THE KABALARIAN PHILOSOPHY: Charismatic Control and Sexual Convictions

A dissertation submitted to the School of History, Philosophy, Religion, and Classics, University of Queensland in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Renée Anne Brodie

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Declaration

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. This material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

Renée Anne Brodie
Dedicated to my amazingly patient and always cherished family,
Carl and Lorraine, Blair and Roxanne, Michelle, Sean, Mackenzie and Piper,
To my inspirationally humorous friends,
Ayla, Rich, Joanne, Jason, Allison, and Nigel,
And to my wonderfully loving and devoted husband and *cinq-cent* partner
forever,
Frédéric.

*Merci.*
Operating in relative anonymity throughout its seventy year long history, the Kabalarian Philosophy is a Canadian New Religious Movement that became known to the public during the much publicized criminal trial of its most recent leader, Ivon Shearing. Charged with twenty counts of sexually based offenses including rape, indecent assault, and sexual assault, a jury found Shearing guilty of sexually violating the rights of many of his female devotees. The violence Shearing perpetrated against his own members in a religious setting brought to the forefront several interesting dynamics and questions, including Shearing’s ability to convince members to submit to his sexual demands. To reveal Shearing’s exploitative actions, the contributing factors that enabled him to engage in abusive behavior for twenty years need critical analysis and detailed understanding. This study, therefore, explores the theoretical models that characterize and outline charisma and charismatic authority, sexual violence, and power differentials that coalesced to give rise to an environment where Ivon Shearing was able to sexually manipulate his followers.

While the theoretical models do help in creating a model potentially capable of predicting situations of sexual violence, the Kabalarian Philosophy’s case identifies a significant obstacle in establishing a foolproof predictive model: members gave no outward indications that they were in a sexually abusive environment. The failure to be able to apply a predictive model of violence in the Kabalarians’ case, however, does present the opportunity to explore the breakdown of control within the movement that led to outside agencies discovering the ongoing abuse. Moreover, the research gained when examining the Kabalarian Philosophy also shows how Shearing used his charismatic authority and control to demand adherence to his unconventional rituals.

By relying on reputedly esoteric doctrine to ultimately justify his actions, Shearing was able to imbue profane acts with an aura of sacred importance.
convincingly. Since the image of perfection Shearing portrayed was so skillfully maintained, had the internal controls restricting members’ interaction with each other not waned, his secretive abuse could have continued indefinitely. This analysis explores each of the elements and unique features of the Kabalarian Philosophy to see how Ivon Shearing was able to manipulate the movement’s teachings and beliefs to engage in the sexual exploitation and abuse of his female devotees.
Acknowledgements

I readily admit that without the ongoing and continuous prodding, pleading, bargaining, (occasionally) threatening, and supportive comments from my supervisors, mentors, family, and friends, I would still be working on page one of this dissertation. For the momentous achievement of providing me motivation to actually write, albeit sporadically, thank you to all. You know who you are.

Specifically, I wish to thank Dr. Lynne Hume, whose patience, perspective, and insights were invaluable to me, as was her mountain retreat. Having read countless drafts of my work, she far exceeded her role as supervisor and became a source of encouragement and wisdom, especially when confronted with obstacles that seemed overwhelming.

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And to Frédéric, my beloved husband, thank you for always being there and giving me support when I did not think I could make it. Your love has allowed me to follow my dreams and I have been lucky enough to have had you travel the journey with me. Your sacrifices mean more to me than I can express.
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Preface

On the rarest of occasions, opportunity really does come knocking. So it was, when Stephen Kent awoke me from my reveries by rapping on the seminar table before class. Knowing that I was interested in pursuing my Ph.D., Steve arranged a meeting with me after class to discuss possible topics of interest. During that meeting, I concluded that I would be interested in looking at a Canadian New Religious Movement that I had not formed any preconceptions about. He handed me a newspaper clipping with the heading, “Woman felt honored by sex with Kabalarian” by Brian Morton, which prompted me to ask him about the group and its leader. With a knowing smile, Steve encouraged me to find out the answers to my own questions: and so, my research into the Kabalarian Philosophy began.

Although I did not realize at the outset that in exploring the Kabalarians I would be dealing with issues of charisma, authority, power, and sexuality, over the course of my research these aspects emerged as fundamental to understanding the group and the events that led up to its leader being convicted on numerous counts of rape and sexual assault. These elements also happen to be central issues of debate in the ongoing “cult wars,” and therefore were fraught with polemics, so much so that it seemed you needed a scorecard to keep track of the arguments, the rebuttals, and the rebuttals to the rebuttals. It was within this controversial arena, however, that I wished to add my voice, however small, and share what I discovered about the Kabalarian Philosophy. In the process, I learned perhaps the most important lesson that dissertation research could lead to: that “[c]ults are a genuine expression of religious freedom deserving toleration … [but] [a]t the same time, they are opportunities for unchecked exploitation of followers by leaders deserving civic scrutiny” (Zablocki and Robbins, 2001:x). Perhaps we should all learn from opportunity knocking.
**Introduction**

“It is obvious that the world needs a new religion, one of truth and logical facts, one whose reality could be established in the lives of men.”

Alfred J. Parker, *Hidden Forces*, 1977

In the early part of the 1930s, a man living in Vancouver by the name of Alfred J. Parker believed that he had a mission in life that he needed to share with the world. He wanted to “blend … , unite … , and thus balance … [the beliefs and principles of Eastern and Western thought] through understanding, [so that the merging of the two worldviews] … would provide the world with a perfect religion, a philosophy of life in its entirety” (Kabalarian Philosophy, “History,” 1999). This altruistic statement marked the foundation of the group called the Kabalarian Philosophy, which, over its seventy-year long history, has had only two leaders: Alfred Parker and his successor, Ivon Shearing. These two men, however, established a movement that during Shearing’s leadership tenure, reveal a sexually exploitative group whose leader actively created situations of abuse. For this reason, studying Shearing’s actions presented an unparalleled opportunity to explore religious violence and the way that outsiders came to discover such violence.

A significant question asked during the course of this research, was whether this study could establish a predictive model that enabled outsiders to become aware of potential situations of violence, or if the creation of such a model was impossible without insiders revealing the truth to an outside agency. To explore this question, the research focused on the role of charismatic authority, sexual violence, and unequal power differentials in closed, spiritually based communities, and how the combination of these factors created a situation

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1 Many of Parker’s lectures, writings, and workbooks referred to in this study were published posthumously. For this reason, the publication dates of many books and articles are dated after Parker’s death in 1964.
where sexual abuse became justified through the application of esoteric doctrine. Although Shearing’s sexual abuse of devotees could have lasted indefinitely, the twenty years of abuse ended when the pressure of maintaining a secret became overwhelming for a single devotee. Shearing’s loss of absolute control over his members’ behavior signaled the beginning of an investigation into his actions, the group he led, and the loss of his position as leader of the Kabalarian Philosophy.

Throughout the history of the group, one of the Kabalarian Philosophy’s proclaimed aspirations was to bring enlightenment, harmony, and understanding to the world. Through the dissemination of their fundamental creeds and teachings about the Laws of Nature, the movement’s leaders claimed to know the workings of the universe. Somewhat surprisingly, then, the undercurrent of sexual violence that permeated the last two decades of the movement’s history is an unexpected twist in an otherwise unremarkable chronicle of the group. The leader of the group, Ivon Shearing, was charged and found guilty on multiple sexual offenses including rape and sexual assault, behavior he engaged in by using his authority and spiritual teachings to exploit his female members. Shearing’s defense against the charges was that his actions were justified theologically — a position that was as publicly contentious as it was convincing to his most dedicated followers.

Given the Kabalarian leader’s conviction, one needs to explore the events that led up to Shearing’s prosecution and trial. The story is an interesting one,

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2 Currently, the official name of the movement is the Society of Kabalarians of Canada & Kabalarian Philosophy. Due to several name changes throughout the movement’s seventy year history, I use Kabalarian Philosophy or simply Kabalarians unless the name is of direct significance.

3 Although there is no tangible evidence suggesting that Parker abused female members of the Kabalarian Philosophy, during Shearing’s criminal trial, a witness stated that both Parker and Shearing abused her throughout their tenure as leader of the movement (Witness #9, R v. Shearing, 1997:816).
because while Shearing’s 1997 trial drew significant attention to the movement, outside of the courtroom, few have ever examined the group’s history, beliefs, internal structure, or dynamics. Prior to the public becoming aware of Shearing’s crimes, there seemed to have been no need to critically examine the Kabalarian Philosophy’s beliefs or actions since the group appeared to be both benevolent and harmless.

The peaceful image depicted on the group’s website, however, does not coincide with the sexual violence underlying the Kabalarians’ history, nor is it consistent with Shearing’s self-serving reliance on reputedly esoteric teachings to gain sexual access to his victims. The contradiction between the Kabalarians’ public image and private rituals represents a juxtaposition that could have been maintained indefinitely had claims of sexual abuse not been leaked to the media by a member of the movement. Moreover, since no one outside of the movement realized that Shearing possessed a powerful charismatic and authoritarian presence within the movement — qualities he used to control every aspect of his members lives — non-Kabalarians had no indication that members depended so completely on their leader’s proclamations and demands.

