. The organisational capacity negatively impacts the member's experience when it is no longer able to provide the required social and cultural functions (Demant et al., 2008a, 2008b; Demant et al., 2009). Affective commitment can be subjected to dual processes; whereby the reduction in positive affect can influence the member's interpretation of information and lead to perceived deficiencies in normative and continuance spheres (Demant et al., 2008a; Klandermans, 1997). Alternatively, reduced positive affect can be a consequence of the identified deficit.

Failing group organisation.

Highly entitative and ideological social groups can adopt various different organisational structures; from fixed hierarchal organisations with

authoritarian leaders, to fluid and decentralised networks. Whether formally recognised or not, each member is assigned status within the organisation. Leaders are viewed as 'exemplary', and ethically as well as morally consistent with the group's ideals and goals, and group members who do not uphold the prototypical characteristics are viewed as less worthy (Demant et al., 2008a). This can lead to intra-group conflicts such as power plays, competition between members and disloyalty, which can dishearten fellow members and cause offending members to be rejected or treated negatively; this can cause personal uncertainty regarding social acceptance for such members (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Branscombe et al., 1999; Demant et al., 2008a; Horgan, 2005). While some groups do not have formal leadership hierarchies, they can be highly status-orientated and competition between members makes them increasingly vulnerable to accusations and rumours (Horgan, 2005). Antagonism between members can produce suspicion and, in terms of self-isolating groups, fears of infiltration from rival groups or authorities. Mutual competition, contempt and distrust can cause disillusionment as individuals do not experience the level of security they expected when joining (Bjørgo, 2011; Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009).

Rejection by the group can be perceived as the threat of expulsion, the removal of membership status, or the unwillingness of the group to accept the individual as an ideal or prototypical group member (Branscombe et al., 1999). The strength of identification with the group determines the individual's reaction as those low in identification can disidentify in anticipation of further rejection. Such members maintain self-esteem by attaching a positive emotional response to their non-prototypical identity and find another group that he or she perceives as a 'better match'; thus making disengagement more likely. However, rejected members who are high in identification are more likely to experience low self-esteem as they continue to admire prototypical members and view themselves unfavourably (Branscombe et al., 1999).

Failing leadership.

In addition to intra-group relationships, the leadership's failure to adhere to expectations can cause members to doubt their involvement and

the sacrifices made for the group. Intensive interviews with 40 voluntary defectors from 17 religious movements led Jacobs (1987) to view deconversion as an evolutionary process that started with reducing the social affiliations with the group before severing emotional ties with the charismatic leader. Disillusionment that caused discontent and challenges to authoritarian figures was associated with the group's social elements, such as conflicts resulting from restrictions on the individual's social life, as well as the allocation of status and position in the group. The challenge to authority rarely involved the charismatic leader, but was rather directed at the middle level of the hierarchy – those responsible for enforcing the group values and decisions. In spite of the dissatisfaction with the group's organisational and social aspects, commitment to the leader as an ideal, pious figure remained as the emotional disconnection from the leader required the difficult acknowledgement that perhaps their devotion was committed to someone not worthy of their trust.

For those who experienced disillusionment with the leader during their voluntary defection, Jacobs (1987) emphasised four sources; physical abuse, psychological abuse, emotional rejection, and spiritual betrayal. The study indicated psychological abuse and emotional rejection were the predominant causes of disillusionment, with rejection derived from unfulfilled expectations of the spiritual deity or the affective relationship between leader and follower. The spiritual betrayal was linked to the leader not fulfilling the member's expectation of a moral and pious lifestyle. As leaders are representative of the prototypical member, or are presented as the 'hero' for members to admire, any inconsistencies between the leaders' behaviour and the group's ideals or the message propagated can lead to the interpretation of the ideology and methods to achieve goals as insincere. The inability of leaders and comrades to practice what they preach, and maintain the idealistic view held by members when they joined can result in disillusionment (Demant et al., 2008a; Rommelspacher, 2006; Wright, 1987). The double standards in lifestyle regulations between leaders and members can also create resentment and cause doubts about the need for the sacrifices deemed to have been required to achieve group goals (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009).

Members can also become disillusioned by the inability of leaders to provide sufficient direction and focus, or adapt to the changing circumstances and, thus, inspire members (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Demant et al., 2008a; Fink & Hearne, 2008). A lack of leadership and political influence can cause members to doubt the group's capability to achieve societal change (Reinares, 2011).

Those with leadership roles are also vulnerable to a loss of status and confidence within the group (Bjørgo, 2011). Disengagement becomes a more attractive option to a fallen leader who has lost status due to internal conflict or changes in the dispersion of power. Bjørgo (2011) suggests this form of disillusionment can be instigated by outside sources through the release of discrediting information. The drop in confidence and status in a leader can have a two-fold effect on the remaining members; the failures on behalf of the leader may have caused irreparable doubts about the value of group involvement, or a leader's disengagement may serve as a warning to both current and future members of the pitfalls of membership.

Continuance factors leading to disillusionment

Practical life circumstances, or continuance factors, can significantly influence the propensity for maintaining functioning membership. These factors are characterised by an imbalance between the practical advantages and disadvantages of group membership, which is likely to facilitate disengagement (Demant et al., 2009). While continuance factors can be influential, Demant et al. (2008a) propose they only play a supporting role, providing extra motivation to the normative and affective factors of disengagement. Thus, it is only when the continuance factors provide a negative variant, such as stigmatisation and outside pressures, that they have a direct role in disengagement.

Maturation / youth adopt more adult roles and identities.

Some social groups tend to consist of young participants and furthermore, Weinberg (2008) and Sageman (2008) argue that the longer the organisation exists, the younger the recruits become. While drawing on a sample of over 500 members or terrorist groups, Sageman (2008) found the

average age for membership waves reduced as the group's grievances became entwined in a broader, global identity. An advantage is their ability to devote themselves in terms of time and resources to the movement due to the lack of restraints from familial or employment responsibilities (Demant et al., 2008a; Silke, 2003). There is also the more youthful, idealistic notion of having the ability to change the world and possess the energy to pursue group tasks (Gendron, 2006). However, the problem faced by the group is maintaining this level of dedication as the youth develop into more adult roles and identities. The importance of membership wanes as they no longer have the same need for excitement, have less energy or crave a more subdued lifestyle (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Demant et al., 2008a; Horgan, 2005).

In comparison to the founding generation, Weinberg (2008) suggests youthful members are less ideologically or religiously sophisticated, lack an understanding of the long term purposes of the organisation, and are typically 'looking for action'. While street gangs and racist groups can reflect this analysis, Weinberg's (2008) argument conflicts with Sageman (2004, 2005) and Horgan's (2008) study of terrorism with the average age of 25-26 for Jihadists and al-Qaeda. While this age is still young, it is past the adolescence phase of development. The opposite is also true for one percent motorcycle clubs as Veno (2003) asserts the average age in the 1980's was approximately 25 years, but demographic changes have seen the average age rise to the late 30's. The increase in age has reflected cultural changes as clubs move towards more entrepreneurial goals (Quinn & Forsyth, 2007)

Despite older cohorts, the effects of aging within an extreme lifestyle can influence the member's practical ability to fully participant in group tasks (Bovenkerk, 2011). Veno (2003) notes that as members of the one percent motorcycle clubs age, participating in group activities becomes increasingly difficult; for example the inability to handle the cultural symbol Harley-Davidsons, opting for trikes or cars, or the inability to endorse a 'hard living' lifestyle of alcohol and partying. The isolation of the groups from institutions can result in members avoiding medical treatment, and in the case of one percent motorcycle clubs, years of harmful lifestyle choices can lead to

medical conditions preventing further involvement in group events and celebrations (Veno, 2003).

Competing social relationships.

The realisation that further commitment will require the permanent severance of interpersonal connections with those outside the group can discourage members from furthering their involvement, particularly those with previous connections to society (Demant et al., 2008a). However, those from minority groups are expected to experience a different process as the connection to society is not felt as strongly as those from the mainstream majority, and the feeling of not belonging may have played a role in their initial radicalisation (Demant et al., 2008a). It is more likely that the lack of connection contributed to the first step in the engagement process for minorities, while it acts as the final barrier to engagement for the majority. These social groups meet members' social and affective needs, and in some cases can serve in place of primary or quasi-primary groups; for example, the pseudo-family (Wright, 1987). However, when disillusioned with the group, the influence of external relationships increases and places strain on the resources the individual commits to the group (Reinares, 2011). When the member interacts with people, external to the group milieu, which he or she trusts and respects, the interaction can operate in opposition to the group and intervention can be initiated through ideological dialogue (Demant et al., 2008a). The respect for these individuals increases the openness to alternative opinions and world-views, and encourages doubts about the group's ideology.

Social groups are aware of the strain dyadic relationships can place on members' time and resources. Frequently, there are formal and informal regulations restricting two-person intimacy, or the world-view endorses attitudes to counter the dyadic formation; for example, encouraging celibacy or sexual pluralism (Wright, 1987), as well as the attitude of the opposite sex as inferior and a threat to group stability. Failure to do so can threaten membership in various ways, such as one member of the dyad wanting to leave and persuading the other, or as the relationship intensifies, greater emotional investments are placed in the dyadic relationship at the expense

of other existing relationships. Increased interaction with non-members can cause normative ambiguity due to the lack of reciprocity over shared beliefs and the affirmation of peaceful behaviours (Garfinkel, 2007). Family and partners are a source of support that provide a sounding board for concerns; they may emphasise the plausibility of alternative and socially acceptable options (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009;). The establishment of a family external to the group also places demands on member to adopt new responsibilities for both the spouse and children, Bjørgo and Horgan (2009) argue this is one of the strongest motivations for the defection from social groups demanding significant commitment and resources.

Reduced insulation from the outside world can disrupt the meaningful interactions between a member and the group, dependent socialisation, and commitment processes (Wright, 1987). This provides a stimulus for altering discredited perceptions of the larger society by removing group boundaries; therefore, minimising group distinctions and undermining the importance of belonging to a unique social group. While it is proposed that members will seek affirming reactions from external social relationships when group relations no longer fulfil affective needs, the context provided by membership needs to be acknowledged. For example, Wright (1987) argued that only members who join the social group just to fulfil social requirements are likely to drift to external relations if their needs are not met.

External pressures and stigmatisation.

Involvement with highly entitative and ideological social groups and associated activities can cause emotional strain and be detrimental to relationships and future opportunities. Those operating in a clandestine manner and experiencing threats of violence or punitive actions from enemies or authorities can find themselves longing for a mainstream society lifestyle; including lifestyle factors unavailable while maintaining membership, such as marriage and starting a family, and/or developing a career, or living without the fear associated with inter-group conflict (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Horgan, 2005). While some members perceive the notion of a normal way-of-life to be dull, the experiences of stigmatisation, social isolation and being

consumed by intense hatred can exhaust the individual and lead to a break down.

Membership can have negative implications for other aspects of the member's life by influencing perceptions and treatment from those outside the group's milieu. The member's identity, outside the group environment, can be disregarded in social situations where the expectation is to be assessed on individual characteristics or merits; such as employment interviews (Branscombe et al., 1999). In instances where the individual is assessed based on their group identity, there may be an experience of prejudice and discrimination. The interpretation of being prejudged on the basis of group membership, rather than as an individual, can cause resistance when the individual deems his or her group membership irrelevant or illegitimate to a specific context. For those with low identification with their social group, this discrimination can emphasise intergroup heterogeneity and/or further disillusionment with their membership (Branscombe et al., 1999). The lack of opportunities available to members can lead to an increased dependency on the organisation, or can cause the individual to evaluate the costs associated with maintaining the discriminated group identity. An autobiographical account of a former member of the German 2nd June Movement, Michael Baumann, discusses how external pressures can be internalised and influence group dynamics (Alexander & Myers, 1982, p. 174). Rising external pressures and increased group cohesiveness appeared to increase the frequency of mistakes made by members. Baumann describes how the pressures can be internalised by members, which caused greater concentration and an intense desire to achieve. However, these factors can compound until all rationality within the group and its methods is removed. It was at this stage of internal conflict, resulting from external pressures, which Baumann disengaged from the 2nd June Movement. While this describes Baumann's exit, this may not apply to those who still maintained significant attachment to the group. Skonovd's (1981) study in religious defection found participants could use a variety of psychological mechanisms to resolve conflicts experienced, rather than choose disengagement; repression and avoidance, rationalisation, reformation, and role withdrawal. These strategies are explained in more depth below in the

section on crisis response (pp. 55); they suggest that the individual's response to a crisis may be influenced by the continued attachment to the group.

Section summary.

The aforementioned contributing factors to disillusionment may not be seen as valid reasons for disengaging when considered in isolation; however, they can have a significant effect on the initial phase of doubt, and therefore help to overcome socialisation barriers. Skonovd (1981) acknowledges in his religious defection study that ex-members are likely to list the above reasons as sufficient for disengagement, but they may not be the real cause. This attribute of disillusionment may indicate individuals do not have great insight into the disengagement experience, but may suggest the use of justifications as a means of psychologically protecting exiting members.

The commitment to a group is likely to wane when the material, psychological and communal benefits of membership are outweighed by the time and resources required to maintain association. Idealists who maintain the ideological aspects may disengage and maintain radical beliefs, alternatively, the costs of membership may be minimised (see pp. 55 for Skonovd's discussion on the psychological aspects of conflict resolution during membership). However, members are more likely to disengage from the group if they believe that increased commitment is not likely to produce more desirable outcomes. Maintaining membership in many of these groups requires resources by the member in terms of money, time, energy and the loss of previous relationships. The significant investments by members enables groups to discourage disengagement as the leaving is associated with the loss of effort, and as such, any thoughts of disengaging need to be deliberate and intentional. Determining the importance of the membership and the cost of investing with the group differs according to roles and responsibilities, and the political-economic and socio-cultural context in which the individual and group reside.

Crisis Response

Following the crisis stage, the members begin to question and re-evaluate their identity, lifestyle and ideology, reflecting on past experiences with the collective's ideology and organisational structure to validate their involvement despite apparent contradictions (Ebaugh, 1988; Rabasa et al., 2010; Skonovd, 1981). The attempt to reduce the individual's experience of dissonance initiates processes for either resolution within the group's framework, or further culmination of the need for disengagement (Skonovd, 1981). At this stage, the individual monitors his or her behaviour, as well as acknowledges the reactions of others to determine if the doubts are accurate and whether to continue the exit process (Ebaugh, 1988). Examples of this include approaching leadership or other members to talk over concerns or engaging in behaviours, which are not consistent with the group norms, to elicit feedback.

The individual either finds reasons to minimise doubts and support the continuance of membership, or is further motivated to distance him or herself from the group. In Skonovd's (1981) work, defection as a response to a crisis was relativity rare in comparison to the following crisis responses. These responses do not necessarily operate exclusively and successfully overcoming doubts may require several or all of the following responses.

1) Repression and avoidance: This involves repressing any knowledge of the crisis and actively avoiding the acknowledgement of its existence. If a strong collective identity is maintained, it is more likely the concerns will be forgotten as the doubts and negative information are not part of the collective reality. Moreover, social relationships within the group can be threatened if the issue is pursued.

2) Rationalisation: This approach operates as a method for 'adjusting' reality and exploiting ambiguity to meet the needs of the collective or particular individual. The rationalisation of disconfirming events and crises can occur in various forms. One approach is to attribute deficiencies to the individual rather than the collective or ideology, as such, the fault is internalised by the individual perceiving the

problem. Alternatively, members can denigrate the conflicting information or the source of the information. For example, any person overtly opposing the ideology is deemed an enemy, insane or manipulated by corrupt sources; therefore, the information is rendered unreliable. Members can also engage in counter-balancing where additional information is provided, or sought out, to validate their beliefs while ignoring the conflicting information. The reaffirming of the collective identity while disregarding negative elements remind the member of the group's importance and its existing ideology. Rationalising the problem can be effective, particularly if the response evokes a negative emotional and/or cognitive influence over the alternative sources.

3) Reformation: This can occur at a collective or personal level when there is recognition of a problem or contradiction. Collective reformations involve attempts to change the direction of behaviours of the group or certain members, while personal reformation involves adjusting one's own beliefs. This personal reformation allows the individual to alter an aspect of their philosophy to maintain positive affiliations with the collective.

4) Withdrawal: This approach does not refer to the withdrawal from the group, but involves the relocation of the individual to a role or area of the organisation that aligns with the individual's ideological sensitivities.

5) Escape: This form of response is an interest of the current study and involves members distancing themselves from the group to relieve tension, and re-establish, as well as maintain, self-integrity. While some may intend on returning, others have no such intention; therefore, signifying the end of group affiliation. Plausible re-entry into the group is often complicated by the impact of social distancing and group evolution. Thus, the group that was left behind may be quite different to the group's current state at the time re-entry is attempt.

In Skonovd's (1981) study, most members were compelled to overcome the crisis and maintain group involvement. Leaving comes at a cost due to the fiscal and social investments in the group, along with other barriers to disengagement that are unique to fundamental and extremist groups (Bjørgo, 2009; Bromley, 1998; Decker & van Winkle, 1996; Disley, Weed, Reding, Clutterbuck, & Warnes, 2011; Rabasa et al., 2010). However, when the decision to disengage was made, exiting members continued the process of review and reflection to convince themselves the decision was necessary, as well as to make sense of their experiences with the group.

At this reflect and review stage, the individual considered past experiences, looking for reasons to stay or leave (Skonovd, 1979). When attempts to resolve the crisis fail, the member recalled repressed or forgotten inconsistencies and unpleasant incidents, which increased the disillusionment with group affiliation and strengthened the motivation to exit (Skonovd, 1979, 1981). During most instances of dissatisfaction, the individual maintains appropriate role performance and is reluctant to show any signs of dissatisfaction; however, once the perceived rewards of involvement cease, the desire to invest with the group reduces.

Once the individual is motivated to distance him or herself from the group, ideological conflicts develop into a rationale for disengaging and the individual reduces psychological dependency on the group (Skonovd, 1981). The identification by the group of the member's intent, or act, of disengaging can lead to a reaction from other members in the form of labelling. This can accelerate the disengagement process by altering self-perceptions. Brinkerhoff and Burke's (1980) evaluation of the influence of labelling during the stages between defection and becoming an apostate revealed that ex-members redefined the self consistently with this new label. Consequently, if the group views ex-members as 'non-believers' or 'inactive', then this role can be integrated into the new identity, and the ex-members may perform acts violating group norms to reaffirm as well as announce their newly assumed status. While the transition to an ex-member is a gradual social process, the labelling from the group can act as a catalyst to complete disengagement.

Ebaugh's (1988) qualitative study into the exit from major social roles proposed that individuals began to seek and weigh up alternatives, and this process acted as a reinforcer for the initial doubts. As new alternatives were identified, Ebaugh's participants engaged conscious cueing, anticipatory socialisation and role rehearsal, which shifted reference group orientations. These responses allowed the individuals to form an increasingly salient alternative identity and prepared them for the social transition into alternative roles post-exit. Skonovd's (1981) interviews with religious defectors found once individuals were motivated to distance themselves from the group, ideological conflicts developed into a rationale for disengagement, as well as reduced the individuals' psychological dependency on the group.

Ebaugh's (1988) argued that after identifying alternatives, a turning point is reached where the individual becomes consciously aware the old role is no longer desirable and realises the opportunity to form a new direction. Rabasa et al. (2010) refer to this point as the mental calculation of the push and pull factors in which the expected utility of maintaining group membership is less than the expected utility of leaving. The turning point serves three functions for the individual; reducing cognitive dissonance over staying or leaving, providing an opportunity to announce the decision to leave to others, as well as the mobilisation of the resources required to complete the exit.

The Exit

At this stage the individual has confirmed the decision to leave the group and actively, as well as consciously, removes him or herself from intra-group relationships. Skonovd (1981) describes this stage in terms of the decision process and strategies of leave taking. The decision to disengage may be made quickly but is usually a result of long periods of disenchantment and deliberation which end with a catalytic event. Some individuals require an alternative reality to move towards before defecting, which reduces the group's influence over the individual's reality and limits the ability to rationalise away inconsistencies. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for anticipatory socialisation into a new role and adoption of its attitudes and beliefs; thus, having a new role to move towards reduces the

uncertainty of life without the group. Once the decision to leave has been made, the individual must decide on how, if at all, the group should be informed.

The Exit: Covert, Overt or Declarative

Exploring literature on the physical exit of former extremists (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Rabasa et al., 2010) and defectors from controversial new-religious movements (Wright, 1987) found disengagement could manifest in three ways; covert, overt or declarative departure. The method of disengagement employed by a member was influenced by the experience of disillusionment, strength of intra-group relationships, and the group's structure. For example, radical groups with informal structures can blur the lines of membership making it easier for members to reduce interaction and drift in and out whereas highly structured and exclusive groups (such as one percent motorcycle clubs who have by-laws regarding attendance and duties) exert greater control over membership with rules and processes for entering the group and the expectations surrounding the termination of membership.

The covert departure is achieved without drawing attention to the member's intention to leave. The individual leaves in secret to evade any discussion or debate over the decision, as well as avoid the group's scrutiny and repercussions of being labelled a traitor. Bjørgo and Horgan (2009) and Wright (1987) propose this method is more common with less known members who can gradually drift to the margins of a group and reduce their commitment in terms of time as well as resources before dropping out. For fringe members of a radical group, the disengagement process can be less daunting – particularly for those who were not publically identified as members (Bjørgo, 2005). As they begin to drift away, interest is lost in the group, and the group can lose interest in the marginal member. At this point the individual can develop new reference groups and engage ideological reformation through external relationships. While this form of defection is least likely to result in reprisals, there is the concern that without a clean and public break from the group the past may become public knowledge (Bjørgo, 2005). If kept private, ex-members are at risk of embarrassment or damage

to their reputation should their involvement surface later in life (Wright, 1987). While this method reduces negative sanctions in the short term, the long-term consequences can be more detrimental to post identity.

The overt departure is done quietly but not in secret. Often the individual reluctantly leaves after failed deliberations with group leaders and finds solace in the fact that attempts were made to reconcile first (Wright, 1987). This method of departure is more common with long-term and veteran members. Skonovd's (1981) reference to religious totalistic groups found the emotional aspects and the institutionalisation of group involvement made public announcements of defection extremely rare. When a member breaks from the group but still maintains its ideological beliefs, there may still be experiences of social ostracism and harassment from both the former group and former enemies (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009). If the ex-member was a publicly known member of the radical group, the intensity of the stigmatisation experience is increased, particularly as social and professional prospects are restricted. The experiences of isolation and loneliness increase the risk of the individual drifting back into the group, or towards a less stigmatised group. However, as noted by Bjørgo (2005), such attempt at disengagement is usually part of the disengagement process; full dissociation with the group and its ideology tends to occur with time and the development of alternative group affiliations.

Finally, the declarative departure involves the announcement of the decision to leave, without the willingness to negotiate (Wright, 1987). This dramatic statement involves the rejection of the ideology, as well as the attitudes held by the group. This approach is particularly beneficial for well-known members who have fewer alternatives for disengaging, and provides a public break with their past which displays to outsiders the desire for a new beginning. This act is deliberate and is often a reflection of the member's bottled-up sentiments, resulting in confrontation with the group, psychological strain on the disengaging member, and security risks of reprisals (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009). The group is typically unaware of the member's prior intent to leave and is unable to mobilise counter arguments in a timely manner (Wright, 1987).

Post-Exit

After exiting the group, the individual experiences the 'in between worlds' phenomenon where the current self-identity is compounded by elements of previous roles and memberships, as well as the development of new roles and associated values (Skonovd, 1981). As individuals leave the group, they assume new responsibilities and make decisions previously handled by the group. For example, in totalistic groups, which provide necessities such as housing, food and employment, the individual must now find another way to obtain these resources. Additionally, the socialisation and lifestyle of the collective can cause a residual effect on the individual (Skonovd, 1981). Despite the rejection of the group, practices and ideals may remain part of the individual's habitual behaviours, which can cause cultural clashes. It is not until such habits are altered that 'normal' life may resume. Ebaugh (1988) argues the individual will 'look back' at their previous role, which can result in further anxiety and fear of the unknown future; it is how the individual responds to this emotional stage that influences the success of the exiting process.

At this post-exit stage of the process, the individual is likely to experience emotional and cognitive responses due to cultural changes and past reflections. Skonovd (1981) noted his participants experienced psychological phenomena such as fear and guilt, meaninglessness and depression, as well as floating (pp. 133-146). Skonovd describes floating as the 'flashback' experience of periodic reversion to beliefs and behaviours of a former way-of-life. Coates (2009, 2010) phenomenological study of six former members of charismatic groups supports Skonovd's (1981) finding with exiters struggling to adjust to appropriate social interactions. Skonovd (1981) found fear to be a product of the beliefs perpetuated by the group and the apparent damnation for defecting, as well as individuals' concerns about their ability to operate in the world independently. Guilt is associated with the rejection of previously held beliefs and ascetic practices, as well as the rejection of a group to which the individual had great attachment. Kassimeris' (2011) case study of former Greek 17 November member Patroklos Tselentis described the post exit experience as 'wrestling with himself' as he

tried to expiate his involvement in certain group acts. The meaninglessness and depression, as well as social isolation, can be a result of the above experiences following disengagement. Additionally, the loss of camaraderie and intensity of the previous lifestyle can also cause individuals to lose their sense of meaning and purpose, furthering their depression.

Skonovd (1981) included both participants who had been deprogrammed and those who exited voluntarily. The negative post exit experience may have been influenced by the roles of the anti-cult organisations as exiters tended to adopt conspiratory approaches towards the group and their involvement. Wright's (1984, 1987) sample of participants, who were voluntary exiters and were not exposed to any deprogramming, tended to display more positive emotions towards their involvement. Participants appreciated certain aspects of group membership; the strong affective ties experienced by the participants during their membership were not dismissed despite ideological differences. An assessment of post involvement attitudes of the voluntary exiters saw 67% of the 45 participants state they felt wiser for the experience, while only 9% felt they were brainwashed and 7% felt angry. Wright (1984) argues voluntary exiters are able to reflect on membership by sifting through the favourable experience and events as separate to perceived immoral acts.

Forging the ex-identity is the last stage of the disengagement process where the individual re-integrates into mainstream society, with varying degrees of success. Skonovd (1981) describes two modes of integration, passive and active. The passive mode requires individuals to recognise their previous totalistic involvement, but avoid direct confrontation with past beliefs and relationships over fears that they will be drawn back in. Voluntary defectors were more likely to assume the passive integration and were more reluctant to seek counselling or identify themselves as ex-members. This passive approach can be successful for ignoring the past; however ex-members are likely to switch to the active mode when remaining passive becomes damaging to their new identity. The active mode requires the difficult and direct confrontation with the individual's past to address the group's cognitive and emotional influence. This may include confrontation with active members, analysis of the doctrine and ideology, and/or personal

reflections on past experiences. By doing so, the individual may make sense of their experience and find peace with their past identity.

The formation of the ex-identity also requires the individual to cope with reactions to the newly developed identity (Ebaugh, 1988). This can include the reactions of those with whom the individual has shared their past, or the realisation that skills and opportunities may have been hampered by prolonged involvement with the group.

Barriers to Disengagement

Members devote considerable amounts of time and resources to the collective goals and activities, as well as to maintain their intra-group relationships; as such, the notion of withdrawal can be perceived as costly and as a personal failure. While there are many factors leading to the consideration of disengagement, there are also several factors that can impede the process. Taylor (1988, p. 168) refers to the concept "spiralling of commitment", where previous investments and organisational pressures entrap the individual into maintaining membership despite doubts. The psychological barriers that enforce group commitment consist of three fundamental elements that make disengagement unlikely;

1. The group's ability to ensure the member's behaviour requires psycho-social investments;
2. Decisions reinforcing such investment are advocated as the only feasible option; and
3. Any efforts to avoid the investment only serve to consolidate the entrapment of the member (Taylor, 1988).

Disengagement from any social group can have negative repercussions in terms of the loss of identity and community; however, the groups of interest to the current study can produce additional and more severe consequences that need to be taken into consideration, such as violent reprisals and the loss of protection. Demant et al. (2008a) identified examples of social and psychological barriers involved in disengaging; fear of reprisals from the group, the loss of reputation as well as protection, and the marginal position following disengagement. These barriers are designed to ensure the

dominance of the group's ideology, the individual's social dependence on the group and instilling practical lifestyle barriers that make withdrawal unattractive (Demant et al., 2008b).

Loss of Friendships

The groups provide friendship and social support, whereby exiting requires the severance of these social networks; thus, the experience of disengagement can be more difficult than establishing membership. Social relationships developed within ideological social groups tend to be heightened by sharing the same world view, the perceived threat from outsiders as well as the camaraderie developed through shared adversity and isolation from mainstream society. Interviews with 11 ex-servicemen from the UK's armed forces found leaving the armed forces led to feelings of isolation and a loss of a collective purpose or bond (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). Brunger et al. and Higate (2001) found this loss of mateship and camaraderie was one of the main difficulties in adjusting to civilian life.

These intra-group relationships require high investments in terms of friendships and social support and can, at times, provide a substitute family, security, and a sense of identity (Bjørgo, 2002, June; Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Coates, 2010). Even when the individual is at odds with the group's ideology and politics, friendships and loyalty can be strong enough reasons for maintaining membership. This is supported by the findings in Photiadis' (1965) study of commitment and conformity of 553 men in a Mormon community. The study found a stronger correlation between participation on a social level and conformity to group norms than between overt conformity and the strength of attachment to ideology.

Abuza (2009) notes in his review of the prison-based deradicalisation programmes in Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia, that the target groups' organisational aspects can prevent the programmes from having an effect on intergroup relationships. These deradicalisation programmes target groups, including the Islamic militant Jemaah Islamiyah, which deliberately utilise a highly interconnected network with friendships and strategic marriages. Abuza (2009) argues this extreme level of interconnectedness serves to insulate members from outside influences and increase the psychological

strain of disengagement. To depart from the social relationships developed during membership can leave the individual feeling isolated and alone, as well as in a social vacuum. In terms of countering collective ideologies, the group's cohesiveness can have detrimental implications for attempts to isolate and rehabilitate existing members (Abuza, 2009).

Another negative consequence of leaving the social network is the loss of protection from rival groups (Bjørgo, 2002, June; Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Caldwell & Altschuler, 2001). Despite leaving the radical milieu, rival gangs who are unaware, or do not care, of the ex-member's status may still harass and assault a disengaged individual. The fear of being victimised without the previous level of protection can cause the individual to reject the idea of leaving the group, and may prompt others to return.

Stigmatisation

Criminological theories of labelling and the amplification of deviance highlight the implications of stigmatisation on the likelihood of future criminality and deviant networks (Becker, 1963; Pontell, 2005; Roach Anleu, 2000). The stigmatisation by authorities and the community can trigger psychological processes that influence an individual to migrate into deviant groups that can provide social support. Becker (1963) theorises that the final impact of stigmatisation, and engagement with deviant groups, is the adoption of collective rationalisations, definitions, and opportunities that encourage and facilitate further deviant behaviour. Leaving the group becomes difficult as social interactions between the stigmatised individual and others are often characterised by expressions of uneasiness, embarrassment, vagueness, and intense efforts at impression management (Bernburg, Krohn, & Rivera, 2006; Goffman, 1963). The discomfort associated with such interactions can lead to both sides to avoid further contact.

Those who belong to highly stigmatised groups experience greater difficulties disengaging and re-integrating in the mainstream community, particularly if members of their own group and rival groups, police, and community members still perceive them as members and treat them as such (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009). If the individual is still viewed as a member, the

label may mask any behavioural changes indicating a shift in identity and restrict the opportunities available. As such, the consequence of labelling can encourage the member to remain with the group despite a desire to pursue an alternative lifestyle (Caldwell & Altschuler, 2001).

The isolation and marginalisation experienced by members can serve to enhance group cohesion. As some of these groups are considered to be irrational and/or dangerous by the mainstream community, attempts are made by the community to distance themselves from these groups (Demant et al., 2008a). As a result, the group becomes increasingly alienated from society and previous relationships, which causes members to become even more isolated from social institutions, such as employment and education. This increased isolation means members are no longer involved in relationships and social institutions that could reintegrate them into society, and consequently, serves to increases marginalisation and reduce the plausibility of alternative lifestyles (Demant et al., 2008a).

Social Isolation

Often, as individuals interact with their group they engage in the subsequent socialisation process of severing ties to the mainstream community and external relationships (Bjørgo, 2002, June; Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Demant et al., 2008a; Demant et al., 2009). As groups demand significant commitment from their members, the number of intense relationships that can be maintained outside the group is limited, and often reduced in terms of time, energy and resources (Wolf, 1991). Additionally, the involvement in violent activities and conflict with authority can make harmonious relationships with society increasingly difficult, with society and the individual severing relations. The member develops social dependency, whereby, without the group the person will be isolated in a social vacuum and have to rely on him or herself for protection. By minimising social alternatives the individual progresses further into this socialisation process and greater social dependency on the group is developed (Demant et al., 2008a).

Consequently, it becomes harder for a member with doubts regarding membership to envision a reconnection with the broader community due to

their severed relationships; hence, the perception of having nowhere to go but the group can lead to feelings of social isolation (Bjørgo, 2005; Noricks, 2009). Wright (1987) and Demant et al. (2008a) argue the social vacuum that results from socialisation into stigmatised groups is one of the main factors preventing disengagement. Individuals trying to leave a group face the socialisation challenges of establishing these factors in the outside world, which require the reestablishment and mending of relationships left behind, and establishing a new identity.

The isolation experienced when leaving social relationships behind can be reduced through anticipatory socialisation where an individual seeks out and develops relationships prior to disengagement (Ebaugh, 1988). This allows the member to engage behavioural roles that coincide with developing a new identity and relationships. For members who have little control over the process, or disengaged unexpectedly, the benefits of anticipatory socialisation are not experienced.

Loss of Identity

The assimilation into the group can lead to the systematic reformation of the member's individual identity, forming psychological dependency on the group (Demant et al., 2008a, 2008b). The review by Demant et al. (2008a) on the barriers to leaving religious sects found the collective identity decreases the confidence of the members in their ability to make judgements and function without the group. These self-doubts can augment the group's influence over personal and moral aspects of a member's psychology. Consequently, the individual may view disengagement as a personal weakness and a failure that he or she is not able to live up to ideals. Prior to disengagement, members can experience an inner conflict between their desires for an alternative lifestyle and the need to uphold their moral obligations.

The deindividuation in group processes and the minimisation of the individual's identity can form psychological dependence on the group whereby disengagement seems impossible. This psychological dependence can cause members to maintain their membership in fear of losing their understanding of how the world operates, as they view it as defined through

the group's ideology (Demant et al., 2008a; Wright, 1987). The ontological security provided by the ideology provides a level of self-esteem afforded by knowing how the world works and one's place within it. Additionally, the psychological dependency may cause a decrease in the member's confidence to make sound personal and moral judgements, creating a cycle that allows the group to have greater influence (Demant et al., 2008a). The loss of such psychological support from the group, and the ontological security, can threaten the self-identity of members and place them in a moral vacuum.

Reprisals

The threat of reprisals from remaining group members is a significant fear for members in the groups of interest to the current study (Bjørgo, 2002, June; Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Caldwell & Altschuler, 2001; Demant et al., 2008a). For some groups, the promise to keep quiet about group business is not enough and they may seek a return for their investment into the member. Leaving can be viewed by remaining members as betrayal and can be dealt with in a severe and violent manner. This can be observed in the literature of one percent motorcycle clubs that discuss the notion of leaving in 'bad standing', whereby ex-members are subjected to extreme, and sometimes fatal, violence (Ballard, 1997; Blackburn, 2000; Montgomery, 1976; Quinn, 2001). These concerns can ensure members remain loyal and continue to invest their resources in the group; however, these threats may exist only as myths to discourage disengagement.

The threat (actual or perceived) of violence and death is often perpetuated through myths and stereotypes regarding how one can leave the social group; in particular, youth gangs and one percent motorcycle clubs (Ballard, 1997; Caldwell & Altschuler, 2001; Decker & van Winkle, 1996). Caldwell and Altschuler's (2001) study into adolescent street gangs demonstrated that despite knowing members who had left the gang unharmed, many members perpetuated the only way to leave a gang is to die. In most cases, Caldwell and Altschuler (2001) found members drifted to the fringe of the gang, gradually stopped associating with other members, and pursued new friendship networks as well as interests before

disengaging. Only in rare instances were member punished or assaulted for their attempts to leave.

Bjørgo's (2002) study into the EXIT programme also found long-standing defecting members were often sent death threats, but rarely were the threats carried out. More often ex-members of totalistic groups experienced harassment, verbal threats and expressions of contempt in place of violent reprisals. However, some radical social groups can treat defecting members in a more extreme manner than adolescent gangs; for example, one percent motorcycle clubs. Those who leave may be violently punished, have their tattoos forcibly removed and be required to surrender all assets to the club (Ballard, 2007; Bucci, Cooper, & Mills, 2014). The labelling of ex-members as traitors reinforces defectors as failures not worthy of the group, and as such, reinforces the consequences of leaving to remaining members.

Section summary.

Social groups are most significant in human interaction and the investment of time and resources, as well as the emotional attachment, make departing a group a painful experience. Members in the social groups of interest to the current study come to rely on one another for support and psychological wellbeing. The organisational structure of such groups ensures members are invested socially as well as psychologically and employ socialisation practices to prevent drop outs. As a consequence, disengagement from these social groups can have negative repercussions for the self-identity and safety of ex-members. The decision to abandon the group is complex and while there may be justifiable reasons to leave, the barriers reinforcing the social dependency on the group ensure disengagement is not simple.

Variables Influencing the Experience of Disengagement

While the shared outcome is the termination of group membership, the disengagement experience varies between individuals. Ebaugh's (1988) study of 185 participants, who engaged voluntary role exiting processes, identified key commonalities in exiting a diverse range of roles, including ex-

convicts, ex-alcoholics, ex-doctors, ex-nuns and divorcees. The triggers that facilitated the decision to exit, and the creation a new identity as an "ex-", included a sense of disillusionment with the individual's persona or identity and an attempt to identify and assume an alternative, more satisfactory role. While analysing the qualitative data on role exit, Ebaugh (1988) identified 11 variables that influenced an individual's experience of disengagement from a social role (see Table 3). Support for a number of these variables was also found in the disengagement literature and examples are provided in the discussion below.

Table 3.

Ebaugh's (1988) Variables of Disengagement

Variables		Description
Voluntariness	•	Degree of choice in making an exit
Centrality of role	•	Master roles, influence of role
	•	Exiting a master role requires a radical transformation of self-identity
Reversability	•	Ability to return to previous role
	•	Irreversibly roles tend to be central to self-identity and initiate change in spin-off roles
Duration	•	Positive support facilitates process while negative reactions hinders
	•	To a certain point, the longer the deliberation process, the easier the adjustment
Degree of control	•	In most cases, the exiter is dependent on other people or institutions
	•	Cohort effect can increase awareness of control over decision to stay or leave
Individual vs. Group exit	•	Cohort effect can be both suggestive and supportive
	•	Allows sharing of deliberation process
Single vs. Multiple exit	•	Generally multiple exits occur simultaneously and may compete for time and resources
Social desirability	•	The desirability of the ex-identity is considered when weighing alternatives and impacts on the cues presented after exit
Institutionalisation	•	Social expectations on process and time to adjust
Awareness	•	Awareness of exiting
	•	Organisational awareness contexts
Sequentiality	•	Specified progression of events

Voluntariness: The voluntariness refers to the individuals' degree of choice in the role exit. Ebaugh (1988) argues that those who initiate the disengagement process experience the four stages of the role exit process, while those who are forced to exit do not experience, and act on, their first

doubts, nor do they have the opportunity to seeking and weigh role alternatives. This can have an impact on the individual's attitude towards their previous involvement as Galanter's (1989) study of voluntary and involuntary defection from the Unification Church found differences in individual feelings towards their group after an extended period of time. Those who left the sect voluntarily usually experienced a long disengagement period after disillusionment with organisational and normative issues; however, the involuntary departure was often initiated suddenly by concerned family members and supported by counter-ideological and educational components, as well as the physical isolation from the group. Galanter (1989) found in later years, those forcibly removed displayed more negative feelings towards the church, experienced greater isolation from the church and displayed lower loyalty to former members as well as ideology. Voluntary defectors indicated positive feelings towards existing members of the church and still maintained some beliefs in the church's ideology, suggesting involuntary disengagement and de-programming components with radical religious movements may be more effective in deradicalising individuals.

Centrality of the role: The level of attachment, or the degree of emotional intensity invested and associated with membership, plays a significant role in disengagement. There are a variety of roles that people engage in everyday life. Some of these roles are of great importance to the individual's self-identity, while others are peripheral and can be abandoned without much distress. The roles are not equally important to self-identity, nor do they operate all at the same time; thus, there is a hierarchy of roles, which influences self-involvement and affect devoted to specific roles. Those with high attachment, which are central to the individual's self-identity (master roles), require greater levels of intensity and effort. When two or more roles are simultaneously activated inter-role conflict occurs, which then triggers distress and motivates the individual to adopt a dominant role (Ebaugh, 1988). The departure from a master role usually initiates changes to an array of other roles, leading to a radical transformation of self-identity.

Long-term core members have a more complete ideological formation inherent in their identity than new or fringe members, and are consequently

exposed to more disengagement barriers (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009). As totalistic groups provide resources for all aspects of the members' lives, the exit has implications for the members' other roles such as employee, family member and friend. The isolation due to extensive membership can increase the extent to which psychological support and identity come exclusively from the social group and further complicates disengagement.

Reversability: The ability to return to a previous role after disengaging is referred to as reversibility. Ebaugh (1988) proposes role exits that are irreversible tend to be more central to an individual's identity, thus causing the individual to take longer to deliberate, weigh alternatives and engage role rehearsal, as well as anticipatory socialisation.

Duration of disengagement: The time taken to disengage from a role may vary from days to many years and is influenced by the centrality of the role and the reactions of others. Receiving positive social support helps to facilitate disengagement, while negative reactions can hinder the process. The individuals engage reality testing where they seek assurance from others that problems exist in the current role and their doubts are justified. At this point, the individual engages significant others to identify plausible options gain support for their concerns, and explore alternative definitions of events.

Ebaugh (1988) argues increased awareness of alternatives and consequences tend to extend the course of deliberation and the duration of the exit process. The extensive deliberation, up to a point, is proposed to provide the disengaging individual fewer regrets and ease the adjustment to an ex-status. Wacquant (1990) suggests to the contrary, that increased awareness and access to information facilitates a clear and swift evaluation of alternatives as well as variables within the individual's control, resulting in a rapid role exit.

Degree of control: In most instances, an individual is not able to disengage by him or herself, but is dependent on other people or institutions, such as the criminal justice system or a spouse. The perceived degree of control may be increased when exiting as a cohort or by witnessing others disengage. This 'cohort effect' increases the awareness of other members'

concerns and discontent with the social group, and highlights the plausibility of another way-of-life.

This may also reflect conformity in regards to self-categorisation. Acknowledging differences between oneself and a fellow in-group member may produce subjective uncertainty and motivate attempts to identify with a more relevant group (Hogg, 2000). When members consider themselves as separate to the group and form their own cohort, they distance themselves from the norms, beliefs, and behaviours of comparison with the new out-group (previously the in-group).