The dynamics within the Kabalarian Philosophy, therefore, are of significant importance in understanding sexual violence and the eventual outcome of the trial, primarily because the public did not recognize⁴ that Shearing was engaging in abusive behavior with Kabalarian members until the allegations of abuse surfaced publicly. The skill with which Shearing manipulated and convinced his female devotees that their spiritual welfare depended on their complete adherence to his demands, underscores the power he held over his followers and the need to explore his case more closely. By examining the factors that contributed to Shearing’s ability to sexually exploit his female followers, we can explore the theoretical models of charisma and charismatic

⁴ Throughout this study, I use American spelling except in direct quotes where the authors use British spelling.
authority, sexual abuse, and power differentials and their effect on the internal dynamics of the Kabalarian Philosophy.

To accomplish a thorough investigation into Shearing’s actions and his role within the group, text analysis is the most suitable methodology. Examining Shearing’s court transcripts for the recurring themes of sexual abuse, power, control, and charisma, text analysis provides a systematic way to understand the context of the example. This methodology also proves to be indispensable when examining the primary writings of the Kabalarian Philosophy. In these documents, one can methodically explore the movement’s beliefs and worldview, which are elements that Shearing used to create esoteric doctrines that had as their sole purpose his own sexual gratification.

To create the main theoretical framework that defines many of the characteristics contributing to violence, charisma, and the unequal power distribution in New Religious Movements, I rely on secondary source analyses from prominent researchers in the fields of religious studies, psychiatry, and sociology. Lorne Dawson (1998; 2002), Anthony Storr (1996), and Max Weber (1964; 1968; 1978), for example, respectively present compelling arguments exploring the nature of charisma, the characteristics that often signal charismatic individuals, and how charismatic influence affects the internal dynamics of a movement. Together with Janet Liebman Jacobs (1987; 1989), Richard Emerson (1962), Margaret Singer (1995; 2003), and Janja Lalich’s (with Singer 1995; 2004) research on power and the relationship between leaders and their followers, the dynamics involved in closed communities reveals the unequal power distribution and the advantages this brings to an authoritarian leader.

Further contributing to the seemingly inseparable relationship between power and charisma that exists between leaders and their followers, Robert Cartwright and Stephen Kent (1992), Thomas Robbins (1988; with Palmer 1997; 1999), and others provide a comprehensive analysis of the role of leadership in New Religious Movements. These studies highlight the importance of understanding the power dynamics within these movements and the influence of charismatic leaders on their followers.

5 I often refer to a New Religious Movement as simply NRM throughout this study.
6 Janet Leibman Jacobs is referred to as Janet Jacobs throughout this study unless specifically noted otherwise.
2002) and Dick Anthony (with Robbins 1995), all present differing perspectives and compelling theories examining violence in NRMs. Cartwright and Kent, for instance, explore sexual violence from a familial perspective, revealing the parallels that exist between domestic abuse and the sexual violence that can occur in NRMs. Robbins and Anthony’s research, however, does not deal with familial abuse, but instead provides the seminal foundation for understanding violence within NRMs. These men outline the endogenous and exogenous factors that have a distinctive influence on a movement’s function and interaction with others — both amongst themselves and with society — providing the main framework from which a predictive model emerges.

In part, one of the goals of this study is to explore the interrelatedness and contribution of various factors to the Kabalarians’ abusive environment. To achieve this goal, the research is broken down into three parts. Part one comprises of two chapters, beginning with the history of the Kabalarian Philosophy from its foundation up to the early stages of Shearing’s tenure as leader of the movement. Chapter two deals exclusively with the Kabalarians’ beliefs and worldview, while presenting the group’s main theological principles and their evolution.

Establishing the history and the worldview of the Kabalarian Philosophy in part one allows me in part two to review the theoretical arguments and paradigms that provide a backdrop against which the Kabalarians are compared to in part three. The theoretical framework outlined in part two specifically avoids drawing on the Kabalarian Philosophy, and draws on examples from other NRMs to present a broader scope for understanding the complexities found within the Kabalarian Philosophy. By avoiding extensive Kabalarian examples in part two, the final analysis of the Kabalarian Philosophy in part three shows the movement as a relatively closed system that has nuanced dynamics that are not easily broken into separate categories. Although each chapter in part two has a specific focus, part three looks at how each element contributes to the functioning of the Kabalarian Philosophy and Shearing’s exploitative behavior.
Broken down, part two deals with the difficulties of defining what a New Religious Movement is and the stereotypical and often negative assumptions often associated with the term; chapter four explores the characteristics and features of sexual violence within some NRMs, while chapter five provides a coherent model of charismatic leaders. Finally, chapter six explores the power differentials between leaders and followers in closed communities. Taken together, these four chapters present us with the tools needed to analyze the Kabalarian Philosophy and more importantly, the group’s charismatic and abusive leader.

By focusing on Shearing’s abusive behavior, this research deals with contentious and hotly debated issues. The importance of the 1997 court transcripts, therefore, cannot be overstated and the specifics outlining Shearing’s sexual abuse are well documented therein. While the transcripts provide detailed evidence revealing Shearing’s systematic manipulation of Kabalarian doctrines to achieve his goal of sexual gratification, the transcripts also show the authoritarian control he had over his devotees’ lives. The victims’ testimony regarding Shearing’s sexual exploitation describe the powerful factors that influenced the devotees’ willingness to submit to Shearing’s sexual rituals, and portray Shearing as a man unconcerned by the negative effect he had on his members’ welfare. Despite the defense’s suggestion that Shearing’s goal was always to enhance members’ spiritual development and awareness, the jury found this argument to be less than believable and convicted him on twelve out of twenty charges.⁷

⁷ According to the jury’s decision, Shearing was convicted on twelve of the twenty charges brought against him (Foreman, R v. Shearing, 1997:2491-2492). Out of these charges, “four were stayed and a retrial was ordered on four other counts following appeals” (Government of Canada National Parole Board, 2003:3). The Crown declined prosecuting the four stayed charges again, ultimately deciding that even if they were to gain convictions on those counts as well, it would not greatly affect Shearing’s length of imprisonment.
Interestingly, the transcripts do not record Shearing’s voice with respect to the allegations he faced because he did not testify at his trial. One can only speculate about his reason not to testify in his own defense since he did not comment to the public during his trial, his appeal, or his sentence. Presumably, Shearing’s silence strengthened his claim of innocence (which he maintained while serving his five-year prison term), since one could infer that his lack of active participation in his own defense was a demonstration of his conviction that he was innocent of the charges. In all probability though, one could speculate that Shearing’s counsel told him not to testify so that the prosecution would not have the opportunity to question Shearing on his extra-marital relationships with members (amongst other questionable sexual beliefs and practices) to which he later admitted. In a report given at his parole hearing, Shearing “admitted to being sexually unfaithful to [his] wife ... [but] that she understood that [he] would use [his] sexual behaviour to help needy women” (NPB, 2003:3).  

Although never conceding that his rituals constituted sexual abuse, Shearing’s admission during his parole hearing that he had several extra-marital relationships provides us with a retrospective glimmer of enlightenment into his fall from leader of the Kabalarian Philosophy. Fundamentally, though Shearing did not testify in open court to his infidelities, many female members of the Kabalarian Philosophy discovered his indiscretions. Upon discovering that Shearing did engage in numerous sexual relationships with members, the female devotees were prompted to confront him about the sexual relationships that he

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8 The National Parole Board of Canada’s report is discussed in greater detail later in the introduction.

9 Of significance, Shearing’s wife also remained silent for the duration of the trial. She was not called upon by either the prosecution or the defense, nor were there any charges laid against her. A corollary is that the other woman who played a significant role within the Kabalarian Philosophy, the medium or channel that Shearing used in many of his sexual rituals, was also not called upon to testify on either Shearing’s behalf or for the prosecution. The absence of these two women’s testimony and the lack of charges being brought against them is a matter that is interesting, but is, ultimately, an unknown in this case.
had with them and the underlying purpose of the sexual rituals he engaged in supposedly at their behest. Shearing’s inability to maintain secrecy about the relationships he was having with several Kabalarian women caused dissention within the group and a breakdown of authority. Without the women’s disenchantment with Shearing, those outside the movement would likely never have known his abusive actions. The court transcripts provide insight into the breakdown of the Kabalarian women’s trust and belief in Shearing, as well as the women’s reluctance to accept Shearing’s manipulation of them.

Further documentation supporting Shearing’s manipulative tendencies that were alluded to earlier emerges by way of the National Parole Board of Canada’s report denying Shearing parole. In this report, the Board concluded that Shearing “abused [his] authority over teenage girls as the spiritual teacher of ... [the Kabalarian Philosophy], convincing them to consent to sexual acts to further their spiritual growth and to solve problems” (NPB, 2003:3). In addition to the Board’s findings that he victimized his own followers, they clearly indicate that Shearing was “in a position of trust and ... [his] victims were young and vulnerable ... . [As a result of his actions, Shearing caused] serious emotional anguish and psychological harm ... [to his victims]” (NPB, 2003:3). From the documentation relied on in this study, the significance and severity of Shearing’s actions require careful analysis and critical thought.

With a sense of humility, therefore, I explore the inner workings of the Kabalarian Philosophy (and by extension Ivon Shearing), hoping to shed light on a movement that has remained in relative obscurity throughout its seven decade long history and the conviction of its leader. Perhaps the most intriguing aspects of the Kabalarian Philosophy is that Canadian society has reacted to the movement with little more than a passing interest in the movement, scandalized by the leader’s behavior one day, and then forgetting entirely about the movement the next. For this researcher, however, the leader’s criminal actions and reputedly spiritual justifications underscore the need to explore the factors that contributed to this abusive environment. While to some the Kabalarian
Philosophy constitutes only a cursory example of another dangerous “cult,” the movement tragically represents an opportunity to gain significant insight into the complex dynamics that drive some charismatic leaders to abuse the power given to them by their followers.
Part One: The Kabalarian Philosophy
Chapter One: An Historical Overview

Ivon Shearing, who was convicted on twelve counts of criminal sexual behavior, was the leader of the Vancouver, British Columbia, movement called the Kabalarian Philosophy. He continues to act as a spiritual guide to his devoted followers, although officially he tendered his resignation in 1995. Although several members have left the movement, as a result of conflicting beliefs about the purpose and actions of their leader, Shearing and the rest of his devotees maintain that his actions were not criminal, but in fact part of the Kabalarian process of spiritual healing. The movement’s historical development and evolution plays a significant role in unraveling how many members can still believe in a leader who has been convicted of violent crimes against members of his own movement. This chapter, therefore, provides an historical context for understanding some members’ reactions to contemporary legal events and revelations.

The movement began in 1936 with only a few devoted followers, but in 1999 was 1500 members strong in Canada (MacGregor, 1999), with an unspecified number of members internationally. Led by a charismatic man named Alfred Parker until his death in 1964, the movement proselytized the message that there was a set of laws in the universe that governed all things that were beyond God’s explicit control. As a child, Parker believed in the axiom, “God is Love,” but as he grew older he began to think that there must be something else governing life. Over time, he developed certain theories about the universe that he thought other religions lacked. Parker:

\[\text{conclud[ed]}\] that the answer to the problem lay in nature, which is the handiwork and the reflection of God, [and as a result,] he began to delve therein. This search led him to [make the claim that he had studied] all the leading spiritual philosophies of the east and west, finally arriving at the point where he could clearly discern that there should be no division between the concept of the east
and west. In unity [of philosophy] there is harmony. ... All laws of nature are irrevocable. There is no favouritism for anyone. These laws penetrate into the smallest details of our lives. Therefore, no matter what may be the nature of the problem, it can be solved by the application of the laws contained within the Kabalarian Philosophy. (Kabalarian Philosophy, “History,” 1999)

The belief in these founding principles presumably led Parker to create his own organization that sought to teach these 'laws of nature' primarily through classes and lectures, since he believed that no other organization understood the universal principles as clearly as he did.

Parker wrote extensively about the core principles of the group and why he founded the Kabalarian Philosophy, but there is little available information dealing with the history of the group. Consequently, I rely heavily on a single source — a romanticized narrative of the Kabalarians’ history and foundation written by Parker’s daughter, Carollyne Tylor. Among the other material available to the public is the historical information that interested parties can read on the movement’s official web page. The official site does not provide comprehensive documentation on the movement’s evolution and growth (a process that has been ongoing for over half a century), but it does provide some basic information on the main reason Parker established the group. Therefore, anyone interested in learning more about the Kabalarians is limited to material that the group provides.

Only two written works are accessible to members of the public who seek out the historical aspects of the group via the Internet. The first, a cursory and brief document entitled, “History of the Kabalarian Philosophy,” focuses on the breadth and universality of the doctrines that Parker spent his lifetime learning about and, later, teaching. The second, a single printed hardcover book that one can order online, is comprised of articles from the Kabalarian Courier January to

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10 This book receives much greater analysis later in this chapter.
December 1949, an internally circulated newspaper espousing the group’s views. The description of this book on one of the movement’s websites is as follows: “Visit the foundation years of the Kabalarian Philosophy through this historical collection of newsletters. Peruse numerous philosophical articles written by Alfred J. Parker and Kabalarian students” (Kabalarian Philosophy, “Printed Books and Publications,” 2001). Contradictorily, on the official Kabalarian web page, there is an explicit suggestion in the advertising that the compilation explores “the foundation years” (italics added) of the group, but at the same time gives a timeframe of a single year (1949) of the movement’s history. Even more confusedly, the Kabalarian Courier January to December 1949 is not even a chronological narrative of the Kabalarian Philosophy, as one would expect, but is, rather, the compilation of assorted philosophical musings by Parker and other members. Clearly, no one in the Kabalarian Philosophy believes it is necessary to record anything more than a brief outline of the history of the movement for public scrutiny, and seemingly, the history of the group is of lesser importance than its doctrinal positions.

In theory, however, there is one exception to this lack of publicly available information on the history of the Kabalarian Philosophy. Carollyne Tylor, Alfred Parker’s daughter, wrote a biography of her father and the long process involved with the development of the Kabalarian Philosophy. This biography circulates among members, and supposedly is available to the public. It is difficult, however, to locate a copy and it is not available on the group’s website. If one looks closely at Tylor’s book, however, the proper term for this type of biography is hagiography, or a biography that tends to idealize and worship the subject. This type of biography deals with “[f]ewer scholarly questions … about the logical certainty of the claims of these texts, and more emphasis is put on the impact that the text has within networks of personal relationships” (Hutch, 1997:3). A devotional biography has a different purpose than does any other type of biography, for it provides the reader with a model of behavior by “present[ing] subjects as individuals who have realized, perhaps in a distinctive
way, an image, ideal, or attainment already recognized as worthy by some religious community” (Hutch, 1997:12). In this instance, the community is Kabalarian Philosophy. Although there is an air of domestic biography\textsuperscript{11} that also underlies Tylor’s work, her purpose seems to be to communicate her father’s humanity, wisdom, and knowledge to future generations of Kabalarians. While Tylor does present some of her father’s less than perfect behavior, it seems more probable that her wish was to share only her idealized vision of her father.

Furthermore, this idealized vision manifests itself in the biography/hagiography when Tylor portrays her father as a “compelling religious role-model” (Hutch, 1997:111), or the equivalent of a saint. When we read \textit{Against the Tides}, it becomes clear that Tylor’s foremost concern was to create an image of the man who is at the center of her spiritual salvation — essentially, she wishes to depict Parker as the center of her reverence. As such, her writings “narrat[e] [the] ‘holy li[fe]’ [of her father] as venerable aspects of explicit (‘institutional’) religion, or leader-like or heroic role-models that are evident in the world’s religious traditions as such (for example, Muhammad, Buddha, [and] Christ)” (Hutch, 1997:111).

There is little doubt that Tylor saw her father as an exemplary man and heroic leader, who overcame many obstacles and much opposition to achieve his goal of establishing the Kabalarian Philosophy. As a result of her careful narration, the reader can develop feelings of empathy towards Parker, and see him as a man who pursued his destiny in the face of antagonism to bring his message of harmony and knowledge to the people. Viewing Parker in such a light cultivates a connection between the reader and Parker, where the reader experiences the trials that Parker underwent to become the saintly figure that his followers now perceive him to be. Hutch further develops this argument that members see Parker as a saintly figure when he suggests, based on arguments

\textsuperscript{11} A domestic biography is “the writing of Lives [sic] and memoirs by authors whose connection with the subject is first and foremost a family one. … [I]t is [most often] the family relationship, and sometimes only that, which qualifies [the author] for the job” (Tolley, 1997:1).
presented by James Dittes, that there are four main “lifestyle features that arise and shape the saintly character” (Hutch, 1997:117):

(i) “Asceticism,” which is an idiom of “sacrifice” and a measure of “loyalty to the higher power” ... (ii) “Strength of Soul,” or a sense of “enlargement of life,” one so uplifting that the power of self-interest is denied and “new reaches of patience and fortitude open out”; ... (iii) “Purity,” or an enhancement of sensitivity to “spiritual discords” and an imperative to cleanse from existence “brutal and sensual elements”; ... and (iv) “Charity,” or “tenderness for fellow-creatures,” which inhibits “ordinary motives to antipathy” and makes the saint love his enemies and treat “loathsome beggars as his brothers.” ... (Hutch, 1997:117-118)\[12\]

Tylor adeptly used each of these features as she attempted to cultivate and create the saintly (or at least religiously heroic and worthy) figure of her father. Moreover, all of these characteristics appear in Against the Tides, to varying degrees, with little deference to the supposed truth of the claims. Tylor’s biography reconstructs her father’s life history and events without any substantive evidence that the stories recollected are even true.

Peter Berger’s arguments regarding the process of creating a group saint also sheds light on Against the Tides. Positing that “[a]ll socially constructed worlds are inherently precarious ... [and as such] are constantly threatened by the human facts of self-interest and stupidity” (Berger, 1967:29), one can certainly see the need for Tylor to insulate her narration from outside criticism and disbelief. By establishing the unique history of her father through the required filter of group membership, Tylor’s hagiography essentially socialized her readers to the important truths of the movement — namely that Parker’s leadership derives from his special insights and understanding. This socialization,

\[12\] All material in quotation marks in this passage is from James Dittes’ article, “Beyond William James.”
in turn, leads to social control and the legitimating that “serve[s] ... to justify the social order ... [and answer] any questions about the ‘why’ of [the] institutional arrangement” (Berger, 1967:29). Clearly, Tylor’s efforts to present a legitimating rationale for Parker’s exclusive leadership surfaces throughout *Against the Tides*, although members of the Kabalarian Philosophy were likely not even aware of the process. The most probable explanation for this willingness to believe in both Parker and his leadership abilities is that the idealized image of the man is an image that many members strive to emulate. The history of the organization is “true” to a large degree because the movement presents it as such.

One can build further upon Berger’s notion of legitimation by applying the theories he developed to Tylor’s narrative. Arguably, when we view Tylor’s book using Berger’s theories, it is possible to surmise that, in effect, *Against the Tides* is one tool that helps members of the organization “relate ... the precarious reality constructions of empirical societies with ultimate reality” (Berger, 1967:32). Additionally (and with perhaps an air of cynicism) when we look at *Against the Tides* with Berger’s theories in mind, we can convincingly argue a likely scenario to describe the true purpose behind the creation of a hagiography — namely, to ensure the origin of the group is “so interpreted as to hide, as much as possible, its *constructed* character ... [thereby having] people forget that [any philosophical movement, including the Kabalarian Philosophy, for instance] was established by men and continues to be dependent upon the consent of men” (Berger, 1967:33).