Individual versus group exit: The cohort effect allows the individual to realise other like-minded individuals are experiencing doubts and abandoning their role commitments, providing support and informing the individual. Sharing doubts and deliberation the exit allows others to present the benefits and costs of group membership, and at the same time allow alternative definitions of context. Ebaugh (1988) argues that the group exits tend to be shorter in duration and more socially accepted as the increased numbers in defectors tend to represent a flaw in the group, rather than the attribution of failure to the departing individual. However, leaving with peers can also present additional problems in terms of its success, as highlighted in Tchappat's (2009) autobiography. Tchappat (p. 13) recalls how his first attempt to 'escape' the Exclusive Brethren with two other members failed when one developed 'cold feet' and confessed the escape plot to the leaders. The remaining two were caught, punished, and isolated from each other as well as from the rest of the group.

Single versus multiple exits: Concerns with one role can spread to having doubts for other roles which share responsibilities, particularly when the concerns are with the roles central to self-identity. When exiting a central role, individuals tend to exit an array of roles, which may or may not be related due to the overlap with peripheral roles, or the time and resource needed to establish an ex-identity. Exiting multiple roles can cause considerable strain in terms of prioritising time and energy, and those with greater awareness of the multiple exits tend to be less overwhelmed and frightened at the point of exit. Furthermore, those with greater awareness

spend more time deliberating the process and engaging anticipatory socialisation for multiple new roles.

Social desirability: When considering the advantages and disadvantages of exiting a role, Ebaugh (1988) argues social desirability of the ex-identity is an important factor. The awareness of social reactions can impact the kind of cues presented by the individual after exiting; for example, publicly declaring the exit or the minimising the display of group norms. Upon declaring an ex-identity, most individuals expect social reactions to differ from their previous role and disappointment is experienced when the new identity is disregarded. For other members, the former identity is not discussed for fear of judgement or the unwillingness to discuss such a personal matter.

Degree of institutionalisation: Institutionalised roles are those associated with expectations and rituals for the role-exiting process, such as the time taken to adjust. Some exits are considered rites of passage and are afforded positive responses, such as graduating or retiring and are given status through labels (alumnus and retiree). This can be observed in the one percent motorcycle subculture where older members who are unable to fulfil the needs of club commitment are allowed to exit and become 'honorary' members. These members maintain status within the club and can visit and participate in rides, but have limited knowledge and influence over club activities (Veno, 2003).

Degree of awareness: This is influenced by both the individuals' process of disengagement; for example, the deliberate and calculated exit compared to the split with much less deliberation as well as awareness, and the organisational structure. The individual awareness includes the knowledge of single and multiple exits, social desirability, and the level of control over the process as well as group membership.

The structure of the organisation influences the awareness of members by allowing, or inhibiting, the flow of information among the members themselves, as well as between members and outsiders. Ebaugh (1988) proposes organisations with an open awareness context allow members to realise what factors are within one's control, easing the weighing of alternatives and deliberation process. Groups with closed awareness

contexts deliberately attempt to prevent members from being aware of alternatives. These groups discourage doubts regarding commitment by providing an ideology or world view that integrates into a totalitarian system, such as cults (Skonovd, 1981; Wright, 1987). It is when these groups experience change or are challenged that individuals are more likely to question and doubt their roles.

Sequentiality: While not specifically relevant to the disengagement from radical social groups, Ebaugh (1988) also raised the issue of sequentiality – the specified progression of events. Examples of sequentiality include the voluntary process, such as engaged to married and recruit to officer, and the involuntary process of child to adolescent. The sequentiality of events can contribute to individuals' perceived lack of control over the exiting process. This feature is not considered relevant to the majority of groups of interest in the current research as they work to maintain memberships; however, may be relevant to those exiting the combat role in the military because retirement is inevitable as the body ages.

Section summary.

While most studies present a step-by-step description of disengagement with little discussion on individual or group variability, Ebaugh (1988) proposed a list of variables that influence the individual experience of disengagement. Some of these factors can serve to hasten or impede the disengagement process as well as potentially adversely impact psychological wellbeing. While Ebaugh's (1988) study focused on exiting from socially defined roles, the generalisation to disengagement from social groups is notable and these factors highlight the complexity of studying the individual's experiences.

While Ebaugh's (1988) study has a flavour of 'catch all' categories that lack analytical comparison and its assertions requiring further validation, it does provide a common sense approach to the under-researched area of disassociating and disidentifying across varying social positions. Ebaugh (1988) has assumed role exit is a homogenous process unaffected by the norms specific to different subcultures and this requires further analytical comparison between diverse cultures to substantiate this claim. As such, the

current research will construct a model of disengagement based on the homogenous process, but will also take into consideration the individual variables and their impact on the individual experience.

The next section presents the rationale for the current study.

Rationale

The literature on disengagement from religious groups and violent extremism describes the decision to leave ideological social groups as a complex experience. Chapter 2 explained the significance of social groups in the social identity of individuals, particularly in highly cohesive, ideological social groups. However, the negative social perceptions associated with the majority of social groups in the current study have meant individual experiences are often overlooked in favour of achieving a counter extremism objective. Many of these papers also rely on secondary sources or incarcerated populations. While there are some empirical studies on the disengagement from religious groups, fundamentalism and role exit, the existing literature is generally focused on one social group, or social groups of the same ideology. As such, little is known of the psychology behind the broader disengagement experience.

Most existing studies also place a heavy emphasis on the causes of disengagement, while offering little explanatory power on why these causes are influential to the individual member. Researchers are able to pinpoint what facilitated the disengagement process, but are unable to establish why a particular trigger was significant to one member and not another. These studies do suggest that disengagement is a complex psychological phenomenon, but there remain gaps in the field. Why do certain crises influence some members but not others? What is the nature of such crises that facilitates disengagement? How significant are normative, affective or continuance factors in disengagement? Are reported crises causes for disengagement or justifications for the exiting decision? How do members manage the decision making experience? What variables influence the individual experience of disengaging from ideological social groups? Does psychological disengagement facilitate deradicalisation?

Previous research indicates that disengagement from such social groups can impact individuals in significant ways. The disengagement can have severe repercussion for an individual's social environment, identity and in some cases cause anxiety over personal safety. However, little research exists on exploring the psychological experience of disengagement that draws on multiple ideological social groups. The current study addressed this gap and the above questions through interviews with former members of diverse ideological social groups. The use of primary sources provided a robust insight to the experiences of psychological disengagement and facilitated greater understanding of the psychology of disengagement and deradicalisation.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature relating to disengagement in order to understand what is currently known about this phenomenon. It established that the majority of the literature pertains to the causes of disengagement with only a few studies empirically researching individuals' experiences. The causes are varied and previous studies offer little insight as to why some causes lead to disengagement in some individuals and not others. The processes involved a crisis, which caused individuals to perceive the role and/or membership unfavourably and facilitated an evaluation of alternatives. After reaching a turning point, members would physically disengage and establish an ex-identity. The exit impacted the psychosocial wellbeing of the individual.

The nature of entitative social groups and the costs associated with disengagement served as inhibitors to the exit decision-making process. Many of the barriers pertained to the group's psychosocial aspects; relationships, identity and belonging. Unique to fundamental social groups is the socialisation and rituals of exiting. These groups want to reduce member attrition and may pursue an act of vengeance if a disengaging member is perceived as disloyal, or needs to be made an example of. As a consequence, disengaging from such social groups can have negative repercussions for the self-identity and safety of the ex-member.

Ebaugh (1988) proposed a list of variables that influence an individual's experience of role exiting. Some of these can serve to hasten or impede the disengagement process as well as potentially adversely impact psychological wellbeing. While there is support for these variables in the disengagement literature, there is little discussion focusing on individual's experiences or related factors.

While comparisons between various studies indicate shared similarities in the disengagement from extremism, gangs, cults and religious affiliation, no previous study (to the best of the researcher's knowledge) has explored these groups concurrently. Additionally, much of the research focused on the outcome of disengagement rather than the individual experience. Therefore, there is a need to explore the experience of disengagement to increase understanding of the psychosocial impact on the individual. The next chapter describes and discusses the research methodology employed by the current study to explore the individual experience of disengagement from ideological social groups.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

In order to answer the research question "what is the individual experience of psychological disengagement" a grounded theory methodology was adopted. This chapter explains the research processes taken to explore this experience of disengagement. This begins with an explanation of the epistemology, theoretical assumptions and the use of the grounded theory methodology as it was applied in the current study. The next section provides a detailed discussion of the research process, including participant profiles and recruitment, the interviewing method, and the ethical considerations relating to the interviewing of participants from sensitive populations. The final section will discuss the grounded theory method of analysis of the interview transcripts.

Research Design

As the purpose of the current study was to explore personal experiences of former members of highly entitative and ideological social groups, it was essential the methodology allowed participants to express their perspectives while minimising limitations on the discussion. For this reason a qualitative approach was chosen as the aim was to *describe* the phenomenon of disengagement from the perspective of the social groups of interest. Qualitative methodologies are useful in the exploration of fields where little previous knowledge exists, as well as allowing individual experiences to provide rich and detailed narratives of an unexplored area (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). As such, the current study emphasised discovery, description and meaning in its findings.

To establish theoretical rigour in the research design it is important for the researcher to state the philosophical underpinnings of the study (Koro-Ljunberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009; Rennie, 1988). In line with Crotty (1998) the following section explains the epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology and methods underlying the current study (see Figure 1.). The epistemology and theoretical framework justify the methodology and approach to the current study. This provides guidance to

the researcher for conceptualising knowledge and also allows the reader to appreciate the value and rigour of the findings (Koro-Ljunberg et al., 2009).

Epistemology

| The understanding of knowledge | Social constructionist |

Theoretical framework

| Philosophical worldview | Interpretative phenomenology |

Methodology

| Research plan of action | Grounded Theory Methodology |

Methods

| Strategies for conducting research | Sampling: Purposive, theoretical
Data: Interviews
Analysis: constant comparison, coding, memos |

Figure 1. Philosophical paradigm guiding the study of individual experience of psychological disengagement

Epistemology

The epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and understanding, which influences the research process (Crotty, 1998).

Traditional positivist epistemology emphasised knowledge as a product of the individual irrespective of the social world (Dancy, Sosa, & Steup, 2010; Goldman, 1999); while interpretative epistemologies, particularly social constructionism, focus on the social practices and interactions experienced by individuals.

Social constructionism rejects the assumption of a universal truth and proposes that meaning is achieved through engagement with the social world (Burr, 1995). Each social reality is, therefore, grounded in an individual's social interactions and is constructed, as Crotty (1998, p. 8) explains,

> There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon.

As such, this philosophical approach emphasises that individuals attach their own subjective meaning to experiences, rather than merely reacting to a stimulus. Knowledge is, therefore, formed through the interaction and self-reflection of individuals. While the phenomenon being studied could have an element of 'sameness' about it, in the sense that there is a shared experience of disengagement, each individual would ascribe his or her own meaning to the experience.

In the current study, social constructionism was an appropriate epistemology as group membership is given meaning and significance through social processes and discourse between the member, the group and society. While each participant has experienced the disengagement phenomenon, their perception and meaning has been grounded in their own social reality. It is these commonalities in meanings, as well as shared processes, that a grounded theory approach elicits to develop a substantive theory.

Theoretical Framework

The epistemology informs the theoretical framework, and thus the methodology (Crotty, 1998). There are various theoretical frameworks available to study human experiences; however; however many of these frameworks make use of pre-established categories to interpret cultural data and draw on the external observer's perspective rather than those within the culture being studied. Aligning with social constructionism, the theoretical framework should reflect an interpretivist framework that allows for understanding individual meaning. Interpretative phenomenology was selected as the theoretical framework for the current study due to the qualitative and philosophical nature of the current research – extracting meanings and essences of the lived experience of disengagement as articulated in participants' interviews, to construct a substantive theory (Patton, 2002).

Interpretative phenomenology.

The aim of the researcher in adopting an interpretative phenomenological framework is to describe and interpret the social and psychological phenomenon as accurately as possible from the perspectives of those involved (Groenewald, 2004). Interpretative phenomenological theoretical frameworks emphasise an 'insider' perspective that explores a conscious experience through introspection rather than inferentially through behavioural observation. Doing so implies theoretical knowledge is secondary to the experiential, practical and instinctive understanding of an experience (Standing, 2009). By exploring the experience from an insider's perspective that is derived from introspection, the information is at risk of post-hoc alteration, which may be construed as a limitation; however, it provides insight into the phenomenon according to personal significance and individual history.

There are two distinct philosophical streams of phenomenology, descriptive (Husserl, 1952), and interpretative (Heidegger, 1927/1962); contemporary approaches have often opted to utilise aspects of both of these streams; however the current study utilised the interpretive

phenomenology framework. The difference underlying the two phenomenological approaches lies in the epistemology, Husserl utilised an objectivist view, while Heidegger viewed reality as socially constructed. Underlying Husserl's phenomenological approach is the assumption that certain features are common across all who experience a phenomenon. These are referred to as universal, or eidetic, structures that represent the true nature of the phenomenon being studied, and are viewed as objective and separate to context and history. This is unlike Heidegger's interpretative phenomenology, which incorporates subjective personal experiences in the shaping of perceptions and analysis.

Heidegger (1927/1962), and later Gadamer (1976), differed in their view of phenomenology by emphasising the need for pre-understanding. These phenomenological interpretations differ from Husserlian philosophy, arguing interpretation is intrinsic to qualitative works. Descriptions of experiences are attempts to interpret and communicate in a form significant to both the research and individual, thus reality is constructed and altered by the individual (Laverty, 2003). In the current study, pre-understanding was established through the literature review, which justified the research question; however, data analysis was conducted through constant comparison between participants rather than pre-imposed categories or theories. By focusing on the whole person's interpretation of the experience, and not just the event, interpretative phenomenology avoids concepts of reduction and bracketing. These concepts within Husserlian philosophy (1927/1962) negate researcher's prior knowledge and research objectives. Rather, interpretative phenomenology encourages interaction between the researcher and the subject matter and acknowledges the research process involves some prejudice, as one cannot simply disregard knowledge by adopting a detached attitude (Laverty, 2003).

In the current study, the use of interpretative phenomenology as a theoretical framework allowed the research into disengagement from ideological social groups to be interpreted beyond the descriptive level to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological experience. The epistemology and theoretical framework provide the philosophical understanding of how knowledge is constructed, and acknowledge the

influence of both the participant and researcher in the study. The next section discusses the methodology used for eliciting data and analysing the personal experiences of disengagement. Consistent with the interpretative phenomenological approach, the research used the meaning and essences of the interviews to construct a grounded theory of disengagement.

Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded theory methodology is a research strategy that generates a theory by forming conclusions based on data analysis and comparison (Annels, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003; Weed, 2009; Weingand, 1993). Annels states that researchers who employ both an interpretative phenomenological framework and a grounded theory methodology are committed to a "qualitative, naturalistic, contextual, historical, inter-subjective methodology to understand human responses and experiences from a variety of perspectives as they are transformed over time" (2006, p. 267). By explaining the relationships between arising concepts, the researcher attempts to develop an understanding of behaviours, beliefs and social processes to form a substantive theory. Thus, the aim of a grounded theory methodology is to construct a theory that accounts for a pattern of behaviour by demonstrating the relationships between concepts, which explain or predict the experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). From this approach, qualitative data can generate a substantive theory which can inform practical intervention and future studies.

Evolution of Grounded Theory Methodology

Evolving out of Chicago Interactionism and the philosophy of Pragmatism, grounded theory methodology was a response to the construction of theories, at the time, that appeared abstract and disconnected from personal experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Gilgun, 2010). Introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1973), grounded theory methodology emphasised procedures and techniques through which a social phenomenon can be studied. In particular, this methodology emphasised the need to gather understanding from the field and develop a theory that is grounded in reality; acknowledging the role people play in shaping their

world; the interrelationships between meanings and behaviour; and systematic analysis through coding and hypothesis testing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Differences arose between Glaser and Strauss regarding the application of grounded theory and, along with Corbin, Strauss offered an alternative approach to grounded theory (Heath & Cowley, 2004). The Glaser and Strauss (1973) introduction to grounded theory emphasised that previous conceptual models should not be used to guide the research. This initial approach believed imposing preconceptions on the data would reduce the accuracy of the findings. As such, Glaser and Strauss (1973) considered using prior knowledge more as a method of modifying existing theory, rather than development of a substantive theory. The Strauss and Corbin (1990) approach on the other hand took the position of utilising prior knowledge of a topic to allow the sorting of particular observations from the innumerable possibilities. Thus, the conceptual framework or prior knowledge guides the researcher as to what to pay more and less attention to, but still allows the grounded theory to evolve beyond previous knowledge by including the unrestrained constant comparison of interview data (Annels, 2006).

Gilgun (2010) proposed several approaches for applying pre-existing knowledge in a grounded theory study. The approach employed in the current study of psychological disengagement included a broad set of concepts derived from the literature surrounding disengagement, desistance, defections and social-role exits that developed a rationale for the study and guided the initial, basic analysis of the interviews. However, to remain consistent with the interpretative phenomenological approach of the current study, open-ended semi-structured interview questions were used to allow participants to discuss what was pertinent to their experiences, regardless of the relevance to existing literature. This approach was used as a screen to assist in illuminating and interpreting findings and a conscious effort was made not to impose the findings of the current study into pre-existing categories. As such, the researcher also employed the analysis method by Strauss and Corbin (1990) that incorporated constant comparative data analysis where themes are compared between the interviews, as well as the use of reflexivity to acknowledge biases through memo writing.

Method

Participants

A purposive sample of participants was recruited; specifically, individuals who have experienced psychological disengagement from ideological social groups. This ensured participants had the lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation. The participants self-identified as former members of highly entitative and ideological social groups and volunteered to participate in the research. Representativeness of the sample was not of concern as the intention was not to generalise to the population but to explore personal experiences through descriptive data. Interviews continued until a point of data saturation had occurred.

The first stage involved identifying former members of selected social groups, special operations forces, one percent motorcycle clubs, cults and political or religious fundamental groups, who were willing to share their experiences and participate in the study. Each of these social groups fitted the research aims and definitions of entitativity, as well as ideology (please see chapter 1 for an explanation of group characteristics). Unique to the current study is the inclusion of military special forces in the participant sample; the next section describes the how the characteristics of the military combat unit is related to the selection criteria of the current study.

Inclusion of military special forces participants

The effectiveness of special forces units is rooted in the comprehensive system of selection, training, infrastructure support, leadership, and organisational culture. Bartone, Roland, Picano, and Williams (2008) describe soldiers who are successful in SF selection as displaying higher levels of resilience, good health and elevated performance under a range of stressful conditions. They comment that these soldiers demonstrate a strong sense of commitment to life and work, are actively engaged in their environments, and exhibit high levels of belief in their capabilities. Bartone et al. also argue that these soldiers are internally motivated and able to create their own sense of purpose. In the current study, the decision to include military special forces in the sample is based

on meeting the criteria of social identification, to the extent of jeopardizing their own, or others', safety for group objectives.

Military psychology argues that the unpredictable operational environment requires defence forces to emphasise conformity in behaviour and attitudes, as well as implement a system of beliefs to allow units to operate with optimum effectiveness (Jeswal, 2011). The military unit represents an autonomous entity, deliberately structured to enhance survival, and to reduce both discontent on deployment as well as the negative psychological impact of the combat environment. A soldier's identification with the military is enhanced through the cohesive nature of military units, which shapes the social identity of soldiers and fosters the internalisation of group norms through psychological processes (Campbell, 1958; Hogg & Reid, 2006). The organisational processes that serve to strengthen the military identity are also those found in entitativity literature, depicting a social group as a coherent, unified and meaningful entity that influences information processing and social perceptions.

The entitative principles, which are instrumental in the military setting, are proximity, similarity, common fate, and cohesiveness. Members of military units remain in close proximity to one another when training and on deployment. Conformity to military norms is a method of reducing social distance between soldiers by emphasising personal similarities in values, attitudes and behavior (Akerlof, 1997). Similarity comprises the internal homogeneity and behavioural consistencies, which form a collective identity and promote segregation between groups with differing dynamic characteristics (Read et al., 1997). Similarity between soldiers can be observed in the wearing of the uniform and the use of military symbolism, separating soldiers from mainstream society and other military groups (Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull, 2006). Physical, emotional, cultural and social attributes are shared with a linguistic identity that further segregates military forces from the mainstream.

Soldiers share a common fate; having a common group goal or facing a shared threat significantly influences group processes and effectiveness by enhancing intra-group solidarity and reducing the likelihood of internal factions forming (Brewer, 1999). Cohesiveness is observed through shared

norms, mutual acceptance, soldiers' attraction to the collective identity, and resistance to disruptive influences. Strengthening a unit's cohesion can improve soldier performance and personal satisfaction. However, elevated cohesion can also pressure soldiers into conformity and group-think, as well as raising anxieties when structures change or soldiers leave. The strong discipline that characterises the military also helps to develop unit cohesion through enforcing standards and norms. Other factors identified in literature that contribute to the cohesive military unit include esprit de corps (the spirit of camaraderie and devotion to a goal), the separate and distinctive military discipline systems and a doctrine that binds soldiers to a common purpose.

Soldier identification with the unit is not only influenced by the ideological and organisational factors of the military but also the relationships forged within the unit. A cohesive unit is characterised by trust between soldiers and those in command. Four principal tenets are generally recognised as essential to successful relational bonds (van der Kloet, Soeters, & Sanders, 2004). Competence provides an indicator of a fellow soldier's ability to perform his or her allocated tasks. Predictability ensures soldiers can rely on one another's response and gauge the reliability of others. Honesty amplifies the trust among soldiers, in particular the confidence that promises, once given, will be kept. Benevolence represents the likelihood that soldiers will voluntarily provide assistance to their mates. From a social identity theory perspective, the combination of entitativity and intra-unit relationships reinforces identification with the military identity and culture (Hogg & Reid, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The soldiers' personal attachment to the unit and to the military is reinforced by personal psycho-social investment in the job and relationships.

Participant recruitment

The recruitment process included a systematic approach that incorporated snowballing and chain referrals. The snowballing technique allowed participants initially chosen for the study to act as informants to source other potential participants. Much like snowball sampling, chain referral sampling utilises referrals from participants; however, it also extends

past one social network by employing multiple networks (Penrod, Preston, Cain, & Starks, 2003).

The researcher began by approaching contacts within her personal and professional networks for assistance in liaising with persons of interest. As a point of contact between researcher and interviewee, they were able to act as referees to vouch for the authenticity of the study and the integrity of the researcher. Due to the sensitivity of the current study, recruitment of participants was difficult and required referees to assure participants of the safety and confidentiality of the study. Many contacts made in the research process had concerns regarding violating their former social groups' confidentiality, fear of reprisals, and also expressed sensitivity towards sharing such a personal experience.

In addition to utilising existing networks, another method employed in identifying participants involved contacting support organisations, such as Defence Veteran Affairs and ex-cult resource centres. These were successful in recruiting former members of cult and religious extremist groups, and through chain referrals participants were able to recommend other individuals that were suitable for the study. Online forums also provided an access point for former members to consider participating in the study. Problems that arose through the use of internet forums included fears that the researcher was a 'spy' trying to ensure that ex-members did not talk to outsiders about what occurred in the group, that information was being collected in order to black-mail ex-members into submission, and the risk to the researcher due to the exposure of private information. While attempts to recruit online were largely unsuccessful, some participants were recruited through this method. Another unsuccessful approach to recruiting was contacting those who had published autobiographies or books about their former groups, or had emphasised their past involvement within the media. This involved contacting publishers or through email addresses provided online. Most of these cases did not elicit a response from the individual and those that did respond were reluctant to participate.

At the proposal stage of the current study, the intention was to interview 60 former members from a variety of ideological social groups. However, as the study progressed the reluctance of participants to disclose

information made evident that such a number was not feasible. An example of this is from a former member of a one percent motorcycle club who sought approval from other ex-members and was informed it would be "on his head" if he chose to participate. Another concern for ex-members was that the current study would result in the destruction of their former social group should law enforcement use the information to remove the social rituals that bind the groups. A former high profile one percent motorcycle club member was contacted and declined explaining that participating would see him labelled an informant within the motorcycle club culture.

At the conclusion of the current study, 27 interviews had been conducted; this included four former one percent motorcycle members, five former special forces soldiers, 12 former fundamental religious group members, four former cult members, one former political activist group member and one former white supremacist group member (see Table 4. for the breakdown of participant types). It must be noted that participants were not necessarily interviewed in the order presented in Table 4. Participants were not interviewed in order of group type, but as they became available to engage the research. Participants were categorised according to self-identification. This decision to allow participants to define their own group was made due to the ambiguous nature of some of the terminology presented in the literature, law enforcement and media; particularly in reference to cults. Definitions between fundamental religious groups, new religious movements, sects and cults are debated and can depend on personal biases towards the group (Pffefer, 1979; Stinnett, 2005). The labelling of a group as being a cult can be used to reduce legitimacy of minority religious groups; alternatively it can be used to describe group features such as charismatic leadership and brain-washing. The definition debate is beyond the scope of the current study, and as such, groups are defined by participants' definitions.

Interviewing

The benefits of conducting personal interviews over using other a communication mediums includes the level of control the researcher has over the interview process (Appleton, 1995; Polit & Hungker, 2004). Further,

effective interpersonal skills can put the participant at ease and the interviewer is able to reword questions that may not be understood. As such, the quality of information gathered is improved through dialogue, and is

Table 4.

Participant Demographics

	Participant code	Group	Year of disengagement
1	1%-1	1% motorcycle clubs	2007
2	1%-2	1% motorcycle clubs	Early 1970s
3	1%-3	1% motorcycle clubs	unknown
4	1%-4	1% motorcycle clubs	2011
5	SF-1	Military special forces	2008
6	SF-2	Military special forces	2010
7	SF-3	Military special forces	2004
8	SF-4	Military special forces	1970s
9	SF-5	Military special forces	2010
10	FR-1	Fundamental religious	1969
11	FR-2	Fundamental religious	2003
12	FR-3	Fundamental religious	2007
13	FR-4	Fundamental religious	2006
14	FR-5	Fundamental religious	2006
15	FR-6	Fundamental religious	2009
16	FR-7	Fundamental religious	2007
17	FR-8	Fundamental religious	2011
18	FR-9	Fundamental religious	2012
19	FR-10	Fundamental religious	2000
20	FR-11	Fundamental religious	2012
21	FR-12	Fundamental religious	2013
22	C-1	Cults	1997
23	C-2	Cults	1987
24	C-3	Cults	Late 1970s
25	C-4	Cults	Late 2000s
26	P-1	Political activist	1991
27	WS-1	White supremacist	2013

influenced by the interviewer's skills and expertise. By using open-ended questions in the interview, participants in the current study were encouraged to develop their responses, which provided a wealth of information.

Once participants were identified and had agreed to participate in the study, a medium for the interview was selected from face-to-face interviews, Skype or phone. At the proposal stage, there was the intention of focusing on Australian based ideological social groups; however, the difficulties encountered in obtaining willing interviewees meant the scope of the study needed to be broadened to include international participants as well. For interviews that were conducted in person, a time and location that was convenient to the participant, and ensured both the participant's and researcher's comfort as well as safety, was chosen. These included holding interviews in public, but quiet places, or if the interviewee was vouched for by a personal contact, at the interviewee's residence. For those unavailable for face-to-face interviews due to distance (with participants from North America and Europe), Skype and phone interviews were conducted. Interviews were audio recorded on a digital voice recorder, with the permission of the interviewee, for verbatim transcription

Interview process.

Rapport with the interviewees was established through informal dialogue at the beginning of each interview and the explanation of the aims of the study. Participants were informed about how the current study aimed to understand their experience, that there was no intent to cause discomfort, and that all answers were voluntary. During this introduction, the researcher also informed members of the confidentiality of the study and the possible risks associated with disclosing criminality; it was emphasised that certain crimes might have legal consequence and the participant was urged to be cautious of disclosing such information. Participants were also informed they did not have to answer any questions that they did not want to and they could withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. All participants appeared comfortable with the level of confidentiality and explanations provided

Each participant was asked for their consent to record the interview and then transcribed verbatim to a typed format for analysis. All but one participant allowed the interview to be recorded. Recordings were destroyed

after transcription to protect the interviewees' identities. Field notes were also made.

Some participants disclosed being nervous at the thought of disclosing details of their group involvement and experience; however, admitted after the interview that it "wasn't as scary as I thought" (1%, 1). Some participants were also very aware of the type of information they were revealing in the interview and made conscious efforts not to refer to names or events when describing criminal behaviour. For example, one participant requested to stop the audio recording to ask if disclosing the details of criminal behaviour would cause an ethical problem.

Twenty-eight interviews were conducted as part of the study; however one interview was removed from the analysis on the basis of not meeting the criteria of the study. This interview was removed as the participant was not a member of a highly entitative social group, but was rather the wife of a former Australian Special Air Service Regiment soldier. While the data from the interview were not included in the model of disengagement, the interview did provide confirmation for the information provided in the interview with her husband. As such, 27 interviews from willing participants formerly in the social groups fitting the criteria of the study (including fundamentalist religious and political fundamental groups, cults, special forces, white supremacist and one percent motorcycle clubs) were used to construct the model of disengagement.

Participants were asked to describe in detail their experiences of disengaging from their corresponding social groups; interviews ranged between 45 and 105 minutes. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were thanked and conversations continued as a means of maintaining rapport, ensuring participants were comfortable with their participation and not distressed by the research process.

Interview schedule.

A semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix C) was developed to facilitate in-depth dialogue exploring participants' perceptions of the causes, processes and experiences of disengaging from an ideological social group. The interview schedule was designed specifically for the

current study and asked participants to describe how they became involved with the social group and what kind of roles or positions they held during their membership. The aim of collecting background information was to establish the context of the participants' membership and to allow participants to become familiar with the interview process. Following this, participants were asked to 'describe what it was like to leave the group'. The interview continued in a conversational manner with prompts to clarify information and allow the participant to expand on their descriptions while limiting the researcher's influence.

The purpose of this type of interview was to elicit as much information as possible about participants' experiences in their own words. Allowing the interview to be directed by the participants emphasised the personal impact and decision making involved in each individual disengagement experience. Furthermore, the data collection was viewed as a process in constant development. In accordance with grounded theory methodology, the interview schedule was constantly evolving as data collection and analysis informed the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2001).The semi-structured interview schedule allowed adjustments in response to the identification of new information, or approaches to eliciting information (Breakwell, 2006; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995; Strauss, 1989).

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the study and the backgrounds of the participants, as well as the potential for reprisals and stigma, it was imperative that the identities of participants be kept confidential. During transcribing, all names and places disclosed in the interview process were removed to protect both the interviewee and their connections. Statements by participants that identified the group by name were also altered to protect the participant from the possibility of reprisals or retribution from opposing organisations, as well as the possibility of direct legal action. In addition, audio recordings were deleted after transcription. This meant there was no voice evidence of participants' involvement in the study and no traces of identities or events referred to within the interview that might pose a risk. While this has implications for the ability to refer back to recordings, it was

deemed in the best interests of the participants and required by the Edith Cowan University Human Ethics Review Committee.

The proposal stage of the research highlighted the issue of disclosure of criminal activities within the interview. Within the Australian legal system there are certain crimes that are not protected by the statute of limitations and/or oblige the researcher to report the incident to police (for example; terrorism or crimes against children). There is also the issue of the Australian Crime Commission's extraordinary powers of coercive hearings should the interview be of significant benefit to an on-going investigation into organised crime groups, a significant issue of concern when interviewing former one percent motorcycle club members.

These legal risks to participants influenced the construction of the interview method, with no questions directly relating to criminality; however, there was a concern that criminality may have been related to the cause of disillusionment. If a participant was affected by the disclosure of criminal behaviour, the researcher would have requested the interviewee to be selective when disclosing peripheral details such as names, or to use pseudonyms. If the researcher felt there was over-disclosure regarding criminality, she would have reminded the interviewee of the risks, or in extreme cases, terminate the interview. No case of this emerged during the process of data collection.

Prior to each interview, participants were provided with an information letter that addressed ethical considerations of the study. A final reminder was given before starting the interview, participants were again informed of the potential consequences of sharing sensitive information, and were reminded the interview process was voluntary, in which they do not have to answer any questions, which may cause discomfort or they deem dangerous.

During the research period, all data collected were stored in a locked filling cabinet at Edith Cowan University, accessible only to the researcher. Following the completion of the study, it is securely stored for the required five years at the university.

Data Analysis

Following Corbin and Strauss' (2008) approach to grounded theory, the data analysis began with a microanalysis of the data acknowledging every phrase, sentence and paragraph to generate initial categories and relationships. This first stage of the analysis required going through the transcripts and taking notes to get a general feel for each interview. This stage of analysis focussed on participants' meanings and described the experience in a step-by-step manner. The analysis of individual experiences and process of disengagement, which occurred at the start of the data collection stage generated fresh theories that required new data and reanalysis (Strauss, 1989). Hyener (1985) emphasised this stage as the development of the general meaning of the experience and identifying any ambiguities in the units of meaning discovered. Identifying and recording meanings relevant to the research question required the researcher to make judgements on the relevance of the data. This was achieved through a comparative approach with other interviews for commonality, as well as giving consideration to the impact of that aspect in the disengagement process. After becoming familiar with the data and establishing a general understanding of the experience, the coding of data began.

Coding, Diagramming and Memoing

Coding allowed the researcher to break down data, conceptualise it in various ways and then reconstruct it to develop theories. There are three major types of coding described by Strauss and Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; 1990); open, axial, and selective. These coding measures do not necessarily take place in order, and the analysis process could move between the different coding approaches several times in a single coding session.

Open coding is the process of breaking down the data for the purposes of examining, comparing, conceptualising, and categorising (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). This required taking apart each observation, sentence, paragraph, event or idea that represented part of the psychological disengagement experience through asking questions about its

nature and engaging in comparisons with other interviews. These became concepts that were labelled and described, and through analysis, grouped into categories. The categorisation allowed the research to explore the various properties and dimensions of psychological disengagement and determine the relationships between the categories and sub-categories.

While open coding breaks down the data, axial coding allowed the researcher to reconstruct information by establishing the connections between categories. To think systematically about the data and the relationships, Strauss and Corbin (1990) proposed a paradigm model linking categories to subcategories through causal conditions, the phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies and consequences (see Table 5 for an explanation of each process). Applying this model of coding and questioning allowed the participants' experiences to be analysed with precision and abstraction in the analytical thinking process.

The categories and the properties identified through the open and axial coding were systematically related to each other in the selective coding process. This served to validate the relationships and refine categories for the purpose of determining the central phenomenon. Strauss and Corbin

Table 5.

Systematic Analysis of the Relationships between a Category and Subcategories

Paradigm feature	Description
Causal condition	Causes giving rise to the occurrence of the phenomenon
Phenomenon	The central event/idea initiating related actions or interactions
Context	Properties relating to the phenomenon
Intervening conditions	Condition impacting on actions or interactions strategies relating to the phenomenon
Action /interaction strategies	Strategies employed as a response to the phenomenon under certain conditions
Consequences	Outcomes of the action/interaction strategies

Note. See Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 99-107) for a detailed explanation of each feature

(1990) insist on conceptualising and committing to a story line that allows the subsidiary categories to relate to the core category and provide an analytical fit to the proposed story-line. Through validating these relationships against the data, the research concluded with a substantive theory of psychological

disengagement – under A conditions, B happens; whereas when C happens, D happens. In the current study, the phenomenon of psychological disengagement has been explored and the story-line constructed begins with the causes leading to participants' disengagement through to the consequences of leaving.

To help develop a thorough and systemised understanding of the relationships between concepts and categories, diagramming was utilised. This visual representation of the relationships allowed sorting of memos and data that correspond to various parts of the theory as well as the 'story line', and conceptualise each element of the theory. These visual models evolved throughout the analysis process until all participant experiences of disengagement were accounted for by the proposed theory.

Throughout the research process memoing was employed to further enhance abstract thinking and the formulation of the theory. In addition, memos provided storage for the analytical ideas developed throughout data analysis that were sorted according to need. The memos included notes made during the coding phase of analysis (coding notes), the inductive and deductive reasoning of categories (theoretical notes), and the notes relating to research development and enactment (operational notes). These memos, along with corresponding diagrams, were stored in an electronic journal and helped enhance rigor through an audit trail.

As such, the theory of disengagement developed and described in chapters 4 to 10 adhered to the 'fit, relevance, work and modifiability' emphasised by Glaser and Strauss (1973). The theory emerged from the data rather than from existing theoretical perspectives, thus providing a *fit* to the specific area researched; the theory has *relevance* as it focused on the central experience of participants and the corresponding process of resolving the issues; the theory *works* as it explains and predicts the experience of psychological disengagement; and is *modifiable* as it is adaptable to emergence of new data, providing validation and extension to the theory (Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003).

Rigour

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, theoretical rigour was established through a consistent epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology and methods.

In addition, analytical rigour was enhanced by the memoing of data during the construction of the grounded theory, with the storage of the developing theories providing an audit trail. While the researcher was responsible for the coding of data, the supervisors provided feedback on developing theories and coding consistencies. Five conference papers and one journal article were peer-reviewed, which provided triangulation through feedback from topic matter experts. These papers were also available to participants, who offered their feedback on the analysis of data.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the research process involved in the study of psychological disengagement from ideological social groups with high levels of entitativity. The Strauss and Corbin (1990) grounded theory methodology was utilised to allow the experiences of participants to guide the emerging theory. The experiences of 27 participants who self-identified as former members of highly entitative and ideological social groups were elicited via semi-structured, in-depth interviews. By applying grounded theory methodology the interviews were analysed through open, axial, and selective coding, memoing and constant comparison with theoretical integration. This methodology allowed a substantive theory of psychological disengagement to develop, which is discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 5: A GROUNDED THEORY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISENGAGEMENT

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents an overview of the grounded theory and an explanation of the key components in the process of psychological disengagement, which was developed from 27 interviews with former members of ideological social groups. The grounded theory is presented early rather than at the end of the findings to allow the following discussion of the individual components to be understood in relation to the disengagement process and the broader context of the theory. Further explanation and description of the five key stages (threat, discrepancy, management, physical disengagement, and the post-exit identity) of the theory are presented in the succeeding chapters with quotes from participants. Discussion of previous literature is integrated within the findings chapters; in some instances definitions drawn from the literature are used to explain the experiences of the participants in the current study.

Overview of the Grounded Theory of Disengagement

The grounded theory methodology approaches an experience in distinct stages to further understand the context of the psychological phenomenon. The grounded theory approach posed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) presented an analytical model (see Table 5 on page 97) that was adopted for the current study and the succeeding chapters that discuss these key aspects of the psychological disengagement experience adhere to this structure. The model is presented in distinct stages; however, it is important to note that elements of each stage can overlap or continue to be employed at other stages in response to feedback and situational threats.

In the current study, participants shared a consistent pattern of moving towards membership reappraisal and disengagement (see Figure 2.). Group factors were taken into consideration in the analysis, and were found to be an intervening condition that influenced the personal experience; however, the psychological process leading to psychological disengagement was shared by all participants from a diverse range of social groups. This process
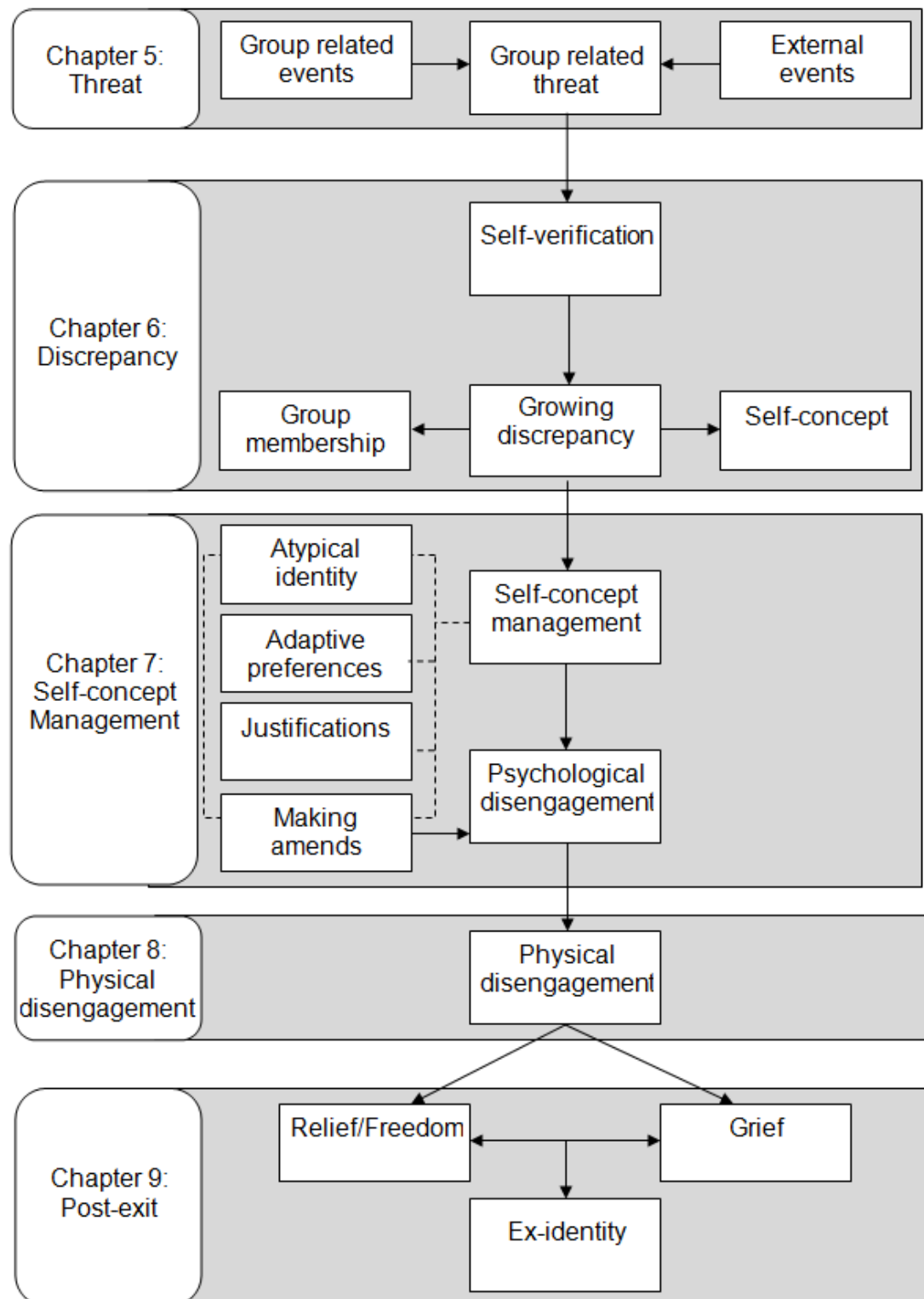
Figure 2. Grounded theory of psychological disengagement

began with the experience of a personal threat that was related to, or derived from, the group and concluded with the reformation of the self-concept as a former member. The core experience identified in participants' interviews was the discrepancy between group membership and the participants' self-concept. The group was perceived as inconsistent with participants' self-concept held, to the extent that identification with such a group conflicted with personally held goals as well as values, and threatened psychological integrity. For the participants in the current study, the self-discrepancy was resolved by employing self-concept management strategies that aimed to restore psychological integrity. In addition, participants psychologically, as well as physically, disengaged from the group as a means of restoring consistency between the self-concept and social group membership.