Throughout Tylor’s book, there is an underlying message that Parker was somehow filled with qualities that others do not possess and, as such, he has a connection with something greater than humanity itself. Berger addresses this point when he states that “[r]eligion legitimates [constructed] social institutions [and patterns of thought] by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by *locating* them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference” (Berger, 1967:33). As Tylor presents Parker and the Kabalarian Philosophy, the
man and the movement seem destined to have come along just as they did, almost as a manifestation of the will of some larger power.

One of the cornerstones of the Kabalarian Philosophy is that Parker allegedly possessed a key that would unlock the mysteries of both Eastern and Western philosophies. Based on this premise, it seems unsurprising that a biography written by the daughter of the movement’s founder would convey this message through a carefully crafted piece designed to support the subsequent social order and belief system. The legitimating effect of Against the Tides is considerable for devotees of the group, since it packages the formation of the group as a natural progression of divine revelation.

While writing the history of the group allows the daughter to control her father’s image, it also serves to establish guidelines and a set pattern of members’ behavior and beliefs. According to Berger, this process marries history and biography as a means to establish a connection between past actions and current or future traditions (Berger and Luckman, 1966:86). Once Tylor connects the dependence of the movement’s history on Parker’s revelation and current traditions, the institution described by her in Against the Tides stands as authoritative.

When we read Against the Tides, several problematic issues related to the nature and purpose of hagiographic literature emerge. One such problem is that it is not clear which sources Tylor herself relied on to write the biography. Nor is it clear how much she relied on her own memories or on the memories of former and current members. She does not mention any students by name — apparently so that she does not bring any unwanted attention to them — and numerous details and stories in the book call into question the accuracy of the historical information. In addition, Tylor’s motivation for writing the book is suspect in light of certain sexual allegations made against her father, and his successor, Ivon Shearing. Tylor writes:

The most important reason of all that I may have had [to write this book], is to show to his students the likelihood of reality in the
statement that he so often made to his classes, “Whatever I have
done, you can do and go much farther in the doing, for I have but
laid the foundation.” ... A man in the public eye is different from
most of us in one respect, for his errors are frequently blown out of
proportion and he is often severely and unfairly criticized. The fact
that [Parker] can err in one incident makes him fair game for those
who unscrupulously manufacture stories to discredit, to build their
own ego, or to exploit for financial gain. Every public figure is
subject to this. Our anonymity is our protection. (Tylor, 1983:5)

When we read Against the Tides in light of the problems the movement has
faced, Tylor’s biography — and certainly this passage, specifically — seems to be
an attempt to prepare Kabalarian members for future allegations of impropriety
against their leaders, almost an anticipation of controversies.

Another of the obvious problems with the supposedly factual aspects of
the biography is that the history portrayed in the book predates the author’s life
by decades, although she writes the book as an omniscient narrator. Against the
Tides recounts the events and drama of Parker’s life, including Tylor’s own birth,
using dialogue to which she could not possibly have had access, as well as
insights into the minds and motivations of the characters. Yet another aspect
that puts this source’s historical reliability into question is the lack of documented
sources. On several occasions she mentions, in passing, that she has spoken to
former friends, acquaintances, and students who had contact with Parker, but
she does not list the dates of her conversations, nor whether the stories she
recounts on behalf of these people are documented, or merely a collage of
memories. Essentially, she does not provide any information from which we can
critically analyze her claims. When we try to create an accurate history of the
Kabalarian Philosophy’s growth and development, this lack of precision is a major
problem. Hutch purports, however, that “when searches for the historical
individual ‘behind’ the biographical ideal fail to show clear results, [the reader
may] end up seeing the importance of the more devotional” character rather than focusing solely on the historical figure (Hutch, 1997:13).

While *Against the Tides* describes Parker’s life in great detail, and the history of the movement indirectly, the biography is not mentioned anywhere on the movement’s website, which suggests that searchers must already have some familiarity with the movement before they can gain access to the book. Although there are no outside sources which can confirm the details portrayed in it, *Against the Tides* does offer some insight, however romanticized, into the foundation and evolution of the Kabalarian Philosophy, although we should question why Parker’s life history was written down, mythologized, and then likely remythologized to fit the needs of his daughter and the Kabalarian Philosophy.¹³ I have relied heavily on this book, in combination with personal interviews, to create an historical overview of the movement that grounds the reader in the Kabalarians’ ideology and structure.

To understand the Kabalarian Philosophy one must first become familiar with the founder himself and what members believe drove him to create the movement. According to his biography, Parker’s primary goal in creating the Kabalarian Philosophy was to analyze the world beyond what he believed were the set of universal laws that govern all things. To this end, he boldly claimed that the purpose of his studies (and essentially his mission in life) was to find and share with the rest of humanity the “key which would unlock the secrets of the mind and unite spiritual concept with scientific principle, that humanity might measure and understand the essence and working of the divine mind through its

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¹³ Joe Law and Linda K. Hughes explore the likelihood that when the biographer writes about his or her subject, he or she is also filling a need and is remythologizing the subject’s life to this end. One possible reason for this remythologizing is that the subject of the biography is a model of spiritual behavior and insight, and holds up a mirror to all others. By showcasing the subject as an individual worthy of emulation, perhaps the biographer can provide guidance to others, showing the reader the ideal way to live. To read further on the biographer’s potential temptation to ‘play God’ when writing a biography, see Law and Hughes (2000).
individual channels” (Kabalarian Philosophy, “History,” 1999). Since Parker supposedly succeeded in this mission, the Kabalarian Philosophy can solve any problem, “by the application of the laws contained within the [movement]” (Kabalarian Philosophy, “History,” 1999). The movement’s founder, therefore, established the Kabalarian Philosophy as an unparalleled organization which is unlike all other philosophies and religions.

After reading *Against the Tides* we are left with the impression that Alfred J. Parker was a man “who wondered about things and asked compelling questions” (Tylor, 1983:4) but who was also humble and accessible, rather than a man who was revered and unavailable to the members. Parker’s daughter portrayed him as having a keen sense of curiosity and desire for answers, which she claimed continued throughout his life, as evidenced by the numerous articles and books he published over the decades. His curiosity also lent itself well to his ongoing analysis of the world around him and its relationship with logic, and what would eventually become known as the Mathematical Principle.

While curiosity fuelled Parker’s quest for answers, it also seems that Parker wanted to find a way to control his emotions, which were, at times, both blinding and paralyzing. Tylor described at least three incidents of great emotional significance in Parker’s life that left a deep impression on him, and which also inspired a need to understand and overcome such intense feelings. One story recounted Parker’s discovery of his fear of heights, when, as a boy, he almost fell off a bluff into the water below. Although he clung to couch grass and twigs on the edge of the bluff until his friends managed to help him up, the fear that he experienced caused nightmares, and he continued to experience the memory of this event for years (Tylor, 1983:52-53).

An additional story that illustrates Parker’s temper, and lays the basis for the principles that supposedly would be foundational to his movement’s purpose, dealt with Parker’s proclivity towards fighting when provoked. Parker had:

[an] intense temper ... [that] involved him in a fight with another young man. ... [Parker] literally “saw red” and had to be pulled off
his opponent. A spectator to the incident took Alfred aside and said to him, “Look here, young fellow, you’d better learn to get a hold on that temper of yours or someday you will kill someone!” It shocked [Parker] so to hear this that he made a vow to himself, there and then, that his temper would never again get the best of him. And with a great deal of self-control, he never let it. (Tylor, 1983:18)

Throughout his childhood and adult life, Parker constantly strove to restrain his temper and emotions. Although the above quote suggests that Parker was successful in his restraint, a third story seems to disprove this conclusion.

The third story recounts “[o]ne of the many lessons Alfred learned in his youth ... [regarding] the detrimental effect of violent rage upon mind and body” (Tylor, 1983:102). As a 19-year-old man, Parker thought he had fallen in love with a girl, who, at a dance they had gone to together, publicly humiliated him by dancing and “giving her absorbed and undivided attention” to someone else (Tylor, 1983:102). Parker was so angered by seeing this public display, he allegedly experienced a “blinding rage” (Tylor, 1983:104) that was so intense that he temporarily lost his vision. Soon after this episode, while lying in bed, Parker decided it was necessary to get his temper under control (Tylor, 1983:104).14

These three stories serve to illustrate one of the driving forces behind the eventual foundation of Parker’s Kabalarian Philosophy — intense and uncontrollable emotion that Parker believed needed to be understood and controlled through the natural laws of the universe so that humanity was not at the mercy of emotion. Interestingly, Parker continued to be so affected by

14 Incidentally, this episode also prompted him to stop smoking, a precursor to one of the required habits laid out in Attitudes and Habits, where Parker states that “the smoking habit ... destroys one’s concentration; it poisons the breath before it has time to oxygenate the blood; it poisons the bloodstream and becomes a habit that one cannot break” (Parker, Attitudes, 1960:26).
intense emotional outbursts, even after he vowed to control them, that he tried repeatedly to discover the best way to gain systematic control over emotions. As a result of his experiences, Parker chose to concentrate on creating a way of living life that was predictable, and under one’s own control. Parker believed that members of his movement should be able to focus on two things in their lives as a result of their involvement with the Kabalarian Philosophy. First, they should be able to understand the logic and nature of the universe, and second, they should be able to learn to control all aspects of their lives, from personal habits to the growth and evolution of their own minds. To understand, therefore, the history and purpose of the Kabalarian Philosophy, is to look at Parker’s life and the various other influences that shaped the movement, both directly and indirectly.