The following part of the chapter discusses the theory of psychological disengagement as a process to provide a general understanding of the shared experience of participants in the current study prior to the in-depth discussion in the upcoming chapters. While the theory is presented in a sequential manner for the ease of understanding its aspects, there were variations in the duration of each stage, and the possible overlap and repetition of stages. For example, self-verification methods were employed at various stages of the disengagement process as a method of reaffirming the self-view that one was distinctly different to the group's core members.

Causal Conditions

The causal conditions were the triggers interpreted by the participant as a threat, which caused psychological distress. Specifically, these conditions were understood as personal threats that were related to the group experience. This personal threat was an event, or accumulation of annoyances, caused by either intra-group events and/or external pressures related to group membership. Common group-related threats that contributed to individuals experiencing a discrepancy between the self and group membership included;

     a) failed interpersonal dyadic relationships (within the social group);

     b) changing group dynamics;

     c) role conflict or performance;

d) leadership's failure to act in accord with expectations and group norms;

e) police pressure; and

f) external family commitments.

Through the process of analysis, the causal conditions revealed two distinctive types of triggers; intra and extra-group. Overall, disillusionment with the social group was necessary for the psychological disengagement. Participants who only experienced extra-group causes physically disengaged, but maintained a positive identification with their social group. This was demonstrated through their expressed desire to rekindle affiliation if life circumstances were different. Hence, such individuals may have physically disengaged through the termination of membership, but were still psychologically engaged.

Core Experience

Self-verification.

As an attempt to reduce the personal threat derived from causal conditions, participants began seeking information to justify their involvement with the group through self-verification methods of social feedback and self-evaluation. The social feedback involved attempts at addressing concerns and/or attempts to justify involvement through dialogue with other personally significant members. The self-evaluation involved comparing the self with standards on measures considered personally significant. These standards were either personally held or imposed by the group for membership, or to hold a specific role. While the initial threat varied in source, many participants shared the experience of negative affective interactions with remaining members and/or leaders when they attempted to address their concerns. Additionally, the self-evaluation of personal qualities and abilities, in regards to those emphasised within the group, provided a point of discrepancy when participants were unable, or unwilling, to epitomise these standards. For many of the participants, these self-verification methods coincided with information-seeking as a means to verify growing concerns over membership, and justify their continued involvement with their group.

When participants sought to resolve the threat, they attempted to address concerns with other personally significant members. When the feedback received did not match expectations, participants began to question their relation to the groups' identity, norms and values. For example, if significant others did not display the sense of community and support that was emphasised as a central facet of the group, then participants experienced a greater threat to their perceived sense of significance within the group. Participants expected to reconcile with the group, but found inconsistent responses amplified the initial group related threat towards the self and caused interactions to worsen. The discrepancy between the expected response and the actual feedback further threatened the participants' sense of belonging in the group. Thus, the feedback from the group intensified perceived discrepancies between being a member and participants' self-concept.

The inconsistent feedback and self-evaluation intensified the discrepancies between the self and group standards. As a result, the trigger and the growing discrepancy increased in personal significance and fostered negative affect towards group interactions and norms. As the group's norms and values had shaped participants' expectations of the collective identity, any inconsistencies between the group responses to participants' expectations elevated the group as a threat to ontological security. This form of security is derived from the continuity of the self-concept within personal experiences and the social environment. Through self-verification methods of self-evaluation and social feedback, the group was identified as discrepant with participants' personal goals and attitudes, which created a conflict between group membership and the self.

Self-discrepancy.

Discrepancies relating to the self-concept and group identity were experienced by participants in the current study in two ways; (1) as an awareness of the discrepancy between the self as perceived by individuals (actual-self) and the self as perceived by others (social-self-discrepancy); or (2) as a discrepancy between the actual self and the standards as well as attributes individuals believe they should possess within the group role

(ought-self). The social-self-discrepancy was experienced when the feedback to concerns regarding a personal threat relating to the group were inconsistent with group values. Self-evaluation was more influential in the ought-ideal self-discrepancy, particularly in the instances where personal performance in a group designated role became the source of the personal threat.

The awareness of the discrepancies between how participants viewed themselves and the distinctive principles of the group facilitated a feedback loop in terms of interpreting self-relevant information. This influenced intrapersonal processes such as affect, motivation as well as information processing, and interpersonal processes such as social perception as well as reactions to interactions and information. As a consequence, events and information were interpreted by participants in a manner that was consistent with their growing discrepancy.

Despite growing discrepancy between the self and group membership, commitment to the group was maintained at such point of the disengagement process as an intrinsic part of self-identity. However, as participants were unable to reduce the threat, these attempts at reconciliation further enhanced the discrepancy between the group and the self by revealing and emphasising further inconsistencies. This growing discrepancy produced negative affect towards the group, influencing cognitions and social interactions. As the discrepancy between group membership and self-concept increased, participants began reducing psychological dependency on their social group and the personal identity became increasingly salient. This psychological dependence reduction influenced the appraisal of situational cues and interactions with greater self-awareness, and increased focus on personal priorities. With the decline in psychological dependency, participants were more receptive to factors that made the exit, or an alternative group membership, favourable.

The discrepancy produced psychological distress as participants realised they held membership in a social group with values that were inconsistent with their self-concept. As an individual is motivated to maintain consistency, this psychological experience produced distress and the motivation to restore consistency. In the current study, participants required

either a change in their self-concept to allow reconciliation with the social group, or a change in behaviour that would reduce the discrepancy by physically disengaging, as well as excluding the group from their self-concept.

Self-concept Management Strategies

At this point, participants appeared to be affected by both the interpersonal discrepancy caused by membership, and the experience of disidentifying with the group. Consistent with theories of cognitive consistency (cognitive dissonance theory, balance theory; Abraham, 1998; Aronson, 1999; Festinger, 1957, 1964, 1985; Steele, 1999) and self-discrepancy theory (Bizma & Yinon, 2004; Higgins, Klien, & Strauman, 1985), the participants were motivated to restore consonance between their social identification and the self.

The psychological distress caused by the discrepancy motivated participants to restore consistency between their social group identification and the self-concept. Four common methods of alleviating this distress and restoring psychological integrity were employed to reduce psychological identification with the group, (1) atypical identification; (2) adaptive preferences; (3) justifications and rationalisations; and (4) making amends. The management strategies adopted by participants in the current study reduced the identification and psychological dependence on the social group. In addition, a feedback loop allowed new information and past events to be framed consistently with the participant's new attitude towards his or her social group, creating a self-consistency bias. This is consistent with Skonovd's (1981) findings that those leaving new religious movements tended to reflect and review on previously repressed or forgotten inconsistencies as means of increasing support for their dissatisfaction. In the current study, this shift in cognitive processing served as reinforcement for disillusionment with membership. The collective identity reduced in salience as these management strategies further reduced the psychological dependency on the group. Furthermore, the self-concept was reconstructed to exclude group membership as a core aspect of the participants' identity.

Despite this reduction in psychological dependency on the group, participants still maintained involvement at various levels. Only when an event acted as a catalyst to hasten the exit, or the member felt adequately prepared for life after the group, would the participants reach a tipping point and physically disengage.

Physical Disengagement

As the reconstructed self-concept became increasingly salient there was less psychological dependence on the group and their members redefined him or herself as atypical in comparison with other group members, and in contrast to the group's identity. While some participants acknowledged that they never saw themselves as the 'ideal' member, they had not felt the need to overtly emphasise the individual and group differences. This awareness of the individual identity conflicting with the group resulted in participants distancing themselves from the collective imposed identity and group norms.

The core experience of the discrepancy between the group and the self-concept led to the use of self-concept management strategies to reduce psychological distress. The consequences of these strategies were the termination of membership and disengagement from the group. The physical disengagement was a distinct stage in the process with significant consequences, but in terms of the current model the physical exit was overshadowed by the psychological experiences of preceding and post-exit stages. Variations in the physical disengagement included the approach of announcing the exit to the group (fading away, covert or confrontational), practical aspects (living arrangements, employment, relocation), and the shift in reference groups and relationships. For many of the participants, all relationships with other members were severed in deliberate attempts to present themselves as a former member, reduce the discomfort caused by the temptation to return, and avoid being stigmatised or labelled as an apostate, traitor or a failure.

Post-Exit and the Ex-Identity

Following the physical exit from the group, participants experienced a post-exit emotional shift. Initially, the experience produced feelings of relief over fulfilling the decision to leave, as well as the freedom of no longer adhering to group rules and the opportunity to engage new experiences. Following this initial positive response, participants experienced episodes of grief. The experience of grief was expressed in various ways; a sense of longing, anxiety, feelings of guilt and shame, resentment and hindered self-esteem, as well as behavioural responses such as the deliberate avoidance of other members, related activities, and preoccupation. Despite the negative affective experience post-exit, participants still affirmed their decision to exit by emphasising the differences between the self and group identity, as well as highlighting the significance of the positive and consistent self-concept they achieved.

The result of the participants ending their membership was the reformation of the self as a 'former member'. The disengagement model ends at the ex-member identity stage; however, this does not suggest the past identity is no longer relevant to the participant, rather it has been integrated into the perception of the current self.

<div align="center">

Intervening Conditions

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Intervening conditions were those that influenced individuals' experience of disengaging from their social group. While all participants experienced a discrepancy between their self-concept and the social group values, the experiences of physically exiting varied across participant groups. Intervening conditions identified in the current study were;

(1) Duration of physical disengagement:

The period of time participants required to physically leave the group after acknowledging their discrepancy varied with two influential factors affecting the process; the need for a catalyst and achieving certainty in the decision. The catalyst was a personally significant event that hastened the exit; for example, a law enforcement raid on the group's premises or the participants' direct experience of violence. The catalyst

accelerated the exit, which in many such cases prevented the gradual reduction in psychological dependency on the group and the preparation for the exit.

The need for certainty in the decision-making process prolonged the exit and allowed participants to reduce psychological dependency on the social group. This allowed participants to reduce self-doubts over their reasons for leaving and resist any attempts made by members to persuade them to remain. In achieving certainty, participants evaluated the costs of leaving and were more prepared for the losses associated with exiting.

(2) *Preparedness*:

This refers to the practical aspects associated with the physical exit from the social group. These practical aspects included participants' awareness and proactive approach to addressing changes in living arrangements, employment, and relocation. Those who were able to plan and prepare themselves pre-exit, reported greater ease in the physical disengagement, while those who did not plan the physical exiting from the group experienced greater uncertainty. For example, former members of the special forces reported practical support from the military in terms of the transferring of skills and preparation for a career outside the army. As a consequence, the special forces participants in the current study were able to manage the distress of leaving by controlling some of the variables in their environment, such as employment, finances and outside relationships. Conversely, some participants in fundamentalist religious groups were restricted in their ability to prepare for lifestyle changes due to the covert nature of their exit.

(3) *Social networks:*

The experience of disengagement was significantly related to the social environment participants created outside the social group. This involved both social support for the disengagement, as well as anticipatory socialisation. The support was drawn from family and friends external to the group who provided emotional support as well as alternative viewpoints towards group membership. This reduced the

insulation from the outside world, and provided psychological and practical assistance post-exit. Anticipatory socialisation required individuals to seek out and develop relationships prior to disengagement and engage behavioural roles that coincided with developing new identities and relationships. Participants who reported involvement with new social groups found new standards and goals to replace those of the previous groups and provide a new set of standards to evaluate the self with. This reduced the psychological dependence on the current group membership by providing alternative standards for the participant to self-affirm by. For example, one participant explained how the values and standards emphasised in the new friendship group established at a kickboxing club conflicted with the drug and alcohol behaviours of the one percent motorcycle club. The behaviour in one social group impacted the other, leading to the participant's decision that memberships in both groups could no longer exist.

(4) Group involvement:

Organisational support was reflected in the disengagement from groups with contractual memberships, particularly the special forces. The contractual involvement gave participants a greater awareness of their exit process. While participants did not utilise the military's psychological services, the practical aspects of reintegration, skill transfers and paid leave/vacation were involved in the process and aided the transition from soldier to civilian.

Some groups also had exiting rituals that participants needed to formally acknowledge in the exit process. For example, many former fundamental religious participants were required to attend a leadership meeting several months after disengaging to be formerly recognised by the group as no longer being a member. While this often led to the negative labelling of the participant as an apostate or defector, it provided a final opportunity to confront the group, express discontent and gain closure over the experience

(5) Ideology;

The extent to which psychological disengagement from the social group influenced their personal attachment to the collective ideology

varied between participants. The groups to which the participants belonged provided a fundamentalist approach to their ideology, emphasising that the propagated doctrine was the only acceptable system of beliefs. When participants physically disengaged from their groups, there was a reduction in the isolation from the outside world and alternative ideas. With increased receptiveness to alternatives, participants in the current study were more likely to re-evaluate the established beliefs imposed by their group membership. Participants varied in the rejection of the ideology, with some noting minor changes in attitudes towards the belief structure while others rejected their group's ideology outright. For example, special forces soldiers are employed to provide the manpower for a political objective; however, the military forces also promote a strong social ideology based around camaraderie. While support for the group's political goals may have reduced, the social ideology was still strongly supported. However, the participants from fundamentalist religious groups who observed failings in the religious doctrine found this to be a justification for leaving the group. These failings were viewed as examples of the group leaders being dishonest as well as inconsistent and also provided the catalyst for ideological reappraisal.

The above five intervening conditions positively or negatively influenced the experience of psychological disengagement, and either hastened or impeded physical disengagement. Each of these conditions also influenced the participants' self-concept by furthering the discrepancies between the self and group membership, or allowing a reformation of the self as separate to the group identity.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the grounded theory of psychological disengagement through the key elements of analysis. The interviews indicated participants progressed through the disengagement process after a threat initiated self-verification methods of feedback and self-evaluation. The core experience shared by all participants was the self-discrepancy in relation to group membership, causing psychological distress. The

experience of this discrepancy motivated participants to engage self-concept management strategies that psychologically protected them. Management strategies used to address the psychological distress caused by the discrepancy included four techniques; atypical identification, adaptive preferences, making amends and justifications. The consequences of these strategies were the decline in psychological dependence on the group, and the psychological as well as physical disengagement from the group. The physical disengagement from the group varied in method and preparedness, depending on context, but the post-exit experience of initial relief and freedom was felt before entering a period of grief.

The following chapters describe this process in greater depth with excerpts from participants' interviews. Findings are also discussed in relation to the literature to further explain complex phenomena and demonstrate the current studies relevance to various academic fields.

CHAPTER 6: CAUSAL FACTORS

Chapter Overview

The previous chapter provided an overview of the theory of psychological disengagement and explained that the main experience of participants was the discrepancy between group membership and self-concept, causing participants to experience psychological discomfort. This chapter discusses the events that triggered the reappraisal of the group identity in relation to the self-concept, and the awareness of the discrepancies between the two. This analysis identified two categories of threats (intra-group and extra-group). The psychological processes initiated by these threats are similar as they both lead to physically disengaging from the group; however, the extent of psychological disengagement varied depending on the threat category. Threat types are illustrated by excerpts from the participants' interviews and discussed in relation to existing literature.

Introduction

The disengagement process began with a *group related threat* that was appraised by the participant as a personal threat and related to their group membership. This threat was caused by an intra-group event, accumulative annoyances or external pressures that presented group membership in an unfavourable way to the participant. Psychological disengagement began with an event that acted as a catalyst to the cognitive processes that identified the social group as a threat to participants' psychological integrity. Common themes for the group related threats included failed intimate relationships (within the group), changing group dynamics, role conflict or performance, and the leadership's failure to act in accord with expectations as well as group norms. These threats can be described as affecting four domains of participants' self-esteem; competence, significance, virtue, and power.

The role of self-verification in the disengagement process is discussed in greater depth in the next chapter, as the precursor to increasing discrepancy between group identity and self-concept. However, it is essential

to acknowledge the involvement of self-verification aspects of social feedback and self-evaluation in relation to causal threat. While the findings and models are presented in a sequential manner it is important to note that many of the psychological processes repeated throughout the disengagement experience. For example, causal threats prompted the self-verification in relation to group membership, and this revealed and/or increased awareness of existing discrepancies. This discrepancy became the source of threat and facilitated further self-verification (see Figure 3.). This cycle continued until participants engaged self-concept management strategies that reduced this discrepancy.
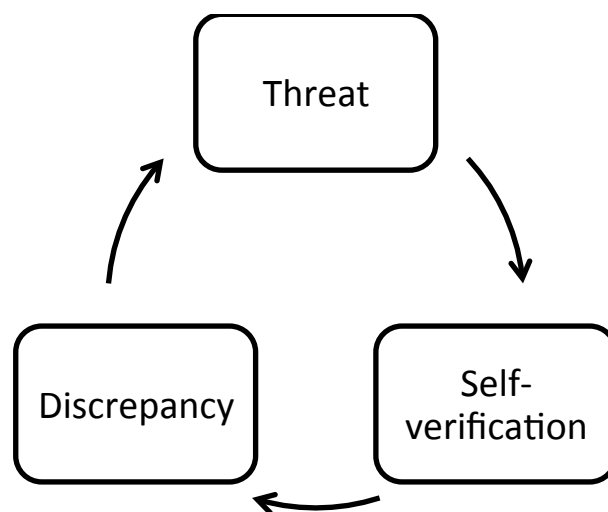
Figure 3. Psychological cycle of threat and discrepancy

Threat

Causal threats are classified into two categories; those relating to the in-group and those outside the group, which negatively impacted participants' commitment to their groups (see Table 6). The causes were classified in this way rather than push and pull factors (Bjørgo, 2005; Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Demant et al., 2009; Rabasa et al., 2010), or normative, affective and continuance factors (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Demant et al., 2008a, 2008b; Klandermans, 2005) as neither of the approaches distinguished between physical and psychological disengagement. The findings of the current study demonstrate that both intra-group and extra-group factors can trigger the disengagement process and encourage members to exit the group; however, disillusionment within the social group

was necessary for psychological disengagement. As stated previously, only participants who experienced outside forces, such as external family commitments or police pressure, physically disengaged but maintained a positive identification with the group and expressed an unfulfilled desire to rekindle affiliation.

Table 6.

Causes for Group Related Threat

Intra-group conflict	External influences
Failed relationships	Police pressure
Changing group dynamics	Family commitments
Role conflict	
Failing leadership	

This section discusses the circumstances acting as the catalyst to the disengagement process for participants of the current study. As mentioned, intra-group threats were found to be necessary for psychological disengagement; whereas, when external influences were the sole source of threat only physical disengagement occurred. As such, the following section discusses the catalyst events and factors in terms of intra-group conflict and external influences.

Intra-Group Conflict

Interviews with participants who psychologically disengaged from their respective social groups identified intra-group conflict as the threat to self and group involvement. Intra-group conflict refers to friction between members, or the member and those in leadership positions (Branscombe et al., 1999; Horgan, 2005). This form of conflict can be experienced in various ways, and included the failing of in-group intimate relationships, disagreements with members significant to the participant, or the perception of leadership acting in ways that violated the prescribed group norms.

In the current study, intra-group conflict was significant in the process of disengagement as it served as both a catalyst for disillusionment, and also as part of the reappraisal process when participants sought feedback for their concerns. This feedback was paramount to participants in developing a new perspective towards their social group, and the identification of membership as detrimental to self-integrity. In many of the following

examples, the event, which triggered reappraisal was combined with feedback from significant others within the group. This feedback intensified disillusionment with the group and amplified the discrepancy between the self and group membership.

Failure of Intimate Relationships within the Group

Romantic partners who were integrated into the social group intensified the emotional commitment a member had to the group by the overlap in partner and group roles (Wright, 1987). As a consequence, the breakdown in romantic relationships between a member and another group member can cause the person to question involvement, particularly, if the group fails to embrace and support the member during this emotional time. In the current study, the response from the group gives feedback regarding participants' personal significance and influence. When this response is not as supportive, or as positive, as expected by the participant, the group response becomes the primary threat to self-integrity. Participants in this current study who experienced failed relationships expressed their discontent in maintaining relationships with those they considered friends, but had failed to support the participant adequately. As such, the personal threat from either the dyadic relationship, or the social group negatively impacted the other group based relationship.

For some of the participants in the current study, these significant dyadic relationships were threatened by their partner's infidelity. For example, a participant who had been involved in the one percent motorcycle club subculture as the significant other of a patched member for six years had described the club environment as her family. When asked 'why she chose to leave the club', she cited an affair by her ex-partner;

He was having an affair. A few of them (1%, 1).

Despite feeling her self-worth had been challenged by the relationship, she still maintained an active role in the club arguing that she had developed strong relationships with other members and their partners. When these relationships with others were threatened by her position as the 'ex-partner' she began to re-evaluate her commitment to the group.

> *Like, they'll be told not to see me, or whatever. And that used to be the done thing years ago. Like "no, don't have anything to do with her". And so you're like "oh what, my friends just dropped me, because they say". And then everything's cool again and I thought, "nup, I don't need that" (1%, 1).*

For this participant, the end of the relationship with a patched member meant close friends would no longer associate with her without expressed approval from the club and their partners. While this participant self-reported infidelity as the cause of her leaving, she was still motivated to remain with the club due to the strength of her relationships with other club women. It was not until these women were told (by their 'patched member' partners) they could not spend time with her that she decided to distance herself from the group. This participant viewed this type of behaviour from friends as challenging her self-worth and personal significance within the club.

Another participant who lived in an integrated religious community also experienced partner infidelity as a catalyst to reappraisal. The failed relationship was further complicated by the wife's new boyfriend sharing the house with both the wife and the participant.

> *My wife is a [group name] and then she, she pretty much cheated on me and then while we were still living together she brought her boyfriend in, so I was in one room and they were in the other. And for anyone, especially for [group name] this isn't a good situation and then I talked to the [leaders] about it, all the [leaders] said was you probably need bible study (FR, 4).*

When the participant sought support and advice from the leaders within group, the response was to encourage him to do more bible study as a means of coping.

> *[Group name] are always saying how they look after their members but here I was in this situation and the only thing they did was just offer bible study, whereas two people that I met at work who turned out to be homosexuals. . . . They're the ones that took me under their wing and offered me a place to stay and get me out of the situation. So here were God's people doing nothing to help me, whereas you know God's enemies they were the ones taking me under their wing. So that kind of started to leave a question mark in my head (FR, 4).*

This response to an already threatening experience resulted in doubts over his personal significance within the group and the unvirtuous behaviour of other members and the group's leaders. This combined with outsiders demonstrating more 'godly' behaviour further emphasised the failing of the leaders.

While these participants identified partner infidelity as the catalyst for their disengagement, they stated that feedback from other significant members and/or leaders was a greater source of disillusionment. These participants belonged to social groups that emphasised a cohesive and supportive group environment. As such, the lack of emotional support from other members, when the romantic relationship ended, caused a perceived discrepancy between how other members valued the individual and his or her self-worth.

Changing Group Dynamics

Previous studies have argued organisational changes within the group can act as catalysts for disillusionment in the sense that the member's role, relationships and status could be threatened (Bjørgo, 2011; Demant et al., 2008a). These organisational changes can influence the individual's perspectives towards group goals, the methods to achieve these goals, or a shift in personnel and/or roles that influences group morale.

In circumstances unique to the one percent motorcycle club culture, one participant's club experienced an identity transformation through the form of a patch-over. A patch-over is when a larger club assumes control over a smaller club and integrates members to form a united and larger club. Formally, this occurs when the members of a smaller motorcycle club are congruent with the dominant club's 'persona' and meet the required membership standards (Ballard, 1997; Quinn, 2001; Quinn & Koch, 2003). In reality, clubs commit patch-overs as a method of asserting power and/or acquiring territory, and the members of the subjugated club are required to hand-over their colours (club patches), and usually, go through the stage of prospecting for the bigger club. This period of re-prospecting required the participant to be subjected to demeaning tasks and challenges for a period of time to prove his worth and level of commitment. The participant described

this experience through the loss of status and brotherhood, and the declining morale of members of the patched-over club was expressed as "*going from the top, to the bottom*" and turning up did not bring the same level of enjoyment, as "*they didn't know you*" (1%, 2).

'Patch-overs' threaten the distinct identity of each club by removing inter-club boundaries. In some instances, members could assume the new collective identity; however, the loss of status and negative interaction can exacerbate intragroup conflict and reduce member identification.

> *It just, well what happens is, if, in that instance, was you have colours and you had to hand your colours in so. And your colours we're like your badge of honour I guess. And there was a lot of etiquette around when and where you could wear them and all sorts of things, and one of the things was when you got broken up by a bigger gang then you had to hand your colours to them and they had what you call a colour curtain of all these clubs that they had busted up over the years. So you became, you weren't a member of anything really. (1%, 2)*

For this participant, the lack of inclusiveness and camaraderie in the new club lead to the decline in the perceived brotherhood and resulted in the questioning of commitment and sacrifice for club activities.

Additionally, a second participant from a one percent motorcycle club cited changing group dynamics, as a result of recruitment methods, to have been a threat to group identity. While chapters tend to be small with strong bonds formed in a tight-knit environment, a couple of clubs introduced younger recruits to operate within the club businesses and to provide strength in case a bikie-war occurred. Participant 1%, 4 experienced this rapid recruitment of young males during the expansion stage of the club as detrimental to the brotherhood ethos;

> *I thought they would be a little more cautious on who they recruit. I didn't think there would be so many dickheads, you know a lot of idiots mate. I don't like them (1%, 4).*

This rapid recruitment and the inclusion of non-patched members increased the risk of fragmentation and diluted the distinctiveness as well as exclusivity of club identity.

Describing these new recruits as "*born-again rich kids*", the intra-club conflict came from the generational differences and disapproval of youthful

hedonism. While older members were aware public displays of deviant behaviours bring unwanted attention, younger members acting on impulse created a fanatical environment and spurred on group think.

> *They've just recruited straight through to, straight through to patching guys up. Like um, the patching, um young kids mate [emphasis], in [location]. They're just kids, they're teenagers. They haven't even reached 18 mate, some of them. You know. And they are a [rival club]. And that's why it's so fanatical down there in [location] at the moment. Like kids like [nickname], and that. You know. Born again rich kids. . . . [Name] is only 18 or 19 years old when this happened. And they're at the [pub] and they're all [rival club], they've been patched up and they're giving him shit and because [victim] is a good lad. He doesn't take much shit from many people he's just given it back, giving a bit of cheek back. And they didn't like what he had to say because he made them sound like idiots. So they waited til he left and went home to grab a baseball bat and a golf club and come back and belted the shit out of him. Because they are young and they don't know what they're doing mate. They think just because they've got a patch on their back they've got a little bit of power. And, put him in a coma and then you got [name] who's in lock up for seven years. You know, ruined the kids life. But, yeah. (1%, 4)*

The differences in behavioural expectations were a source of conflict between club members and led to the participant reducing identification with the club. Consequently, the commitment and identification with a role in a club where bonds had not been forged with many of the new members was a source of psychological distress.

Role Conflict

Role conflict was the disillusionment directed at the performance or attainment of a particular position within the social group. For example, being moved into a more violent position that conflicted with personal goals and/or values, or experiencing an impediment preventing satisfactory performance of designated role tasks. Self-concept and self-esteem theorists posited task performance and competence are essential to the feelings of acceptance and belonging in a group (Epstein, 1973; Novick, Cauce, & Grove, 1996). Additionally, Allen and Meyer (1990) argued that feeling competent and comfortable in a role within a group is the strongest antecedent to emotional

attachment. However, when the individual is unable to sustain standards (self or group imposed) this lesser performance and hindered competence can cause a threat to the self-concept.

Self-standards.

For the participants of the current study who experienced role conflict, it was the self-evaluation process that identified the discrepancies between self and group membership, rather than social feedback. This was encountered by either the failure to perform to a self or group imposed standard, or performing tasks that contradicted personal values and goals. This discrepancy between behaviour, standards and values caused a conflict between the individual and collective identity.

Two special forces participants emphasised the high intensity, physicality and job satisfaction as key motivators for their involvement. The satisfaction of the role derived from the tasks involved, and the sense of elitism engendered by high performance. The occurrence of long-term illnesses and injuries prevented these participants from achieving the same level of intensity and physicality desired. The negative affect produced by their health condition, coupled with their lack of involvement in their desired team role, threatened the self-image of elitism;

> *It was a definitely a shock to the system thinking that I was the fittest, fastest, strongest I've ever been and suddenly put on my knees. . . . Depressing, very depressing. Going from nothing can stop you, physically able to do anything to suddenly being told, or knowing that you can't do even the most basic thing (SF, 1).*

For one of these members, the injuries required five operations in a period of 18 months. This meant that he was unable to perform the operational aspects of his role, which led him to physically distance himself from other operational soldiers in the regiment.

> *I asked to be put in a job where I wasn't involved in the operations stuff and I didn't want to be around the people at work flat out busy because you just feel like you are missing out (SF, 2).*

The move to an administrative role did not fulfil the personal needs of the participant or allow him to achieve the same level of role satisfaction. The

lack of physical competence in the body and role performance was unexpected, and threatened the participant's self-concept as he was unable to achieve the standards that were held previously, and believed he ought to, in his role.

Value-conflict.

Role conflict was also a source of disillusionment for those who opposed the methods employed by the group, particularly when they conflicted with personally held goals and values For example, one former fundamentalist religious group member described how holding a leadership position was conflicting with his ability to care for his wife.

> *My wife at the time was going through some serious depression, clinical depression and I was missing a lot of [group name] meetings, they have three a week plus field service on Saturday. So four times a week, I was missing all those and just those elders in the congregation came by concerned, not for my wife but because I was missing the meetings. I was a [leadership position] at the time so I had to set a good example for the congregation so they told me I needed to be at the meetings no matter the condition of my wife. It didn't sit right with me so I started to question some other, some other things in the congregation. (FR, 7)*

This participant considered caring for his ill wife as more personally important than attending the group meetings, which conflicted with the group's expectations of leaders. The pressures placed on the participant to put the group before his wife's care caused internal conflict and his resistance to uphold the leadership position's requirements saw him stripped of his position.

Another participant also experienced a value conflict when changing group roles. FR, 10's initial role in the group was the translation of doctrine and teachings from Indonesian to English for the purpose of gaining support from the non-Indonesian speaking Muslims. The group then offered him the opportunity to travel to Afghanistan for basic combat training. While optimistic over the trip, the unexplained and covert reasoning for going to Afghanistan made the participant uncomfortable with his new tasks in the group.

> *I ended up going to Afghanistan and then I came back from Afghanistan, fairly quickly. Because the reason given to me was basic*

training, but it as it happened it wasn't basic training at all. It was for a completely another reason all together (FR, 10).

The extreme nature of the task he was asked to perform by the new leadership appeared excessive as a methodology for achieving the group's goal of spreading the Islamic message.

The new leader [name], he had a much more serious agenda. I say that serious, the initial leader was serious also, but he didn't see it as lets bomb these people here, let's bomb those people there. He didn't see it like that, he was more like let's educate these people, educate those people and who knows in a generation, two generations we will achieve what we are setting out to achieve. (FR, 10)

The new leader took a violent approach to gathering support for the cause, which appeared overly aggressive to the participant, particularly when the participant was required to directly involve himself in the violence. The conflict between , morals and the required tasks triggered uneasiness and the participant started to look for a way out of being involved in the bombing of a government building. However, at this stage the participant wanted to avoid the violence but still remained within the group.

Failing Leadership

Leaders who do not act in a prototypical manner (in accord with the group's projected ideals and values), or did not effectively respond to members' personal needs, can lose the trust of members (Demant et al., 2008a; Jacobs, 1987; Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009; Rommelspacher, 2006). In the current study, this loss of trust often led to the questioning of commitment and sacrifices made for the good of the group; particularly, when the sacrifices made by the member are perceived to be disproportionate to those in positions of power. For example, a former cult member explained that her disengagement process began with a private conflict with the group leader over the lack of assistance and differences in personal sacrifices;

my car broke down and I remember going into the house and telling [leader's name] that my car had broke down and she doesn't have a car to give me a ride, and she said 'don't cry, I don't have a car and I get along just fine, you shouldn't cry'. And I remember my first self-thoughts

came through at that time, thinking for myself. I thought 'you may not have a car but you never walk anywhere, you never ride a bike anywhere, you never take the bus anywhere, you never take a taxi anywhere. You always catch rides with us kids, but you never pay for gas to reimburse us. You're a hypocrite (C, 1)

This perceived discrepancy in investments by those in leadership, and the lower ranking members continued to produce negative emotions for the member who described the following interactions with the leader as a "*slippery slope*". After this catalyst, the participant expressed resentment towards the leader and emphasised she allowed her own thoughts to influence her interactions with the group, rather than following the instructions of the leaders. This event triggered a reappraisal of past and succeeding events and constructed a feedback loop which influenced future interactions with the group.

I think it was just progression over time. There was not one specific incident, but yeah all of them were making things incredible worse. Emotionally, she had messed with my mind incredibly. I don't mean to offend you, but the term that comes to mind is 'mind-fuck'. And that what another ex-member used as well. And from the point where we had that disagreement about the car, and I internally called her a hypocrite, it was just a downward slope (C, 1).

The change in perspective towards leadership caused a shift in the participant's interpretation of group interactions. The new standpoint for evaluation towards group norms led to a reluctance in continuing to allow the leaders to have significant influence over him or her.

These types of social groups demand significant commitment and sacrifices to satisfy group membership. However, in some cases disagreements over the negative impact of the sacrifices on personal circumstances forced a re-evaluation of priorities. For one former fundamental religious group member, the care of his wife (also a group member) took precedence over membership duties. The subsequent negative feedback from other relevant members created a discrepancy between the promoted group ideals of caring and supporting each other, and the perceived treatment.

My wife at the time was going through some serious depression, clinical depression and I was missing a lot of [group name] meetings, they have three a week plus field service on Saturday. So four times a week, I was missing all those and just those elders in the congregation came by concerned, not for my wife but because I was missing the meetings (FR, 7).

This participant felt he was forced to choose between two personally significant roles that were central to his self-concept; the role of a group member, or the role of a caring husband. The participant held the view that the lack of concern and support for himself and his wife were inconsistent with the core values of community and support emphasised by the group.

The leaders' interactions with participants demonstrated an inconsistency between values the individual felt were necessary for membership, and which were also intricate to his self-worth within the social group.

I didn't like the way they had spoken with me, the way they had dealt with me at all. They were downright nasty. And I thought how can you be nasty one minute and very nice the next, you know it doesn't do it for me. You're either nice with me or you're not. You're either nasty with me or you're not. You're not my parents you know. I put up with that kind of rubbish when I was growing up and don't have to do it anymore. To me it wasn't very Islamic traits (FR, 10)

Feedback from the leadership, which conflicted with group's core values could lead to either doubts in the group's ideology, or the rejection of the group as a representative of the broader collective ideology; for example FR 10's perception of the group behaving in a non-Islamic way.

Another example is a participant who followed group recommendations and sacrificed his employment to satisfy group commitments, and financially suffered as a consequence. When the financial problem escalated, he sought assistance from group leaders.

I just quit a job in a company because they had asked me to work more hours which would have interfered with the theocratic schedule of the weekly meetings as well as the door to door field ministry work and then here I am reaping the consequences of these financial issues and then these two elders, who I had grown up and were twice my age or more say to me 'well you know if you have to work on the weekend or

you have to miss meetings then that is what you have to do' and it was very odd because all my life I had been told by these same individuals at different times to quit a job, to spend more time in the ministry to put kingdom interest first, which is a phrase frequently used, and now when I was reaping the consequences of those decisions now they were telling me something the exact opposite, which I never quite got over (FR, 3).

The response by the leaders was inconsistent and contradicted previously stated requests. This was seen by the participant as a deliberate attempt by the group to deflect any responsibility to his financial problems. These problems were a source of stress for the participant; however, the feedback from leadership group appeared in contrast to the group values. This led to the participant questioning the level of commitment and personal investment required to maintain group membership. Adding to the disillusionment with the group was the perception of leaders offering contradictory information that led to the participant assuming the rules were distorted to suit the needs of the leadership of the time.

In other circumstances, the failure of leaders to effectively represent the ideal, pious member led to participants challenging the group's validity. For example, a former white supremacist described how the arrest of one of the leaders who acted as a mentor to the participant was arrested for paedophilia.

In my mind I left over 18 months ago because I found out that the guy who actually got me into [group name] in [location], so to speak, he was actually arrested on child sex offence charges. So, I was very shocked. You know this was the guy, who I'd say the word you could say was mentor. But I don't want to use it. The guy who taught me to live by their standards, do things their way, was convicted of something that was very, we absolutely hate. You know in the music side of things they have songs about hanging paedophiles and that sort of stuff. In my mind, that's when I left. You know, its bullshit how someone can hide for so long who they really are and all they are doing is masquerading under our guidelines and it looks bad on that group. I would say us, but I'm not part of it. (WS, 1)

The police pressure on the organisation was not the trigger; rather it was the violation of significant group norms by a highly-regarded leader. This caused

disgust in the participant and triggered the perception that the group was no more supreme than those they condemned.

Another example included a fundamental religious group participant who recalled the failure of a respected leader who had international influence over the group's organisational and doctrinal aspects. The failure of this leader to behave in accord with the group's emphasised moral code challenged the participant's confidence in the ideological premises.

> *... he had been having an affair for seven year…. So the [leadership group] says that [group name] holy spirit directs the people appointed that he is directly involved in making the decision to [leader] and so obviously the holy spirit wasn't involved. If it was involved he would have alerted him to the fact that he was committing adultery and so wasn't acting as an [leader]. So that got me questioning whether or not is the Holy Spirit really involved directly in the organisation (FR, 5).*

The failure to act in accord with the group values suggested to the participant that there were fundamental flaws in the belief system. Additionally, the standards of behaviour imposed on members were not upheld by those who sought to enforce them. This raised issues regarding both the belief system and the legitimacy of the leadership group.

Furthermore, personal conflicts between leaders can have detrimental effects on the morale of the membership as it presents a divided value system and environment of distrust. This conflict can lead to member's disengaging, particularly when it involves a member directly. For one participant in the current study who had interactions with both Australian and international leaders, the power struggles between the two leadership groups produced a frustrating and volatile environment.

> *Once I had been in [location] about a week I went back to [location] and then all of a sudden it became a major drama for the twins. The reasons they gave me was they were the leaders of the group in Australia and they saw [name], the person in Malaysia as interfering with their control over the group in Australia, blah blah. It's absolute garbage you know.... And I think a lot of it had to do with money. I was given money, I was financed to do certain things here in Australia and they, I think they came to the conclusion that that money should have gone to them. And that's what it really came down to I think, pathetic really (FR, 10).*

This participant was involved in a religious organisation that had international, regional and national leaders. The power struggle between the different leadership groups was related to finances but the participant felt he was being manipulated by both sides. The outcome of the power struggle is consistent with Wright's (1983) findings in religious defection where second-tier leaders become overzealous or insensitive in their roles and can alienate members, leading to defection.

Inconsistencies in leadership behaviour and messages produced negative consequences for the affective attachment towards the group's organisational aspects. This can be linked to the changes in ideological interpretations. For example, one former fundamental religious group participant referred to the change in doctrine, and inconsistencies in the propagated messages, as a concern.

> My main objection is the authoritarian approach that they have that you are required to believe the belief de jure which can change at any moment and then you must be immediately with them even though your conscience might be telling you something totally different, and so therefore what was a prophesy yesterday, maybe a required belief today, you were required to believe it and teach it and tomorrow it might be a prophesy again so they flip flop on a number of matters (FR, 2).

The change in ideology led to members' resenting their leaders, as well as a loss of faith in the group's ideology. However, it was not the ideological inconsistency, but the leadership style that frustrated most participants.

> I thought that was the height of arrogance and that was the final straw for me as having any confidence in their interpretation at all (FR, 2).

While leaders were granted a certain amount of power over members, the perceived abuse of power beyond expectations of what is personally considered acceptable caused distress in the members. One former fundamental religious group participant recalled the shock of a mass ex-communication of over 1000 members, without following due course or procedural regulations. This was a source of apprehension for the participant who believed the leaders were abusing their positions of authority.

> [The leadership group] duly met and to my astonishment they didn't go by their traditional procedures, principles, facts, they didn't present any facts, they decided that they would ex-communicate all of [location] as

an act of obedience to [international leader's name] without invoking any facts, principles or anything else and that was to me an extreme and completely unaccepted and unprincipled example of his dictatorship (FR, 1).

The threat became personally significant when it had implications for the members directly, and if these concerns were not met with an effective response or support. For this participant, the failure of being able to influence the group's policies threatened his perceived significance and social power within the group. This threat increased in personal significance as the group was perceived as siding with the leader and not supporting the member, creating a divide between the group and personal identity.

External Influences

External influences refer to the forces acting on the individual that make maintaining membership unfavourable. For participants in the current study, there were two external influences identified; 1) partners and family commitments outside the group that pulled members towards alternatives that demanded time and resources, as well as 2) the stigmatisation and pressure from mainstream institutions, such as law enforcement. The extra-group factors could also come into effect during the self-concept management stage as the participants moved towards an alternative identity. However, as a threat, extra-group factors could be present in combination with intra-group conflict, or as the sole source of threat. As mention previously, in the current study participants who only experienced extra-group factors as the catalyst for membership appraisal physically disengaged from the group, but still maintained a positive psychological attachment. If circumstances were to change, these participants said they would contemplate returning to the group.

Partner and/or family

Significant personal relationships demand time and resources, presenting participants with a conflict between competing priorities (Wright, 1987). As participants' dyadic relationships intensified, greater emotional investment was placed in the relationship at the expense of other existing

relationships, including the social group. Families and partners external to the group were important as they represented a change in priorities. The establishment of (or desire for) a family external to the group also placed demands on the participant to adopt new responsibilities for both spouse and children. Family and partners provided a source of support, a sounding board for concerns, and emphasised the plausibility of alternative as well as more socially acceptable options. The participants' trust in their partners and family allowed them to be receptive to their opinions and reduced the insulation from alternative viewpoints.

    For two former members of one percent motorcycle clubs, the desire to establish a stable future with a partner, or their family, was an influential aspect in membership re-appraisal.

> *I met my wife and um, I guess it was sort of, it was almost like you either don't be in it and we'll get married or if you're in it, your sort of. She had nothing to do with that side of my life at all (1%, 2).*

For this participant, the partner and biker identities were exclusive and in combination with negative intra-group interactions (club patch-over, see page 118), blending of two roles was not perceived to be a favourable option.

    Family also represented a new set of responsibilities that exceeded the significance of group commitments. This threat was often accompanied by other threats but served as a justification and new set of self-standards to validate disengaging from the group.

> *With me getting older and having more family responsibility it was time for me to see the light and go on the straight and narrow (1%, 3).*

For both of these former one percent motorcycle club members, the pressures from intimate relationships formed externally to the group were accompanied by other stressors. For one, there was increasing pressure from law enforcement;

> *The police now had the advantage on me with their knowledge of me and me now having a criminal record. All they had to do was breach my conditions to get me in more trouble and use that against me to get me to roll on the club (1%, 3)*

The other former motorcycle club participant was experiencing inter-group conflict in the form of a patch-over (the club was being assimilated into a larger, more violent club).

> *You weren't a member of anything really. And if you decided you wanted to stay with them you had to become like a prospect to start with anyway. You couldn't just, you weren't welcome with open arms, you had to go through the process, again (1%, 2).*

As such, members can experience a loss of status and negative affect towards the new club, reducing member identification. In combination with growing commitment to their partners, maintaining membership became detrimental to familial responsibilities, and feedback from their partners furthered the divide between club identity and familial role.

One former special forces participant expressed conflict between the divergence of military and family life, with the commitment for long periods away from home causing disillusionment.

> *I still loved the job but just was six, seven, eight months a year away from home and it was just pretty tough you know (SF, 5).*

However, most participants who reported family commitments as an influential factor in disengaging described the significance of family within their self-concept management stage. The use of adaptive preferences allowed participants to restructure their goals to make family a higher priority and the detrimental impact of the group provide justifications for their desire to disengage. These participants emphasised that being away from home for long periods of time conflicted with their desire to establish or maintain the familial role to their standards.

> *It's very restrictive if you had a family and things like that, so whilst it is, was, a great life and an awesome job to me it wasn't really conducive to having a family (SF, 1).*

For participant SF, 5 the time away was only viewed as a negative factor when discussed in terms of family commitments, otherwise the role in the military remained favourable;

> *"I reckon I'll be 60 and going I want to do it, yep 100%."*

While participants were quick to point out that their partners were supportive of their careers and understood they needed to spend time away, changing

personal priorities emphasised the conflict between balancing competing salient social identities in the military and family.

While these participants emphasised family commitments as the causal factor for disengagement, the majority indicated other intra-group factors were also influential. However, for one of the special forces participants, family commitments was the sole reason provided for the decision to disengage, and at time in the interview, still maintained a positive psychological attachment to the military role and relationships.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused on the events that initiated the disengagement process. The predominant causes leading to disengagement came from within the social group, directly affecting intra-group relationships and the participants' affective attachment to group role and identity. The intra-group nature of these causes was significant, as it served as both a catalyst to the disengagement process as well as part of the reappraisal process when participants sought feedback for their concerns. The group's inability to respond adequately to participants' concerns highlighted inconsistencies between the manner in which the group has been perceived by participant and his or her self-concept.

The extra-group factors identified in the current study, which included partners and family commitments, as well as pressure from law enforcement, only encouraged physical disengagement when occurring in isolation. For some, the extra-group factors existed in combination with intra-group conflict and these participants psychologically disengaged.

While the initial threats varied in nature, participants in the current study engaged self-verification methods to substantiate their concerns. The role of self-verification and the awareness of discrepancies between the self and group membership are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 7: CORE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE

Chapter Overview

This chapter details the participants' experience following the identification of the threat as being related to group membership. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and explain the core experience of participants of the current study; the discrepancy between the self and group membership. This self-discrepancy is discussed in two distinct stages. Firstly, the role of self-verification in establishing an awareness of the discrepancies between group identity and the self is discussed. The following section discusses the self-concept discrepancy, with an emphasis on the types of discrepancies relevant to the participants (competence, significance, power and virtue), as well as participants' experiences of these self-discrepancies. While self-discrepancy is presented in two sequential stages, it is important to note that the stages are not mutually exclusive and in many cases are repeated until a consistent self-concept is achieved. Participants continued to engage self-verification and self-management strategies throughout the disengagement process to achieve psychological integrity and a consistent self-concept. Findings are illustrated by excerpts from participants' interviews and discussed in relation to existing literature.

Threat to Self-concept

In the current study, discrepancies between self and self-standards, or the self and how others perceive the self, threatened integrity of the self-concept. The self-concept is the mental representation organising an individual's perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of his or herself as an object (Markus & Wurf, 1987). It is not a physical entity, but rather a collection of self-schemas. These schemas are the beliefs a person holds about him or herself, and in which his or her identity is constructed. Self-schemas provide a standard through which people evaluate themselves and others, and those schemas most important to a person become defining and significant to motivation.

In the current study, the threat to integrity of the self-concept, arising from the initial threat and self-verification processes, resulted in

psychological distress for the participants. When the self-concept was threatened, participants attempted to reduce or eliminate the threat through cognitive and behavioural means. These methods aimed to reduce and eliminate the threat to the self-concept and restore integrity. This process was identified as continuous as the self-concept had to be managed in response to the discrepancy between self and social identity, and in light of new information arising throughout the disengagement process. The identification of new information (for example, learning the doctrine one had believed for a lifetime was inaccurate after exiting the group) could create a new threat to the self-concept (see figure 4.). The outcome of self-concept management strategies is the disidentification and disengagement from the group, as well as the self-concept developing the ex-member identity.
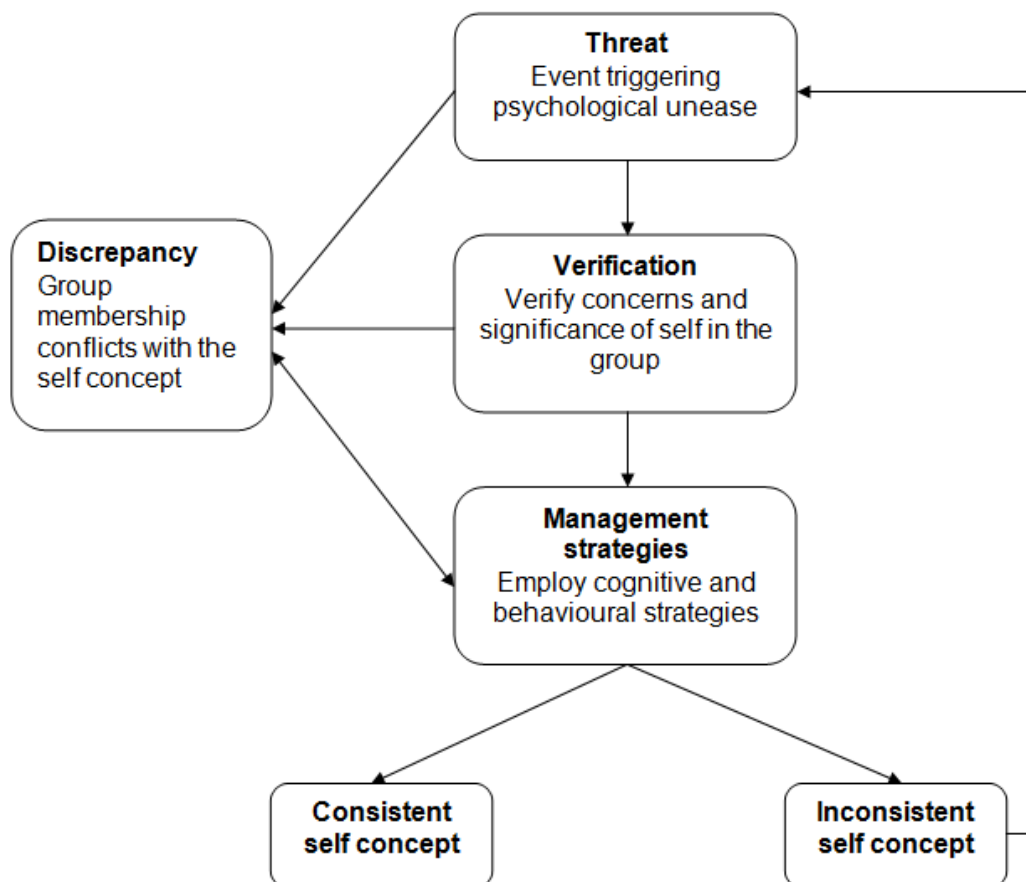
Figure 4. Process of self-concept management

The first phase of the disengagement process involved recognition of a personal threat creating psychological distress (as discussed in the previous chapter). The second stage involved verifying concerns about the significance of the self within the group. The third phase in the process is

recognition of self as discrepant with group membership and acting to restore integrity through self-concept management strategies that redefine the self away from the group. The following section discusses the verification phase and the psychological experience of discrepancy.

Self-Verification

External pressures and internal conflicts vary and can occur many times in the course of membership without leading to disengagement. The consistent finding in the current study was that the threat that led to disengagement from the group was followed by participants' reappraisal through self-verification. This reappraisal identified further discrepancies between the group and self-concept by negative interactions with other significant members or the lack of satisfaction within the group role.

In the literature, self-verification refers to evaluating the consistency of existing perceptions of the self by seeking information from alternative sources (Swann Jr, 1983; Swann Jr, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003). It provides assurance that the beliefs one holds about oneself are accurate and sensible. As such, being 'verified' improves predication and control by assuring others hold appropriate expectations towards of the self (Chen, English, & Peng, 2006; Swann Jr, 1990; Swann Jr et al., 2003). In the current study, participants' use of feedback and self-evaluation provided verification of the self-concept in relation to the group identity. This self-verification led to awareness of a discrepancy between the self and social group identity. The increased awareness of this discrepancy was deemed psychologically significant by participants.

The self-concept was evaluated in relation to the information that was accessible to participant. In the current study, weight was given to information provided by others as social feedback (other's responses to the individual's behaviour), and self-evaluation (comparing the self with standards one believes they should possess; see Figure 5.). When exploring experiences of disengaging in the current study, participants employed both social feedback and self-evaluation after experiencing a threat, in attempts to address their concerns and reduce the experience of psychological distress.

The verification created greater awareness of existing discrepancies and led to an increase in participants' psychological distress.
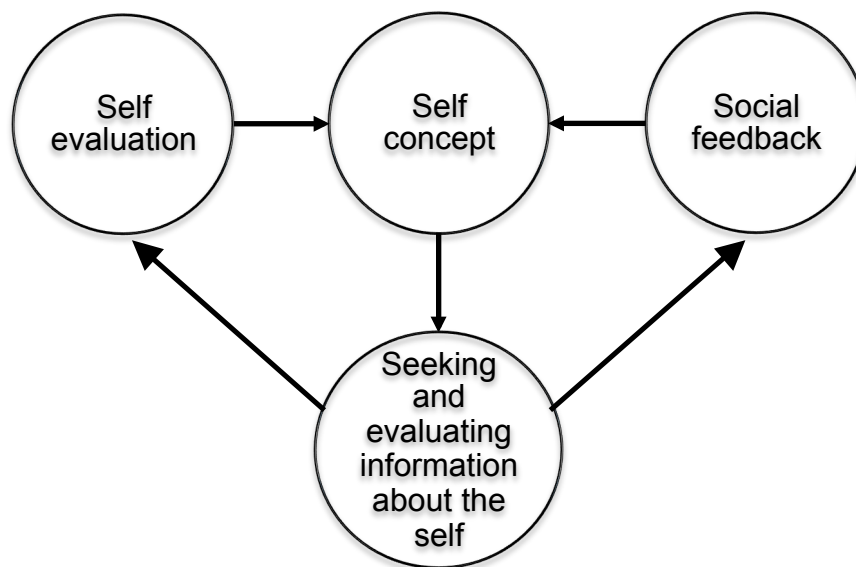
Figure 5. Member self-verification method

The initial threat in itself acted as the catalyst but was not the sole cause for disengagement. The self-verification succeeding the catalyst gave further strength to participant's concerns and highlighted the discrepancies between their self-concept and group identity. Participants were motivated to assess the validity of these concerns by seeking information that would either refute or consolidate them. Primarily, participants sought to reduce the threat and reconcile the self with the group and at this point participants may not have been cognitively aware of their involvement in the disengagement process.

Social Feedback

Social feedback requires the use of behaviours to elicit feedback from others regarding the significance and acceptance of the individual (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Swann Jr et al., 2003). The congruence, affective valence and personal significance of this feedback determine an individual's cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to feedback (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Spreitzer, Stephens, & Sweetman, 2009). In the current study, feedback provided validity to participants' concerns regarding group related threats. Thus, the significance of the source, self-relevance of the information and the

level of consistency with existing attitudes influenced participants' reactions to feedback. Strategies that can reduce the impact of disconfirming feedback include selective attention, selective memory and selective interpretation (Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Schröder-Abé, Rudolph, Wiesner, & Schütz, 2007). However, the priming by the initial threat and the deliberate act of seeking feedback from significant others increased the participants' awareness of an existing discrepancy.

Social feedback in the context of the disengagement experience.

In the current study, some participants attempted to address their concerns through discussions with those in leadership, while others approached family members or significant others. Some participants formerly involved with fundamental religious groups also made the effort to source outside information regarding doctrine, and presented the inconsistencies they identified to the group's leadership.

> *Sometimes I would talk things over with my teacher rather than research which of course they would have an explanation or, reinforce the teachings. They would say it was basically for my own good or it was for the good of my soul, or someone else's own good. It seemed to tie into things that I had read, or learnt before I came to this organisation as well. A lot of the teachings seemed to be borrowed from other traditions and things like that. That actually helped me to justify some things for a while (C, 2).*

For some, this dialogue with leaders and other members was able to facilitate temporary reconciliation with the group by maintaining positive attachment. It was viewed that the leadership had made an acceptable effort to address these concerns and also maintained social bonds between participants and the group. For example, the following participant had discussed his concerns regarding the doctrine with his father (who was also an elder in the religious group);

> *I talked them out with my father who had been an elder. . . . I talked them over with him and I wound up suppressing my questions and negative feelings about the authoritarian approach of the organisation (FR, 2).*

This reconciliation was influenced by the source of the message and the desire to maintain positive relationships with family members, rather than the credibility of the arguments.

> *Mine was to provide a stable atmosphere in the family while my son was growing up and in school but the main thing was just to maintain peace in the family and not to rock the boat, so to speak, or disturb the status quo* (FR, 2).

As a consequence, the premise for the concerns was not resolved and uncertainty over the group doctrine lingered. This continuing distrust of the group's leadership style meant the participant was more aware of future inconsistencies between the self and the group.

When those in leadership were unable to respond adequately to participants' concerns, they became the focal point for the disillusionment between group and member. This provided justification for viewing the group as a threat to the self. In many cases, this disillusionment with the leadership had been reported to be more significant than the initial threat. An example includes one participant who was sexually abused by her uncle while under his care, and approached the leadership group for help;

> *I talked to the [leaders], I told the [leaders] everything that had happened. They told me that it was a family matter and I shouldn't tell anybody, I shouldn't have even told them because it should be handled in the family and not with anybody else. They still expected me to sit next to him at meetings like church, yeah it was handled wrong and that's why I left, because it's corrupt (FR, 6).*

This participant expected the leadership group would act to protect her and punish her uncle, but their reluctance to act led to concerns over her significance within the group.

In some instances, participants sought to reconcile with the group by seeking a greater understanding of the group ideology and history. When the leadership discouraged extended learning, it further contributed to their participant's disillusionment with the group.

> *When I told him that I was doing, trying to make an effort to do more in depth study using what the organisation calls the inside volumes which is their equivalent of a biblical encyclopaedia, when I told him I was doing more study along those lines he kind of laughed at me and then*

counselled me not to get overly involved in study that I should be focussed more on my activity in the door to door work. So those things bothered me for a number of years (FR, 2).

The group's objection to this participant's self-learning of the doctrine increased his interest into the reasons why the group would discourage further religious studies.

Furthermore, participants viewed their attempts at approaching leadership to discuss their concerns as justifications when they left the group.

I was able to give them an opportunity to respond to the many biblical problems I had found with the teachings and ultimately that went nowhere. They could not provide any meaningful answers or comments (FR, 5)

The perceived failure of the group to reconcile any ideological inconsistencies led to the participant positioning responsibility for disengagement on the group. As participants openly discussed their concerns with the group, participants argued it was the group that failed to provide adequate resolution; thus, validating the decision to leave.

Information seeking.

As well as utilising social sources from inside the group to verify their concerns and self-concept, some participants in the current study engaged in seeking information external to the group as a means of clarifying and authenticating beliefs. This approach was more common for those in fundamental religious and political groups. This may be due to the fundamentalist approach to doctrine where the slight fallibility of a belief system can significantly impact on the collectively promoted interpretation of reality (Skonovd, 1981). Threats, which discredit the central tenets of a belief structure can a cause ripple effect and spread to other core and peripheral beliefs (Zimmerman, 2003).

For some participants in the current study, seeking external information was in combination with discussing their concerns with significant others within the group. For other participants, it may have been their only source of alternative information due to the covert nature of dealing with

membership concerns. For example, some participants expressed concerns of being 'kicked out' or being in danger if other members knew they did not support the group's beliefs.

> *I had to keep all of that from my friends because I knew that if I started to talk about it I would be labelled an apostate and kicked out so I couldn't actually discuss anything with anyone (FR, 5)*

> *If I had said this to the group, it's quite possible that 'well you're a traitor, we'll kill you'. Who knows, that was the fear I had at the time (FR, 10).*

The fears of having their membership status revoked, or more severe consequences meant some participants sought information privately and externally to the group's regulated information sources.

> *I had started to have had some doubts about the faith and started to do some independent research, meaning research outside of the [group] which they try to discourage (FR, 7).*

Groups that attempt to insulate members from the outside world often view this type of research negatively as it can provide plausible alternatives, which threaten the groups' propagated norms (Wright, 1987), particularly as participants' type of research focused primarily on the group's doctrine.

For some participants, information seeking was a significant and lengthy element in determining remaining involvement in the group. For example, one fundamental religious participant, who was born and raised in the religious group, wanted assurance that his concerns were well founded and accurate.

> *I spent a solid three years maintaining my affiliation but I spent a solid three years investigating and research the history of the organisation and different lines of the historical development of certain doctrines. I wanted to be absolutely certain of, and give this the analysis that I felt that it was due (FR, 3).*

It was important for participants to feel confident in their attitudes towards the group and in the validity of any contradicting information. The distrust caused by changes in beliefs led to further psychological distancing from the group's ideology, provided justifications for disidentifying with the group, and consequently, deciding to disengage.

While research was often sought to validate groups' ideological premises and doctrine, inconsistencies threatened both participants' ontological security derived from their ideology, as well as the faith in the organisation's leadership to act in a virtuous manner. A fundamental religious participant who identified failings in the organisational teachings describes the experience of identifying errors in the doctrine;

> I started researching earthquakes and I found out that there's always been the same amount of earthquakes, that there wasn't a 20 times increase. . . so that started me questioning whether, what was in the [group publication]. Because I think the most shocking thing is to find out was that they actually lie, like I always assumed they were well intentioned and maybe they had things right or wrong, maybe God wasn't clearly directly them but I always thought it was honest (FR, 5).

When participants were presented with inconsistent information, trust in the organisation decreased. Subsequently, this distrust intensified participants' appraisal of involvement with the social group as a threat to their self-concept. Participants who found reasons to doubt the honesty of the group's teachings and doctrine reported negative feelings of being manipulated and duped by leadership;

> At some point you feel a little duped, and you feel stupid but at the same, you know what you're born into and what you're told from childhood is what you believe (FR, 7).

This realisation of being fooled further threatened the self-concept, particularly in the realm of personal significance, as participants believed others had treated them dishonestly. The personal impact of believing a 'lie' and having developed new beliefs that were no longer consistent with the group-imposed ideology further increased the discrepancy between the self and the group. This led to the need to know the extent of misinformation and alternative perspectives available. An example of this included a participant who felt the leadership had deliberately misled members by interpreting the religious information to justify their own beliefs and agendas. As a consequence, this participant began researching intensely to determine how much of the group's teachings were false.

> the [group name] taught the closest thing to what the bible writers really intended but the more I researched the more I came to find out that

they are actually a very naive group with very poor doctrine, it's very much eisegesis, where they worked out want they want to believe and they find a structure to support it rather than the other way around.... And then when I saw that they actually do lie to try and support the teachings then, I felt like I'd been completely manipulated and so that was just the start of this massive downhill spiral from there, from then on I just went crazy with research, just researched absolutely everything you can imagine, that I'd ever learnt, ever known. (FR, 5).

The information gathered external to the group doctrine played a significant role in the loss of faith in the group and its leadership. Wright (1983) argues that the less insulation from alternative interpretations a group has, the greater the risk of disengagement as it reduces influence of social mechanisms that reinforce commitment and promotes aversive evaluations of the group.

The seeking of alternative information outside the group doctrine was significant in the reformation of belief systems. For many of the fundamental religious group members, this approach began at the self-verification stage of the disengagement process. For other participants, awareness and receptiveness to alternative information was prevalent in later stages of disengagement as a method of managing their self-concept prior to physically disengaging by providing justifications. Additionally, alternative information was relevant post exit as the self began to incorporate the ex-member identity. The purpose of the information was to clarify and give certainty to their thoughts and later provided a justification for either their continued involvement or discontent with the group.

Self-Evaluation

Coopersmith (1967) defines self-evaluation as "a judgement process in which the individual examines his performance, capacity and attributes according to his personal standards and values and arrives at a decision of his worthiness" (p. 7). Like other attitudes, this evaluation and attitude towards the self can influence intellectual and motivational processes (Coopersmith, 1967; Silvia & Duval, 2004; Silvia & Phillips, 2013). People develop standards for themselves in situations that allow a comparison against absolute standards (ideal), relative standards (peers), and perceived

evaluations from significant others (Higgins et al., 1985; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). Each of these comparisons can vary in importance for different individuals and in different situations. Research (Besser & Priel, 2009; Brown & Brown, 2011) has found self-evaluation can impact an individual's self-esteem. Higgins et al. (1985) suggest failure to achieve personally relevant standards can cause dejection or agitation-related emotions and, consequently, motivate an individual to make changes to self-relevant standards and/or behaviour.

In the current study, self-evaluation appeared to be more prominent for participants who experienced role conflict rather than social feedback. Negative affect as a product of self-evaluation can occur when a member is required to perform tasks for the group that conflict with personal values. For example, a former member of a one percent motorcycle club who was given the task of being the enforcer for the club, which involved violent confrontations with others on the orders of the club hierarchy;

> *I um started getting phone calls because I'm a kickboxer, ok. Because I can fight. Whenever anything happened or someone had to be dealt with [unclear] I would do it. So I was more so, like a debt-collector without collecting any debts. And I didn't like it. Because I trained for the complete opposite reason (1%, 4).*

Originally this participant was involved in the sale of drugs, but was moved to the more violent role due to his increasing interest in kickboxing training. This role change led to comparing the self with relative standards and identifying the discrepancy between the self and behaviours required for group membership.

> *You know you could get a phone call and go in and speak to someone and this is what happening and then it's like fuck. You know, this is actually happening. And I've got my head on my shoulders now and um, I started doing that and was going around and I was just a little bit fucking, bit more concerned about my actions then I was before. Then it just started hitting home in a sense and I'm just not about that anymore Kira (1%, 4).*

While the participant did not seek to discuss the role-related problems with others, the violent behaviour was an aspect of the group's involvement that conflicted with standards the participant adopted at his kickboxing club.

Another source for negative self-evaluation is when a member is unable to achieve self or group imposed standards for their desired role (Higgins et al., 1985). This can motivate individuals to change the self to achieve these standards or seek alternative standards for self-enhancement. For two participants from the special forces the need to identify alternative standards was recognised as their bodies were unable to maintain the physical intensity required due to significant illnesses and injuries.

> *I got diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome in 2004 and it pretty much put me out of the game in terms of living life normally, at that point no one could tell me if I was going to recover or what the treatment was or anything like that so it set me off thinking okay I had to think about another way to earn my living (SF, 1).*

The inability to effectively achieve task performance furthered the group related threat by posing problems relating to personal finances and security. Realising the standards required to maintain their roles were not attainable motivated seeking of alternative lifestyle options outside the military.

The self-evaluation identified discrepancies between the self and role competency required to effectively maintain membership. The unwillingness to perform tasks, or the inability to achieve standards, led to re-evaluation of group membership and the self. Participants that identified conflicts with their roles appeared motivated to seek alternatives external to the group rather than adopt different intra-group roles.

Section summary.

For many members, there were experiences of disillusionment throughout their involvement; however, not all resulted in disengagement – and a full understanding of why some events lead to disengagement and others do not is beyond the scope of the current research. However, a commonality across participants was the reinterpretation of the significance of the threat through interaction with others and self-evaluation. Participants engaged self-verification by methods of appraising feedback, self-relevant information and self-evaluation. When social information relating to participants' concerns conflicted with expected responses, participants became aware of discrepancies between their own self-concept, how they

perceived other members viewed them and the group imposed identity. This discrepancy with relevant others can project uncertainty as well as threaten self-esteem and social acceptance (Abraham, 1998; Anthony, Holmes, & Wood, 2007; Bizma & Yinon, 2004; Bukley, Winkel, & Leary, 2004; Epstein, 1973; Haslam et al., 1996b; Tajfel, 1978). The following section discusses the psychological experience of the discrepancy, with excerpts from the interviews to illustrate.

Core Experience: Self-Discrepancy

A positive self-concept can be threatened by interpreting information from others and/or events that contradict the self-view, or the image they project to others (Higgins et al., 1985). These threats can arise in a variety of ways; inconsistencies between self-concept and cognitions as well as behaviour, inconsistencies between self and other people's responses to self-image, and when self-standards are not achieved (Higgins et al., 1985; Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994). Each of these highlighted discrepancies between who the person perceives him or herself to be, and who they want to be, or recognised as.

After the initial threat and self-verification highlighted discrepancies between the self and social group, participants engaged various methods to restore a balanced and consistent self-concept. Resolving the self-concept discrepancy involved either addressing concerns by reconciling the self with the group, or socially distancing from group norms. Skonovd (1981) argues that most instances of conflict result in alternative psychological processes (repression and avoidance, rationalisation, reformation, escape, role withdrawal) leading to reconciliation with the group; however, as the purpose of the current study was to focus on the experience of disengaging, these psychological processes are outside the scope of analysis.

Self-esteem and psychological integrity are derived from the emotional evaluation of the self and judgements of one's own self-worth. The initial threat and self-verification methods identified discrepancies between the group and the self in four different domains; (a) competence (success in meeting achievement demands), (b) virtue (adherence to moral and ethical standards), (c) power (the ability to control and influence others), (d)

significance (the acceptance, attention, and affection of others). Epstein (1973) and Coopersmith (1967) postulate these four dimensions of self-evaluation are significant in determining self-esteem. However, the significance of each dimension varies between individuals and those with high personal relevance are core characteristics of the self (Aronson, 1968; Markus & Wurf, 1987)

(1) Competence – the competence discrepancy relates to task performance and was observed with participants from the special forces being unable to fulfil their role to personal and group imposed standards due to the physical limitations imposed by work induced illnesses and injuries.

> *I had five operations over a year and a half, so it was just long and drawn out. A bit painful I suppose and it wasn't like cut away and do something else, just loitering around getting surgery done and rehab and then more surgery and rehab. . . . I've had enough of just waiting around because what it comes down to in the end, they can't discharge you until you are medically at a certain grade, so that could be indefinite and I just said oh I want to move on so yeah, frustrating. (SF, 2)*

(2) Virtue – the virtue discrepancy refers to the moral and ethical differences between the self and the group. Examples included leaders not acting in with the group projected value system,

> *He began to abuse his power in a very flagrant way, he began to demand money, he began to say very seductive, in the public meetings he began to say very sexually orientated things about the women in the meeting, he began to lust after them and say lustful things about them, he began to talk about their genitalia and their breasts. As for the men, he began to say abusive things to them in the public meetings, he began to use quite offensive words like 'son of a bitch' and 'bastard' and 'someone around here stinks' and this got progressively worse in the course of 1970 and the other thing he did was that in private homes he would start fondling the woman and fondling their breasts and asking them to sit on his knee and he would kiss them by putting his mouth over their mouth, and making skew noises and he sort of expected he had the right to do this because of his position as the leader and he would sort of brag about the fact that he could do this and no one else could do this (FR, 1);*

or being asked to perform a violent role that is perceived as unjustifiable.

> *As far as I was concerned it wasn't the basic training that I was led to believe that I was sent to Afghanistan for. Basically the idea was to come back, and it was basically what I ended up getting charged with, was conspiring to blow up the [organisation's name] in [location]. And I though, wow that's pretty big you know. And I couldn't sort of see that as valid in my head (FR, 10).*

(3) Power – The power discrepancy was related to the participants' inability to influence others. For example, a former fundamental religious participant overtly challenged the decision making of the leadership group in front of 1,000 other members and with no other members supporting him felt isolated from the group and with little persuasive power,

> *That was to me an extreme and completely unaccepted and unprincipled example of his dictatorship and the meeting in [location] where it happened there was about 1000 [group members] present and I was the only person who questioned the decision and said "how can we make a decision like this without been given the facts", and not a single other person supported me (FR, 1)*

(4) Significance – The significance discrepancy relates to the acceptance, attention and affection of others, and was the most prominent discrepancy experienced by participants. Social interactions are a significant influence in the construction of the self-concept, with people's perception of how others view them, rather than how they are actually viewed having the greatest impact. The social self-concept originated in the works by James (1890; as cited in Berndt & Burgy, 1996) who defined it as the self-perceptions of social acceptance; thus the perceptions one has about how well liked and admired he or she is by others. Maintaining a positive interpersonal image of the self is stimulated by the need for belonging, and a fear of rejection and social exclusion.

The threat presented a significant discrepancy in three different ways. Firstly, participants experienced negative interactions with other members.

> *I said like, I didn't realise there would be so many dickheads so, you know a lot of idiots mate. I don't like them. I don't like some of the*

people in the club, so like how am I supposed to have this passion for this club when I don't even like half the people in it mate (1%, 4).

The lack of mutual affection created a social divide between the participant and other members. With the resulting negative interactions, the participant felt he or she was not socially accepted.

Secondly, was the loss of personal status held within the group was challenged.

Because the people at the club that you could sort of join um, they didn't really know us so, if you didn't turn up or whatever it was, you weren't really missed I suppose (1%, 2).

The loss of status and attention from other members encouraged the participant to re-evaluate the commitment required for a group where he did not feel others appreciated his worth.

Thirdly, the threat came from the failure of those in leadership positions to respond supportively to the participants' through this challenging experience.

I was cutting myself all the time. When the [leaders] saw that they told me I could be disfellowshipped because that is wrong don't do it, it wasn't trying to help me it was just don't do it (FR, 6).

The lack of support and benevolence from others in the group suggested to the participant that she was not as significant to others as she thought she was. This conflict emphasised the differences in her self-worth and how others viewed her.

These four domains were prevalent in the identification of discrepancies between self and group. However, the significance of each individual domain varied between participants. As the discrepancy between group membership and self-concept continued to grow through self-verification methods, members were faced with two conflicting options; (1) reconcile the self with the group, or (2) end membership. Either approach required managing the self-concept to reduce psychological discomfort. To remain in the group when the member has experienced a shift in beliefs, values or goals saw the social and personal identities clash; alternatively, to leave behind a group to whom one has committed a substantial amount of effort and resources was also a source of distress.

In the current study, the failure of participants to adequately reduce their concerns created psychological discomfort, and the discrepancy between self and group membership increased. With greater identification and awareness of this discrepancy participants began engaging in methods to reduce the discrepancy and restore psychological integrity. Achieving psychological integrity resulted in reducing psychological dependency on the group and led to disengagement.

Psychological Experience

The experiencing of self-discrepancies and the inconsistency between social and private self can lead to negative psychological outcomes (Higgins et al., 1985; Higgins et al., 1994; Matz & Wood, 2005). A key experience for participants in the current study was the occurrence of psychological distress. Distress, as defined by Lazurus and Folkman (1984), is the "particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her wellbeing" (p. 21). There is an emphasis on the cognitive appraisal as the key component of the stress experience, thus a person evaluates a given situation or event in relation to how it impacts the self. As such, some discrepancies may be idiosyncratically experienced as stressors by some individuals, but not others. Stress symptoms can be experienced in cognitive, emotional, behavioural and physical forms.

When experiencing discrepancy, participants were aware of their dissatisfaction with membership but were ambivalent about the notion of leaving the group. The experience of self-discrepancies was significant to all participants, and particularly stressful for most. The discrepancy that was identified and emphasised through the self-verification stage led to a further psychological distress for participants, as their behaviour (membership) was inconsistent with their cognitions and attitudes towards their social group. The experience of the discrepancy was described in the current study as 'psychological distress'. Some participants described the experience as a physiological response of 'feeling sick' or the arousal experienced during anxiety, while others described negative emotional responses, such as 'disillusioned, 'unbalanced' and 'scared'.

Consistent with cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), the conflicting views exacerbated the distress of the participants. However, Steele and Spencer (1992) oppose the notion of a consistency motive in psychology and its centrality in dissonance processes, arguing inconsistency only initiates some other motivation. They acknowledge the role of consistency between cognitions in reasoning and inferences but argue against Festinger (1957, 1964, 1985) and Aronson's (1968, 1999) theory of psychological consistency being a motive to change beliefs and behaviour. Emphasising the role of self-motives, Aronson (1999) argued self-integrity is the primary motivator for addressing any self-inconsistencies, thus only when inconsistencies threaten one's general moral and adaptive capacity are people motivated to self-justification and self-improvement. In the current study, the impact of this discrepancy between the social feedback and the self-concept pertained to acceptance by, and identification with, the group. As the participants felt their self-integrity was challenged by group membership, their sense of self on both an intra and interpersonal level was threatened, creating a negative psychological experience, which supports Aronson's (1999) argument. The challenge to self-integrity resulted in participants experiencing psychological, social and value conflicts over group membership and the motivation to resolve the conflict.

An example of conflicting beliefs included two former fundamental religious group participants who researched the scientific elements of their group's doctrine and found contradicting information. They described the psychological experience of managing opposing beliefs. The lack of faith in the group's doctrine was contrasted by the intense relationships formed within the group. Participant FR, 4 described how the overt rejection of the doctrine would result in being labelled an apostate and would risk damaging personally significant relationships.

> So you know, I'd make myself sick just worrying about it you know because it is easy to say I don't believe in it anymore but for a [group name] and especially someone like me, living in a small world, that was all my friends and that was what I considered my family (FR, 4).

A second former fundamental religious group member described the feeling of doubting the authenticity of the group doctrine, but at the same time fearing the consequences of exploring these doubts.

> *So that sort of undermined my state in it and got me really unbalanced but at the same time I was scared of being influenced by Satan and didn't really do any research I just had this massive gap for 10 years there was just this doubt there without actually knowing what the doubt was and why (FR, 5).*

These feelings of conflict were symptomatic of trying to make sense of previously held beliefs and conflicting information. The group's doctrine and world-view were perceived by the participant to be an inaccurate interpretation of reality. At this stage, participants reported both feelings of uncertainty in terms of their role in the world and group membership, but also described having confidence that their doubts were accurate. This certainty in the knowledge, which justified the rejection of the group, provided a sense of relief as the newly held world-view was perceived as more consistent and accurate.

Collapse of belief system.

Confirming the participants' doubts gave strength to their arguments, but also gave rise to psychological distress by developing awareness of valid alternative explanations that challenged their existing world-view. Within fundamentalist groups, the experience of managing previous belief systems with the influx of new information was described as overwhelming;

> *I felt like a gun was held to my head every day. You have this, there was a lot of cognitive dissonance going on and I was always trying to rationalise, or explain away the [group] interpretation of the world and, what I was now learning about the world. Meaning, evolution for example, and I started taking some community college courses in biology. So I was trying to reconcile that with creationism essentially, so my head was about to explode (FR, 7).*

Describing this experience of feeling 'like a gun was held to my head' illustrates the stress the participant experienced when aware of the discrepancies between what he was led to believe by the group and what he later perceived to be a more accurate interpretation of reality. Another

participant described the impact of conflicting beliefs in regards to the hatred of those outside the Aryan race.

> *I've always sort of been like that. My parents knew I was in there. They don't know how far or the depth that I was in to it. I was brought up that everyone gets a fair go, don't be judgemental and all that sort of stuff. I was always going, in the back of my head, yeah but you don't really hate them do you. And I was fighting in my own head, but I'm part of the group, and then the part of me that was brought up goes, yeah but you don't hate them. And my mum always used to say that to me, "I know you're a part of it, but I know you don't hate them". (WS, 1)*

The group's influence on the participant's immediate thoughts contradicted his personal beliefs and caused distress as he tried to manage conflicting values. This internal 'fight' needed to be balanced by either adopting group values or rejecting the group.

Similarly, another fundamental religious participant described his experience of uncovering inconsistent information as the critical part of re-evaluating the group's authenticity and membership. After a personal conflict with the leadership the concerns held about the political aspects of the top level leaders became more significant and led to researching the accuracy of group teachings.

> *I really felt quite disillusioned. And it was those issues that really led me to evaluating my life, how I'd got into that position and that in turn meant evaluating my religion and I started investigating the chronology the organisation uses to claim that it has been chosen by God and once I really started investigating the chronology then my faith in the organisation completely fell apart (FR, 3).*

Attempts to integrate conflicting information into the group's interpretation caused psychological distress in participants, and in some cases, led to the conclusion that the group had provided misleading information. This supports Skonovd's (1981) finding that ideological conflicts can develop into a rationale for disengaging when members review and reflect on their involvement.

In the current study, these ideological conflicts challenged the certainty of the belief system, but also the self-concept as a coherent and consistent whole. The extent of the changes in the participants' belief

systems can be described through Zimmerman's (2003) doxastic principle of minimal mutilation. This principle of beliefs argues any changes to core beliefs leads to rejection of both core and corresponding peripheral beliefs relating to group identity. The collapse of the belief system had a far-reaching impact on the certainty and security of participants. Progressively, concerns relating to the group accumulated to the extent that the member felt a need to physically remove him or herself from the group.

Special forces.

Participants from the special forces appeared to be less psychologically distressed over the discrepancy than other participant groups. This may be due to several reasons; the emphasis on self-evaluation, rather than feedback and acceptance, at the self-verification stage. The self-evaluation emphasised a greater value on the individual identity and self-awareness, rather than collective norms or goals.

> *It was always my intent to leave the army after 10 years to pursue other things. I got crook when I was in the SAS so that was further motivation to stick to my plan because it is such a high intensity life style and such a high demand on you as a person to stay in that unit (SF, 1)*

Alternatively, the criterion of group membership and mental resilience training may influence the individual experience. Soldiers who are successful in special operational forces selection display higher levels of resilience, good health and high performance under a range of stressful conditions, in comparison to other operational soldiers (Bartone et al., 2008). These soldiers demonstrate a strong sense of commitment to life and work, are actively engaged in their environments, and exhibit high levels of belief in their capabilities. Bartone et al. (2008) also argues that these soldiers are internally motivated and able to create their own sense of purpose. Additionally, these participants may represent a different cohort due to previous exposure to potentially threatening events.

> *You can deal with a lot of things because you know you can do it. You know you can, you have the qualities. You know, you go through so many hard things, if its mental or physical, and you see how a big operation happened, so anything you do in life is not a big deal, it's like simple (SF, 4).*

The special forces participants in the current study did experience self-discrepancies in the form of virtue (for example; considering one's self as a person-of-peace, rather than a person-of-war), which positioned them in contrast to the group norms, as well as self-standards in regards to role competence. The threat experienced by some of the special forces participants was related to injury and competence; it is the interpretation of this threat that determined psychological disengagement. The participant who felt alienated from the unit and removed from the inner workings of the group experienced a loss of significance and power, which challenged his self-concept in relation to his social group. Whereas the participant who responded to the injury by self-affirming on other domains, but maintained positive ties to the group, physically disengaged but did not reject the idea of returning to the group.

These participants engaged a variety of self-concept management strategies (adaptive preferences, justifications and atypical identification), as discussed in the next chapter, but did not experience psychological distress over the identity-shift to the same extent as the other participant groups.

Chapter Summary

The discrepancy between the group and self-concept that was identified and emphasised through the self-verification stage led to a further increase in conflicting information regarding the group. This discrepancy was identified in four domains relating to the participants self-esteem and psychological integrity; (1) competence, (2) virtue, (3) power, and (4) significance. These discrepancies resulted in psychological discomfort to the participants, which were described in the current study as psychological distress. Some participants described this experience in terms of a physiological stress response, while others described negative emotional responses.

Participants found their group membership and world-view was discrepant from their self-concept. While self-verification confirmed participants' doubts and gave strength to their arguments, it also presented psychological distress by acknowledging the group's imperfections and inconsistent ideology. Participants reported mixed feelings of uncertainty in

their belief systems, but clarity in their reasoning that group membership no longer provided psychological integrity. This experience challenged the certainty of their belief system and also the self-concept as a coherent and consistent whole. As such, participants engaged self-concept management strategies to reduce these self-discrepancies and associated psychological distress. These strategies are the focus of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 8: MANAGEMENT OF THE SELF-CONCEPT

Chapter Overview

The initial threat and subsequent discrepancy identification caused participants in the current study to experience a disturbance to their self-concept. This disturbance led to the use of management strategies to restore self-integrity by reducing the discrepancy between their self-concept and their social identity. Four strategies were identified in the participants' experiences; (1) forming an atypical identity, (2) the use of adaptive preferences, (3) the use of justifications and rationalisations, and (4) making amends. For participants in the current study, these management strategies restored consistency and psychological integrity, as well as provided validation for their decision to disengage. Each of these strategies is defined by existing literature and then explained in relation to the disengagement context, which is illustrated by excerpts from participant interviews. Following this is an explanation of how self-concept management strategies influenced participants' commitment to their group and further reduced psychological dependency.

Discrepancy Management Strategies

Growing discrepancy between the self and the group motivated the use of self-concept management strategies to protect participants from viewing themselves negatively and to restore psychological integrity. These strategies served as defence mechanisms by influencing participants' interpretation of events and interactions, as well as restoring a consistent self-concept. Previous studies have found that alternative avenues for establishing a positive self-concept can reduce the impact of psychological discomfort (Coates, 2013; Davidman & Greil, 2007). In the current study, four strategies were identified in participants' experiences; atypical identity, adaptive preferences, justifications and rationalisations, and making amends. Table 7 provides an overview of these four strategy types, their corresponding characteristics and their outcomes. While these strategies are presented separately, participants could utilise multiple strategies concurrently or at various stages of the disengagement process.

Table 7.

Self-concept Management Strategies

Strategy type	Characteristics	Outcomes
Atypical identity	Develops a self-image that contradicts the norms of membership	Differentiate the self from other members Decentralises the group from social identity
	Self-enhancement	Personal goals replace group goals
Adaptive preferences	Altering perceived unattainable preferences for those believed to be attainable	Group identity replaced with a new set of standards
	Self-affirmations	Development or enhancement of alternative sources to improve self-integrity
Justifications and rationalisations	Validate disillusionment	Reframing the situation Shifting blame
Making amends	Undermining group/leadership	Righting wrongs Seeking retribution

In addition to these management strategies, all participants physically disengaged and ended their membership with the group as means of establishing consistency. This physical disengagement is discussed later in the chapter as it served as both a management strategy to reconcile the self-concept and as a consequence of other psychological processes. The next section of this chapter discusses the management strategies that allowed participants to psychologically disengage and disidentify with the group; firstly, by explaining the strategies as a psychological mechanism, and then as experienced by the participants in the current study.

Forming an Atypical Identity

The categorisation of the self and others allow an individual to become part of, and belong to, the 'in-group', which in turn enforces group norms and encourages conformity to prototypes. This categorisation influences cognitive processes such as perceptions, inferences, feelings, and behaviour as well as interpersonal interactions (Hogg et al., 2007). Self-

categorisation into social groups involves recognising the group prototypes that define how people will, and ought to, behave as well as interact with each other (Turner et al., 1987). Social groups prescribe typical behaviours and attitudes that allow the evaluation of the self in terms of shared in-group attributes, and by doing so promote group membership as central to one's perception of the self.