**History of the Movement**

Born in 1897 in Great Britain, Alfred James Parker was the only surviving triplet of Minnie (Mary Anne) and Ernest Parker.\(^{15}\) Ernest Parker, the patriarch of the family, moved his family from Great Britain to Canada in 1910. After they arrived in Winnipeg, the Parkers moved several more times in search of a better job, a greater business opportunity, or simply because Ernest wished to change the family’s surroundings. In addition to Winnipeg, the Parkers also lived in Cranbrook, Medicine Hat, Vancouver, and Tacoma, Washington. The move to Tacoma was to start a Simonizing business, which, in the end, proved not to be the family’s calling.\(^{16}\)

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\(^{15}\) Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information on Alfred J. Parker is from his daughter’s book, *Against the Tides*. It is worth noting again here that there are no other substantial accounts of his life that provide any other details or differing perspectives.

\(^{16}\) Simonizing businesses deal with car detailing, including washing, waxing, buffing, and cleaning both the vehicle’s interior and exterior. Interestingly, Tylor recounts a story dealing with that business which gives a glimmer of insight into Parker’s morality and character. According to
When the Parker family first moved to Tacoma, Alfred was in poor health. He had a severe lung condition and asthma that was aggravated by “his continual [use of] cigarettes and coffee, poor diet, and lack of proper care and rest” (Tylor, 1983:135). Although his mother managed to help him restore some of his health by feeding him well and providing him time to rest, Parker remained in relatively poor condition. In addition, Parker continued to search for spiritual answers that he felt he lacked. This quest for spiritual answers and guidance was partly a result of his upbringing and partly the result of his insatiable curiosity.

Though he was raised in an Anglican family, religion played only a minor role in Parker’s family life. It could be argued that Ernest and Minnie Parker believed that music and singing in church choirs seemed of greater importance than any specific religious ideology. This belief manifested itself in how Minnie Parker raised her children — without any strong convictions one way or the other regarding religion. She conveyed her own attitude toward spirituality to her children, and it was clear that she “was not actually a religious woman; she didn’t think deeply about her faith. The family had always been Church of England, and so be it” (Tylor, 1983:109). By contrast, Parker often “attended various churches or lectures on unusual philosophies and questioned the ministers or speakers on their theories, challenging them for logical answers that they could not always give” (Tylor, 1983:117). Unlike his mother, Parker was deeply interested in religion and philosophy as a means to understand his world. As a result of years of searching, he came to believe that disharmony and suffering were the result of ignorance and disobedience to the laws of nature, which philosophies and religions were supposed to address. To this end, Parker began a search that:

led him to a study of all the leading spiritual philosophies of the East and West, finally arriving at the point where he could clearly

_Tylor, Alfred found out that several of the clients of the Parker business were “big wheels in the underworld, rum runners, [and] gangsters, [yet Alfred is said to have stated that] ‘their money is as good as anyone else’s’” (Tylor, 1983:134)._
discern that there should be no division between the concepts of the East and of the West. The very lack of unity between eastern and western thought created discord, for in unity there is harmony. ... The concept of the East, wherein it is one’s duty to unite one’s mind with one’s inner consciousness and thus attain mastership, becoming the mouthpiece of wisdom, and the concept of the West, by which one seeks through scientific channels the reason of being through a fundamental and basic principle, are relative. When blended, united, and thus balanced through understanding, they would provide the world with a perfect religion, a philosophy of life in its entirety. (Kabalarian Philosophy, “History,” 1999)

In Tacoma, Alfred met one of the most influential individuals in his life, a man named Wasson. This man significantly changed Parker’s outlook on personal habits and practices, and Parker’s desire to learn and understand universal principles of both Eastern and Western philosophies was heightened by Wasson, and later, by Swami Mohan Dutta in Aberdeen, Washington.

According to Tylor, Wasson was quite an awe-inspiring individual who taught “Yoga Philosophy” (Tylor, 1983:135). Parker immediately took to Wasson’s yogic exercises, and when Parker began to apply them daily, some color supposedly returned to his face. Moreover, “[Parker] successfully licked the cigarette addiction, and his body began to respond to the exercising and breathing” (Tylor, 1983:135-136). The breathing techniques that Parker learned from Wasson would permeate all of Parker’s later teachings, and were a foundational element in the movement.18

17 Tylor does not mention Wasson’s full name in Against the Tides, nor is there any mention of it on their website.

18 Both the breathing techniques and other foundational principles of the Kabalarian Philosophy receive greater attention in a later section dealing with the beliefs and practices of the movement.
When Parker met Wasson, he immediately began to discuss Eastern philosophies and gain further insight into how they approach and deal with life’s struggles. Although interested in the perspectives Wasson discussed with him, Parker “knew it was not the complete answer” (Tylor, 1983:136). Parker felt that this experience was truly the point in his life where he thought that Eastern philosophy and Western scientific notions should unite. The Kabalarian Philosophy’s official website highlights Parker’s belief succinctly with this quote: “[Parker] concluded that Kipling had erred in his much-quoted poetical expression concerning East and West, and that he should have said: ‘For East is East and West is West, and ever the twain must meet’” (Kabalarian Philosophy, “History,” 1999; italics mine).

To further his spiritual explorations, Parker, along with his new friend Wasson, continued to make forays into the occult sciences, including local séances and hypnosis, which in the 1920s, were “wildly popular ... [and] the thing to do” (Tylor, 1983:136). According to Tylor, Parker had had some experience with and interest in the occult prior to the 1920s and his meeting with Wasson. As a teenager, Parker became interested in hypnosis and unorthodox spirituality when he began to search for the mysteries of life through his voracious readings. In Against the Tides, Tylor recounted several incidents where Parker used his alleged hypnotic skills, with varying results. She described a story involving Parker and his friends using hypnosis as part of the innocent party games that he and his friends played, developing the skills needed for such ultimate concentration in a playful manner. These innocent games, however, soon led to a situation that scared Parker, and changed his perception and understanding of the power of hypnosis.

At a particular party one evening, the topic of conversation soon began to revolve around the validity and credibility of hypnosis and those who practiced it. There were many skeptics at the party and opinions varied. As a way of bolstering his opinion, one of Parker’s friends said that Parker himself could hypnotize people so it must therefore, be true. To that end, Parker’s friend
convinced the budding hypnotist to perform a small demonstration for the guests. Always willing to face a challenge, Parker agreed and proceeded to hypnotize a girl. While allegedly under hypnosis, she performed many activities on Parker’s command, until the time that he tried to bring her out of this suggestible state of mind: “Confidently he snapped his fingers to awaken her, but a cold feeling of fear, dread, and near panic hit him when on opening her eyes the young lady said with a trembling voice, ‘Alf, Alf, I can’t see anything! What’s happening? I’m blind, Alf! Am I awake yet? Is this part of the hypnosis?’” (Tylor, 1983:110). Parker quickly responded that he had to put her back in a trance to make everything all right but feelings of terror ran though him. Although Parker supposedly succeeded in restoring the lady’s sight after putting her in the second trance, he believed that he had been lucky. For him, “[a] little knowledge [was] a dangerous thing” (Tylor, 1983:110).

Based on the less than positive experience Parker had had with the girl at that party, one might think that Parker would have avoided what he, himself, thought was a dangerous practice. Such avoidance, however, was not to be the case. According to Tylor, only a short time after this harrowing event Parker “used his hypnotic talent again” (Tylor, 1983:111). This time, rather than being a party trick, Parker supposedly used his talent as a means to calm a violent and mentally disturbed person (Tylor, 1983:111-112). Parker’s “perseverance and hypnotic gaze had their effect” (Tylor, 1983:111) of making the boy more “lucid and compliant” (Tylor, 1983:112). Although a taxing event, this experience provided Parker with another element that he incorporated into the foundational principles of the Kabalarian Philosophy. From this event, Parker understood the power and “value of eye contact and a positive thought” (Tylor, 1983:112).

Parker’s interest in hypnosis waned slightly over the next few years, for he became wary of the practice due to his mixed experiences. While his interest

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19 Although Tylor described the incident in some detail, there is no clear description of the activities the girl performed under Parker’s instructions.
seemed to decline in one area of the occult, another blossomed. Extrasensory perception, or E.S.P., became Parker’s new area of interest. He had experiences with E.S.P. that had a deep impact on his own notions of the mind, and subsequently, of nature and of life. Against the Tides contains an example of Parker’s presumed experience that showcases his testing of the limits and boundaries of the mind in an attempt to find logical (and, presumably convincing) answers to questions that he believed no single religion, philosophy, or understanding of life provided. In addition, all of Parker’s forays into different spiritual avenues illustrate a willingness to learn from both orthodox and unorthodox sources. As the founder of a new religion, the steps that Parker took to fill the role that dominated his life present an interesting perspective on the qualities of leadership that a successful spiritual movement requires, as well as the methods of disseminating to others what he learned through his life’s experiences.