Once the individual is placed in a particular category, his or her behaviours become interpreted in terms of the status held (Cohen, 1972; Turner et al., 1987; Wyer, 2010). Having achieved a stable and validated sense of self, people are invested in maintaining and protecting this self-view and are likely to pursue a range of strategies to confirm and verify their self-concept. Group members who do not display the prototypical characteristics are viewed as less worthy by other members and can cause internal conflict (Demant et al., 2008a). Branscombe et al. (1999) argue members low in identification disidentify in anticipation of further rejection and maintain self-esteem by attaching a positive emotional response to their non-prototypical identity. Furthermore, people are more likely to apply self-categorisation of themself into another group that is perceived as a 'better match' (Brinkerhoff & Burke, 1980). As a consequence, the interpretation of rejection from the social group can make disengagement more likely.

Forming an atypical identity in the disengagement context.

In the current study, participants began to self-categorise as distinct from the group and rejected their in-group status. This influenced social behaviour and facilitated an on-going feedback loop as it shaped the meaning ascribed to the interactions and cued behavioural responses from others. As such, assuming an atypical identity served as reinforcement for participants who already felt alienated from the group.

As participants began to disidentify, discrepancies between the group and the self became increasingly apparent. In efforts to maintain consistency, participants redefined themselves as different to the typical, or ideal, member. In contrast, participants characterised themselves as atypical and not consistent with the group's norms and expectations. In the current study, two former members of the special forces each identified himself as a

'person of peace', which countered the military identity imposed in war. For example, a former Israeli member of the special forces described involvement in the military as compulsory in Israel, but not something that was consistent with his self-concept;

> *But all the time I know that I am, I would say a peace person and not a war person. When I need to be in a war, I will be in a war but it is not part of my life. . . . I don't like that, I don't like the military, I don't like to fight, I don't like to do all that. I do it because I have to (SF, 4).*

An Australian special forces participant also re-evaluated his role within the organisation after significant injuries impeded his ability to perform. While his injuries triggered the disengagement process, this participant evaluated himself in relation to the political goals of the Australian Defence Force and found a discrepancy in values and goals. The participant perceived the military as focusing on commodities and economics rather than the personal aspiration of helping others.

> *I think as you get on a bit you start to question things more than when you are young and naive. Like Timor I thought it was awesome, we go there help people and rescue the refugees and stuff. And later you find out it was all about gas and oil, you know that was the real reason, as a country they were interested in Timor. You go that was pretty average, but I mean we still help people so that's good. Afghanistan is not really, well you don't go around helping too many people over there (SF,2)*

The political goals related to the war in Afghanistan conflicted with the self-view that one was helping to make the world a better place. As helping others was a motivating factor in joining the Army, the participant reflected on his experience as inconsistent with his identity. When asked if he would consider a return to the army, the participant reported he would rather be helping others than being involved in the acts of war that involved killing. This disidentification with the special forces identity was significant as in post-exit reflection he believes he would have been better suited to a role in the fire brigade.

> *Well for me, I like helping people so, if I went back in time I would have joined the Fire-ies [fire brigade] because that is more about helping people, I'm not kind of interested in the whole gung-ho crap and anyone that is probably shouldn't be in that role anyway because it is not about that, it's about just getting the job done and quite often you see people*

that have watched too many movies and they get carried away, they won't even get in the army, they definitely almost wouldn't get into special forces because they don't want that. For me I'd rather go out and save people and rescue people rather than go out and kill people, for example (SF, 2).

The forming of a self-identity that excluded the group and its values served two valuable psychological purposes for the participant. It allowed further justification for disengaging as the group was perceived as inherently different to the individual, and the likelihood of shared values seemed implausible. The other purpose of forming an atypical identity was that it reduced the impact of ending their membership by providing a buffer against feelings of personal failure and responsibility. This allowed membership to be viewed as a temporary lapse of judgement that was corrected, rather than a character flaw.

Another example of adjusting the self-view to exclude group identity is of a former one percent motorcycle club member who experienced a loss of status through the defeat of his club by another. Dealing with the adjustment caused by the change in club dynamics, the participant reflected on his experience as a patched member who was forced to re-prospect and prove himself to the new group. The loss of status and the significant effort required to achieve full membership in the new club led to redefining himself as not suitable for the one percent motorcycle club culture.

I weighed up at the time, what do I want to do? I suppose in hindsight it probably, oh my heart wasn't in it anyway to a certain extent. Um, might not be that sort of person, you know (1%, 2).

The participant emphasised he was not like other members because he was focused on more conventional values, such as being employed and ambitious as well as looking to better himself;

I think because I had a regular job too, but um, wasn't really frowned up on but wasn't looked as if, 'oh you've got a regular job', so. There are other ways of making money without having to work for it, in that way so, yeah (1%, 2)

The forming of an atypical identity management as a strategy saw participants place a greater emphasis on the discrepancies between the group's values and traits, and their self-concept.

As these differences came into awareness they became readily available and easily primed. As such, these cognitions influenced participants' interpretation of the social environment and created a feedback loop that further reinforced differences between participant and the group. After forming an atypical identity, there was less psychological dependency on the group and the commitment requirements were not viewed with the same level of enthusiasm. The changes in perspective created a salient personal identity in which the demands of the group conflicted with individual values and goals to the extent of questioning group behaviour.

In addition to disidentifying and reducing psychological dependency, reaffirming the self as atypical produced self-categorisation into a 'them' and 'me' classification;

> *That's just the wrong life. Wrong. That's their life, their thing and that will always be their thing (1%, 1)*

Self-categorisation as an atypical member allowed participants to maintain their positive overall evaluation of the self and justify their disengagement. This contributed to the feedback loop of social interaction, whereby participants who acted in an atypical manner elicited behavioural responses from other members that furthered the discrepancy between the self and group identity.

Adaptive Preferences

Another approach to reduce the discrepancy between the self-concept and group membership was *adaptive preferences*. The term adaptive preferences, borrowed from Elster's (1985) approach to dissonance reduction, utilises the concept of 'sour grapes', where an individual experiences psychological distress caused by wanting something that he or she is unable to obtain or the experience of outcomes that do not reach expectations. The discomfort caused by this experience is reduced by adopting less positive attitudes towards the unattainable.

Individual preferences are influenced by perceived options and life circumstances. Preference autonomy allows an individual to establish preferences based on deciding what is personally good or bad (Harsanyi, 1982). Adaptive preferences formation is the unconscious altering of

preferences in light of perceived available options (Bruckner, 2009). Changing preferences is a subjective experience as it relies on an individual's preferences being defined by the individual beliefs regarding the option's availability, rather than the intrinsic qualities of the options that are present (Colburn, 2011). Character transformations are those where the individual is aware of limitations in his or her options, and alters projects and desires to settle on attainable preferences; thus employing conscious strategies of liberation (Colburn, 2011; Elster, 1985). The difference in these two approaches of reducing discomfort is the consciousness of preference alteration; adaptive preferences formation works to downgrade perceived unattainable options while character transformations upgrade the options perceived as attainable.

Adaptive preferences in the disengagement context.

In the current study, the changing of preferences from maintaining membership in an unfavourable state, to adopting perceived achievable goals in a new role external to the group was a common approach for those who experienced a competence threat. This self-evaluation dissatisfaction motivated a conscious character transformation to liberate from negative affective responses. For example, two special forces participants who were limited in their roles due to illness and injuries engaged in character transformations and focused on their future plans. One of these participants highlighted the significance of developing a family and moving towards the "next biggest step" in his life;

> *It is such a high intensity lifestyle and such a high demand on you as a person to stay in that unit, it's very restrictive if you had a family and things like that, so whilst it is was a great life and an awesome job to me it wasn't really conducive to having a family. So for me that was the next biggest step, so in order to do that I felt I had to leave (SF, 1).*

The initial threat instigating the disengagement process was the experience of chronic fatigue, which reduced the participant's ability to achieve the standards of his given role in the special forces. As a result of his illness, he had begun changing his preferences towards fulfilling this family role.

It put me in a position where I wasn't physically able to do any job at all, so a minimum of 18 months thinking that way really forced me to think about how I was going to live the rest of my life (SF, 1).

The change in lifestyle preferences presented a dichotomy of options. Originally, the military role took precedence over family commitments; however, the adaptive preference and character transformation positioned the familial role as primary and downgraded the significance of the military. This was expressed by acknowledging the negative impact of the military role on the family. The preference for the family role meant previous sacrifices that impacted the family were now recognised as detrimental to the recently changed self-standards. As such, the willingness to commit to tasks for the benefit of the military became less appropriate.

At least twice I've rung her saying I'm leaving in half an hour, I'll give you a ring when I can so she was used to that sort of lifestyle but it is not something you would want her to do day in day out (SF, 1).

A second special forces participant also adapted his preferences in light of his injury restricting his involvement with operational aspects of his role. The first aspect of preference change occurred when he requested to be moved away from the team and the operational role to avoid the negative experience of being unable to perform. The changing circumstances and dissatisfaction with the new role also contributed to the motivation to move towards a different career goal;

I was pretty lucky with all this CrossFit stuff, because I always wanted to own a gym and train people with so it's all happened at the right time (SF, 2).

As the position in the special forces was threatened by illness and the inability to maintain the intensity required, the option of alternative roles became more relevant to enhancing self-esteem and a positive self-concept.

In the current study, the self-evaluation dissatisfaction motivated a conscious character transformation to liberate from negative affective responses. Participants engaged adaptive preferences to devalue membership (in an unfavourable state) and increase the attractiveness of alternative goals. These goals in a new role external to the group were perceived as more favourable and achievable.

Self-affirming.

Another approach to reduce the impact of self-discrepancies is to evaluate the self on qualities and allow the individual to measure him or herself positively (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Steele, 1999; Steele & Liu, 1983). This self-affirming behaviour reduces the threat to the self-concept by focusing on and affirming competence in an unrelated domain. Like adaptive preferences, it allows an individual to measure him or herself on personally significant goals and standards that are perceived more favourably than those provided by the group identity.

An example of this is a former fundamental religious group member who emphasised his responsibilities as a father throughout the interview. This participant described how the totalitarian approach negatively impacted his life and how constant changes in beliefs reduced commitment to the cause

> *I don't think it is a matter of god changing his mind I think it is a matter of these men who take it upon themselves to interpret the bible and require you to adhere to their particular interpretation, they change their minds and I think they're bloody guilty. (FR, 2)*

As the significance of his collective identity decreased, the participant emphasised his positives in another domain, that of being a father. This self-affirmation in a domain separate to the group norms influenced his perception towards the group and became a divide between the social roles. This divide was particularly relevant when the belief and norms emphasised by group leadership had the potential to negatively affect his son's quality of life. For example, he described the group's position on blood transfers;

> *Especially certain things that have disturbed me though would be the blood doctrine, where I think it is a total misfabrication of scriptures that refer to blood, I do not believe it applies to the medical use of blood, which is a whole another subject in itself. . . . I assured him that he knew when he was growing up and I was still going to meetings that if the blood issue came up or any other issue that I would have always chosen his welfare first over anything the organisation taught, this is specifically referring to the blood issue. (FR, 2)*

Additionally, this participant described this necessity to provide his son the right to choose his own religion as essential in his decision making towards disengaging;

> *It finally got where I just couldn't suppress what my conscious was telling me to do anymore and I feel really good that allowed my son to freely make his choice as to whether or not he wanted to be a [group member]. (FR, 2)*

The concern over the welfare of other family members became more significant as the participant's identification with the family role was bolstered and the group identification declined.

> *By this stage, I had to think about other people and how it affected them. And I couldn't be selfish anymore. When you're young and you're single, you don't have kids, you're not running around kids, running after kids, you just think about yourself. So it's a luxury to have convictions in that sense, and to hold on to those ideals. But when, sort of, the situation changes you can't be so stubborn. (FR, 9)*

After disengaging from their groups, these participants (FR, 2 and FR, 9) continued to evaluate themselves in relation to their parental roles rather than their former membership. This served to bolster self-esteem and reaffirm the necessity for leaving the group. By leaving, the participants were able to reconcile the self-concept and restore psychological integrity.

> *Well I'm just very glad I was able to liberate my son and give him the freedom to choose…. You know I was very glad about that and he realises that it was out of love for him that I allowed him to make up his own mind without any pressure or any consequences at all towards our relationship with him (FR, 2)*

The father identity became salient and provided the participant with a self-concept that represented his personally held goals and standards by which he perceived he could be positively evaluated.

Justifications and Rationalisation

Justifications may be used to reduce dissonance, which is experienced when a person's behaviour is perceived and acknowledged as inconsistent with their beliefs (Festinger, 1957). Steele (1999) posits that the distress caused by dissonance may not be the inconsistency between

actions and beliefs, but the resulting negative self-image. This dissonance causes unease, particularly in circumstances related to an important element of the self-concept, and a person will seek to justify their behaviour and deny negative feedback in order to sustain psychological integrity (Aronson, 1999). Additionally, rationalisations can be used as an unconscious defence mechanism to logically justify and explain perceived controversial behaviours (Batson, 1975; Zepf, 2012). An individual will conceal the true motivations of his or her behaviour, thoughts or feelings through self-serving and reassuring, but untruthful, explanations. This allows individuals to engage *ad hoc* hypothesising to justify their attitudes and behaviour if the face of arguments towards their reasoning.

Justifications and rationalisation in the disengagement context.

As the reconstructed self-concept became salient there was less psychological dependence on the group and the individual no longer considered him or herself as a prototypical member. Furthering the disidentification with the group imposed identity was the *justifications* used by participants to validate their attitudes. This included secondary conflicts that emphasised the group's organisational failings, for example the Army's organisational processes became a source of conflict;

> *It's just the planning, a guy at his desk in Canberra hasn't done his job then time gets away and instead of getting two or three months notice you get like two days notice . . . It's like saying that is a retarded kid that's annoying, yeah but he's retarded. The army is the way it is, it's not going to change. (SF, 2)*

Also, the failings of the group's leaders to address participants' concerns provided justifications for moving towards disengagement. Participants emphasised the responsibility for their disillusionment lay with the group's inability to effectively resolve such conflicts;

> *The [leaders] do what they call sheppard you, help you through your spiritual problems, your doubts that you were having. So I brought a lot of my concerns to them. And that went back and forth for a couple of months . . . . At first they were supportive and then as it became clear that I wasn't going to attend meetings and wasn't going to go back, then it became more of ostracising me. So I decided to leave (FR, 7)*

This participant validated his desire to leave by pointing out the group had the opportunity to respond effectively and it is therefore "*their fault*" that the group and the self-identity could not be a realigned.

Making Amends

'Making amends' describes an individual's attempt to make up for a perceived wrongdoing. These transgressions may be a direct result of the individual's behaviour, or a consequence of affiliation or interaction with the offending individual/s. Okimoto and Wenzel (2008) argue that there are two types of transgressions that motivate responses; (1) the undermining of status/power, or (2) the undermining of a shared value system. When other members or leaders transgress against collective or personal values, a person may assume responsibility and experience associated guilt or shame. This emotional response can motivate the individual to actively reduce the discrepancy between the self and offending individual/s.

An intra-group violation of values induces a negative response towards the offending member as it challenges the validity of group norms by undermining perceived consensus (Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997). When the victim and offender share a common identity and are expected to share identity-defining values, any violations undermine the group identity. A member who perceives the transgression and attempts to alter group behaviour engages in value-adherence activism; as such, is motivated to change the group's behaviour to be in line with his or her personally held values (Glasford, Pratto, & Dovidio, 2008). Undermining, or seeking retribution against those violating group values can serve to restore group integrity, and its collective identity (Haslam, McGarty, & Turner, 1996a; Wenzel & Thielmann, 2006), as well as reduce the discrepancy between the self and group membership.

Other strategies that allow individuals to rectify the transgressions and feel better about the self include righting wrongs, retribution, contributing to a solution, and self-punishment (Edwards, 2012). These allow individuals to feel they are able to reduce the consequences of past behaviour, publically denounce the transgressions in efforts to move towards reconciliation, or engage compensatory acts to improve the conditions of those affected.

Making amends in the disengagement context.

When facing low self-esteem from their involvement with what was perceived as a morally corrupt organisation, participants sought to make amends for their group involvement. Some participants viewed their group as detrimental to the wellbeing of members as well as morally corrupt, and as such, were faced with the conflict between their personally held values and group membership. This drove these participants to attempt to make amends for their involvement in the group and make up for their perceived wrongdoing in order to maintain a positive self-concept. Making amends, or reparations, was prevalent in reducing self-blame when a person was able to identify a personal responsibility for any of the group's failures (Weinberg, 1995).

Two purposes were evident in the interviews that demonstrated the concept of 'making amends' - righting wrongs and seeking retribution. The attempts to right the wrongs performed by the group were an effort at reducing personal responsibility for the group's activities and an attempt to prevent further wrongdoings or limit the impact of past transgressions.

> *I think since we were all part of it in one time and directly or indirectly contributed to the vilement of it a lot of us feel a certain moral obligation to try to do what we can to undo the damage and to help victims as far as we can (FR, 1).*

A person may try to 'undo' an unhealthy, destructive or otherwise threatening thought or action by engaging contrary behaviour, or overtly attempt to counter the group's status quo. In the current study, some participants actively sought to undermine the leadership of their group when they identified their involvement as a behaviour that is inconsistent with their morals and perceived to be detrimental to others. In particular, one former fundamental religious participant attempted to overtly speak against the leadership. He had become disillusioned with leaders acting outside the group norms and felt the group had become harmful to remaining members and their families due to the fundamentalist approach to group doctrine;

> *I continued to attend the meetings partly because that is where I could express my disillusionment and question what was being said. And chat to the people there and tell them how I felt, either publicly or during the*

course of the meetings or afterwards, after the meeting was finished. I did that really as a matter of principle because I did want to try to convince to some people at least that the [group name] had turned bad and taken a very wrong turn. . . (FR, 1)

This participant described distancing himself from the group at meetings when he began to feel personally involved in the group's immoral behaviour;

I continued to attend the meetings for a bit and then I stopped attending meetings and they challenged me as to why I was not attending the meetings and I said 'well frankly I don't like attending meetings because I feel morally defiled when I'd been at these meeting I experience the hypocrisy and the falsehood and the pressure of totalitarian attempts for one lot of a people to control another lot and I find that whole thing defiling and when I am at the meetings I begin to feel I am part of it and I feel morally defiled' and they were horrified when I said that (FR, 1)

The attempt to alter group behaviour and distancing from membership requirements were perceived by the participant as an opportunity to absolve responsibility for the group's moral transgressions. This act of 'undoing' or making amends allowed the participant to explain away group membership as a behaviour that was not consistent with personal values or self-concept.

Section Summary.

Methods of self-concept management were initiated by growing discrepancies; however, they were also maintained throughout the remaining disengagement process and supported the establishment of new identities. Self-concept management strategies protected participants from viewing themselves negatively and increased the psychological distance between the self and group identity. For those who psychologically disengaged, group identity reduced in salience as discrepancy reduction methods reconstructed the self-concept to exclude group membership as a core aspect of the self.

Reducing Psychological Dependency

The self-concept management strategies discussed in this chapter provided participants with the perspective that their self-concept was inconsistent with the group identity. Research supports the significance of maintaining a sense that one is a virtuous, competent person, who is

accepted by others and able to influence the outcomes of events as essential to psychological health and wellbeing (Aronson, 1968; Coopersmith, 1967; Epstein, 1973; Steele, 1999). Self-theorists propose that people are motivated to self-enhance (i.e., feel good about themselves); seek consistency (i.e., seek information and behave in ways that are consistent with their self-perception); self-assess (i.e., seek information about him or herself); and self-improve (i.e., seek to make themselves a better person) as a means of maintaining self integrity. As well as being motivated to maintain a positive self-concept, people are also motivated to maintain a positive interpersonal image (i.e., social image), which is a positive self-image that is consistent with how others perceive them. The discrepancy led to participants positioning the group as contrary to the self-image.

Forming this perspective can have negative consequences for intra-group interactions as participants were no longer prepared to provide the same level of commitment to group activities and interactions. This was demonstrated by increased salience of personal identities and personal interests, and the emphasis placed on differences between the self and the collective identity. A key observation in the reduction of participants' psychological dependency was the change in the assessment of group interactions and behaviour.

One participant described this experience of reduced dependency and commitment to the group through his change in attitudes towards group behaviours. Specifically, this participant described a change in attitude towards the group's violent behaviours as a method of resolving conflict and ensuring social power.

> I guess I started to have a conscience I think. And I started questioning some of the things that we were doing (1%, 2).

This participant referred to a violent attack on a woman who had spoken ill of the club. While he did agree that the woman deserved to be punished, he pointed out that he had pulled other members off the woman because of the extreme nature of the violence. This change in attitude reflected the rejection of such extreme means used by the group after experiencing self-discrepancy. While the use of violence was not outright rejected, the

inappropriate amount of force was viewed as potentially having personal consequences. Without the strong social identification with the motorcycle club, these personal consequences became more relevant and influential.

This sentiment was shared by another one percent motorcycle club member who tried to distance himself from the role of an 'enforcer' in the club. This role involved violent confrontations with people outside the club who had business or social disputes with the motorcycle club. The participant's personal goals of developing into a competitive kick-boxer were becoming more salient and influencing the attitude towards group behaviours. This involved the unrestrained use of violence outside the competitive environment, and the use of drugs when socially interacting with other club members.

> *I was recreational using so I couldn't completely, so I was sort of like, ease myself off of it. Even though I was still training I was like, and it was affecting my training when I was getting on the drugs here and there. But I was only getting on drugs here and there when I caught up with the group, so. And that was when the signs started kicking in. You know like. Is this really working for me? (1%, 4)*

This participant tried to distance himself from the violent role in the club by avoiding phone calls and attempted to minimise interactions with other members; however, he still maintained social ties with a small number of close members. Despite not physically disengaging at that stage, the participant emphasised the group environment would not fulfil his personal goals and needs, and therefore, maintaining group interaction would jeopardise psychological integrity.

> *So I just want to, want to change my life in order to better myself and in order to do that I need to make changes to my life. I have ambitions and goals now, whereas before they were my ambitions. They were my goals (1%, 4)*

The participants' emphasis on personal goals illustrated an identification shift away from the club goals. Rather than devoting resources towards group activities and goals, participants focused more on their own personal goals. This allowed them to achieve standards in new, personally relevant domains that would reduce the discrepancy between the self and group identification and restore psychological integrity.

Reducing the psychological dependency had consequence on participants' commitment to the group. For some participants, the changes in commitment were kept private to reduce the risk of confrontation and for others the interactions were negatively influenced. These experiences are consistent with effort justification in cognitive dissonance literature (Alessandri, Darcheville, & Zentall, 2008; Aronson & Mills, 1959) as the effort participants put into their group relationships was directly related to the its subjective value. The negative affect towards other members, and the group, reduced the desire of participants to devote their efforts to group activities.

As the psychological dependency on the group began to reduce and participants became increasingly conscious of existing discrepancies, many participants described an awareness of their exiting process. For these participants, exit seemed inevitable and they became more deliberate in their psychological and practical preparation for exiting. An Australian special forces participant described how the reduced dependency on the military identity and the increased significance of personal goals accelerated the physical disengagement from the special forces role.

> *So living like that accelerated the process for me and said right'o, you need to think about some way of getting yourself back on your feet and then earning a living and then making it a worthwhile pursuit in terms of [making a] living. And then if you are going to have a family, thinking about how you are going to support your family. Thinking that you may not be able to physically do a lot of things that other people take for granted, but luckily things have turned out well (SF, 1).*

This reduced psychological dependency on the special forces and the desire to improve his life conditions escalated the physical disengagement process.

Leading up to physical disengagement, participants expressed their awareness of the exit process. This personal awareness of disengagement was also associated with individuals making the decision to eventually leave the group. Participants had experienced distress over their membership within the group and reaching this decision provided a sense of relief and autonomy. All participants reported the decision to exit as their voluntary choice regardless of their reasoning for leaving.

> *I could see that the [group name] and I were going to separate but I specifically wanted it to be seen and to be obvious that the separation*

was something they imposed I didn't want it to be seen as something I imposed, I didn't want to be seen as separating from them because that would be, in a way, supporting the principle of separation because under the business of disagreement, I wanted them to throw me out, I wanted it to be clear that it was them that were doing it (FR, 1).

This stage of the disengagement process is consistent with Ebaugh's (1988) finding that the individual becomes aware that group membership is no longer favourable and moves towards an alternative. As participants in the current study identified their exiting process some were able to mobilise resources towards exiting and consider their approach to leaving (this is explained further in the following chapter).

Chapter Summary

This chapter described participants' responses to experiencing psychological distress over the discrepancy between the group and self-concept. Four self-concept management strategies, which reduced psychological distress, were identified in participants' experiences. The *atypical identity* allowed participants to self-categorise themselves as distinctly different to the group and reject the in-group status. Assuming an atypical identity served as reinforcement for participants who already felt alienated from the group. *Adaptive preferences* saw participants who were threatened by the social-self discrepancy look for more favourable alternatives. This restored self-esteem and psychological integrity by self-affirming of alternative domains in which participants considered themselves positively. Furthering the disidentification with the group-imposed identity were the *justifications* and *rationalisations* used by participants to validate their attitudes. These reduced participants' self-blame for the relationship failure by emphasising the social group's inability to reconcile. Finally, *making amends* saw participants attempt to right wrongs and seek retribution, which reduced personal responsibility for the group's activities.

Self-concept management strategies gave participants the perspective that maintaining group membership was inconsistent with how they viewed themselves and led to a salient personal identity. As psychological dependency on the group reduced, and the distress of

maintaining group membership reached a tipping point, participants sought to physically distance themselves from the group and their group role. The next chapter describes and explains the experience and methods of physical disengagement.

CHAPTER 9: PHYSICAL DISENGAGEMENT

Chapter Overview

As participants began to redefine the self, there was a cognitive separation between the self-concept and the groups' identity. This disidentification with the group led to participants physically disengaging from the social environment to achieve consistency between their self-concept, their behaviour and their social identification. This chapter discusses the participants' experiences of physically disengaging from the group, which was characterised by the participants' exit from the group and termination of membership. There were three approaches participants used to end their membership, namely fading away from the group, confrontational exits and the covert exit. These are described and explained further in this chapter, are illustrated by quotes from participants' interviews and discussed in relation to existing literature.

Physical Disengagement

Despite reducing the psychological dependency on the groups, participants maintained involvement at various levels until the discrepancy between the group and their self-concept reached its threshold and life outside the group became more attractive. At this stage, participants deliberately removed themselves from group activities and physically disengaged. This was often accompanied by social distancing where participants no longer identified themselves as members nor acknowledged group membership in public interactions.

The physical disengagement process described the manner in which participants ended their membership with their group. This included how the group became aware of the participant's exit, the manner in which participants included the group in the process, and the group's response to the exit. The physical exit varied across participants in three ways; 1) participants reduced involvement and quietly drifted away; 2) participants left swiftly and quietly without the group noticing, or 3) participants took more sudden and confrontational actions. Fading out was an attempt by

participants to avoid conflict and, as it took a longer period of time, participants were able to reduce interaction and increase their psychological independence. The covert option differed from the fading out as participants still maintained full membership commitment prior to the sudden, unannounced exit. The confrontational approach involved the announcement to the social group of the participant's intention to leave. This confrontation was an act of defiance that was used to ensure the group knew the participant could not be persuaded to stay. While many participants attempted the fade out and covert methods of disengagement, failing to do so successfully meant the majority of participants needed to engage confrontational exits (see Figure 6.).
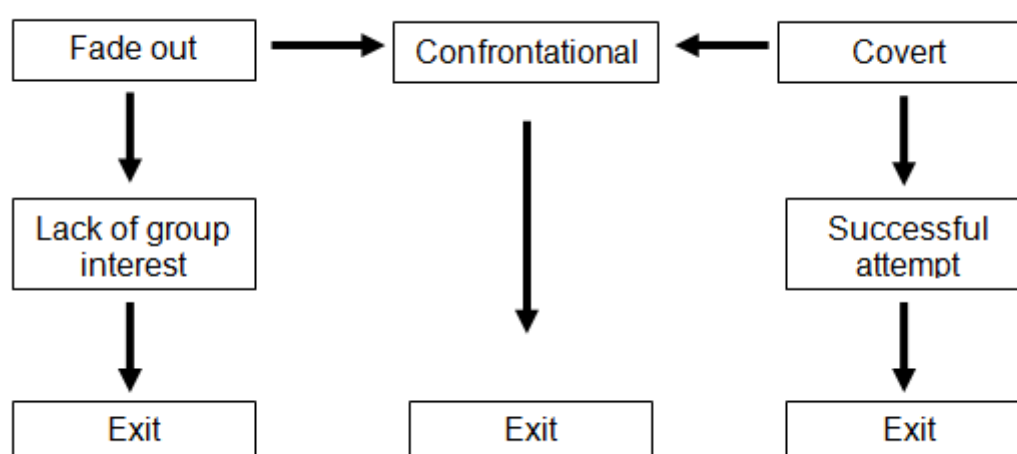
Figure 6. Physical disengagement methods

Fading Out

Fading out of membership was an attempt to reduce interaction over a period of time without confrontation or conflict with other group members. Consistent with Wright, (1987) Bjørgo and Horgan (2009), participants who were not central to the group were able to drift to the fringes and reduce their commitment. Fading away was a viable option for these people as the barriers to leaving were not as strong as those who had been involved for longer periods, and there was less effort by the group to maintain the relationship. For those who had more significant roles, which were the majority of the participants in the current study, groups made greater attempts to prevent the disengagement. In the current study, these attempts

by the group to prevent disengagement failed, but the participants were forced to make more deliberate and overt announcements of their intent to disengage.

For peripheral members, increasing the social distance from the group enabled them to fade away. For example the former partner of a one percent club member described her decision to socially distance herself and reduce interaction with the motorcycle club as an opportunity to focus on work and other personally relevant aspects of life.

> *Yeah, I think once you reduce it, I just thought, nah this, there's leaps and bounds forward that I can go (1%, 1)*

By reducing social interaction, this participant felt she became increasingly independent and over time did not feel the need to continue affiliation with the club.

> *Just be lessening the time I spent with them. You know, I might spend like every second week with girls, or um, especially if the other halves are away or stuff, or parties. You know, just social events. I just wouldn't go there, which would involve both of them. Both men and women. I just wouldn't go. And then eventually, I just thought "no, I don't even need to go. I don't even want to go". (1%, 1).*

The social distancing was a cyclical process as the reduced interaction and identification with the group further strengthened the participant's resolve to dissociate herself. Such participants would slowly reduce their interaction with other members as they continued to view the group negatively, which subsequently reduced the psychological dependency on the group.

> *I did not want to be considered a [group name] anymore, I stopped going to meetings cold turkey, I'd been very sporadic in the [group role] for quite some time but I stopped everything all of a sudden and never went again, that's pretty much the way it went (FR, 2)*

By exiting this way, participants could avoid the reactions by their group and subsequent consequences.

> *I don't live in the area anymore and no one in the area where I am living now knows I ever was a [member] and I don't make an issue of working against the organisation, so I just kind of faded away, if the issue was pressed and my estranged wife does not want it to be pressed you know I could be [membership formally terminated], they just have chosen not to follow up. (FR, 2)*

For the fade away approach to disengagement to be successful, the groups had to allow participants to reduce their involvement in group activities and social interactions.

One problem faced by participants attempting to reduce interaction and fade away was the group's reluctance to allow them to reduce commitment. For example, a former fundamental Islamist member described how other members would still insist on him attending group activities.

> *I was trying to distance myself by the group by not attending meetings, just not associating with them. But that seemed to, they kept on coming around and calling me "what's going on, are you going to come" and be "oh no I'm a bit busy". I was trying to distance myself. It was a bit awkward (FR, 10)*

Another participant who had been a member of a one percent motorcycle club in the 1970's also described the difficulties with avoiding other members and reducing club responsibilities.

> *It was hard because if something was happening, you know didn't have mobile phones or anything in those days so they would come around and pick you up. It wasn't like, don't answer it or that sort of thing. It was more they would come to your door and say something has happened and we need you to come with us, so. You couldn't say no. Um, so you had to go basically. (1%, 2)*

For another former one percent motorcycle club member, attempts to fade away failed due to still having intimate relationships with other members.

> *Um, so yeah, I was more involved in everything else outside of that so, um. I didn't really connect the dots until like, until like I started to think, started to think seriously about leaving. Um, but yeah so like, it was just one of them things I just stayed away from. I just thought that it would die off but I was kidding myself. It was always going to be there and like um, they were always in my life and everything, because they are my mates, you know. So like, I just, couldn't prolong the inevitable Kira. (1%, 4)*

When it became obvious that this participant would not be able to leave this way, he organised a barbeque with other close members to discuss his discontent with the group and announce his exit. He had expected these members to understand his reasons for leaving, but his friends took the exit as a personal rejection.

Um, mate I thought it would have been a lot more smoother than what it was going to be. I thought just a barbecue with my two mates, and um, and their two partners. But, because we were a pretty tight group so it was never really any one too far outside of our circles when we had like the, um, get together like that. It was more of ah, just like a catch up like you would with any other friends. We're just like anyone else you know. Um, so I organised the barbecue and um, at their place and I've gone around there and uh, and yeah the girls were inside and I'm out the back talking to the boys and because the alcohol was involved, I think it had a little bit to do with the way it went. Um, I didn't think about that [giggle] too much. I just thought, I thought it was going to be, I thought it was going to be a handshake and it was going to be sweet as mate, you know. You know, you mean more to us then, then this. Whereas, I was mistaken. It was an insult right, took it personally. (1%, 4)

These groups appeared either unaware of participants' intentions to disengage or were reluctant to let these participants reduce their involvement. However, when the disengagement was seen as inevitable the response by the groups changed and became more hostile.

Well at first they treated me like someone who was just spiritually sick or weak, was going through a difficult time. They didn't understand that it wasn't that I didn't understand, you know. They didn't understand that I was, you know, not attending meetings, and therefore spiritually weaker, didn't understand some point of doctrine. And once I did I would snap out of it and everything would be ok. They never really understood until the end that I didn't believe this anymore and I didn't believe in god or their interpretation of it at least. (FR, 7)

These responses by groups were problematic for the participants as they sought to exit without causing conflict. When fading away from the group scene failed, participants were forced to confront the group and make their intention to leave public.

The attempts to fade from the group, without any confrontation or conflict, were unsuccessful as the groups still viewed these participants as active members. However, at this stage of the disengagement process, participants did not reciprocate the commitment and still aspired to exit. As a result of the fade-out attempts failing, the majority of these participants had to engage a more confrontational style of exit, while only one these participants chose a covert approach.

Confrontational

This style of exit involved a confrontation with the group where the participant announced his or her intention to leave and was not willing to negotiate. This differs from the declarative exit (Wright, 1987) as the group may be aware of the participant's discontent, and the exit is not declared to the general public. Participants engaged this type of exit if the attempts to drift to the fringe and fade away had failed, or they wanted their discontent to be known by others in the group. This allowed participants to provide the group with justifications for why membership and group relationships needed to end.

The types of social groups in the current study are reluctant to lose members. In some cases, even with an announcement that a participant wanted to leave, the groups still continued to treat the participant as an active member. For one participant who sought to leave a fundamental religious group after suffering sexual abuse, her request to have her group membership formally terminated through exiting rituals was denied by the leaders. The leaders' refusal meant she had to manipulate the situation to force the leaders to act. While this involved a covert act in manipulating the group, the strong act of defiance was still achieved.

> *After a few events I decided it wasn't for me, so I went to the Elders who are the, pretty much priests that are in charge of the congregation itself. I went to them and asked them to [formally terminate membership] me because I wanted to be no part of it anymore. But they knew me, and they knew me as I grew up and didn't want that to happen so they said no, which meant I had to do something wrong to have to leave. So I moved in with a guy and I got [formally terminated]. (FR, 6)*

Determined to have her exit from the group formally recognised by the group meant the participant needed to break group norms and wait for someone to inform the leaders. This participant deliberately violated the group rules that stipulated members must not live with a person of the opposite sex out of wedlock, nor should they form social relationships with non-members.

This style of exit often put participants in direct conflict with their group, regardless of the participants' intent to confront the group. For one former

cult member, the intent to covertly exit the group was unsuccessful as she needed to return to the group's residence to collect her belongings and a file the leader had kept of all her personal details and therapy sessions.

> *I pulled up with a U-Haul truck attached to my car, behind it. I had one other person – a neighbour I had hired to carry my belongings out of the [group name] into the truck to haul it away and we did it in about 10 minutes I think. Just, I didn't have much but came hauling it down the stairs and into there, and of course one of [leader's name] kids saw me doing that and went and told [leader's name] immediately. They came out and jeered at me "what do you think you're doing, where do you think you're going? You can't make it on your own, you're going to fail. We're not going to help you, you know." It was awful. I kept my composure while I was there, but as soon as I got in the car and was driving away I was just weeping uncontrollably, and I was positive that they were following me and I was scared that they would find out where I was living and the new living arrangements and things like that. (C, 1)*

The confrontation often led to other members and leaders rejecting the participant, labelling him or her an apostate, traitor or implying the participant's inability to succeed in the group was a result of personal failure. While the event was psychologically distressing for all the participants the desire to disengage was more significant.

The confrontational approach to exiting allowed participants to publically announce to the group the reasons for no longer wanting to maintain membership. This interaction with the group not only provided an opportunity to declare their frustrations but also a sense of finality. An example of this also included the institutional process enforced by the group. This formal hearing is used by some groups to recognise the member's departure and also gave the participant the opportunity for a last act of defiance and closure.

> *So I told them that I would drive or fly back to where the congregation was on the day that they said they were going to meet. I brought the woman I was living with and she travelled with me to the [location] and I walk in and there are three [leaders] that I had known for 20 plus years and my ex-wife, a fourth [leader] that wasn't involved in the meeting and [name] and I. So we walked into the library in the [location]. It was a small room adjacent to the main auditorium. The three [leaders] informed me that I had to be alone and so [name] asked if it was ok if I*

was alone, and I said yes. Then they essentially went through their list of why they wanted to [formally terminate membership] me, that they had heard that I was living with another woman. I essentially told them it was none of their business and left. (FR, 7)

Participants were defiant in these interactions, making it known that they did not see the possibility of maintaining or returning to a fully active membership. After a confrontational interaction with other members and leaders, participants felt the exit could not be undone and confirmed that life in the group was now over.

Covert

Participants who took a covert approach to leaving their groups hid their intentions of leaving and often kept their growing discontent quiet. This differed from the fading away approach as participants maintained membership requirements prior to the sudden exit from the group. For many of these participants, the intent was to avoid any confrontation with the group. This was associated with concerns the group would manipulate him or her into maintaining affiliation, the fear of reprisals and public labelling of the participant as a failure, apostate or traitor.

Some participants maintained secrecy over their disengagement to avoid confrontation with leaders or other members who would attempt to persuade them to remain with the group. One former cult member described how he informed other low ranking members hours before leaving, but avoided the confrontation with leaders.

I literally couldn't stomach to be there and pretend that like everything was ok. So I arranged to catch a flight, just a few hours, to go to another friend's house in another country. So I left there. I told all the people that were there that I was leaving and in a few hours I had left. I didn't know how they were going to react, but basically they tried to convince me to stay in the spirit of camaraderie. That's what they were approaching me with, but this with other students that were there in the same group that I was in. When I left, the people who were running this house weren't there. I don't know how they would have reacted (C, 3).

While the participant had expressed confidence in his decision to leave the group, he wanted to avoid the direct confrontation with leaders. The

participant had previously witnessed the reactions of the leadership towards those who had left.

> *I received an email from the guy who was heading it, a day or two later, basically telling me that, you know it was a shameful thing I had done and I was not got to receive god's grace in my life from that point forward. That was something I had heard before though. When they talk about people who have gone, that basically god turns his back on you if you leave. You're not going to have the grace, you know there are going to be strong spiritual repercussions for you. (C, 3)*

While this participant stated he did not know how the leaders would have responded he had observed their reactions to other people leaving previously. As such, he was familiar with the shaming the leaders used to alienate and label the person an apostate. This was used to both prevent other members from following and to cause self-doubts in the person leaving.

Another reason for the secrecy surrounding the participants' decision to leave was the threat of retaliation. For example, a former Islamist group member who was concerned about the group's violent direction believed discussing his concerns and desire to exit would lead to physical reprisals.

> *Because if I had said this to the group, it's quite possible that 'well you're a traitor, we'll kill you'. Who knows, that was the fear I had at the time. I had no idea what was going on. (FR, 10)*

This fundamental religious group member was concerned about the plot to bomb a government building and wanted to fade out without confronting other members. This particular participant's covert exit was unique as it involved an attempt to manipulate the group to the extent that they chose to reduce involvement with him. However, the reluctance to let the participant reduce his interaction led to him seeking help from law authorities.

> *I was on the way out. I was trying to find a way out and I hadn't yet, I was still with the group at that moment. But I was still trying to find a way out of the situation I was in. And that's why I decided I'd try and call the American Embassy, ASIO, whoever you know. I just needed someone to hear what I had to say, other than the group. (FR, 10)*

When the participant received no response or assistance from legal authorities, he covertly manipulated the group leaders until they felt he was too risky to work with and reduced their involvement with him.

For many of those who used a covert approach to exiting, the preparation for life outside the group was hampered by their secrecy. These participants were unable to effectively prepare for logistical aspects of exiting, and life outside the group, without arousing suspicion from other members.

> *So I packed a small bag that morning with a few essentials in it and went out of the house knowing I could not come back and not knowing where I would sleep that night (FR, 1)*

While participants in the current study had known they were eventually going to exit the group, the ability to prepare themselves for life immediately after the exit was either neglected or rushed. Further discussion on individual differences regarding preparation for exiting the group is discussed in greater depth in chapter 11, which discusses individual differences in the disengagement experience.

Chapter Summary

The physical disengagement included three approaches towards the exit; fade out, confrontational and covert. While many participants attempted the fade out and covert methods of disengaging, failing to do so successfully meant participants needed to engage confrontational exits. Fading out was an attempt by participants to avoid conflict but was only successful for participants who did not have a significant role in their social group. Those who were considered significant or held intimate relationships with other group members were forced to exit in a more confrontational manner, which often included an act of defiance. Participants described a sense of closure and finality with confrontational exits. The covert method was considered necessary if the participant was concerned about the possibility of reprisals, being publically shamed, or any attempts by others to convince him or her to stay.

At this stage of the disengagement process, the participants were no longer recognised as members of the social group by current members. Additionally, participants did not identify themselves as members and assumed a former member status. The next chapter illustrates the psychological impact the physical disengagement had on participants.

CHAPTER 10: POST EXIT

Chapter Overview

This chapter describes participants' experiences after physically leaving their social groups and becoming former members. After the termination of membership, the discrepancy was reduced and participants experienced relief; however, the psycho-social impact of disengaging also resulted in the experience of grief. Grief was described by participants in various ways but was experienced in two distinct forms, (1) those which were psycho-emotional (examples included the sense of longing, anxiety, shame and guilt, or resentment) and also (2) behavioural responses. These behavioural responses were engaged by participants to manage the psycho-emotional experiences of grief.