Equipped with what they thought was a basic knowledge of occult sciences and thought, Parker and Wasson began to frequent local meetings that demonstrated some of the more secretive and powerful aspects of the occult tradition. They quickly realized that both the charlatans and those who were supposedly genuine in their abilities charged money for a direct experience of the hidden and powerful forces of the occult world, and Parker and Wasson thought it dangerous to deal with “forces over which one has no control or understanding” (Tylor, 1983:136). From their experiences, the men felt that both the charlatans and the gifted did not have proper respect for the occult, nor did

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20 While the use of the word ‘occult’ here is broad and meant to include a variety of hidden traditions and perspectives usually considered outside mainstream religious thought, the word is best defined as: “[a set of] practices and beliefs relating to ‘hidden’ spiritual truths or esoteric insights essential to fully understand the inner workings of the universe on the divine and mental, as well as physical, planes. These truths and insights might be deemed occult because they have been deliberately concealed ... or because, by their nature, they are unknowable apart from special preparation and initiation” (Smith, 1995:806).
they know the power they could potentially harness. Again, given his history, it seems as though Parker either did not learn from his past experiences or thought he had an almost supernatural ability to transcend the boundaries that apparently limited everyone else. While it seems unlikely that Parker did not learn from his own spiritual experiments, since he incorporated what he learned about the occult in his later writings, the most likely supposition is that Parker did believe that he possessed a greater knowledge and control over his mind than did other individuals. This extreme self-confidence and belief in his own superiority is an important element in the establishment of his movement.

To further illustrate Parker’s belief in his supremacy over others in his understanding of the occult sciences, at the next séance, Parker and Wasson decided that they would apply “Eastern breathing [techniques] ... to strengthen and control one’s thinking. [As a result,] ... they concentrated on blocking the [medium’s] expression. Suddenly [the medium] was unable to express [the disembodied mind] and the voice faded gradually away to nothing” (Tylor, 1983:137). Their ability to block, and essentially control, other individual’s abilities to experience the occult suggests Parker’s belief that his own capacities superseded all others’ claims. After this experience, the two men chose to demonstrate their own abilities by attempting to expose fraudulent mediums as often as they could,21 essentially pitting their knowledge and proficiency in esoteric traditions against all others.

Parker’s involvement with different aspects of the occult continued when, with the help of his sister-in-law, Edith, he confronted an alleged poltergeist that had played tricks on him (Tylor, 1983:140). Edith, who reportedly possessed psychic abilities of her own, encountered spiritual entities. She, however, did not have the same ability to control her mind as her brother-in-law did, and as a

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21 Tylor goes on to recount several episodes where her father, together with Wasson, managed to interfere with the money-making schemes of some fraudulent mediums. While the stories showed Parker disproving the abilities of some mediums, she continued to write this biography without ever questioning her own father’s abilities.
result, Edith was often distressed by these encounters. In addition, Tylor recounts that Edith was often not in control of her body, and acted as an unwilling medium on several occasions. From her perspective, then, Edith benefited greatly from Alfred’s ability to help guide her through her experiences, including using hypnosis to resolve problems (Tylor, 1983:156-157).

Among Parker’s other interests was palmistry, which Tylor calls a “pseudoscience” (Tylor, 1983:154). If we take the literal definition of this term, then there is a distinctly negative connotation attached to it, implying that there is something fallacious or deceptive about it. The stories that Tylor recounts, however, show that Parker thought it “fascinating ... that one’s life and destiny seemed to be etched out in the lines and creases of one’s hand” (Tylor, 1983:154). Parker embraced palmistry and thought that there was some validity to it, although as with his other spiritual pursuits, he was never fully convinced that it was totally reliable (Tylor, 1983:155).

The pattern of Parker’s quest for spiritual answers becomes more clearly defined when we look at what interested him. All the religions, philosophies, and ideas he sought out dealt with some aspect of powers beyond the mind that perhaps could be controlled by it. Parker focused especially on Wasson’s understanding and interpretation of the yogic aspects of the Indian philosophy that dealt with breathing and the power generated when one’s mind supposedly controls the most basic aspect of living — breath. With all of his spiritual experiences, Parker built up his belief in the power of the mind and reinforced his belief that there could be tragic results for a human being who did not fully comprehend the spiritual realm. According to the stories that Tylor conveys, her father believed not only in forces that were not always accepted by mainstream religious institutions, but also in the power of believing in something spiritual. Even in the face of challenging mainstream religious beliefs and when he did not always gain support from those around him, Parker seemingly persevered to broaden his own thoughts on the matter of religious understanding. It is not
surprising, therefore, that in 1925, when Parker met Swami Rai Mohan Dutta, his interest in further understanding the power of the mind peaked.

Meeting Swami Dutta, as Tylor describes it, carried great importance for Parker. Tylor claimed that the meeting was instrumental in the development of Alfred’s religious perspectives:

How many of us in our moments of imagination have devised various ways and means that the door to our dreams might open some day? ... I am sure that my father had a few dreams of his own in those early years ... [and he] too must have looked for a door to open. But the door did indeed open for him ... [when] a man was to enter his life who would guide his footsteps toward the path for which he had spent his whole life, until that time, searching. (Tylor, 1983:163)

Furthermore, the meeting seemed an almost fateful event because Parker did not know how the Swami had found his name or discovered his interest in learning about philosophies. Nevertheless, their encounter provided Parker with a great deal of knowledge and insight.

Swami Rai Mohan Dutta is a man who remains somewhat of a mystery. Tylor states that he was “a man who commanded and received respect, [and] was considered to be a holy man in his own country” (Tylor, 1983:164). Because the Swami was familiar with yoga and Indian philosophies, it was presumed that he was from India. The Kabalarian Philosophy’s official website declares that “Swami Rai Mohan Dutta, a very highly educated man, [was] fluent in seven languages, [and] ... had attained spiritual mastership. Despite the Swami’s humility and unassuming nature, he was widely known in many countries (Kabalarian Philosophy, “History,” 1999). It is noteworthy, though, that beyond the reference made in Tylor’s Against the Tides, and the brief statement on the website, no substantial historical data exists on the man. Another researcher supports this conclusion, claiming that she “was unable to find biographical data ... either within or without the [Kabalarian Philosophy]” (A. Lewis, 1994:9). It is
curious that there is a complete lack of detailed information about a man who figured so prominently in Parker’s life. Considering the influence Dutta had on Parker’s philosophical and spiritual development, it is regrettable that there is little information on his contributions to the Kabalarian Philosophy.

Despite the absence of documentation, the role that the Swami played in Parker’s spiritual development is undeniable. The official website credits the Swami’s influence as the main factor in “Mr. Parker himself [having] gained perfect health and [Parker’s] mother [having been] cured of her heart condition” (Kabalarian Philosophy, “History,” 1999). This remarkable healing and continued good health was the result of learning about yogic breathing, gaining absolute control over the body, understanding yoga philosophy, and achieving complete mastery of emotions and subsequent reactions (Tylor, 1983:164-165). Parker supposedly spent countless hours learning from the Swami, asking questions, acting as his secretary, and following him around the area as the Swami lectured and shared his experiences with others who were interested. As Parker’s knowledge expanded, the Swami made a suggestion that would forever change the way Parker thought. The Swami said: “... it is surely your duty to find the link and merge [the East and the West]. I can only tell you this, that you will find that key in mathematics, but I don’t know how or where to direct you” (Tylor, 1983:165). From this statement, Parker concluded that language and mind must be synonymous, as language is the expression of the mind, and a connection must exist between language and mathematics (Tylor, 1983:166).

This last principle grew out of a numerological question that a student asked the Swami during one of his lectures. Parker listened to the question and recalled what the Swami had said to him earlier about the use of mathematics to find the answer. Parker thought that numerology was a novelty and not a part of the more valid occult sciences about which he had spent an enormous amount of time learning, although the Swami had said the key was in mathematics.
Consequently, Parker believed that the connection had to be present in some esoteric way. To this end, Parker engaged in a thorough search to prove and disprove the true value of the alphabet and its influence or lack of influence in relation to man’s mind. He looked into various religions using this new basis of comparison and found that this was not a new discovery, but that name and the changing of name had been in the history of many faiths, and had a prominent place in Scripture that he had previously discarded as a meaningless part of the story. (Tylor, 1983:167)

As with all knowledge, a new perspective often brings new insight worthy of discovery. Equipped with the new focus on connecting the mind with numbers, Parker was able to revisit material he had examined only superficially along his spiritual path of discovery.

As a result of his newfound perspective and memorization of numerous documents supposedly illustrating connections between letters and language, Parker started what would become a cornerstone of the Kabalarian Philosophy — name analysis. Soon, Parker “was able to tell strangers about their personality characteristics, their thinking processes, of their inner feelings and sensitivities — things often never before shared with anyone” (Tylor, 1983:165). Furthermore,

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22 Numerology and its connection with the principles Parker discovered is a relatively contentious issue within the current Kabalarian Philosophy organization. On its official website, the authors make several claims regarding the movement’s connection with numerology and Parker’s understanding of it, but there is little detailed analysis of the connection.

23 It is unclear if Parker referred only to Christian scripture or if he broadly included all religious scripture that he examined.

24 The Kabalarian Philosophy believes that name analysis is a crucial element in the shaping of an individual’s personality, character, and physical and mental health. The organization purports that an individual’s name directly affects the individual’s welfare and relationship with nature, and, therefore, must be chosen carefully. Since name analysis is such a prominent aspect of the Kabalarian movement, a later section here focuses exclusively on the basic principles, as taught by Parker and his followers.
Parker began espousing the notion that mind, language, and name were referring to the same underlying force that connects all things: “Therefore, without the alphabet and its mathematical vibrations, there would be no name and no quality of mind could be created” (Tylor, 1983:165). Parker soon thought that it was truly his duty to share this knowledge with as many people as he could.