The chapter then discusses the formation of participants' ex-identity. Common themes in the participants' reflections included positive and negative perspectives towards their past involvement, reflection on the significance of disengagement and the establishment of new identities. Participants transitioned into the ex-identity when the group experience was internally accepted and personal reflections took a more positive turn.

Findings are illustrated by excerpts from the participants' interviews and discussed in relation to existing literature.

Relief and Freedom

Following the physical disengagement from the group, participants expressed a sequence of emotional responses. Initially, participants experienced feelings of relief and freedom before episodes of grief. The feeling of relief related to the decrease in psychological distress and dissonance over the disengagement decision-making process while freedom resulted from the lack of restrictions on activities and behaviours.

Relief

Relief was characterised by the alleviation of the stress associated with the decision making process involved in leaving and physical disengagement. Participants in the current study described the decision-

making process as the most stressful aspect of their disengagement experience. However, after the exit, participants felt a sense of relief as there was no need to justify continued involvement with the group or the decision to leave.

> *I think that was the most stressful period of time actually, I think that was more stressful than after the time after I did leave. After I did leave I had a wonderful feeling of peace and relief, no more people trying to persuade me. (FR, 1)*

The distress of maintaining affiliation with a group that was inconsistent with the self was resolved and the participant felt confident in his or her decisions.

For participants who had attempted the fading out or covert method of disengagement, intentions to leave were often concealed and they maintained membership requirements.

> *Like I said, it's not something you can just go "oh by the way I'm going". When you're in it you are in it, you can't really get out without putting your own safety in jeopardy, without good cause, so to speak. But they are under the assumption that I still believe in it all that stuff. But I haven't believed in it for a long time. When I was trying to figure out a way to get out of it I had to oblige all my membership details, like going to meetings and all that kind of stuff, and talk to everyone. So it was quite shit, you know I wanted out of it but I still had to play a part, you know like masquerade. It was just shit. (WS, 1)*

Participants' attempted to present themselves as content members with the same shared values, which was a source of stress that was alleviated by disengagement.

> *Well to leave it felt good to finally realise, to stop justifying why I was there and different things that were going on. I felt the need to, I guess to conceal my intentions. (C, 3)*

> *I'm at lot more at peace with myself as far as being consistent with what I appear to be on the outside, I'm not claiming to be a [group name] when I am not (FR, 2)*

Disengagement allowed participants to stop interacting with the group in a way that was inconsistent with the self and provided relief from the anxiety of living double lives. By terminating membership with the group, and physically

disengaging, these participants were able to reconcile a consistent self-concept.

Freedom

The sense of freedom was described by participants in the current study through the reduction of restrictions imposed by their previous group membership and no longer needing to perform group tasks. The reduction of restrictions was particularly prominent in participants who were formerly in groups that restricted activities common in the mainstream society (for example, television or sex out of marriage). These activities were no longer monitored, or punished, allowing participants to indulge and establish new moral boundaries.

> *I suppose I could explain it like a kid being let free in a candy store because being a [group name] you weren't allowed to do so many things, you weren't allowed to watch horror movies, you weren't allowed to go on dates unless you were thinking about marriage, you weren't allowed to have a MySpace or Facebook account, you weren't allowed to talk to girls on the phone. So you know once I stopped being a [group name] I let go of my values and do whatever I want to do. From 6 to around 24 and 25 I lived one way, and then all of a sudden just being let free and having to think for myself which I was really, really scary to do because for all that time I had a group of men think for me as to what I could do and can't do and but then ah you know I could chose my own kind of destiny, I could chose my own kind of life and what to do. (FR, 4)*

When leaving the group, previous restrictions seemed unwarranted and ideologically unsupported. This change in perspective occurred when participants felt the group ideology was no longer acceptable, as well as the lack of social pressures to conform to behavioural norms.

> *You are told you must not do this because this is what God wants, and you must do this because this is what God wants and so you don't develop boundaries you are given boundaries. So when you leave you just ah, it is so confusing because it is like well I have no idea about everything, because I had completely lost trust in everything I'd ever learnt. I had no idea whether I was um, should I smoke or shouldn't I smoke? Should I do drugs, shouldn't I do drugs? Should I have an affair, shouldn't I have an affair? Just absolutely every single thing that*

you normally try. A normal person develops that as a teenager, I just, at the age of 35 had to start to go through everything I believe, every single boundary, absolutely everything. Just had to start from scratch, it was like being just a child again. (FR, 5)

While participants acknowledged their new freedom, there was a sense of anxiety surrounding the responsibility and unfamiliarity with the outside world.

It was hard the freedom. At the meetings they always use like, I don't know how to say it, like little stories to get a point across, they always said there that if you keep a dog on a tight leash as soon as you loosen it they'll run. Which when they say it is means they pretty much say don't loosen the rope because your kids are going to run wild. When I left I felt that the rope had been loosened but I didn't want to run because I didn't know how. (FR, 6)

As these groups required commitment to be demonstrated through group activities and behaviours, the exit provided more free time for participants to pursue other interests. However, without activities to fill this void, or matching in personal significance, this freedom could lead to a sense of unease.

You might just wake up in the morning just laying there for a few hours just looking at the roof and your brain is just going 100 miles an hour and you are like what am I going to do with myself because you are so used to being flat out. (SF, 2)

The freedom experience allowed participants the opportunity to engage activities or behaviours that they had previously been unable to. However, the novelty was affected by both the unfamiliarity of such experiences and the feelings of grief post exit. Similarly, in addiction recovery, practitioners emphasise the need to replace free time with enjoyable and self-fulfilling activities to prevent relapsing to previous behaviours (Marlatt & Donovan, 2005)

Grief

The initial feelings of freedom and relief were followed by grief as the novelty of their new sense of freedom wore off and participants were confronted with the reality of the psycho-social consequences of leaving.

Skonovd (1981) described this as the 'in between worlds' phenomenon where the identity is compounded with the reality of the transition and management of new roles. While the reduced discrepancy provided relief for participants, the experience of leaving was negatively impacted by both the realisation of their involvement and experiences, as well as the loss of the positive aspects of membership, such as interpersonal relationships and status.

> *It was just, it just felt very, just like something was missing a lot, like I didn't have the, you know don't worry there's a honeymoon period where you know I'm on holidays, how good is this or its different but then reality sets in and you are like, you do start to miss it which is why I was so and have been at various stages. It seems to happen less and less now the longer I go, but very, very tempted to go back all the time, all the time. (SF, 5)*

Grief was experienced in various ways across participants, but consistent with Kubler-Ross'(1973) model of grief, the experience tended to fade as participant's came to accept their past. Table 8 provides a list of these grief responses with the key characteristics of participants' experiences. Response types have been categorised into psychological and behavioural domains. The psychological aspects refer to the emotional and cognitive responses of grief. While these may result in behaviours, the behavioural response types differ as they were active attempts by participants to manage their psychological experience. Each response type and corresponding experiences are explained in greater depth and illustrated with excerpts below.

Longing

Holm (1999) described longing as the need for something (a thing, state or relationship) without which the individual does not feel complete. The longing described by participants was expressed in two ways; the sense of withdrawal and the missing of favourable aspects of group involvement. Withdrawals often occur after an individual has been conditioned or addicted to a stimulus (Gilbert, Gilbert, & Schultz, 1998); in the current study, this would refer to participants' groups. The removal of the group from their lives initiated a desire in participants to re-engage their group. In the current study,

Table 8.

Grief Response Type Experienced by Participants after Physically Disengaging from their Social Group

Response Type	Experience	Characteristics
Psychological	Longing	Withdrawals Missing intra-group relationships Missing elements of the group role
	Anxiety	Anxiety or worry regarding the consequences of leaving Anxiety induced by triggers
	Shame and guilt	Regret of past behaviour with group Survivors guilt Shame of past involvement with the group
	Resentment	Negative affective response directed at the group for a perceived wrongdoing
	Loss in self-esteem	Reduced status Loss of power and influence Loss of purpose
Behavioural	Preoccupation	Fixation on the group
	Avoidance	Avoidance of triggers or reminders that induce longing or fear Avoidance of thoughts that may induce self-concept threat
	Replication	Attempts to replicate aspects of group identity in post exit environment

the withdrawals described participants' experiences of craving to regain the positive aspects of their past membership.

> *It's a bit like giving up smoking you know, you feel like a smoke every now and then. And there are certain aspects of it that were good, you know, you sort of. Yeah some of the things you did were a lot of fun you know, to an adolescent mind if you like [laugh]. (1%, 2)*

While withdrawals are often described as eliciting physiological symptoms as a response to a craving, in the current study, participants were more likely to experience pangs of distress due to strongly missing the group's positive elements.

> *There are sort of times when I think about it but earlier on it was kind of virtually daily, and you always kind of remember all the good parts,*

> *especially because the army was really the only thing I've ever done.*
> *(SF, 5)*

Despite recognising negative effects of group membership, participants described elements of the group environment that they still longed for; in particular, the sense of community and intra-group social relationships. In regards to recovery from addictive behaviours, cravings can be reduced by considering the expected outcomes of returning to such behaviour (Marlatt & Donovan, 2005). In the current study, the participants' decision not to reunite with the group, despite longing and craving aspects of their membership, suggests the cost and benefits of reengaging was taken into consideration.

Social relationships.

The intra-group relationships were often the final barrier to participants' decision to leave, as well as the most frequently described source of distress in the post-exit experience. Participants described the personal significance of intra-group relationships during their period of membership. For some, such as a former cult participant, the relationship with the leader was described as central to their life and sense of belonging.

> *It was everything. She was my mentor first of all, so I was tied with her emotionally. It came a point where she invited me to live with her and that she became my landlord. I was unemployed and so, because she had ended up talking me into leaving my job so that job that I held when I first came state-side and I accepted a job at a home for unwed mothers and so she talked me out of that job and I took a job with her brother, her son, working at a Christian book store, so she was tied in with my employment also. And so she became all these things to me, not just a person, but my counsellor, my land lord, my employment. She became my church. . . . She says 'we don't have to go to church, we are the church'. So she was my church as well and she became everything in my world to me. I cut off my family and it was just all, she was my all and all. (C, 1)*

Participants also described the significance of their relationships with other group members. For many, these relationships were more influential than those with group leaders.

> *So leaving it was, a little bit of a lonely experience actually because systematically my whole social life had become tied up in this group,*

members of this group. Having knowing people from all over the country in this group as well, not just within my own town. So it was an experience of having that, and having a lot of friendships to basically walking out with nothing and starting over. That was hard. (C, 3)

These types of groups emphasised their distinctiveness from the mainstream and developed their own community that fostered a sense of belonging. For the special forces, participants emphasised the strong camaraderie that was developed during their operational experiences and shared experiences of war, as well as the physical closeness over extended periods of time during training and deployment.

Especially you have got a lot of really close friends there, and I left there pretty much just after getting back from a deployment so I'd spent five or six months with guys overseas and although you are not best friends all the time, don't get me wrong, you do become quite close, virtually like brothers and like I said it doesn't mean you get along all the time, you fight like brothers fight but at the end of the day they are your brothers, so that was really tough. (SF, 5)

The social groups in the current study also promoted a fundamentalist group identity that distinguished the in-group and out-groups. The sense of community and distinctiveness from the mainstream society ensured participants forged intimate bonds with each other. For many of these participants the relationships were often described as family.

To try to be more exact, it's even the most closest I can tell you about it is love. Why I say love, well because the understanding there is between two people sometimes, only by looking at each other. Only by seeing each other. You know, I can think now what my friend would do and immediately it gives me power. I see know what they going to do and I know what I would do. So this kind of thing, without knowing. What I expect from my friend, I know he will do so this is why I say it's like love. You are using another way of communicating. An another way of relationship that you can rely on, that you can trust on and in the middle of the night he is there and I am here, and I know that he is going to do that. I know it, because I know him, and that I know that he know me. (SF, 4)

The exit from these groups was often complicated by the fact that most of these intra-group relationships would be severed upon disengaging.

Those who were involved with fundamental religious groups described how the label of an apostate during the disengagement process affected their intra-group relationships.

> *I lost all my friends, the ones I grew up with. My grandparents didn't even speak to me. They didn't even come to my wedding. When my nanna died I wasn't allowed at the funeral just because I chose to live my own way and it wasn't what they chose. When they leave, when somebody leaves the [group name] they no longer exist (FR, 6)*

The in-group and out-group distinctions by the groups meant former members were labelled as outsiders. As the social groups in the current study restricted interactions with the outside world, participants became socially excluded.

While not all groups labelled the former member negatively, there were still distinctions made between current and former members. For those who were no longer in the group and engaging in the same activities, the social exclusion was less deliberate. A former special forces participant described how leaving the regiment meant he was no longer kept informed about operations and other soldiers in the regiment did not have the time to maintain the same intense relationships with former members.

> *The guys that are still there are too busy, again once you are out of the unit you are not part of, you are not within that cycle. (SF, 2)*

In these cases it was often the participant who withdrew from these interactions because of the perception that other members were no longer motivated to maintain relationships and the participant's personal interests differed from the group.

Despite withdrawing from group, it was common for participants to describe missing these social relationships after leaving. The sudden severance of the intra-group relationships left a void that had not yet been filled by other social networks.

> *At first I actually missed the club, um, because you become them and you sort of your whole life is, everything you do is, you do with them. And then, when you're out your whole life, which is then, you don't sort of do much with them. . . . That was horrible. Lonely. Because, you're with that, you have that sort of life. And then you don't. And there's no*

one there to pick up your pieces because that's the life you choose.
(1%, 1)

The social exclusion and severance of intimate intra-group relationships also included those who were no longer able to interact with their family. This was common for participants who were in fundamental religious groups and were negatively labelled by the group.

> *Well I think it was more for my mum and my sisters, you know they are like everything, family is like everything to me, just knowing that I couldn't call up mum and talk to her or call up my sisters and talk to them, you know that is why I kind of kept it quiet for so long, just because of the fact I didn't want to lose my mother, I love them. But unfortunately once my mum found out, well my mum and my sisters' found out that I wasn't believing in the [group name] thing anymore they pretty much discontinued me in their life (FR, 4)*

All the participants described the loss of relationships as significant in their disengagement experience; however, the need to disengage was deemed greater than the perceived value of continuing the relationships. Participants perceived their groups as deliberately imposing social distance between itself and the former member. Additionally, participants' were reluctant to allow the group to maintain influence in their lives. A former one percent motorcycle club member who had left the club two weeks prior to the interview described the uncertainty of maintaining relationships while pursuing his own path as an ex-member.

> *The hardest part was losing my two friends. I don't know where I stand still so like um, that was the hardest thing. If I lose those mates. Then again, then I started to think, like, when I started thinking a little bit heavier into it, like I said, you know if they're not being my mates then due to that fact then they're not really my mates, are they Kira? You know. Like, do they actually like me for who I am or what I do? . . . As long as they choose that path for themselves and let me choose my own path for myself, then it doesn't affect either one of us. Then it's sweet as, but I don't think it's going to be that sweet. I don't think it will actually happen, I don't think they will let me, like um, [pause] still be in their life and still have my own life, you know what I mean? It's like one or the other. I think that's selfish. But, I'm being judgemental because I don't know. (1%, 4)*

The loss of previous relationships was compounded by the difficulties in developing significant relationships that matched the level of intensity post exit. Leaving the groups, participants described the differences in developing intense relationships in the external environment and how this conflicted with expectations.

> *You know I'd go and play footy and all that, it was good but it just felt a bit, people were different, which is not an insult to them it's just not, its reality you know. The people I was used to doing this stuff with, these guys were just different. So I didn't feel any connection or any sort of real team or part of that. Whereas where I had been previously it was all about that. So I tried to do it that way but it just didn't happen. (SF, 5)*

Brunger et al. (2013) found ex-servicemen frequently described the loss of camaraderie, which led to feelings of isolation and the recognition that a collective bond no longer existed outside the military. Consistent with Brunger et al.'s findings, the current study found the loss of significant relationships, and the inability to form outside relationships to the same intensity, led to participants experiencing a sense of longing for past relationships.

Group role.

All participants described missing the group's social relationships; however, with the former special forces participants the longing also extended to missing elements of the role, particularly the intensity and significance of the job.

> *A little bit, but you go into that honeymoon period initially, where everything you know is just great you are relaxed and everything and its stress free and once you get through that initial period you kind of have that need for that stress and that adrenaline and for that pressure and all that sort of stuff and you know that probably doesn't hit til maybe two, three weeks, four weeks maybe even two months later. (SF, 5)*

For participants, it was important to find another outlet that could fulfil this void left by exiting from the role; however, it had to be perceived as comparable to their previous experiences. One Australian special forces participant described the importance of finding alternative goals and hobbies

that matched these positive group aspects without the extended time away from family.

> *You know really I think army and especially sort of special forces, it is much more than a job, but I was sort of chasing the good parts of that without the bad parts. That is what I was looking for in an ideal situation, sort of the physical nature of the job, working with good people, doing something that was satisfying I guess and by satisfying probably had to be hard as well, generally comes with the territory, but I wasn't looking for something that took me away from home for long periods of time, that was the big downfall, well the only real downfall I found of the job that I was doing. (SF, 5)*

While this participant had not psychologically disengaged from the group, his experience of longing for the physical and challenging aspects of the military was common within all special forces participants. The positive attachment to elements of the special forces regiment led to many of these participants attempting to replicate aspects of the military in their civilian environment. This is discussed further in the *behavioural reactions to grief* section (pp. 226).

Anxiety

In the current study, anxiety was described as the experience of fear or concern over future and past events, as well as the emotional response to this uncertainty. The future concerns included fear over the possible interaction with, or reprisals from, the group and the fear of his or her membership having negative repercussions in the future, such as restricting employment. The anxiety induced by participants' involvement included triggers that initiated distress and self-doubts, dreams and flashbacks. After exiting the group, the anxiety and uncertainty caused participants to experience a negative emotional state, which some described as a loss of control over their lives.

> *Ah, I felt like the, ah, there's a children's game that they play and a bunch of children stand in line, holding hands, and they run in a line and then the last one whips around. It's called "whip the tail". I felt like the person on the end, and just got whipped around and snapped, and my life was not in control and I'm the one that got snapped on the end and, just beat up on. It was out of control and I know that when I was*

out of control something or someone else controlled me and um, I was,
psychologically, I was a mess and um, emotionally, I was having
nightmares and they were coming up about her, about her control but
disguised. Not with her personally, but. And um, just with her in form,
kind of. I don't know how to explain that. (C, 1)

This anxiety led to the participants withdrawing from social interactions and
caused a depressed emotional state.

But when I started pulling away I had really bad anxiety. I get days
where I don't want to go out in public just because I don't want to be
around people. Sounds stupid, but I get anxiety about my phone
ringing. If my phone rang I'd get anxiety. Straight away I'd be "oh fuck".
. . . But yeah I get anxiety over my phone ringing just because, before I
look at it, and if I saw who it was it would be, "oh that's fine". But if it
went off in my pocket I would be getting anxiety, ahh who's calling me.
Because I don't use my phone a lot so whenever someone does call
me it's usually work, or usually those guys but now that I'm not a
member, no one's called me in two or three weeks. (WS, 1)

But then, um, you know things pop up and you think "oh". You can go
backwards. But not backwards as into going back to them but
backwards until you're sitting at home all the time, thinking I don't want
to go out. (1%, 1)

The anxiety experienced by the participants was detrimental to their
psychological wellbeing and caused distress, emotional instability and
depressive symptoms. The main causes for the anxiety included future
interactions with the group, concerns over the future impact of membership
and the triggers that induced memories that caused emotional arousal.

Reprisals and fear of future interaction.

As participants disengaged, many perceived the group as a threat to
their personal safety. Fears were held about what the group might do in
response to their exit or what may occur if the participant was to come in
contact with the group again, particularly if the exit had been confrontational.
For example, the following participant experienced a sexual assault in the
group and had tried to have the perpetrator punished.

I'm scared of them, if I see them walking past, which I do sometimes,
around here yeah quite a bit, we used to live up the road and we never
got a visit there but here we've already had two and we've only been in

this house like three weeks, which is scary because after the first one they weren't supposed to come back because I'm [formerly recognised as a non-member] but they still did, so yeah I get scared because if they find out where I live then the grapevine and my uncle finds out where I live, which scares the hell out of me, because he still has unfinished business. Even seeing them in the street, if I'm driving and I see them walking down the road I get out of there as fast as I can. I drive as fast as I can to get away from them because they scare me. I mean I know they can't do anything to hurt me now but I don't know I think it is just the way I started thinking after I left, um yeah they scare me. (FR, 6)

The response from the group and the threats from her uncle made her feel unsafe within the group and upon exiting she was afraid of the retaliation for accusing a leader of sexual abuse.

Another cause for concern among participants who had disengaged from groups who condone violence was the possibility of reprisals. Some of the groups promoted myths around the exiting process, which were used to prevent members from leaving. In one percent motorcycle clubs and white supremacist groups the emphasis placed on membership and loyalty implied those who join are members for life; those who are considered to have deserted the group can be penalised by the club and subjected to violent reprisals (Blackburn, 2000). As such, these participants experienced anxiety after leaving over the concerns they may be dealt with violently.

Yeah, the fear of failure, of leaving the group mate. Not know what was going to happen. Not knowing what would happen, not knowing who would, or how, I would get sorted out. Not knowing anything. . . . It won't be talked about afterwards, do you know what I mean? Like, you talk about the people that joined, unless they make an example of someone, maybe. I'm not too sure. Maybe, it's just an assumption, a theory. You know, maybe they might make an example of me, or try to make an example of me or something like, and say "look this is what happens when you do this" but like, I didn't do anything wrong, you know. I did everything right. I was prim and I was proper and polite, and as I said, like "what more do you want?" You know. Like I did everything for them. I never did anything wrong. I did more than enough so. (1%, 4)

While some of the groups were known for violent reprisals against former members, other forms of punishment could be used by non-violent, but nevertheless coercive, groups. For example, one participant described how other group members would wait outside his work to harass and shame him for leaving.

> *Because after I left my parents' home and found lodgings with in another family, a family of strangers, I didn't let the [group name] know I kept my address secret so they wouldn't come and harass me there. But they did know where I worked so they would lie in wait for me at the end of the working day trying to ambush me on my way out of work, that was so they could still manage to keep the pressure up a little bit that way (FR, 1).*

The anxiety over possible reprisals or punishment from the group was common in the participants, especially from the participants whose groups operated outside the mainstream community (this source of distress post-exit was not experienced by participants in the special forces). This aligns with Hassan (2000) and Singer (2003) who suggested anxiety is common in members within cults that rely on fear and guilt to enhance social bonds to the group, and therefore encourage paranoia. However, despite concerns, no participants in the current study had experienced any violence as a result of their exit (by the time of the interviews).

Repercussions of membership.

Another source of anxiety was the uncertainty over future repercussion of their involvement in stigmatised groups. This was often expressed as the group membership "*coming back to haunt*" the participant in the future or "*coming [sic] to bite me in the butt*" (WS, 1).

> *Oh it was awful! I was, I was living at, I was out but I was afraid that the FBI would come after me. I was lonely. I was tormented internally. (C, 1)*

As part of moving on from their experiences, participants developed new goals and lives that were distinctively different to the values emphasised in the former group. Participants from the more stigmatised groups raised the fear that others would become aware of their previous group membership and limit their options.

I don't want to be like that and when I got accepted into university that was another slap in the face, going you know you are actually working towards something good now. I hate to think that one day, and I guess it will unfortunately, it'll come back and bite me on the ass. And you know someone, if I'm working for a government contractor in psychology or the police or whatever, and I guarantee one day I'll get pulled up and they'll say what about this. What about this period of your life. It might be 5, 10 years down the line but someone might still bring it up and go, yeah well you did this so you can't be a part of us. You can't join the police, you can't join DCP, you can't join anything like that because of your indiscrepancies with a white supremacist group and, you know that's something that I am shit scared of happening really in life. And that's why right now I am trying to branch out and give my view on it and try and make better of it really. I am not proud of what I've done. . . . It's so taboo. You know there is a lot of stigma attached to it and that's what I don't want in the future. You know, I can be upfront and honest. But they are still going to be like, yeah you're a skinhead. . . . Regardless of being upfront and honest I still think that it will flag up and someone will go you can't do this because you were a part of that. Or you can't work in this area. You can't do this, or you can't do your dream because of something you did when you were a young adult (WS, 1)

For some this was because of the criminal involvement in the group, but also concerns that the government and law enforcement might have listed them as a security risk, which would limit employment opportunities. The anxiety over the repercussions of group involvement was associated with participants' experiences of shame and changes in personal ideology.

Triggers.

Triggers were the experiences that increased participants' likelihood, and severity, of anxiety and emotional arousal. In the current study, triggers overwhelmed and caused participants to relive experiences that occurred while with the group. While some of the participants described what these triggers were like, there was also an emphasis on avoiding reminders and triggers that would initiate the emotional response. This avoidant behaviour is discussed further in the behavioural response section of this chapter.

Triggers evoked distressing memories, flashbacks, nightmares and intense physical reactions in participants. An example of this is the arousal

experienced by the former special forces from triggers, such as smells, that remind the participants of combat environments.

> *There is a lot of psychological issues that happen to a young guy when he is in the middle of the operation, when he sometimes need to kill, or his friend be killed, or even wounded. And, it's all connected to a lot of noise, to a lot of smells, to a lot of this, to a lot of that. It can come back later on, and nobody dealing with it because only now they start to understand that since then stuck in you in that time, especially in this unit. You're a man, so what. You kill someone, get killed near you, it's part of life, you know. But it's not like that at all. (SF, 4)*

For those who had experienced abuse, psychologically or physically, there were triggers that initiated distressing memories. These triggers were not directly linked to the group but elicited thoughts that primed the member into flashbacks.

> *It still haunts me sometimes, coming up in dreams. Things that they, [name of group], coming through in dreams and um, sometimes I'll actually, even though [leader's name] is in [location] and I am in [location] so I'm 900 miles away, that I'll see her walking down the street and I'll be like "that's [leader]". And of course it's not [leader]. But you know I have many flashbacks and it would just be things that remind me of her or, elements of that, that like um, I saw a picture the other day on Facebook. Somebody's Facebook picture and it's of a girl with a hand, with someone else's hand over her mouth and it really bothered me bad. To me it symbolised that someone was being um, muffled and that reminded me of the [name of group]. And so, every once in a while I'll come back by, what I call it a trigger, um, it triggers me into thoughts or feelings, and this time it foster feelings of the [name of group]. So I guess, I still have thoughts and feelings about that. (C, 1)*

The triggers reminded participants of personally significant, and traumatic, events that threatened emotional stability and sense of control over their environment. The anxiety was associated with a depressed affect as these triggers were related to an experience of trauma and reliving this experience created distress and promoted a sense of powerlessness.

Shame and Guilt

The experiences of shame and guilt impacted how participants interacted with their social environment post exit. The experience of shame is reflected in the embarrassment over affiliation with the group and/or acts committed while in the group. Similarly, guilt was experienced when participants felt their own values had been compromised by their behaviours. While similar constructs, the two varied on the source of judgement. Discomfort due to shame comes from perceived disgrace or humiliation in front of others, while guilt comes from private perspectives that participants had failed to reach personal standards.

Shame.

Participants in the current study who experienced shame did not come from the special forces, suggesting social acceptance of particular groups may buffer the experience of shame in the disengagement experience. Fundamental religious groups and cult participants were likely to describe experiences of shame more than any of the other social groups.

These participants felt they would be judged by their past affiliation with the group, and others would see them as psychologically flawed. As such, participants were reluctant to share their experiences with people outside the group. One participant, who had exited two weeks prior to his interview, described his reluctance to talk about his affiliation with the one percent motorcycle club to friends who were not in the club or who were already aware of his membership.

> *Well at the moment I'm really, really, really ashamed of it. It's not something like, it's not something I like to talk about. It's not something that I'm proud of. It's not something, like um, turning up to the barbecue, you know what I mean? A lot of people are judgemental these days Kira, you know. A lot of people judge a book by its cover, let alone reading the plot. So if you give someone the plot, something like that, it's a bit a heavy you know. It's not something you really, really, I don't know. It might be something that I take to the grave Kira. I think. To be quite honest, I thought I was going to. You know [laughs]. (1%, 1)*

While this participant had only recently left the group, other participants also described how the fear that others would judge them negatively prevented them from disclosing their experiences for longer periods of time.

> *Well for many years I didn't tell them at all, I didn't tell anybody, I didn't want to be seen as someone with a very strange background and with a whole lot of emotional baggage. I did prefer to be seen as someone who was normal. (FR, 1)*

These participants did not want people outside the group to see them as flawed or damaged and this negatively impacted their interpersonal relationships post exit.

> *I felt like I couldn't let anybody know what I had just been through. I was too embarrassed. I was too ashamed. . . . I had to go slow. I had to pick my words carefully and, still I felt, I guess a good word would be contaminated. You know, like "oh she's been through that". Like I was picked out of the garbage or something, I don't know. (C, 1)*

The embarrassment and shame associated with their membership prevented these participants from developing strong relationships and negatively impacted their support networks. As participants were embarrassed by their past and attempted to keep their former membership secret, eliciting social support was generally prevented.

Guilt.

Guilt arose out a participant's perspective that he or she had violated a personal standard. For participants who experienced guilt there was often a significant event that occurred during membership that produced this emotion. For example, one participant who was sexually abused, and whose abuse was the threat that initiated the disengagement process, felt a sense responsibility and guilt over her victimisation.

> *I should have done my own research because my uncle used to use the scriptures, the Bible against me so anything I was doing that he didn't agree with and anything he wanted to do that I didn't agree with he'd show me scriptures in the Bible that told me it was okay, so that is why I thought everything was okay. I should have done my own research and I should have proved him wrong, I should have debated him on subjects instead of saying "okay I'm sorry, I didn't mean to question the Bible" which is what I did every time I thought something*

> *was wrong but backed down because it was in the Bible, it's in the*
> *Bible, so yeah I should have done research. (FR, 6)*

Despite being a young teenager at the time of the assault, the participant felt her inability to accurately interpret the group doctrine led to the assault, and subsequently, felt responsible for the loss of her family relationships through the disengagement process.

For some participants, guilt was derived from the affiliation with the group and their contribution to group activities. While participants may not have actively engaged behaviours that violated moral standards, the perception that their membership allowed or facilitated group behaviour that contravened such standards caused guilt.

> *In a way I do because although I didn't say anything, even though I*
> *objected, I was still there. I was putting money into the collection box*
> *that was going to him. By sort of assenting to it and condoning it, I was*
> *really a part of it. . . . I think since we were all part of it in one time and*
> *directly or indirectly contributed to the vilement of it a lot of us feel a*
> *certain moral obligation to try to do what we can to undo the damage*
> *and to help victims as far as we can. (FR, 1)*

Guilt can be a motivator for correcting perceived wrong-doings and cause a person to attempt to make-amends for their behaviour. For the above participant, the sense of responsibility and guilt for the group's behaviour led to him contributing his free time to a website devoted to former members of the social group and providing advice to those wishing to leave.

Another experience of guilt that was unique to a former special forces participant, who had not psychologically disengaged, was the sense of guilt over the abandonment of fellow soldiers.

> *And even still now, especially, the thing that triggers it now, just really*
> *any time I see the guys on the news, especially if someone is hurt or*
> *killed over there, the last couple, two that have been killed over there*
> *were friends of mine, one in particular and when that happens you kind*
> *of, there is a sense of sense of guilt I guess, which is totally ridiculous I*
> *understand that but you kind of feel I don't know, it just human nature I*
> *think but it comes with the job. (SF, 5)*

This participant felt a responsibility for the deaths of fellow soldiers despite no longer serving in the regiment. The camaraderie developed in the

regiment had led to a sense of protectiveness and responsibility for each other's safety and failure to prevent his friends' death (despite retiring) produced guilt.

Resentment

Resentment is the negative affective response to a perceived wrongdoing, in which the participant holds the group responsible. These wrongdoings were believed to have far reaching consequences on the participants and were considered life-defining factors. For participants in the current study, this was described as anger towards the group for lost time and experiences that may have changed the direction of their life.

One participant described how the religious beliefs of his social group promoted the idea that life is endless and that the rewards for working for the group in this life would be rewarded eternally. This was used by the group to encourage members to deny external social goals and focus on fulfilment within the group.

> So it was, because I naturally wanted to do, how I naturally wanted to live my life, and what the religion tells you're allowed to do is quite different so it's always, you say well, your life is irrelevant now. What you work for is the new system living forever almost in paradise so it's irrelevant in people's eyes and what's now is stop all of that and devote everything as much as you have to [group's deity], because your eternal life is at stake. (Pause). Another aspect of the religion is that when you are a child you are actually told that you are never ever going to die and that life is meaningless, and you better work for the eternal life and which means when you come to realise you are going to die and this life is all there is, it's hard. It's very difficult not to be resentful, of not living the life you wanted to live and you spent that time for nothing. (FR, 5)

The change in belief structure through disengagement led to the participant deciding the eternal life did not exist and the sacrifices he had made for the group were viewed as unnecessary. Such change in perspective led to participants questioning what could have been, if they had never affiliated with the group in the first place.

Participants who had been raised within the groups from early childhood, primarily from fundamental religious groups, were particularly

frustrated by the idea that their lives could have been different had they been able to grow up in a mainstream community.

> *I never know what I actually would have been like if I'd just been allowed to develop normally and been able pursue my dreams as a child. It's difficult because I'm pretty crazy, and a bit self destructive, and I don't know if that is who I would have been if I hadn't grown up this way. I don't know, maybe I would have been, like I'm not at all into sport, I am a little bit, I'm very athletic but I'm not obsessed by it, I don't know if maybe I had been brought up in a family where you watched sports and go to sport on the weekends instead of going bloody preaching on the weekends, then if I would have been you know somebody that really got pleasure out of sport. You just don't know what type of person you would have been. (FR, 5)*

Resentment towards the groups was described as subsiding over time; however, the thought of 'who I could have been' remained during the formation of the ex-identity.

> *I always wonder what my life would have been like if I wasn't born into the faith. There is still some anger and resentment, which has definitely subsided in the five years but it's still there. Probably always will be, but you know I think it is getting to the point where it's definitely not consuming me like it was for the first three to four months when I left. (FR, 6)*

While the anger associated with resentment subsided, these participants who were formerly involved with groups throughout their childhood still contemplated how their lives would have been had they not been restricted by the lifestyle and beliefs imposed by the group.

Loss in Self-Esteem

The loss in self-esteem in the current study resulted from the loss of the previous self-image without the development of a new one post exit that is just as highly valued. Without the development of a new self-image, participants were left with little meaning and experiences to draw positive self-esteem from. In the current study, the loss in self-esteem was described by participants through the loss of three core elements, which were central to group identification; elitism and status, power, and purpose.

Elitism and status.

For those who held positions within the group that were considered elite, leaving was accompanied by a loss of social status. Those within the special forces described the sense of elitism that came with reaching a high rank in the operational aspects of the military. Special operational forces are separated from the mainstream community and engage in activities that are only truly understood by those in the unit. The activities and stature of these members provided a sense of elitism in participants that is hard to find in other roles, particularly in civilian environments.

> *I think that the fact that when we are in our unit because we are the SAS we are cream and we are treated as such, whenever we go we are given the most difficult jobs . . . . The job is so far removed from anything that any normal person does, in the way, the actual requirements of the job and what we have to do and where we are sent is actually so different it can be classed as even being surreal in terms of the reality of the actually job. It's very hard for most people to comprehend the demands that it puts on you mentally and physically because it is it can be, you know you are fighting a war, so you are fighting, you are in the unit in the most intense time in terms of this conflict that Australia has been involved in and that has been the last 12 years where Australia has been involved in this period and since then and prior to that I think the last time was the Vietnam war. (SF, 1)*

As this former participant described, the job was regarded as 'surreal' compared to the career of the average civilian due to the violent nature of war, as well as the mental and physical challenges faced in such environments. This distinction between civilian and special operational forces tasks strengthened the identification of the soldier as separate from mainstream communities and quite often was accompanied by an emphasis on the intensity of the role.

> *Just everything. Way of life, work, everything you do, your lifestyle is revolved around being part of the unit. Which the tempo is really high so everything you do is flat out. Time is always critical. (SF, 2)*

Entering civilian roles, participants were unable to reach the satisfaction that came with their military role.

> *There is a sense of, I say job satisfaction but that doesn't quite do it justice, there is a real sense of how important your job is I think, which*

is huge and just trying to fill that void is really tough. I guess it is sort of job satisfaction and I guess that feeling of how important it is what you are doing. Not in a patriotic way or a helping these people out, I don't know it is hard to describe it, but filling that was what was the most difficult as there are very few jobs that give you that I think. (SF, 5)

Leaving this position also meant stripping the self from the uniform and returning to social status that was not recognised as highly significant.

Because you have to understand that when you are in the special forces, it's not only, the encounter with the enemy, it is also the encounter with the prime minister, people like that. So it's both way, you are the topic of what you read in the paper, see in the television. Then you have to go back to normal life. And when you walking the street nobody know who you are, and what you are and you don't need to show it. You need to be a normal guy. Sometimes can make a problem to some people. Definitely. (SF, 4)

The role within the military was a source of pride and status for these participants. As such, leaving this SASR career without a role that is considered equivalent in terms of elitism and job satisfaction caused participants to internalise the loss of status, leading them to miss the social importance associated with their group identification.

Power.

Power can be observed as the ability to achieve desired outcomes, as well as establish and maintain influence over others (Bernd & Oakes, 2006). Members in these ideological and entitative social groups promoted a fundamentalist outlook that was favourable to the group and united members; thus, making them more resistant to outside threats. The support participants received from the group when facing conflict from outsiders provided members with confidence and a sense of power.

I guess well, the hardest thing is giving up that sense of, you know, if there's a dozen of you go somewhere, you sort of like, you know you're like Arnie Swarzeneggar or the terminator walking into somewhere, you don't fear anything or anybody. And um, you know there are those kind of incidents were people had sort of, said 'oh you're a wanker, I'm going to have a go at you' sort of thing. And sure, no worries, and then you get half a dozen of the guys come with you and you got it, let's go. So giving that up is probably, at that time of my life that was probably hard.

It was that like back up I suppose, um. You know, you're not scared of making a move or doing anything or upsetting people, you just do it. And once you're out of it, you really can't do that anymore because you're always going to come up against somebody that's harder and tougher than you, at some stage. And then you get hurt. (1%, 2)

This participant described how the support of the other motorcycle club members empowered him to violently confront any source of conflict; however, after exiting, the repercussions of still engaging in that kind of behaviour would be detrimental to his relationships and career. Without the group's support, the participant had to alter his behaviour to adapt to the loss of influence and avoid aggressive confrontations.

Purpose.

A sense of purpose means having an identifiable goal or objective that makes life meaningful. It is such purpose that provided participants context for their involvement and motivated them to succeed within the group environment. As such, a great source of confidence and self-esteem was drawn from having such objective and during the disengagement process, participants lost this sense of purpose. While some were able to adapt to new goals quickly and move forward, some participants experienced the loss of self without a clear purpose to engage. These participants described how the role in their group provided a purpose and enjoyment. This was described in two ways. Firstly, participants held the view (at the time of membership) that they were providing help to others.

It felt good to be in a position where you could feel like you could serve others and be of help to others to be useful, so it was important from that standpoint. I never felt a motivation though to do it simply to have a title, that aspect wasn't appealing to me (FR, 3)

This sense of purpose focused on working hard to serve others and contribute to a greater existence. Secondly, participants previously held group status as a motivator for success within the group. This in-group status was intrinsic for participants' behaviours and self-esteem.

Oh I loved it, it made me feel really involved in a family, it made me feel like I had some importance and I thought I was doing what I was supposed to be doing. You know for a guy you are able to work your

way up towards you know Christian, giving readings book study, maybe reading a book study but then they may ask you to handle the microphone at the meeting or handle the you know the book counter and then you may work your way up to being the ministerial servant and you may work your way up. You have all these things that you can work your way up to, and that was just my purpose getting higher and higher. (FR, 4)

'I thought I was doing what I was supposed to be doing' highlighted how group norms and expectations were used to define the self. Sense of purpose was instilled through the group's influence and internalisation of group goals. A consequence of focusing on group roles was the lack of development in transferable skills.

Like for me, that is the only real thing, I don't have a trade or a university degree or anything like that to fall back on. Just got the skills and qualifications I got doing that job. So there's a pretty limited market for that sort of stuff. (SF, 5)

… Guys aren't very skilled when they leave the regiment, you do a lot of stuff, you might be one of the best guys there but you get out and an employer doesn't care that you blow things up, I mean if you go to mines or do something specific but get a job with Telstra and if you are not technical or you know what I mean, you've got to have a specialist job, the army trains you enough to do what they want you to do but it doesn't actually give you a lot of skills. (SF, 2)

Leaving the role without adapting skills to suit external group roles can restrict participants' options and ability to effectively transition to ex-member roles. Accordingly, lack of competence in external roles reduced the participants' sense of competence and associated self-esteem.

Behavioural Reactions to Grief

The behavioural reactions to grief were actions participants described by which they attempted to alleviate the negative emotional experiences of grief. These behaviours included preoccupation with the group, avoidance of experiences, thoughts and activities that might trigger distress and the replication of positive group elements. Such behaviours indicated that the participant was unable to psychologically move on from the group experience.

Preoccupation

Preoccupation involved focussing mental attention towards the group and being preoccupied by constant thoughts revolving around their former social group. While preoccupation included cognitive elements, it led to behavioural responses that reflected the significance of the disengagement experience, as well as the psychological impact and associated distress of leaving. In the current study, preoccupation describes the actions indicating fixation on the group. One participant attempted to make sense of his experiences in the group by spending most of his time researching theology and cults. He described this preoccupation as an obsession that led to depression and the loss of his employment.

> *I think I became probably a bit unbearable as I started to leave as I got absolutely obsessed by it all . . . . One thing that happened was, I did lose my job during that process, because I got really depressed and went through shock and I just spent so much time researching, and I was a sales person so I just couldn't sell. I just couldn't bear to bring myself to talking to people and I was so distracted and so I actually lost my job and ended up losing a lot of money over a period until I sorted myself out. So I guess, not because of the religion it was more, the result was because of all the stress of leaving the religion but it wasn't sort of a lifestyle change as such because of the religion. (FR, 4)*

Many of these participants who became preoccupied were concerned with understanding their experiences and making sense of group dynamics.

> *You know for the first little while, I became I guess, what [partner] calls a militant atheist and I was reading all I could about cults, I read [titles of books that identify the group]. . . . It's been a while since I read it, but I remember he talked about the methods of cults. If they display these attributes they are probably are, cult behaviour, thought, information and emotion. I thought [group name] did a pretty good job for as far as controlling your behaviour. (FR, 7)*

Preoccupation could also be expressed through the mimicking of group behaviour. When these participants first left the group they still engaged group roles and tasks out of habit or compulsion. For example, a former fundamental religious group member who left the group and her family after a sexual assault found herself still feeling the need to attend weekly religious meetings.

> *After I left, it was hard, because I had been going to the meetings my whole life, you know on a Wednesday night I didn't know what to do because that is when we had our meetings or Sunday morning, no idea what to do, so I parked outside the [group building], the church, hoping I could hear something but, and then before it'd finished I'd leave so that nobody saw me. Now I've got better, on a Wednesday night I watch Glee, which is a hell of a lot better than parking outside a hall. (FR, 5)*

Skonovd (1981) describes this as a residual effect of membership where practices and rituals can remain part of individuals' habitual behaviour. Like Skonovd (1981), the habitual behaviour and preoccupation as a grief response demonstrated the difficulty in moving on from the group experience as their behaviour reinforced their attachment. Such behavioural response prevented participants from moving on and was described by them as strongly associated with a negative emotional state at the post exit stage.

Experiential Avoidance

In the current study, experiential avoidance was employed by some participants to reduce the occurrence of memories, anxiety, feelings of guilt, and overcome fear or the high emotional arousal induced by withdrawals from the group. Experiential avoidance is the deliberate avoidance of internal experiences, thoughts, or feelings that cause discomfort (Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follette, & Strosahl, 1996). This provides short term relief from discomfort, which can become habitual and is related to psychopathology as well as post-traumatic stress (Marshall, Turner, Lewis-Fernandez, Koenan, Neria, & Dohrenwend, 2006).

Some participants had a tendency to avoid information or interactions that aroused emotions through negative self-appraisal. These emotions were prompted by reminders of past involvement or reigniting desires to return to the group role. One participant who suffered permanent injuries from his military career commented that interaction with members of his former regiment reminded him of his declining physical competencies.

> *Sometimes, depends on who it is. I sort of dread the guys in the regiment that come up, I don't really want those guys up here, reminds you of where you were at before. I don't know, and a lot of them are pretty messed up anyway. (SF, 2)*

Another participant described the avoidance of other group members because of the concern of being socially ostracised.

> *I still feel and I'm out somewhere and all of them are there, that I just don't want to go in. Um, and I probably, you know that will come with time. I guess. Probably actually the first time I make myself do it. Walk in there and know that everything is ok, um. (1%, 1)*

An additional approach to dealing with the emotions of separation was to avoid information relating to the group. For example, a former Australian Commando who still maintained a positive attachment to the military identity described the avoidance of media reports and literature as helping to minimise the negative emotions associated with the transition to a civilian identity.

> *But it's still, I now have a real tough time or I just avoid seeing things on the news, if there is an article in the paper about it I just don't read it, I know that it will stir up those feelings and I just don't want to have to deal with them all the time. I used to be a bit of a military nerd, you know reading all the different magazines and books and all those now I just really, I haven't read any army or military books in so long, just because I know it will just get me excited and I don't need this so I'll read other stuff and that will do. (SF, 5)*

The avoidance of thoughts and interactions that involved the former group also served to protect the participant from the temptation to return.

> *Just by keeping really busy and sort of directing focussing energies into other things. So I started doing a lot of, I've always done a lot but became even more focussed on training, physical training and got right into that and just a few other things you know. Just tried to keep as busy as possible and as occupied as possible. There were times when I didn't do that and these were times it became really hard and I'd think, you know I'm so bored but I'll go and do it. So as long as I sort of kept those feelings at bay then I was able to take one day and a time and just keep going. There were times when I was extremely close, extremely close, if it would have been just you to me, I dare say I would have done it. It was just enough to stop me from doing it. And now that I'm further advanced along that process I sort of feel each day, each week, each month that passes the easier it gets. (SF, 5)*

This participant demonstrated awareness of his thoughts and feelings regarding the group, as well as the triggers that would initiate the longing for

the positive group aspects. To avoid this temptation this participant attempted to direct his attention and energy elsewhere but noted the difficulties in successfully doing so.

This conscious avoidance protected participants' psychological wellbeing by increasing immediate emotional stability. However, experiential avoidance suggested an unwillingness to confront thoughts and feelings, which has been shown to contribute to future psychopathology, including post-traumatic stress (Marshall, et al., 2006). The following excerpt describes how the involvement in some group activities can be suppressed to avoid psychological distress.

> *If the father rapes the daughter or something, you cannot come in and say "hey, you know you have to think about it because". The same thing happen if you sit in front of a religious guy, or in front of a guy from the special forces or in front of a suicide bomber. Same story. You cannot immediate put it to his face, you have to understand how he feels in the problem and open the door, but slowly. The moment you open the door, this is the moment when you cannot come back. You cannot say "oh no, nothing". You need to face it, and I have to think about it a bit more deeply but there is some doors that I can definitely open in my case, and there is definitely doors that I can open to a suicide bomber or to a religious guy, or to a girl with a problem with her father. It's the same story and the moment you start looking in it. (SF, 4)*

The analogy between the rape victim and the military operation implied confronting thoughts surrounding the participant's behaviour during war may lead to negative self-evaluation. The avoidance of acknowledging and thinking about the events allowed the participant to suppress memories and fostered existing justifications of this behaviour to continue without doubts.

These participants avoided interactions, information and suppressed thoughts that would induce negative emotional arousal. These deliberate acts of avoidance to control the environment and manage emotional responses reveal the significance of such social groups in the participants' disengagement experiences. However, Skonovd's (1981) argues the "passive approach" to an ex-identity, which involved ignoring aspects of their membership and avoiding direct confrontation with beliefs and relationships

is likely to be disregarded when individuals become aware that avoidance is damaging their new identity.

Replication

Replication was used by participants to generate the least amount of personal adjustment in the transition from member to ex-member. This allowed participants to transfer skills, values and expectations between roles and maintain stability. Rather than adapting to new social environments, participants would attempt to mould aspects of pre-existing social environments to meet their needs. Nicholson (1984) argues that the experience cannot be identical in all aspects as there are inherent differences in the environment, and these peripheral changes will over time contribute to changes in the person.

In the current study, replication was more common for those formerly in the special forces than other participant groups. This allowed the special forces participants to maintain a positive attachment to the military routine and training, regardless of the attitude towards the organisation.

> *You are part of a big machine, but you are part of something that works very, very, interesting, perfectly, very professional. Very hard to come back to that, after that there is nothing as important in what you do in life after that because civilian systems don't work like that. (SF, 4)*

For these participants there was a desire to try and replicate the social environment and intensity of the regiment. This desire to replicate the military features in the civilian environment demonstrated the personal significance of the cultural identity forged through their careers. A former Australian special forces participant described how he tried to replicate the activities and military lifestyle he enjoyed while in the regiment;

> *One of the things that made working in the regiment good was that we came to work and we were allocated two hours a day to train in the morning. We did our training and we did whatever we did during the day whether it be shooting or fast driving, or parachuting or whatever and then at the end of the day I would go back and train before I went home. And then I would ride home from there, so to me that was the perfect lifestyle and I wanted to emulate it. So the best way to do it was to try and set up the exactly the same thing. So we start a gym where we could rock up to work and train all day and then we started up a*

security consultancy where we did stuff we were very familiar with during the day and after the end of the day we would train again. And that was the day, so to me we are creating, I am trying to create that same lifestyle that we were so used to, and so enjoyed. And one of the big things about working there but outside the army this time and trying to surround ourselves with similar people who think the way these boys think. And they don't necessarily have to be soldiers and six foot six and 120 kilogram guys. They can be guys and girls now, but the common thing is that they are geared towards doing the best they can and being the best person they can and a lot of these guys that is what they do. So to me the gym is part of this vision. (SF, 1)

This participant not only tried to replicate the physical intensity and lifestyle of the regiment, but also reproduce the relationships with like-minded people. As such, rather than attempting to reconcile the military identity into a civilian role, his personal attachment to the military is reinforced by the social environment he has chosen to create.

One former special forces participant noticed this trend in ex-military personnel and described how many former soldiers tried to implement the language, activities and relationships of the military in the civilian environment.

Yeah, the difference was because I went into private security work, there's a lot of ex-military people in there. It was kind of like leaving the military, but still hanging about with all ex-military people, if you know what I mean. It wasn't like a full on disconnect kind of thing. . . . They leave but they've never really left. The people they hang about with, the way they talk, etcetera. Some guys here just now, they are kind of still talking that, you know 'back in the day', the sort of language and all that sort of stuff. Yeah they've left but they kind of not really left sort of thing. You kind of wonder, why did they leave when they are still holding so tightly to it? The people they hang out with, they are talking to them about, it's just all ex-military people. I think you've got to make the conscientious decision of, draw that line. Put yourself on the other side of that line. (SF, 3)

These deliberate attempts to control the environment and manage emotional responses revealed the significance of military culture in the participants' retirement experiences. Despite replicating parts of military culture, many former special forces participants also avoided military

interaction and related information. This conscious avoidance protected the participants' psychological wellbeing by increasing emotional stability. While experiential avoidance is associated with psychopathology, the replication of military culture may serve as a buffer against the negative aspects of disengagement.

Section summary.

The feelings of freedom and relief that were experienced as a result of disengaging was followed by grief as the novelty of participants' new sense of freedom wore off and they were confronted by the reality of the psycho-social consequences of leaving. The psychological experience of grief was different across participants, experiencing one or many of the previously described responses. In attempts to manage the grief, participants engaged three common behaviours, preoccupation, avoidance and replication. These were attempts by participants to control their environment and psychological experiences. Participants were unable to move on from their group experience while actively engaging in these behaviours as they served to reinforce the attachment to the group.

Ex-identity

The theory of psychological disengagement ends after the physical exit and the identification of the self as a former member. This section of the post-exit chapter focuses on the reflections of participants at interview stage. Common themes in the participants' reflections included positive and negative outlooks on their past involvement, reflection on the significance of disengagement and the establishment of new identity.

Reflecting on Past Involvement

Participants reflected on their group involvement in both positive and negative ways. Most participants acknowledged that while the group had a lot of negative aspects, their experiences had made them who they are today. For example, one participant credits his time with a one percent motorcycle club as the inspiration for attempting new challenges.

> *Oh mate, it made me who I am today Kira. It really has. Like, it was the biggest learning curve ever. And if you could do it, just to learn from it, I'd say do it. But you just can't, you know. Like, ah, it's made me want to try everything like, it's really, really, I suppose it's like, um far out how do you put it? You um, it's really made me want to um, look I want to try everything once in my life. Like I don't want to be um, I don't want to be doing just one thing for the rest of my life. I want to do it all. And I suppose that's made me want to do it all, like because I see myself as just heading down one road and then just having that one life, and um, I sort of like overcome that and just want more for myself. I don't want just one thing, I want everything. I want to be able to do everything. I want to experience everything. It's made me, it made me heaps better in the end, but like, it could have made me heaps worse as well. So, I suppose there is a positive for a negative isn't there. For every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction, they say [laughs]. So that's the only thing I've learned from it, like is um, freedom of choice. And I've just got that locked in. (1%, 4)*

Overcoming the club's lifestyle and disengaging was described as a demonstration of personal strength. The realisation and ability to utilise freedom of choice provided this participant an outlook that everything he wanted to do was possible. Many other participants also saw their ability to physically leave the group as show of personal strength.

> *I do consider it as part of who I am, because it made me who I am now. I mean it was a bad experience of being [group member] but I'm proud that I'm out of it, because not everybody can do it. They will stay in it their whole lives and not want it but they're too scared to leave. So I'm extremely proud that I'm an ex [group member] because I did it. I was strong enough to leave and so were some of my friends, which is great. (FR, 6)*

The pragmatic approach to the experience was to acknowledge the downfalls and accept the past. While participants regret some aspects of their involvement, they knew the past could not be undone.

> *I feel myself as being free from the organisation, I don't have any fear of the organisation, but I cannot escape, at the same time, the effect it has had on my life. That could be a source of bitterness. I try not to let it be. I've learned a lot and benefited in many ways from certain aspects of the organisation, but there's decisions I would have made differently if I hadn't been a part of it and so there is some regret at the same time*

with that, so that is always going to be a part of my life's experience. I really can't avoid that. (FR, 3)

Participants who appeared most comfortable with their current identity did not focus on their past membership, but had accepted it and were not preoccupied with what may have happened if they were not involved with the group. This acceptance was pivotal in participants' ability to move forward.

Some of the things that were done to other people, and people's property you know, it's not really, you know I'd look at it today and think, 'what a dickhead'. . . . It's an experience in life. You know, as I said it's done, it's set me up in certain ways, where it hasn't in other ways it probably hasn't been too good um. I probably regret some things I've done but, you know, you can't turn back time. So what happened has happened so no, I wouldn't change anything. (1%, 2)

Positive growth was observed when the outlook towards the group experience was positive or neutral and participants integrated their past into their current self view.

I suppose, some people still reckon I behave the same way [laughs]. So, ah it wasn't all really that hard, you just consciously make a decision to change, and you change. You know. You got to be flexible in life and be able to operate in different modes depending on where you are at the time, you know. . . . Well, I'm a Christian now. In theory [laughs]. So I guess that's probably a big significant change in my life. Um, I think I still think the same way though, in a sense. You know, I probably still deal with a lot of people, I deal with people in a, if I think they are ok, I'm ok with them you know. I don't give them a hard time or anything else. But if someone, I fire back if someone fires at me. I'm not a shoot first person, but I'll certainly fire back so, um. Haven't changed. And I got that from there so that hasn't changed. But um, yeah I wouldn't think that I could try and carry a lot of stuff from there, so. (1%, 2)

Moving on from the group, participants acknowledged the differences between the current and former self when part of the group. Some participants distanced themselves from the group and emphasised the personal changes, which made them distinct from a typical group member.

I think I have a personality now, I didn't back then I was like a zombie. They all are, you are not allowed to have a personality, you are not allowed to have, you are not allowed to be unique because being

unique means that you want to be different from them and when you are a [group] you need to be the same. Everyone is the same, so now I have a personality. I am unique. I have favourites of things. I have likes and dislikes, but when you are a [group] you are not allowed any of that. You are allowed likes and likes, you are not allowed to dislike anything that you are told, anything that is written in the Bible or written in the publications, if you don't agree with it then you are an apostate so bugger off. But yeah no, I'm very glad with my change. (FR, 6)

The formation and establishment of an ex-identity is a progressive phase that may continue indefinitely for participants. As they transition into new stages of their life, their past is integrated through their experiences and understanding of the social world. At the start of the exit, participants had to redefine themselves as their social roles and environment changed. These changes had a ripple-effect in the sense that all aspects of participants' identities were affected.

I think I'm still in the process of establishing an identity. Only because, well not only, but partly because of my divorce as well. And, having to sort of, find my feet again. And I had lost a lot of my identity through my marriage. It was a very abusive, destructive marriage. Very unhealthy. Toxic relationship. And I had a lot of work to do on myself and I also had to pull away from a lot of community activities, not deliberately but because I needed to focus on my studies (FR, 9)

As participants moved on, the impact of involvement would still be influential in the way they engaged the world and constructed their self-concept. For many participants, the goal was to move on from their membership and adapt to their new life in such a way that life outside the group felt normal.

I wish it was not a part of my identity, but I think it will always be touched by it. I think I will never get away from that. It is very hard to move on, like you go from being a [member] to being an ex [member] and a lot of ex [members] say their goal is to be an ex [member] and just to be, just a person. Just normal and I'm not sure if I'll get to that stage. I think it is always going to be part of my identity. I think there is probably good and bad in that as well, you do learn from having religion in your life so the upshot there are benefits and some negative things about it, so I don't really resent anymore it's just I think anyway it certainly helped me and has made my life interesting at least. (FR, 5)

The positive outlook on their past experience, as well as the recognition of the discrepancy between the self and group, allowed participants to move on from their experience and establish an ex-identity. Research on the defection from new religious movements by Wright (1987) and Coates (2009, 2010) also found participants were more likely to reflect on their membership constructively and consider their involvement as a learning experience. Viewing involvement in this manner allowed the experience to be meaningful as well as former members identifying with insights and skills developed during their involvement.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the participants' experiences after physically leaving their social group and progressing towards becoming an ex-member. The shared theme in the post exit experience was an initial feeling of relief and freedom from resolving the discrepancy, which was subsequently followed by grief. Grief was described by participants in various ways; however, the shared experience was the negative emotional and psychological state of grief resulting from disengagement. In attempts to manage the psycho-emotional experiences of grief, participants engaged three common behaviours to try and alter their experience; preoccupation with the group, avoidance of experiences, thoughts, and activities that may trigger distress as well as the replication of positive group elements. However, while engaging such behaviours, participants reinforced their attachment to the group and were unable to move on.

The ex-identity was formed by the experiences of freedom, relief, and grief, which were combined with cognitive and behavioural reactions that reinforced the change in identity. Participants transitioned to the ex-identity, which was characterised by the acceptance of the past and personal reflections being more positive. At this point, the feelings elicited during the grief period were reduced or absent. Additionally, the psychological disengagement was supported by the continued acknowledgement of the discrepancy between the self-concept and their former group, whereas those who only physically disengaged remained positive towards rekindling their membership.

CHAPTER 11: INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN THE DISENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCE

Chapter Overview

The previous chapters have outlined the theory of disengagement from ideological social groups based on participants' shared experiences. While the proposed theory encompassed the shared experience of participants, there were differences noted in participants' personal accounts. These differences did not alter the proposed model of disengagement but did shed light on the way in which individual participants experienced the disengagement process. This chapter describes these individual factors and discuss how these contributed to the overall experience of disengagement.

Differences

Participants in the current study shared the process of disengaging from their respective social groups; however, variations existed in participants' experiences. These variations included the duration of the disengagement process; the level of participation of the social group in assisting or resisting the participant's physical disengagement; individual preparation for the exit; the effects of external social networks and the extent of ideological shifts. Table 9 provides an overview of individual differences described by participants in the current study and the influential factors contributing to these variations. The following section of this chapter will describe in greater detail these variations.

Table 9.

Variations in the disengagement experience

Variation	Influential factors
Duration	Catalyst
	Certainty
Group involvement	Contractual membership
	Exit rituals
Preparation	Logistics surrounding exit and post-exit
	Relocation
Social networks	Social support
	Anticipatory socialisation
Ideological factors	Rejection of narrative
	Moderation of beliefs

Duration

The duration of the physical exit varied across participants. For some, the physical exit was hastened by a catalytic event or cognitive shift, for others the process was prolonged by the need for certainty regarding their decision. The exits accelerated by catalysts were not hastily made or without confidence in the decision as the respective participants still went through self-verification and management processes. However, rationalisations and justification were not used to the same extent as they were for those who had more prolonged exits. The consequence of accelerated exits was the reduced ability to psychologically prepare for post exit experience.

Catalyst.

A catalyst was a personally significant event that accelerated the disengagement process. It was an event, such as an experience of violence, law enforcement involvement, or intolerable pressure from the group, which caused participants to reach the decision that exiting the group had to occur promptly. For example, a former cult member described how after experiencing conflict with the leader, a law enforcement agency performed a raid on the leader's residence.

> *There had been an FBI raid and one of the children had reported [leader's name] for holding people against their will and the FBI came and raided the place and there had been several police, small police involvements, with the [group name] before, but this was the crux of the matter. And at that point I had already left, but just narrowly and I knew that I didn't want to be there next time they came time and so I left. I left, physically in early 1997, and the FBI was late the previous year, and I went back to the [group name]. I still had a key and was still emotionally involved and took the key and went to get all of my stuff out the [group name]. And the little things. She kept a file on us, like we were her clients, and plus we were her children and so I stole my file out of the [group name] and so that when the police came back, the FBI, I wouldn't have anything there for them to find about me. Anything more than they already knew. So that really put the heat on for me to leave quickly (C, 1)*

This law enforcement raid reinforced to the participant the need to physically disengage and socially distance herself from the group. The threat to her

personal security and exposure to law enforcement acted as the catalyst to disengaging at that particular time.

Another participant described the pressure of group leaders on significant others as an incentive to physically disengage as quickly as possible. The leaders were pressuring the participant's mother regarding the participant's non-conforming behaviour to the extent of causing her distress.

> *I think the sort of crisis came when my mother's mental health began to crack up with these people coming to the house and haranguing us and arguing constantly every day or two and she began to go hysterical and I could see that the strain was too much for her. So I, one night having seen her in this state, I decided that I couldn't stay in the house anymore I would need to move out to protect her more than anything else (FR, 1).*

Additionally, a former one percent motorcycle club member described a physical assault on a close friend as the catalyst for his exit. While he was already disillusioned with the group role and drug use, the violence hastened his exit process.

> *One of my mates was knocked out and uh, while he was knocked out they were throwing rocks at him, on the ground. Um, my mate who was still conscious, and the two girls were screaming, while my mate was still conscious, they smashed a limestone brick over his head. And um, it was out the front of a [business name], like he tried to run into [business name] and grabbed like all the [business name] chairs and uh, there was a big group of about 10 or 12 of these lads and they, uh, belted him with [business name] chairs. And they were still like spitting and jumping on my mates head while he was knocked out. Jumping on his chest, kicking him on the head, throwing rocks at him, and uh one of the girls had jumped over the top of him and stopped them from kicking him while he was knocked out. And they were doing this all while he was knocked out the whole time. My other mate that was conscious, like they just. Really it was brutal what they did to my mates you know. And um, it was all just due to. It was a retaliation mate, so it was just due to who they were and what they did and um. And when I seen my mate, like it was pretty bad. Like I said, like they sent a photo to my phone of my mate and it made me wild, it made me angry. And uh, I didn't go. I didn't go to these houses. Um, I wanted to but the only reason I didn't go was because I knew what would happen if I were to go there. Like I don't know if I would just be able to control myself. Like if I lose it to that point, I think it's the point of no return. Like, I don't want*

> *to go to jail. . . . And that's when I organised the barbecue. That's was when. That was the biggest gut wrenching moment I had, like just because I feared for what I would do. Not for what someone else was doing. Scary, what was going through my head. (1%, 4)*

After the distress of the violent attack on his fellow club member, the participant organised a barbecue with a few other members to announce his exit.

The catalysts experienced by participants in the current study were threats to the self or significant others. Participants were in the process of disengaging prior to the catalyst occurring, but these exits hastened the exit. The self-discrepancy experienced prior to the catalyst may have influenced their response by allowing these events to be used as justifications for their exit, or may have been perceived more negatively due to reduced psychological dependency on the group.

Certainty in the disengagement decision.

The time from reaching the decision to leave and physically exiting varied across participants. As described earlier, reducing psychological dependency on the group was an important aspect of the exit and for some participants it took a long time to mentally prepare for leaving. For example, one participant who identified she was in a cult needed nine months to achieve certainty in her decision and mentally prepare for her exit.

> *So when I had my doubts after these internal thoughts came to me, I called him and I said, I remember being in my room, curled up with the phone in one hand and the mouth over the receiver and I said "I think I'm in a cult." And he said "good", and I said "what do you mean good", he said "I always knew you'd be the first to call", I said "I don't understand", he said "how soon can you reach my office, I want to talk to you more about that". So he eventually helped me get out of the cult during nine months of persuasion and nine months of planning. But I was so attached to the cult because I thought "why am I the only one not happy here? Why am I the only one leaving? Why don't they see what I see?" and it was so confusing because everyone else wanted to stay there. No one else saw her as a hypocrite. I gathered my own thoughts. (C, 1)*

While this participant was convinced she was living in a cult, she could not understand why other members did not see the same problems and why she was the only person who seemed unhappy. These self-doubts prolonged the disengagement process until she was certain that the problems were not because of personal failings, but a result of the group.

For many of the participants in the current study, the physical disengagement was postponed until they felt confident and justified in their reasoning for leaving the group. This provide a locus of control When participants reported that they had reached such point of certainty in their decision to disengage the dissonance of the decision making process had abated. For example, one participant described how he knew for three years that he would eventually leave, but needed to ensure his decision was supported by information that contradicted the group's doctrine.

> *So there was a three year period of investigation during which I knew that I was not going to stay in this but I wanted to have all my facts and reasons clearly in mind, so that if and when questioned by family and friends I would have answers based upon solid evidence. So probably three years and then I was going to be moving and so when I moved I discontinued my association at this time (FR, 3)*

This is consistent with Ebaugh's (1988) discussion on role exits, where deliberation over the exit eased the transition and reduced regrets. By taking this length of time to investigate plausible alternative explanations to the religious beliefs, this above participant was able to exit with certainty and was not able to be persuaded by the responses of the group.

The certainty in their decisions to leave was reinforced by the emotional reaction participants had at the point of leaving.

> *My first instinct was to doubt myself. To doubt whether I was making the right decision, to doubt whether my feelings were justified. Basically I slept on it, I did a lot of prayer over it. And I got up the next day, and not having told anybody about my doubts, I got up the next day. I didn't feel angry, I didn't feel scared, but I knew I had to leave so then I decided that if those emotions weren't governing my experience then I really did have to leave. I did find that to be pretty stressful though, to find a place to live, making arrangements. (C, 3)*

This certainty in the decision to leave also reduced the potential for other members to instil self-doubts and persuade the participant to remain with the group.

While the exit was more abrupt for participants who experienced a catalyst, the emotional reactions of those who took longer to rationalise their exit were less severe. Those with longer periods of time also benefited from being able to plan for the post-exit and evaluate costs of leaving.

> *These decisions are life changing decisions and they are never, mostly very rarely black and white, very rarely an easy decision so a lot of the times you've just got to make it and live with it and deal with the consequences be they good or bad I guess. (SF, 5)*

Having the opportunity to evaluate options and commit to the exit process afforded participants with a sense of control over the outcome of their exit and post-exit life.

Group Involvement in the Disengagement Process

As many of these groups exist on the fringes of mainstream society they were reluctant to actively assist members to leave. That is, the secretive nature and exclusivity of membership makes recruitment difficult and retention most important. However, two types of group participation that assisted exits were noted in participants' experience. Firstly, group membership that was facilitated by contracts (political activist) and employment (special forces) provided participants with the opportunity to assert greater control over the transition from member to non-member. For participants from the special forces, there was also a degree of organisational support. Secondly, some groups held formal procedures for officially recognising the termination of membership. These occurred after participants had disengaged and often provided a final opportunity for participants to voice their discontent with the group.

Contractual memberships.

For the groups that provided membership through employment, the exit process included active participation by the group. In the current study, such participants were involved with either political activist organisations or

the special forces. The group involvement is likely due to understanding members will not be able to sustain the physical aspects of the role for an extensive period of time and will eventually lead to burnout and the inability to perform.

With contractual memberships participants were provided an opportunity to leave the group without severe repercussions. Also, the awareness that the contract would end and he or she would be able to evaluate his or her life circumstances before committing to another contract facilitated greater awareness in the disengagement process. For example, a former political activist who had lived with other members and travelled extensively to help achieve the group's political goals described the end of his membership.

> I don't know, I just felt that I had given a lot of myself and I wasn't getting a lot back. The relationship I had in Adelaide had gone out the window and that was sort of a factor I suppose, and I still wanted to chase the woman in [location] and I did, another insane story but anyway. So, yeah it was a thing that was developing I guess but by around, round about February or March I realised that I really wanted to be in Fremantle when the America's cup was on, for the vibe as much as anything else, and I wasn't because I was just doing stuff, I think we were working on the [group project] which is near [location] and I just said oh bugger this, I'm out of here. So I had a contract which finished with [group], in [location], which finished in March and that was it. (P, 1)

The change in personal priorities provided motivation for exiting and the end of the contract presented opportunity for the participant to leave with minimal consequences.

For those in the special forces, the exit process was recognised by the military and supported to varying degrees. For those in Australia, the military assisted in the transfer of skills prior to exiting.

> I organised a new job. Organised adjustments in the training. I went and saw a woman who gave us coaching and CVs. I went and saw a couple of people about coaching and interviews and all that type of stuff. So yeah, I came and prepared myself. It wasn't like I walked out and, bang nothing was in place. (SF, 3)

However, the organisational assistance in providing skills for transitioning post-career is limited for those who had not been in the special forces for long periods of time.

> *It's all tiered towards how many years you have done service wise. They really only bring out the cheque book if you have done sort of 15 or 16 years, prior to that you know you might get a few different things.(SF, 5)*

As part of the formal military's retirement procedures, participants were aware of their exiting process. This allowed time for participants to psychologically and practically prepare for the exit and life post military. All of the special forces participants in the current study took this opportunity to plan for the exit and described it as essential to the success of their transition into civilian life.

> *The crucial part is you've got to sort out your resettlement. You can't just walk out and you've put nothing in place. Yeah, personally I'd think that's a pretty stupid thing to do, you know you're leaving. From whenever you make the decision that you're going to be leaving, if you don't like sort anything out to when you leave, then it's not the smartest thing to do. And maybe people who have a few issues, they might fall into that category. I'm not saying all of them do, but I reckon maybe a couple of people sort of fall into that sort of category. (SF, 3)*

An additional benefit of employment-based social groups was the potential for paid leave prior to exiting. This provided participants with opportunities to plan and adjust for life without the military, both in a social and fiscal manners. For some of these participants the leave period was an opportunity to travel or establish post-military careers.

> *I had planned to leave for a while prior to that so I had saved up my money and my overseas cash and I'd done a few things invested in a few things to ensure that when I left that I didn't have to go back for financial reasons. Always could self-sustain and achieve what I wanted to do when I left so it was a relatively easy process for me to leave because I also took a year off before I left. I took a year's leave without pay to get myself sorted out so I had the ability to go back after the end of that year and just go back to my normal job but I didn't have to, everything went well. We set up everything well. I met and married my wife and now I've left, there is no financial reason for me to go back. The only reason I would go back now is if there was world war 3 or*

something like that. So when I left it was pretty easy for me to transition. (SF, 1).

In the current study, the special forces were unique as they were the only group who did not hinder the disengagement process. Ebaugh (1988) found increased institutional involvement in the exit, in the form of expectations and rituals in the exit process can influence the exit process. In the current study the institutional practices for military retirement increased preparation for the post-exit life. The impact of the organisational support reduced some of the stressors that other participants faced; however, these participants still described grief in their post exit experiences.

Officially removed from in-group status.

Some of the groups in the current study used rituals to signify the end of a person's affiliation with the group. As noted in the confrontational style of exit, this provided participants the opportunity to voice their concerns one last time. However, it was also used by the groups to send a message to remaining members, by making an example of the participant and depict him or her as a failure, apostate or defector.

And they arranged, their standard procedure when they are going to excommunicate someone is to do it in a meeting where all the [leaders] are present, they call it an assembly meeting which is a bit like a formal. I suppose it's a bit like a formal court, where they hear the case and come to a collective decision and that time the person accused was always invited to attend (FR, 1).

For the former religious group members in the current study, the above formal procedures occurred after they had already decided they wanted to leave and had begun socially distancing themselves.

Although it took me a long time to actually get the courage to leave, I actually had stopped going to meetings for a number of months, and it wasn't until after a number of months that the elders came after me and [formally terminated] me. So someone alerted them to the fact that I had website and so even though I wasn't going to meetings anymore they then came and [formally terminated] me for the website. So I actually, probably hadn't gone to a meeting for six months before they came round and came after me. (FR, 5)

Despite participants avoiding interactions and socially distancing themselves from the group for a length of time, participants noted this formal procedure as their "exit date". Prior to the group's formal procedures and recognition of the exit, participants had reduced their psychological dependency on the group but described this confrontation as the final moment of membership and closure.

Preparation and Logistics

The preparation and logistical aspects of the exit created additional stress for many participants; however, preparation varied due to the nature of the groups, the nature of the exit process, and individual differences. From a logistical point of view, the preparation varied between those who were able to financially and logistically prepare themselves for life after the group and those who left hastily with no place to live and no employment. Mentally, the preparation for disengagement varied in terms of developing external support networks, understanding the socio-cultural differences between the group and mainstream society, and psychologically preparing for the loss of intimate relationships.

For participants who had been living in communal groups for the majority of their lives and were unable to prepare due to the covert nature of their exit, disengaging involved additional lifestyle stressors. Many of these participants had not been exposed to the practices of the mainstream community, which hampered their ability to prepare for life immediately after leaving.

> *I wasn't aware of what it would be like to fend for myself in the real world, I was so ignorant of so much of the real world because we hadn't, there was so much of the real world that we hadn't done, had never experience of, I mean I had no experience of the ideas that they're different kind of ways of finding accommodation, like you can get lodgings, you can get rented flats, you can get furnished flats, you can get unfurnished flats, you can get hotel rooms, bed and breakfast, you can get flat sharing arrangements and I really had no idea of what these all were, or what they were called or where to find them, even simple things like how you are expected to behave if you went into a restaurant or pub, how you order your food or you sat. (FR, 1)*

While not all participants had spent their entire lives within the social group the groups still remained influential in dominant areas of their lives. As such, participants had some, if not all, of their employment, housing, religion, and social relationships tied to the group. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, participants needed to have certainty over their decision to leave, and for some participants, this included the ability to manage these factors post-exit. Another participant described how the logistical aspects of disengagement played a role in postponing her disengagement.

> *Well part of it was just the logistics of it, where would I go? How would I get anywhere? I don't have any money, I don't have any references to get an apartment. I don't know anybody. What am I going to do about it? So there was the logistics to consider, we had to strategize how to physically get out of the house. It wasn't barricaded or anything but I had my possessions in there. If I didn't plan it right I'd be losing those possessions and that was part of it, but the mental anguish was the bigger part (C, 1).*

While this participant recognised that the psychological distress of disengagement played a more significant role in her preparedness to leave, the logistical aspects added to the distress. This participant felt she was unable to leave until her concerns about post-exit factors had been managed.

Relocation.

The relocation away from youth gangs and right-wing movements has been recognised as assisting members to leave their groups, and the EXIT initiative has assisted in relocating right wing members as part of their programme (Bjørgo, 2002). For many participants in the current study, the decision to leave the group also involved moving to a new location free from remaining members. The relocation varied; from moving suburbs within the same city to moving to another country and relocating either temporarily or permanently. This was done for both practical reasons and to reduce psychological distress. The physical distance between the participant and the group assisted in the exit process by reducing the likelihood of conflict, as well as the temptation to return.

One participant who had been reducing his involvement in a fundamental religious group used the opportunity to relocate to another country as an opportunity to end his role commitments in the group. The participant's decision to relocate was only shared with his mother, while the disengagement was implied it was never stated to his family or the group.

> *I ended up moving back to Australia where I made quite a few friends and once I moved back to Australia for a period of about six months, that was it. I didn't go to meetings anymore, I didn't do service anymore yeah so it was only about as I said about three and a half years where I really dropped off. When I told my mum I was going back to Australia she started crying and said I'm going to lose you so she knew, she knew what it meant if I left. . . . No, I didn't, because of the fact that my mum made the point of telling them, telling them for me. I didn't even tell my mum, it was just that I moved back to Australia, because that way it would be easier for me to kind of let go and the chance of being seen over here was very slim (FR, 4).*

Another participant cited his relocation as significant in his success to leave a one percent motorcycle club. The inter-state move prevented going back to old relationships and the temptation to revert back to club membership.

> *So, who know where I may have ended up if I had stayed in [location], you know. Um, I might have still been in it, I don't know. So, yeah. (1%, 2).*

While the participant described how he moved inter-state because of work opportunities and wanting to financially support his partner, he acknowledged the difficulties in walking away from the group had he remained in the same city. The relocation allowed participants to have the sense of 'letting go' and closure as there was no contact with other members that would remind or tempt the participant, and no group pressure to return.

Some participants were concerned about the reprisals from other members for their act of "betrayal". For example, one participant was scared the group may have wanted to kill him for his attempts at contacting law enforcement during his disengagement. He described moving suburbs to distance himself from the religious community and reduce the risk of interactions.

> *I disassociated with the group and um, didn't want anything to do with them anymore. We basically moved in a few months from [location] to*

[location]. In [location] there are a lot of Muslims, especially Indonesian Muslims. And a few of the group members. I thought, just get away from them. Put a bit of distance between us and them. (FR, 10)

Many of these participants who relocated were concerned over the possibility of violent reprisals, or intimidation and coercion from the group.

For some, the decision to relocate was to reduce the psychological impact of remaining in close proximity to the group. One participant who had witnessed other people disengage from the group previously, he was aware of the social and emotive impact of coming face to face with other members post-exit.

I had known other people that had left [group name] and stayed in that city and it's horrible because you are constantly out in public and you'll see someone from your old [group name] and they'll totally ignore you. It's just, difficult to be around that all the time and it just beats you down in you don't have a strong sense of who you are and what you believe in. I felt for me, it would be best if I moved. I had [name] in [location] and, I transferred. I didn't have to get another job I just transferred offices. Got a promotion. And left all that behind me. (FR, 7)

For other participants, the group made it clear that they were not satisfied with participants disengaging from the group. This resulted in the group either applying pressure to re-join, or harassing members to ensure they were aware of the consequences of leaving.

Because after I left my parents' home and found lodgings with in another family, a family of strangers, I didn't let the [group] know I kept my address secret so they wouldn't come and harass me there. But they did know where I worked so they would lie and wait for me at the end of the working day, trying to ambush me on my way out of work. That was so they could still manage to keep the pressure up a little bit that way. (FR, 1)

The costs of relocating were weighed against the negative consequences of possible future interaction with the group. For participants to feel confident in their disengagement and move on, the risk of interaction needed to be mitigated.

Participants who disengaged from groups that were not employment-based perceived more of a threat from other members, either through psychological aggression or violence. As such, these participants were more

likely to relocate after exiting due to anxiety. Some former special forces participants temporarily relocated after their careers through paid leave and holidays. The intention behind this relocation differed however, as it provided these participants with the opportunity to adjust from military culture back to civilian life.

> For the other way, for me, for example after the army I went travelling in South America for two years. Check out everything else for myself, you know. Without even understanding that this is what happening, but you know when you are travelling in poor areas with simple people, you sort of come back into normal life. (SF, 4)

A considerable factor in the attachment to the military role was the sense of elitism and personal significance participants achieved through their special forces role. Leaving this position required participants to mentally adjust to their status in the civilian community and manage interactions with others without the military hierarchy and mentality. For participant SF, 4 the relocation to South America provided the opportunity to negate the military 'mindset without the interaction with former soldiers.

Social Support

The benefits of social support have been noted in studies of religious defection (Wright, 1987) and in leaving extremism behind (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Garfinkel, 2007). Consistent with these studies, forming social networks provided two benefits to participants in the current study. It allowed participants to reduce their psychological dependency on the group by engaging alternative viewpoints and finding support for disengagement. This included interactions with others that contradicted previously held beliefs and stereotypes, as well as assisting the role transition by developing new standards of self-appraisal through resocialisation into new social groups.

Participants who were able to plan their exits and form social networks outside the group acknowledged the social support from these networks was significant in their disengagement experience. One participant described how important it was to have somebody in whom he could confide and share his experiences.

Well I think that just being able to talk about it openly was in itself huge, I didn't necessarily, I'm a fairly independent person, I didn't necessarily need a lot coddling or anything like that but just to be able to openly say this is what is going on with my life and this is how I feel and I want out of this was enormous. To have those words pass my lips was huge because these were things that within my social group within the organisation I could never speak these things openly, but to be able to do that and talk to others, just getting those things off my chest was enormously helpful. (FR, 3)

Another participant described how important it was to be able to discuss concerns with someone who had shared a similar experience, regardless if it was with the same group or not. This comfort in being understood and not judged was significant to participants.

I spoke to my dad about it and he kind of knew what I was getting at. He virtually had been a professional athlete when I was growing up and then he retired more or less at the same age I was. And I know he had a really tough time when he retired from playing footy, so he kind of knew where I was getting at there. But he was also biased by the fact that he wanted us to stay in [location] because that is where they are as well. So he was kind of bias, but he also knew where I was coming from, so a lot of support from him then and that was probably about it. (SF, 5)

For most participants, leaving the group meant severing all intra-group relationships; however, some had left with their romantic partner. Leaving with someone who understood the issues of the group was a source of comfort and support for these participants.

I think it was helpful that we were able to ultimately be on the same page with this, we had seen a lot of the same problems. I know of, I know that there could be others who leave but the spouses have deep disagreements. If my spouse had not agreed with me if we had not seen eye to eye on this it would have been a much more difficult situation. (FR, 3)

While these participants acknowledged their support network was biased in their advice and supported disengagement for their own reasons, the shared experience of disengaging from a personally significant social role provided the participants with assurance.

However, for many of the participants forming relationships after the exit was complicated by psychological experiences within the group, as well as perceived estrangement or stigma from the mainstream community. This was particularly common for participants in the non-military groups. For those who also experienced shame or guilt due to their involvement with the group, post-exit relationships were affected by their reluctance to develop intimate relationships and share personal information

> *In the main I didn't tell outsiders what had happened, in fact I didn't want to talk about [group name], I found the whole recollection so painful that for 30 years after leaving I just didn't talk about it to anyone. I didn't even like talking about it to my wife who had been through it all and who understood and knew what it was all about. (FR, 1)*

> *Well I felt like I had this great big mark across my forehead saying you know, 'I just left a cult' and I felt very ostracised and I felt like everyone could just tell what I had just been through. And, so I was very discouraged and I had the old contract dad who helped me get out. Eventually, I developed a couple of friends but nobody I could deeply tell what had gone on. I had shallow friendships just because I was so scared and couldn't really confide in anybody. (C, 1)*

This shame and guilt over their involvement with the group prevented them from disclosing intimate details of their experience with others and prevented strong relationships from developing.

The psycho-social experience of disengaging also had a negative impact on the social interactions of some participants. Like shame and guilt, anxiety and depression, as well as behavioural aspects of avoidance and preoccupation impacted on the extra-group relationships.

> *I think I became probably a bit unbearable as I started to leave as I got absolutely obsessed by it all and I was massively depressed as well, I went through post traumatic shock. So I think I was probably not very interesting to be around for a while there so some of the friends I'm glad that they put up with me, I was harping on having this one track type of mind for a while, certainly some of them stuck through everything with me and I'm still good friends with them. (FR, 2)*

While disengagement was a life changing experience that elicited strong negative emotions, participants who developed social support networks strongly credited their influence in their successful disengagement.

Anticipatory socialisation.

Anticipatory socialisation is described by Ebaugh (1988) in her role-exiting study as the development of a new social network prior to exiting a role. This new network allowed resocialisation of a member in adopting new behavioural standards and attitudes of the new social group one is joining. An example of this in the current study is a participant who had joined a kickboxing club while still a member of a one percent motorcycle club. As the kickboxing became more of a focus and judgement for self-standards, the kickboxing social network became more personally relevant and influential.

> *Because I started hanging around like minded people, positive minded people. You know, people that are out there to try and be something in their life. And um, very influential. You know, a lot of the people. I suppose um, you see someone that inspires you to be more. And that just um, and you see more than one of them, then obviously, you're influenced by them. And that's where I suppose the influential people in my life, they're still in my life today, they've made me aspire to be more in my life. (1%, 4)*

The development of these social networks provided not only the standards on which to judge the self, but also social support for participants when deciding to disengage.

> *Yes, so I think where I got up to was what made the difference though, that is that I built up a support group, so I got a, started a good career, started earning money and making friends at work that weren't [group name], so I think that's where I was able to sort of move on. Before when I was younger and having those doubts because I only had [group name] friends I just was, emotionally just couldn't cope with the thought of leaving whereas as time went on and I started to prepare myself and make friends elsewhere and be financially independent then that gave me the emotional strength to be able to address the concerns that I had. (FR, 5)*

These new social networks reduced dependency on the previous group and provided participants with assurance that they would not be alone following disengagement.