Throughout this period of rapid learning, Swami Dutta continued to act as a strong guiding force in Parker’s life. The two men remained together in a guru-student relationship. Neither men seemed to tire of the other’s company, and Swami Dutta constantly awed and amazed his pupil. One particular incident that Tylor recalled was when the family, accompanied by Swami Dutta, went on a camping trip. The two men came upon a boy who had just been pulled from the river. While the boy’s rescuers thought that it was too late to save him, the Swami urged them to follow his suggestions, even though the boy had been in the water for over an hour. The Swami said: “Allow me to use the Hindu method of resuscitation” (Tylor, 1983:168). His subsequent actions were a series of breaths and massages to chakra points within the body. Perhaps the most unusual of all the techniques the Swami applied, however, was when he “would blow three sharp breaths into each of the man’s ears and [would then] call his name loudly, … [at which time] after an unbelievably long session, the breath

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25 Despite my research into the exact elements comprising ‘the Hindu method of resuscitation,’ I found no clear description of this technique in Hindu scripture. In the Caraka-Samhita, the Hindu medical texts, there was a passage that presents the yogi with eight supernatural powers, including “[e]ntering [an]other’s body … and doing things at will” (Sharma and Dash, 1985:346), however there was no reference to resuscitating an individual once death had occurred. Furthermore, while the yogi trains to identify signs illustrating when death is imminent, by Parker’s own claim, the boy had not been breathing for over one hour, clearly suggesting death occurred. Because of this absence of supporting evidence, the reader must rely solely on the description of the event in Tylor’s book.
fluttered, returned, and the [boy] stirred and lived” (Tylor, 1983:168). Tylor further claimed that her father and the Swami had defied and proven wrong modern medical science’s position regarding drowning victims. The evidence for this supposition reputedly lay in the fact that although the boy had been deprived of oxygen for over an hour, when he regained life he suffered no ill effects from his experience. His resuscitation was the direct result of the techniques used by the Swami, and it appears that the results were in direct opposition to the outcome predicted by modern medicine. In general, modern medical theory holds that brain damage is a certainty in similar conditions.

26 There is only one similarity between the Swami’s actions and modern cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) techniques, which is the parallel between the body’s main chakra points and the areas of the body where rescuers apply pressure when performing CPR. To illustrate the parallel more precisely, we must first understand what chakras are believed to be in Hindu tradition, and how they are most commonly defined in Indic circles. Chakras are: “vortexes of energy in the subtle (non-physiological) body. In Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism, chakras lie along the spine on three entwined channels of vital energy. … There is a specific chakra associated with different parts of the body and they are located at] the base of the spine, muladhara, genitals, svadhishthana; navel, manipura; heart, anahata; throat, vishuddha; and between the eyebrows, ajna. The seventh or transcendent chakra above the head (sahasrara) is the terminus for the subtle energy, called kundalini, that ascends from the muladhara up through the various chakras” (Smith, 1995:192). As Tylor describes it, her father watched the Swami massage certain areas of the boy’s body as part of the process of resuscitation, and blew short breaths into his mouth to bring the boy back to life. Compare this with the modern and generally accepted lifesaving standards in the West, where CPR is performed as: “an emergency technique which combines artificial respiration (rescue breathing) with artificial circulation of the blood (chest compressions). The compressions carried out by the rescuer squeeze the heart between the breastbone and the vertebrae in the victim’s back. This action can artificially pump enough blood and oxygen to the body to sustain the vital organs” (Dean, 2001:29). The similarities are striking, especially when we compare the location that the swami and the CPR rescuer concentrate on: the heart area and the heart chakra (otherwise known as anahata). The major difference between the Swami and the CPR rescuer’s techniques is the Swami’s short breaths blown into the boy’s ears while calling his name. Otherwise, Tylor’s descriptions of the Swami’s actions seem to reflect modern CPR techniques.
thereby contradicting the results the Swami achieved. This experience no doubt contributed to Parker’s strong belief in the power of applying yogic philosophy and breathing techniques to all situations.\textsuperscript{27} Interestingly, this is the last story that Tylor recorded featuring Swami Dutta. Whether he played a role in Parker’s later life remains unknown.

As Parker’s knowledge and worldview began to coalesce into a more structured belief system, problems at home began interfering with his spiritual pursuits. Parker’s first wife, Pearl, did not share the same enthusiasm for discovery as did her husband, so often there was an undercurrent of tension in the household. When the tension became too much for the family to bear, Parker finally asked for custody of their eldest daughter and an end to the marriage, to which Pearl agreed (Tylor, 1983:172). Parker soon married a woman named Alice\textsuperscript{28} in Aberdeen, Washington, who was willing to give up her career to further Parker’s goals.

Perhaps one of the most unusual stories that Tylor recounts about her father’s life occurred right after Alfred and Alice were married. The story is unusual because it portrays Parker as the target of a negative spiritual force. Tylor recalls:

[in] a time for optimism and happiness, Dad turned to smile at his wife. There, for a fraction of a moment, he saw, with that inner psychic sense of his, a face superimposed over Alice’s own lovely features, of pure evil, laughing in scorn at him. It was a fleeting thing, but the impact was overwhelming, and he knew in his heart that something had manipulated him into making one of the greatest mistakes of his life. (Tylor, 1983:173)

\textsuperscript{27} The claims that Tylor made about this incident are highly suspect on medical grounds, however.

\textsuperscript{28} There is no mention of a last name, and although not Tylor’s birth mother, Tylor refers to her as “Mother” throughout \textit{Against the Tides}. 

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When viewed critically, several interesting aspects emerge from this story. First, Parker seems to lack any sense of personal responsibility in the situation. Although further along in the story Tylor says that Parker thought it was “[t]oo late [when he saw the evil in Alice’s face, and that] there was no turning back [now from the vows he had made.] He would [nevertheless] be the best of husbands humanly possible, but nothing was going to stand in the way of his ideals” (Tylor, 1983:173). If one accepts the story as Tylor narrates it, then it foreshadows and excuses the disintegration of Parker’s second marriage years later. Attributing an evil element to Alice’s motivation for marrying Parker then provides the reasoning behind the failed marriage — she tried to distract Parker from, or convince him to give up, his spiritual duty.

The second interesting aspect about the ‘evil face’ is the implication that something — a force, an entity, or a power beyond our imagination — did not want Parker to spread his knowledge about the order and nature of the universe. According to this perspective, Alice was the means by which Parker was to be stopped. This suggestion appears grandiose and difficult to accept. Although the founders of numerous world religions, such as Jesus of Nazareth and Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha), underwent opposition and attack by their societies (whereas Parker’s opposition was from his wife, in large part) as they spread their message,29 history has shown that Parker is not such a controversial and influential figure as those founders. Although he did establish the Kabalarian Philosophy, at the present time, this movement does not seem to be the beginning of a renowned world religion. Tylor’s motivation for including this story, however, could be to augment and amplify Parker’s stature within the movement.

29 This statement refers to the persecution these religious figures endured as they traveled the land proselytizing. Jesus was often the center of controversy and attack by both the Gentiles and the Jews, and Siddhartha encountered numerous groups of protesters who thought his message was against the mainstream religious beliefs at the time. Interestingly, though, Buddha’s wife eventually joined her husband’s spiritual quest.
As we return to the history of the Kabalarian Philosophy, we continue the recounting of Kabalarian events at a time when the movement’s organization began to take shape. In the 1930s, the Parker family finally settled in Vancouver, British Columbia, where Parker planned “to pioneer his philosophy, to organize classes, and teach it” (Tylor, 1983:173). To this end, Parker thought he would apply his teachings to his own family, in order to try to make the members of his family healthier, happier, and in harmony with the laws he promulgated. He “encourage[d] his mother to drop the name of Minnie and at least return to her original name of Mary Ann. … From that time forward her health improved and she had no more major illnesses in her life” (Tylor, 1983:177). Furthermore, Parker experimented with his daughter’s name, changing it several times to see what result different mathematical combinations would have on her character (Tylor, 1983:177-178). Tylor claimed that the only ill effect that occurred as the result of the negative combinations was “a greater sensitivity [to the power and effect that names had on her character and health, as well as] a severe problem with constipation” (Tylor, 1983:177).

The movement continued to take shape and grow. Parker taught his lessons in a variety of settings, starting in the living room of his home and then moving to the basement to accommodate larger numbers. Although the movement had started out slowly, with two or three students, it rapidly increased during this initial period, to twelve or more. In less than five years, the movement had grown so much that it overflowed the basement classroom where Parker taught (Tylor, 1983:187). Many of the new students had been drawn to the movement through the articles Parker wrote for the *Vancouver Sun*, or by his guest appearances on several radio talk shows. These radio shows “billed [Parker] as the ‘Practical Philosopher’ … [and] [r]equests for written name analyses poured in and chained him to the typewriter hour after hour” (Tylor, 1983:187).

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30 Tylor does not cite any specific numbers at this stage, but the impression she gives is that there were more than 20 students at this time.
The movement’s popularity grew in direct proportion to the media exposure it received, according to Tylor’s memories.\(^{31}\)

Parker gained confidence and increased his knowledge in response to the frequent demands that students placed on him. He began being called “the Teacher” by both students and his daughter, and spent long hours giving personal hour-long interviews with his students. These interviews were dictated to Pauline,\(^{32}\) the movement’s secretary, and were the primary source of income for the Parker family. In the 1930s, Parker also “stud[ied] the effect of the cycles of time\(^{33}\) on the movements of the wheat market ... [as well as] the influence of the cycles on world markets. ... [Parker allegedly made a profit and] took quite a few thousand dollars out of the market until someone became aware of his activities and the fact that he had discovered the key” (Tylor, 1983:188-189).