For those who were able to form social networks prior to exiting, the emotional impact was reduced. This did not mean there was no psychological distress caused by disengaging, but the duration and intensity

was reduced as new social networks replaced the social void. Lack of anticipatory socialisation increased experiences of longing and loss of self as social networks were missing and there were no adequate new standards to judge the self by.

Ideological Shifts

An ideology is a meaning system that provides coherent and comprehensive explanations for the universe and one's existence in it (Iannaccone & Berman, 2006). An effective ideology provides security through structure and stability; it simplifies the perceptions of a complex environment and provides a framework for a person to interact with the world in a meaningful way. In the current study, the ideologies of participants were shared with their groups during the membership period and provided participants a belief structure that justified involvement and group behaviour. For participants who psychologically disengaged (as opposed to those who only physically disengaged), the disengagement experienced included changes to ideological structures and strength.

This ideological shift reflected the change in participants' belief structures, particularly in reference to core beliefs that were previously shared with the social group. Participants varied between the outright rejection of the previous belief system that was shared with their former social group, and the moderation of beliefs. The differences in participants' belief systems were consistent with Zimmerman's (2003) argument that any changes to core beliefs will lead to the rejection of both core and corresponding peripheral beliefs relating to group identity. Additionally, changes to peripheral beliefs of the group's ideology did not impact on central and significant beliefs.

Cognitive opening.

Some participants explored the legitimacy of their group's ideology and doctrine throughout their disengagement experiences. Finding inconsistencies and points for disagreement provided participants justifications for disengaging. For other participants, the ideological shift required a cognitive opening after physically disengaging. Studies in religious

defection and religious extremism (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Bromley, 1998; Coates, 2013; Mellis, 2007; Mushtaq, 2009; Wright, 1987) describe the cognitive opening as the point that allows doubts to arise and the evaluation of maintaining membership. It breaks down the isolation from the outside world and allows alternative viewpoints to be considered, and is capable of accelerating disengagement.

In the current study, a cognitive opening was a moment in time when participants developed a self-awareness of an inconsistency in their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge. This was often instigated by a confronting event and it was during this period that a participant was willing to engage alternative viewpoints.

One participant described the cognitive opening as a potential psychologically traumatic event that threatened the stability of the self and understanding of his past. This special forces participant described the impact of a documentary in which he personally identified with the military pilot who had dropped a bomb on a Vietnamese village.

> *When you leave, it's like normal. You see it after that. A year after, 5 years after, 10 years after, 20 years after. You really start to realise a lot of things that, what you actually went through and what it has meant to you and to other people, and all that. . . . I remember this picture, that they interview a guy, he's like a hippy and one of the mountains and living there by himself. He say "I used to be a pilot, and when I was a pilot what I saw, how to go into integrate, how to put the bullet directly on the target, and how to move this quickly, and how to, all the technique." And I was fascinated by this and I could really, felt like him you know. And then this next picture is this bomb falling and on a Vietnam village, burnt kids and all of that you know. And I think every soldier, not even in a special unit, should go out of the army and see the other side. This movie was an amazing movie. For me it comes at the right time, help me to open up things that need to be opened, you know. (SF, 4)*

This identification with the 'other side', or the enemy, was confronting for the participant, as he strongly associated the consequences of military action shown in the movie with his own career. This created a cognitive opening as these consequences of war on the other side challenged previous beliefs on the necessity of violence and personal justifications for involvement.

When the participant's beliefs that justified his involvement in war and violence came to be seen as invalid, the participant entered a period during which his beliefs about reality and social world needed to be reassessed.

> *It's problematic, because in the first place you, you lose proportion. Because your world was very organised. Suddenly hey, you start noticing it's totally different. You know. So this is what I call the 'dangerous' time. Because in that time you can go, you can lose many things. You can run away, you can fall into drugs, start to be religious, you can meet. You can do many things. Or I also could immediately throw out everything, that all of this is not good. And this is a time to actually guard, you cannot only open the door and go away. You know, if you open the door you must be there to nest the guy until he go out from that. I have to admit that to me it happened with no guarding, but I will say that I had luck. I was wise enough, and maybe look, I didn't kill a thousand people with a bomb, you know what I mean? It depends how far into the problem, or into the issue. So you open the door, you nest the guy and then start talking more and more until he go out to, free, you know? To investigate by himself and this is depending on the guy in the situation and the guy that is helping him to go out from that. But any other way would be too dangerous, it can conflict someone too and it can be very dangerous too. (SF, 4)*

As ideologies are meaning systems that provided explanations for participants' reality and identity, a threat to such understandings caused participants to experience distress and uncertainty. Having to re-evaluate personal ideologies led to participants questioning the validity of their previous beliefs, resulting in either the absolute rejection of the ideology, or the moderation in the strength of beliefs.

Rejecting the narrative.

The outright rejection of beliefs by participants was described in term of the dismissal of the group's doctrine. This rejection of beliefs often referred to core principles within the doctrine that shaped the foundation of the group's ideology, and subsequently, participant's previous beliefs. When central principles were affected, a ripple-effect was created, consistent with Zimmerman's (2003) argument that threats, which discredit the central tenets of a belief structure can have repercussions on other core and peripheral

beliefs. Central beliefs being challenged had an impact on not only participants' belief systems, but also on their self-concept as well as identity.

For some, changes in beliefs occurred over a period of time with increasing influence of alternative information. For example, one participant who spent time researching theology and the group's doctrine after disengaging came to the conclusion that his previous beliefs were wrong and, subsequently, rejected all forms of religion.

> *I'm really surprised that how, I think virtually every single thing they teach is absolute garbage. When I first left I assumed that they were the closest to teaching an accurate doctrine of the bible and even when I started, came to realise that the bible is not infallible and just a book of ancient history, I still felt that they, the [group name] taught the closest thing to what the bible writers really intended, but the more I researched the more I came to find out that they are actually a very naïve group with very poor doctrine. . . I also don't believe in God or the bible any more, basically everything single thing that I was taught to believe I now see as just being completely laughable, so it was, just astounded me how everything could collapse when I was so certain before of what I believed as being completely truth. . . . I am just so turned off religion I just, I could not bear to join any religion, even if it is for the sake of getting to a more loose knit group of friends. (FR, 5)*

Many of the fundamental religious participants rejected the notion of a religious deity and many theological teachings.

> *At the moment I think I am an apostate and an atheist . . . (FR, 4)*

> *Because if you believe that there was a talking snake 6000 years ago in the garden of Eden that was responsible for all the evil in the world, we can't have a logical discussion probably around that. (FR, 7)*

While some still accepted the belief of a cosmic deity, aspects of the group's doctrine were replaced with an alternative religious explanation.

> *I still believe in the creator. I still study the bible. Although my view of the bible and interpretation of the bible is vastly different from what the organisation teaches. (FR, 3)*

While some members rejected the group's religious beliefs outright, others adopted different interpretations of core beliefs; essentially, the groups' ideology and interpretation were rejected.

Participants who rejected their group's ideology came to view the group in a different light after leaving. The group itself, and the higher ranking leadership, were seen as destructive and damaging to members, while the majority of remaining members were viewed as naïve and misguided.

Almost none, I think they are wrong on just about every issue. I do agree they have, the true believer [group name], have good ethics and good morals and are genuinely good people. I think they are misguided and they're wrong on doctrinal matters but my main objection is the willingness to accept whatever is passed down from up high unquestioningly and refusing to reason on a matter, even with close family and friends, their love and regard is very much conditional on your standing with the organisation. (FR, 2)

I continue to feel that it is largely filled with individuals who are very sincere, I think however that most everyone in the organisation has been encouraged to be intellectually lazy and outsource largely, outsource their thinking, their conscience to a group of men in [location] that they do not know. So I think largely I see a lot of people who are victims of this and when given the opportunity to evaluate it they are filled with fear, fear of what I may mean to walk away, fear of what it may mean that what they believed all their life the things they have scarified for are not what they thought they were. (FR, 3)

This view that the members were misled provided participants with justifications for exiting and the ability to rationalise away their behaviour to a period of time when they were not as intellectually or ideologically sophisticated.

In reference to the special forces, government political agendas provided the basis for the military's existence and legitimised behaviours and actions of soldiers that would otherwise be considered immoral (Soeters et al., 2006). However, some of the special forces participants described a cognitive shift away from the political objectives of the government, which determined their military operations and expressed disillusionment with corresponding operational goals.

Yes and no, because you see, in that time, when you are young, you believe more in everything. You believe in the government, you believe in the goals which today I totally, it's totally different. Today I don't believe so much. There is actually, and this is another issue because when you are in this kind of unit you're doing an operation, and a day

later you can read about it in the newspaper. You can hear the prime minister talk about it. And you are only 18, 19, 20 years old, and already you see the gaps between what actually you've done and what they are talking about. And you see that a lot of it is political spin, and already then, you understand "hey, things are not so clear cut. It's not black and white". This is not exactly what you saw when you went and do what you done, you know. A lot of other soldiers who never see this story, they only understand what they are told. I think a lot of the seeds of who I am now were planted at that time when I saw the differences between what, in the beginning I saw that, the pure thing and then uh uh, maybe. (SF, 4)

I think as you get on a bit you start to question things more than when you are young and naive. Like Timor I thought it was awesome. We go there, help people and rescue the refugees and stuff. And later you find out it was all about gas and oil. You know, that was the real reason as a country they were interested in Timor. You go that was pretty average. But I mean, we still help people so that's good. Afghanistan is not, really, well you don't go around helping too many people over there. (SF, 2)

The rejection of the political narrative that previously supported personal involvement in the regiment's operations can have implications for the psychological integrity of the former special operations soldier. For one participant, the disassociation with military goals and the methods used led to questioning his justifications for involvement and unit operations.

First couple of trips you think you are there to change the world and save all these people and that and then you realise it is not like that at all. Maybe it works for the Yanks with their lower socio-demographic areas and whole war on terror and all that crap, but I think people know. You go up to Hollywood and that and I doubt whether many of their kids will be out fighting the war. The politicians, their kids wouldn't be either. It's just a footprint in Afghanistan to secure the Middle East really, their reason for being there, whatever. . . . I think it was just growing up a bit and realising that things aren't always as clear as what they put them out there, wars initially were about what, religion and territory and all that. People don't care about religion anymore, so then it becomes about communism, now it's about terror, there's always something. (SF, 2)

The rejection of the beliefs, which supported the participant's involvement in war resulted in complete psychological disengagement from the military

identity, as opposed to the physical disengagement, which saw some participants move on from their military careers, but still maintain an attachment to the ideological aspects of the group. By maintaining ideological attachment, participants may experience further anxiety and distress as their disengagement, and subsequent behavioural changes, would be inconsistent with their self-beliefs. For these participants, intra-group relationships remained positive, there was a longing for various aspects of their membership and they discussed the conditions under which they would reconsider rejoining the military.

The rejection of the political and religious basis of these groups impacted participants' identity. The group's ideological structure provided the foundation for their membership and behaviour and a subsequent challenge to the ideology could trigger psychological distress relating to past actions and uncertainty in their understanding of the world. Rejecting the group narrative, participants were able to disidentify themselves and view their past membership as a moment of weakness rather than inherent to their self-concept.

Moderation of beliefs.

Participants who had a reduction in the strength of their beliefs did not always outright reject the groups' ideological basis, but the fundamentalist approach to the beliefs was tempered. For many of these participants the core beliefs remained the same but it was the group that was rejected. Without the group influence and active practice of the beliefs, the strength and perceived validity of these beliefs weakened. For example, a political activist who had devoted his career to the organisation admitted his core beliefs had not changed, but the cognitive processing associated with these beliefs was perceived as naïve.

> *My ideology didn't change all that much, but it was more of a realisation that my thinking had been unsophisticated, unconsidered, naïve, idealistic. This didn't devalue for me the basic premise of a range of ideals but it made the prospect of achieving change more remote. (P, 1)*

Believing the activist group was unable to achieve goals due to conflict within the organisation as well as leadership issues, the participant perceived the

group as being ineffective in achieving their goals. The core beliefs had not changed, but the perception of what was considered appropriate behaviour and the methods for achieving goals become more socially acceptable.

Other participants became aware of the diverse standards in the external environment and acknowledged that strong adherence to previous norms would not be beneficial in moving forward.

> *I've learned that, you can't be too stubborn about your ideas. I believe in having a very strong core of principles, but I think I'm a lot more pragmatic and more practical. Because I have to be, I'm forced to be. (FR, 9)*

By reducing interactions with the groups there was less social influence and the strict adherence to ideological norms was reduced. Without the continued influence of the social group, and being increasingly exposed to alternatives or contradicting information meant that existing beliefs were not continually reinforced. As a result, participants had to adapt to their social world and this led to a moderated ideology that was more tolerant towards alternative information and social interactions.

> *I think the way I treated others had to change. As [group name] we were told don't become friends with people only be friendly when you are at their door trying to convert them. If somebody comes to you that isn't a [group name] you walk away, or you be as nice as you can and then walk away because if somebody sees you talking to them all of a sudden you have friends that aren't [group name], which is terrible, so yeah it was different because I had to learn to accept everybody which was pretty hard because I wasn't conditioned that way, I mean at school I didn't have friends because they weren't [group name] so there was no way around that. . . . I saw that the good people are out here and they're the bad ones, they're the screwed up ones, it was, it was different. (FR, 6)*

Some group norms, such as rejecting those outside the group, were rejected to assist in the transition post-exit. However, while discrepancies were described by the participant in regards to peripheral beliefs taught by the group, this participant's core religious beliefs were still consistent with the group's ideology. As such, the participant was able to disregard the need for religious and group segregation, but still maintain a consistent religious identity.

Chapter Summary

The participants in the current study shared the process of disengaging from their respective social groups; however, variations existed in participants' experiences. These variations included the duration of the exit process, social group involvement in the exit, social networks and ideological shifts. The ideological shift occurred either during the period of membership or post-exit, and varied in its intensity. Changes to core beliefs resulted in the rejection of group ideology and required participants' to reconsider the beliefs surrounding their identity. Changed peripheral beliefs could be disregarded or rejected with fewer repercussions to other existing beliefs. Each of these variations could either hasten or impede the disengagement process, yet were influential in supporting the participants' decision to walk away.

The following chapter provides a general discussion of the current study and concludes the thesis.

CHAPTER 12: GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter Overview

Chapters 4 to 10 provided an extensive description of the grounded theory of psychological disengagement. This chapter presents a general discussion of the current study and concludes the thesis. The first section provides a summary of the findings, followed by a discussion of the contributions the current study has made to the existing body of knowledge. The second section discusses the methodological strengths and limitations of the current study. The third section of the chapter considers the implications of the findings for policy and practice in the field of countering violent extremism, as well as practitioners' ability to reduce psychological distress in the disengagement experience. Recommendations for future research conclude the thesis.

Study Summary

Members of highly entitative and ideological social groups are encouraged to develop salient collective identities that dominate over other aspects of their lives. While this serves to reinforce group commitment, negative feedback from the group produces greater affective responses from members for whom group identity is fundamental to the self-concept. For participants in the current study, group identity was linked to family and friendship networks, employment, living arrangements, religious affiliation, and consequently, the group was intrinsic to many aspects of the self.

At the outset of the current study, little was known about the psychological experience individuals had when exiting from such ideological social groups. The aim of the current study was to explore this experience of psychological disengagement through former members and to construct a substantive grounded theory. As an exploratory study, interviews with 27 former members of varying ideological and entitative social groups were conducted to form a grounded theory of psychological disengagement. This theory evolved through comparative analysis; the inclusion of each participant's experience was used to disprove the existing theory of disengagement until a substantive theory that encompassed all participants

was developed. The current study found that the disengagement experience was significant to participants who described the disengagement period as distressing and pivotal in their lives. A summary of the substantive grounded theory of psychological disengagement is presented next and illustrated with the visual representation of the model, as presented in chapter 5.

Grounded Theory of Psychological Disengagement Summary

The psychological disengagement began with an event that caused distress for the member. This *threat* triggered the psychological process that resulted in participants re-evaluating their involvement with the group as inconsistent with their self-concept. The events facilitating psychological disengagement, as opposed to only physical disengagement, were group related events – both with, or without, external events such as incentives or pressures. When external events were the sole catalyst, participants did not experience psychological disengagement.

While the initial threatening events varied, the shared experience was the negative affective interactions with the remaining members and/or leaders that conflicted with expectations of behaviour and self-worth. Participants engaged *self-verification* methods to assess the significance of the initial threat and the relationship between the self and group via social feedback and self-evaluation. When self-verification methods resulted in discrepancies the threat increased in personal significance and fostered negative affect towards group interactions and norms.

Self-verification identified a *discrepancy* between the self-concept and group membership. This included awareness of the discrepancy between the self as perceived by the individual and the self as perceived by others, as well as the discrepancy between the actual self and the standards and attributes the individual believes he or she should possess within the group role. At this stage, participants had to manage their membership and growing
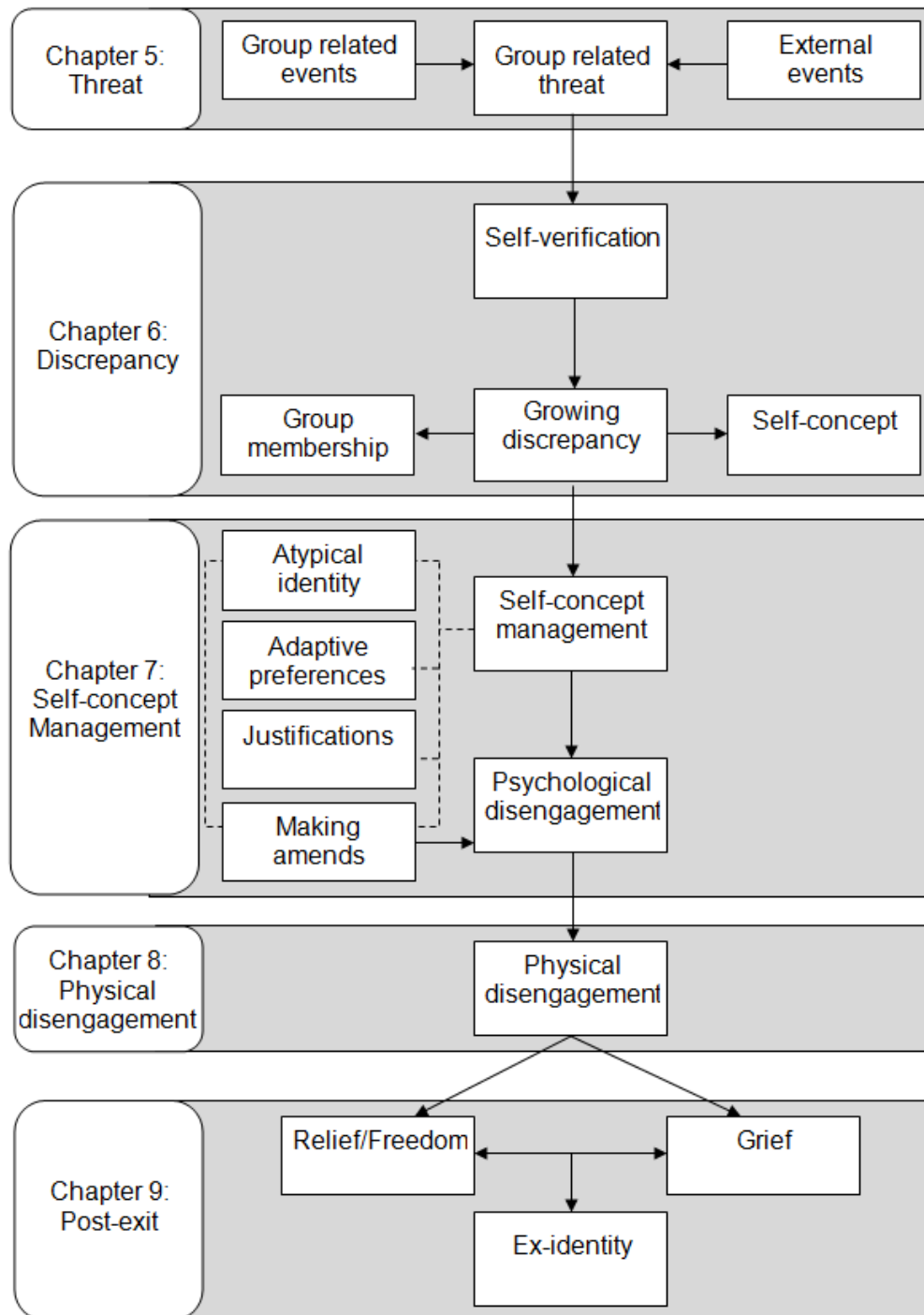
Figure 2. Grounded theory of psychological disengagement

discrepancy between the self and the group. Commitment to the group was still overtly displayed as the group was still central to participants' lives. However, as the discrepancy increased, participants experienced negative affect towards the group that influenced social cognitions and interactions.

Participants experienced psychological distress over the inconsistency of their membership with a group that was discrepant with the self. Motivated to restore consistency, disillusioned members required either a change in attitude (reconcile with the social group) or a change in behaviour (disengagement). Unable to reconcile the discrepancy, participants appeared to be affected by both the discrepancy caused by membership, and the experience of disidentifying with the group. Participants were motivated to restore consistency between their social identification and their self-concept. Four *self-concept management strategies* that alleviated the distress and restored psychological integrity were employed to reduce psychological identification with the group; (1) atypical identification, (2) adaptive preferences, (3) justifications and (4) making amends. The management strategies adopted by the participants in the current study *reduced the identification and psychological dependence* on the social group by confirming group membership as unfavourable.

The shift in attitudes against group membership furthered the disidentification with the group and reinforced perceptions that the participant needed to disengage. As a reconstructed self-concept became increasingly salient, there was less psychological dependence on the group and the member redefined him or herself in contrast to the group identity. The consequences of this disidentification were the termination of membership and disengagement from the group.

Progressing towards the *physical disengagement* from the group, participants began reducing psychological dependency on the group and started socially distancing themselves from the group identity and norms. The physical disengagement varied depending on participants' positions and relationship with the group, but generally required a confrontation with other members or leaders. The *post-exit experience* included a sense of relief, freedom, as well as grief, and was influenced by the preparation for lifestyle changes, social networks and group involvement. For most of the participants in the current study, relationships with the group and all remaining members were severed as participants attempted to develop the ex-identity. Additionally, psychological disengagement led to a reduction in the strength, or complete rejection of, the groups' ideologies.

Contributions to the Body of Knowledge

One of the aims in exploring the personal experiences of psychological disengagement was to increase knowledge in a relatively unexplored area of study. As a result of the current study, the first substantive grounded theory of psychological disengagement has been generated from the experiences of participants belonging to a diverse range of ideological social groups. The theory proposes that the disengagement experience involves a group-related threat to the self-concept wherein managing the self-concept discrepancy motivates a reduction in psychological dependency and identification with the social group. The following section will present key areas of the literature to which the current study contributes.

Disengagement

(1) Firstly, the current study contributes to the field of disengagement by using primary data drawn from experiences of former members of ideological social groups. The current study also explored the experience of individuals who disengaged from various ideological social groups (much of the existing literature that has utilised primary sources has tended to focus on one ideological group type; see Bjørgo, 2009; Kassimeris, 2011; Reinares; 2011). The findings indicated the cognitive and emotional distress experienced during the decision making and physical disengagement process was *shared across the various groups.*

(2) The current study explored the psycho-social experience of psychological disengagement, which required redefining the role of the social group in the self-concept. Findings indicated these social groups were central to the self-concept prior to the experience of a self-discrepancy, which created a *conflict between the personal and social identity.* As personal identities became salient the dependency on the group identity reduced. The current study's approach to understanding disengagement offers insight into areas that have lacked psychological understanding, namely the personal experiences of members within ideological groups.

(3) While Ebaugh (1988) provide an extensive list of variables that were influential in the experience of exiting, the current study highlighted four key variables that influenced the experiences of participants' psychological disengagement; duration, group involvement; social support and ideological shifts. While Ebaugh does not explicitly address the ideological shifts, the duration of the exit identified in the current study is consistent with her findings, and group involvement reflected the organisations with closed and open awareness. Closed awareness contexts occur when groups try to minimise disengagement by reducing awareness of alternatives and reinforcing commitment, which was observed in the fundamentalist and cult groups of the current study. Military special forces displayed open awareness, which increased the flow information and allowed preparation for exiting. These differences did not cause participants to deviate from the theory of psychological disengagement, but did influence individual experiences.

Categorisation of Disengagement Triggers

(4) While discussions in literature (Bjørgo, 2005; Demant et al;, 2008a; Klandermans, 2005) focused on the causes for leaving extremist groups, little explanatory power was given as to why some triggers were more significant to some members and not others. For example, the effects of some push factors can be difficult to predict; negative sanctions can lead members to disengage, or have the converse effect increasing the group's solidarity and cohesiveness (Bjørgo, 2005). The current study explored the significance of the triggering event and found the outcome from the process of self-verification, primarily the group's response, was more influential than the initial trigger. From this perspective, the trigger needed to be personally relevant and related to the group to initiate the process, but could be varied in source. As such, the crisis is personally significant to some individuals rather than others and related to the group's ability to resolve the conflict.

(5) The literature review identified two approaches to categorising the crisis leading to disengagement – push and pull factors (Bjørgo, 2002, 2005, 2009), and normative, affective and continuance factors (Demant et al.,

2008a). The findings of the current study can also be expressed in terms of push and pull factors; however, these categories do not fully represent cognitive aspects of disengagement as push and pull factors do not distinguish between physical and psychological disengagement as effectively. External incentives, which may be considered pull factors to leave were described by participants as motivators for moving forward and justifications for disengaging, as well as a means of reducing psychological distress through redefining the self-concept, rather than causes for leaving.

Again, the normative, affective and continuance factors do not distinguish between physical and psychological disengagement, nor detail the psychological experience of disengaging as a result of these factors. However, the participants in the current study did refer to affective factors as the most influential aspect in the threat and self-verification stages as the groups' responses to participants' concerns emphasised the discrepancy between them and the group. Continuance and normative factors became more influential in the later stages of the disengagement process. These two factors provided justifications for the participants' exit as means of reducing dissonance and providing support for their decision to disengage, but did not initiate the disengagement process. For those who physically disengaged but did not disengage psychologically, continuance factors were described more often in the decision making process. Normative aspects were only relevant when participants explored alternative viewpoints and provided further justification for the disengagement. The normative, or ideological aspects, became significant aspects in the formation of the ex-identity with the rejection or tempering of belief systems. These changes in norms occurred over an extended period of time, but were not described by participants as the cause for disengagement. In the current study, disengagement was justified by continuance factors, but changes in normative factors reflected changes in self-concepts and ideology.

Disengagement and Deradicalisation

(6) Deradicalisation goes beyond the physical exit from a social group and requires a cognitive shift in ideology and the rejection of violence as an appropriate means to achieving ideological objectives (Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009). The current study found psychological disengagement contributed to a decline in ideological attachment. This may have been through the moderation of beliefs, which occurred as a result of a lack of interaction and reinforcement, and the realisation that fundamentalist approaches were not practical for life outside the group. Additionally, many members completely rejected the group's ideology when inconsistencies were associated with its core beliefs. With the moderation or rejection of ideological aspects, as well as the reduced identification with the group, participants were less willing to sacrifice, or perform extreme acts, for the good of the group. This finding provides a reasonable link between psychological disengagement and deradicalisation.

(7) Post-exit, the changes in ideological attachment supported the participants' decision to disengage, which allowed the establishment of a secure ex-identity. Those maintaining ideological attachment and a preference for the in-group had physically disengaged but still longed? for aspects of their group membership. Further research into this cohort of participants may provide insight into both recidivism and post-exit reintegration in to the mainstream society.

The implications of these findings are discussed next.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Countering Violent Extremism

The current study describes the personal experience of disengaging from social groups, which included those that operate outside mainstream communities. While some of these participants were not involved in threatening or criminal behaviour (such as fundamental religious groups), the psychological process of disengagement was shared with those who belonged to groups who have a history of violence or criminality (one percent

motorcycle clubs, white supremacists and special forces). Understanding the psychological experience and decision making process of disengaging from criminal or fundamental social groups has implications for counter violent extremism programmes.

Not only does the current study provide insight to the challenges members of such groups face when planning to exit, but may also prove useful in efforts to encourage disengagement through psychological interventions. Noting the key experience in the disengagement process relates to a self-discrepancy, practitioners may utilise motivational interviewing, which engages intrinsic motivation in behavioural changes. The approach focuses on increasing awareness of the potential problems and risks caused by the behaviour in question, as well as resulting consequences (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). This method of interviewing could be useful once a discrepancy is recognised by current members to encourage the subjective cost-benefit analysis, as well as reinforce the decision making process of former members.

A cornerstone to extremism is a fundamentalist approach to a set of beliefs and values (Saucier, Akers, Shen-Miller, Knežević, & Stankov, 2009). This fundamentalism was challenged throughout the disengagement process by increasing participants' openness to alternative viewpoints, as well as the need to engage with broader community. While participants still acknowledged some of the same thought processes, such as unintentional racism or support of doctrinal aspects, the strict adherence to group norms declined. As a result, participants were able to establish an ex-identity and engage people who were previously disregarded or despised. Increasing interaction with alternatives contributed to decreases in their fundamentalist way of thinking.

Ideological debates in disengagement and deradicalisation.

Many deradicalisation and disengagement programmes incorporate ideological and theological debates in attempts to convert convicted extremists (Boucek, 2009; Johnston, 2009; ICSR, 2010). In the current study, doctrinal issues became prevalent in the later stages as an approach to validating participants' concerns and providing justification for their

disengagement. The ideological crisis was then a result of the group-related conflict, rather than the causal factor for disengagement. This supports Skonovd's (1981) finding that ideological conflict provided justifications for leaving, but was not the cause of disengagement. Programmes may find theological debates more effective after the individual has begun psychologically disengaging from the group, but should not rely on such debates to trigger an ideological shift. It is the affective attachment to the social group, and its norms, that maintain group membership and the adherence to its ideology. As such, it is important that practitioners within counter extremism identify the specific affective factors (virtue, significance, power and/or competence) that are likely to induce dissonance in individual members.

Normative, or ideological factors, were only relevant when participants explored alternative viewpoints and this provided further justification for disengagement. The ideological aspects became increasingly relevant in the formation of the ex-identity with the rejection or tempering of belief systems. These changes in norms occurred over an extended period of time, but were not described by participants as the cause for their disengagement. In the current study, disengagement was justified through the continuance factors, but the changes in normative factors reflected changes in the self-concept and ideology.

From this perspective, the cognitive opening experienced during the self-verification stage of disengagement related to the awareness of social inconsistencies. While inconsistencies did extend to concerns over group doctrine, they were not described by participants as an ideological cognitive opening facilitating disengagement. From a policy perspective, ideological debates would not promote disengagement if the individual still has a positive attachment to the group; however, they can further the disillusionment if the underlying discrepancy between the self and group exists.

Support

The findings of the current study indicated social support, logistics and preparation for the exit were significant aspects of the disengagement

experience. While former military special forces participants had access to government services and were provided support for the transition into civilian roles, many of the other groups did not such support and found the disengagement more psychologically distressing.

Support programmes such as the EXIT programme (Bjørgo, 2002, June; Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Demant et al., 2008b) may prove beneficial to a variety of groups existing outside mainstream society. The EXIT programme focuses on right-wing extremists after they have made the decision to leave by providing practical assistance and a support network. Members leaving the right-wing scene have access to former members with whom to discuss concerns, support for interacting with authorities as well as social services, and financial assistance. These factors were crucial to participants in the disengagement experience with adequate preparation and social support easing the psychological distress and grief period.

Additionally, deradicalisation intervention programmes acknowledge social needs of the individual. For example, the Saudi Arabian programme targeting incarcerated extremists provided incentives to renouncing the group such as financial support and employment (Boucek, 2009; Demant et al., 2008b). Based on the findings of the current study, such incentives could provide justification for disengaging if the individual has previously experienced a group-related threat to their self-concept.

Strengths and Limitations

While the current study provides a unique approach to exploring the disengagement experience, there are some limitations that must be taken into consideration when reflecting on the findings.

Sampling

The method of recruitment and selection of participants is dictated by the phenomenon under investigation. Unlike experimental based research, qualitative studies do not require the concept of random selection of participants and implementation of control groups; rather, participants are purposively selected for their ability to illuminate a particular phenomenon. As such, a strength of the current study was that the phenomenon was

explored through those who have lived the experience rather than relying on testing existing theories or using secondary sources.

Another strength of the sample in the current study was the diversity of the participants interviewed. These participants varied in ideologies with assorted religious, political and social orientations, as well as varied demographics in terms of participants' age, gender, nationalities and the time passed since disengaging. Additionally, the inclusion of the special forces within the study sample prevented defining the social groups as deviant or radical, which could have been perceived as antagonistic to the groups and led to a sensationalist as well as pejorative approach to the research. The sample was based on the psychological experience of identification and disengagement from ideological and entitative social groups, rather than focussing on the side of the law in which the groups exist. Participants from socially accepted, fringe and criminal groups were open about their personal experiences. By providing confidentiality, developing rapport, and providing a space for participants to talk without judgement, the current researcher was able to delve into the core psychological dynamics of disengagement.

As the purpose of the grounded theory was to illuminate the shared experience of participants, there is little discussion on the differences between groups. While the individual differences in chapter 11 identified group factors that could influence the individual experience, a comparative analysis of each group type is outside the scope of the current study. However, to ensure applicability of the model in practice, further consideration should be given to the nuances of each group, with particular attention to leadership and ideological changes as well as intra-group relationships and structure.

The difficulty in obtaining information from some of these groups can be viewed as a limitation as the sample was restricted to those who were willing to participate. Difficulties arose with recruitment as many members of such groups engage psychological defensiveness or are suspicious of the researcher's intent. For example, an issue with the use of internet forums was the thought that the researcher was a spy trying to ensure that ex-members did not talk to outsiders about what goes on in groups, or was collecting information in order to black-mail ex-members into submission.

Another example includes a former member of a one percent motorcycle club who sought approval from other ex-members and was informed it would be "on his head" if he choose to participate. Additionally, there was concern for the wellbeing of their former group should law enforcement use the information of sub-cultural rituals to remove the boundaries binding the groups. As such, the data may be limited by the interviews with only those who were willing to share information relating to their former social groups and their disengagement experience.

Interviewing

In-depth interviews were essential to explore a phenomenon, which currently has little scholarly research on, as they allow a deeper understanding of the disengagement experience. However, interviews are open to bias from both the participant and researcher; participants may describe their experience in ways that would make them look favourable or they may have attempted to provide information they believed the interviewer wanted to hear. However, attempts were made in the interview process to minimise researcher bias beyond the interview schedule and probing cues.

Accuracy of Descriptions

The use of interviews within a methodology is also exposed to potential bias. Participants are asked to disclose information about a lived experience, requiring retrospective insight that is at risk of alterations post-hoc, by confabulation and psychological defensiveness. This viewpoint also has its advantages as it allows the participant the opportunity to integrate and express the experience consciously. As Hyener (1985) acknowledges any form of description is different to the experience itself given the nature of language, yet for exploring a lived experience there is little alternative to the retrospective viewpoint and the medium of language is perhaps the closest a researcher can get.

Additionally, while the researcher must assume the information from the participant is accurate, it is influenced by perceptions and the willingness to disclose personal details. The interpretation of events and experiences are subjective and influenced by cognitive processes designed to protect the

self-identity. While this is a limitation in the use of qualitative methodologies and must be taken into account in the analytical process, it is not a threat to the validity of the research.

Recommendations for Support Services in Reducing Psychological Distress during Disengagement

A threat to their self-concept produced psychological distress in the participants of the current study. While the threat to the self-concept is the source of the psychological distress, the findings suggest the following factors could contribute to reducing this distress toward disengagement.

Anticipatory socialisation; including a new reference group during the disengagement process can increase independence from the social group. These groups provide new measures and norms to evaluate the self, which can construct a self-concept that is atypical of group norms. New social networks can also replace social relationships and sense of belonging post exit. The findings suggest that integrating disengaging members into alternative social groups as early as possible in the disengagement would increase social support and alleviate the distress of losing group relationships and sense of belonging. The adoption of new norms would validate disengagement.

Incentives; incentives are the prospects or rewards that motivate members to disengage. Regardless of whether incentives are intrinsic or external motivations, they can provide additional psychological support through justifying the disengagement decision. For example; the opportunity to pursue personally significant goals that would otherwise be hampered by group membership or, alternatively, inducements through socio-economic rewards. These can be beneficial in the management of the self-concept and post exit experience as they provide both the pull from the group and new goals to work towards, as well as validating and providing assurance for the decision to disengage.

Social support; online forums also played a significant role in the disengagement of fundamental religious groups by providing a forum for individuals who had shared the same experience to communicate. Various blogs and forums exist for leaving street gangs and religious organisations;

however, issues of confidentiality plague many groups and if reprisals are a concern then online involvement may be deemed a risk. Regardless, the significance of a support network, online or face-to-face, cannot be understated.

Reducing Psychological Disengagement

In addition to member disengagement, the current study discovered the significance of intra-group relationships and the need for consistency between the group and member identities. Organisational commitment and membership retention can also benefit from understanding the disengagement process and how to counter disidentification of members. In the current study, the self-verification process emphasised the discrepancy between the self and the group and it is at this stage that members could be influenced to maintain membership or continue down the path of disengagement. To decrease the likelihood of disengagement, the findings suggest a supportive and responsive social group that addresses the individual member's concerns is needed; however further research is needed in this area.

Future Research

The current study has provided insight into the disengagement experience and at the same time identified areas that would benefit from further exploration.

The current study produced a substantive grounded theory based on 27 participants. This theory could be validated in future research and explored in a larger, perhaps even more diverse, sample. While the current study focused on the similarities between the groups and the shared experience, future studies could also segregate samples into small categories, such as violent and non-violent, religious and non-religious, as well as stigmatised groups and those that are social accepted. These comparisons may further identify nuances that may allow practitioners to develop disengagement programmes tailored towards their target groups.

To further explore the validity of the 'grounded theory of psychological disengagement', research could also attempt to engage current members of

these social groups. This may illuminate the self-verification processes used by members who are able to resolve their crisis. Furthermore, qualitative research with current members may identify additional self-concept management strategies that are able to address the group-member discrepancy without disengagement.

The individual differences chapter has highlighted the influence of various factors on the experiences of disengagement. Further research should explore these factors with intention of identifying a cause and effect relationship for ideological shifts and establishing an ex-identity. This may include a comparison of various social settings and resources available during the exit process. Research in this area will strengthen counter extremism programmes and the reintegration of exiting members. For example; some participants in the current study who disengaged from fundamental religious groups emphasised the support received from online forums. The use of online forums may be perceived as a risk for some social groups, particularly criminal organisations; however, further research could explore the potential of online support forums in reducing the psychological distress of individuals who feel isolated or alienated.

Social Mobility and Radicalisation

The current study was not conducted with the intention to threaten the membership status of certain groups; however, the model of psychological disengagement does offer insight into social mobility. The model proposed provides an explanation for movement between social groups that can be applied to both moving from extreme groups to mainstream society, and vice versa, moving from mainstream groups to those which are more extreme.

A personal threat can lead individuals to question their social identities if sufficient social networks are not present, including networks forged in mainstream groups. The findings in the study suggest people are more likely to reduce attachment to a social identity when their significance, power, virtue and/or competence are threatened. The most significant aspects of the groups in the current study are the sense of belonging and purpose, which can promote a sense of personal significance. Alternatively, there is the potential to apply the findings towards member retention. Groups, or the

mainstream community, could reduce the impact of threats by strengthening intra-group relationships and adequately addressing the initial concerns before self-concept changes occur.

Further research should assess this theory of psychological disengagement within social mobility and the transition from mainstream to ideological groups.

Conclusion

The purpose of the current study is to gain a greater insight into the psycho-social experience of disengagement from ideological social groups that lack empirical research. The findings of the current study have shown the experience of psychological disengagement is distressing to participants. It is characterised by the discrepancy between group membership and the self, resulting in a self-concept threat. Findings contribute to the field of disengagement and counter extremism by raising awareness of the individual experience and the socio-psychological impact of disengagement. Secondly, the findings provide insight into how the initial crisis becomes personally significant to the extent of facilitating disengagement. Finally, the study has demonstrated that psychological disengagement is a complex and distressing experience for those involved, as a person's sense of self is threatened. These experiences need to be taken into consideration when social policies are implemented to influence membership in ideological groups, as well as when providing support services to exiting members.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

Study into the Disengagement from Social Groups

My name is Kira Harris and I am a PhD student at Edith Cowan University. The aim of my research is to further the understanding of the disengagement process through in-depth interviews with participants who self-identify as ex-members of social groups that operate outside the mainstream community. This information will then be used to fulfil the requirements of the PhD and research publications.

As a participant of this study, I would like to arrange for an interview to discuss your experiences in disengaging and exiting from your group. This interview will be held either face-to-face at a location convenient to you, or via Skype or phone, and is expected to last about one hour. The interviews will be audio-recorded so the researcher can refer to your comments, and the tapes and notes will be stored in a locked cabinet and destroyed five years after the completion of the study. However, if you are uncomfortable with being audio-recorded the researcher can conduct the interview and take written notes. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your consent at any stage of the interview or research process.

Given the sensitivity of data, your participation will be kept confidential and your data will be de-identified through the use of pseudonyms and codes. During the transcription phase, if information arises that may lead to your identification the researcher will contact you to discuss the option of removing the data.

It is requested that information regarding criminality is not discussed within the interview. However, if a criminal event is part of the psychological experience of disengagement, please refrain from disclosing details of other

identities and/or locations. This is to prevent any risk of the researcher being subpoenaed and being legally obliged to discuss the details of the interview.

If you would like to participate in this research or would like more information, please contact me on 0409 136 117 or kira.harris@ecu.edu.au.

This research project is being undertaken as part of the requirements of a PhD at Edith Cowan University and has been approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project please contact the researcher, supervisors or independent person within the ECU research ethics board.

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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW LETTER

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences and causes of disengaging with significant social roles. If at any stage you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer the question or the interview can be terminated if you wish. There are no questions relating to criminal behaviour, however if this is related to your response, I ask that you do not disclose any crimes that have not been before the courts or use names. While participation is confidential, under certain circumstances there are legal obligations for disclosing information, for example, crimes against children and terrorist acts.

During the interview, I will be making notes. Please don't think I am being rude, but it will help me come back to the topics I'd like to hear more about. Do you mind if I record this interview for transcribing purposes? This will reduce the chance of the information being misunderstood during analysis and the audio-recording will be destroyed once it is transcribed.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

<u>Demographics</u>

Gender   _____

Age   _____

<u>Background information</u>

How did you become part of the___(group name)____?

From your point of view, how would you describe the _____?

What was your relationship with the _____?

Do you still consider yourself as part of the _____? (NO) How long would you consider yourself to be an 'ex' member

<u>Disengagement</u>

Can you describe to me what it was like to leave?

Stop!!
Have you ever belonged to a group considered *different* to the mainstream community?

I want to talk to you!

For my university thesis, I would like to discuss with you the experiences of leaving this group and how this impacted on your practical life circumstances and psychological wellbeing.

❖ All interviews are completely confidential and I will not use names or any other information that can lead to your identification.
❖ Participation is entirely voluntary and you don't have to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with.

If you have any questions or concerns please don't hesitate to contact me

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