Again, Tylor narrates her father’s life story with a sense that he was always being persecuted or blocked from sharing or using his knowledge in some productive way. The wheat market example supports this argument by illustrating Parker’s attempt to use what he had learned in a practical manner, beyond the theoretical, but his attempt was denied because those in charge thought that Parker was too successful.\(^{34}\) Tylor went on to say that “[c]oincidence or not, the trading on the wheat market was then closed down and [Parker] discontinued his active interest in the wheat market” (Tylor, 1983:189).

In the mid 1930s daily life for the Parker family continued without major incident. Parker continued to develop his philosophies and, as a result, paid less

\(^{31}\) There is no data available that either supports or contradicts Tylor’s recollection concerning the number of members in the Kabalarian Philosophy, nor the correlation between the radio show and the supposed increase in membership numbers.

\(^{32}\) Again, Tylor mentions no last name in Against the Tides.

\(^{33}\) This is another underlying belief the Kabalarian Philosophy holds, which receives greater analysis in chapter two.

\(^{34}\) Tylor gives no specific indication as to who specifically denied her father success.
and less attention to his home life. His second wife, at one time, attempted suicide because she was in a deep depression, and although Parker returned home quickly enough to save her, she remained unpredictable throughout the rest of their marriage. Parker “was never free from the haunting thought that she might [try suicide] again, for she had not the respect for life that he had” (Tylor, 1983:201). Furthermore, his daughter also was affected by the time he spent studying: “Although I adored my father, his schedule was full and busy and often when I needed him most, he had not the time for me” (Tylor, 1983:198). The tone that Tylor used when narrating her father’s life is both filled with resentment at the lack of time her father spent with her and also idolization that he accomplished such a lofty and important task as founding the Kabalarian Philosophy. It is not surprising, therefore, that both of these sentiments colored parts of her story.

As an adult, Tylor seemed able to rationalize her father’s absence, but her childhood memories clearly influenced her as she wrote. Perhaps she included these feelings to show that her father was not a perfect man and that he, too, made mistakes and learned from them. If this were the case, then we could speculate that his teachings would be of even greater significance to his members because he wrote about parenting, using his own life as the model. This is a likely supposition because, in her book, Tylor states that “[a]ll of life was a learning experience for this dedicated man. … He had many stumbling blocks, for his home life alone contained … situation[s] that would have defeated the average man” (Tylor, 1983:195). Helping others overcome some of the obstacles he himself faced would be an excellent motivation for writing many of

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35 This is another aspect in Parker’s life that seems contradictory to what he teaches. There is a strong emphasis on parenting within the Kabalarian Philosophy, but it seems that, in practice, Parker was unable to follow his own teachings. Later in this chapter, this contradiction receives greater analysis.
his teachings that deal with behavior, family interaction, and what can be learned from observing and understanding patterns in daily life.\textsuperscript{36}

A question non-members often ask regarding the Kabalarian Philosophy concerns the movement’s relationship with the Jewish Kabbalah.\textsuperscript{37} While a later section in this chapter deals with specific doctrinal relationships between the two, it is significant that Parker lived next door to “an apartment that was tenanted by people of the Jewish faith” (Tylor, 1983:208). Tylor relates that for a decade, the families were close friends until, at “the age of twelve, [the Jewish children] began to attend Hebrew school after our regular day [at school]. ... [O]ur closeness ceased from that time on. Whatever it was they learned in their school, it divided us and we each went our separate ways” (Tylor, 1983:208). \textsuperscript{38} Despite this later separation, Parker often spoke with his neighbor on matters of faith, focusing on the Kabbalah and the neighbor’s interpretations of the Jewish religion. As a gesture meant to show his respect and appreciation for Parker, the neighbor “introduced [him] to a well-known Rabbi in Vancouver, from whom he received some very valuable information and thoughts that opened up his mind to new ideas and discoveries of his own” (Tylor, 1983:208). Tylor does not say what specifically the rabbi taught Parker, but her mention of the connection that her father had with the rabbi speaks to the variety of religious and spiritual influences which had an effect on him. This connection with other spiritual philosophies continued when Parker officially named the organization in 1936.

In that year, Parker believed that he had learned enough to “incorporate a legitimate group that could take its place in the world as a recognized

\textsuperscript{36} The following books likely trace Parker’s family experience: \textit{Our Teenage Revolution}, \textit{Give Your Child Its Inheritance}, and \textit{Attitudes and Habits}. While this list is not exhaustive, these books do serve to illustrate the connection between Parker’s own life and what he chose to write about.

\textsuperscript{37} There are numerous spellings for Kabbalah in English, including Qabbalah and Cabala. Unless in a direct quote, Kabbalah is the translated spelling that I use exclusively herein.

\textsuperscript{38} Although it would be interesting to learn what exactly the children were taught at their school that resulted in a separation between the two families, this information is not available.
philosophic organization. ... He related the name to the Jewish Cabala because ... [he believed that his] philosophy... [was also] concern[ed] with the spiritual qualities of mathematics, as is the Jewish Cabala to some degree” (Tylor, 1983:208). Parker also thought a great deal about the administrative side of the organization. He wanted it to operate smoothly, and to this end he appointed “a secretary, treasurer, and chairman, with himself at the head of the board of directors” (Tylor, 1983:209). In addition to formally organizing the movement, Parker began to make changes in the way that he gave out information. Rather than freely giving out the mathematical combinations he discovered, Parker became increasingly selective and secretive with the combinations once he officially organized the movement (Tylor, 1983:209). This shift in behavior is particularly interesting because it signals the first step in the establishment of Parker as the sole person in the organization able to withhold or disclose the movement’s beliefs and theories. Parker’s ability to possess such control over the movement’s information, and subsequently direction, ties in with his style of leadership and how the Kabalarian Philosophy was first founded — through charisma.40 Parker also became increasingly aware that many of his students, although seemingly nice people who enjoyed his lectures, possessed “minds lacking in Principle. ... The tendency was to over-enjoy being with people in a social way and for relaxation to the point of lazy mindedness when it came to study or finding time for the deeper, more philosophic side of life” (Tylor, 1983:209). Parker attributed this lack of devotion to a new mathematical formula41 he was using that took certain characteristics, namely sociability, too

39 Again, although this association is a point of contention with many of those familiar with the Kabbalah, a comparison of the two traditions follows in the next section and will not be dealt with here.

40 Since I devote an entire later chapter to the exploration of charisma and charismatic leadership in a variety of settings, I will deal more fully with the shift in Parker’s behavior there.

41 Parker believed that there was a direct connection between mathematics and the natural world, including personality and character. When the mathematical formulas of an individual’s
far. This experience reinforced Parker’s belief that there should be a balance between mental stimulation and development, and happy social occasions, as well as a mathematical formula that could produce the desired results.

As Tylor recalled, the organization’s initial creation caused some unexpected difficulties in the lives of the Parker children. She remembered that members constantly scrutinized the family’s actions and often used the children to gain information about their father: “[W]e were too young to defend ourselves or to understand why we were being used. Unfortunately, some of our early experiences formulated many of our attitudes toward people and built up walls that neither of us [Tylor and her stepbrother, Gerald] has ever totally torn down” (Tylor, 1983:210). Just as their father began to be increasingly private with the onslaught of public attention, so, too, did his children. One situation, in particular, that reinforced the apparent need for secrecy and discretion in the minds of Parker and his children, as well as in the general organization, occurred in 1938, when Parker confronted “[the] serpent [who] slithered into our Eden in the guise of the chairman of the board” (Tylor, 1983:210).

Mr Leach,42 the chairman of the board whom Tylor characterizes as “the serpent,” vied for control of the organization in direct opposition to Parker and his vision of proper leadership. Essentially, Leach:

put forward a plan that would give the board control of all money coming into the organization from lectures, classes, and minor monthly dues that barely covered paper work and utilities. ...

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42 Beyond his family name, there is no available information on this man. While the description of him is vague in Against the Tides, it is the only record of the man within the organization. Again, it seems that Tylor’s purpose in recounting such stories is not to provide the reader with an historically accurate record of Parker and the Kabalarian Philosophy’s development, but rather, to recreate historical records according to her own biases. For this reason, all of these records are subject to inaccuracies, personal motivations, and, most obviously, biases.
[Leach] felt strongly that the organization should have control of its leader as the church does its ministers. (Tylor, 1983:210)

Unwilling to give up control of the organization he had formed, Parker denied Leach’s request. As an apparent counter-attack, Leach began quietly to incite members against Parker at every opportunity. Parker’s loyal students brought this traitorous behavior to his attention, and, left without any other option, Parker asked for the resignation of the entire acting board of directors, including Leach. The remaining members of the Kabalarian Philosophy supported this proposition wholeheartedly (Tylor, 1983:211).

Parker found this experience to be one that would teach everyone about the power of uncontrolled ego. When Leach left the organization, several members went with him. Although little is known about Leach or his following, Tylor does say that Leach changed his name to Isun Lea (Isun supposedly being close in sound to the meaning of the light of God, and Lea being a variation of his last name) which was, according to Parker’s Mathematical Principle, a very negative name combination, and Leach died from a stroke within a year of leaving the Kabalarian Philosophy (Tylor, 1983:211).

After having suffered this schism, the Kabalarian Philosophy reorganized and changed the name to the Society of Kabalarians. According to Tylor, she was not privy to the reasons behind the change of name, and over the years, the name changed several more times before the current name, Kabalarian Philosophy, was decided upon. Tylor supposed that it was due to “change in methods of administration … [in each] particular period” (Tylor, 1983:212), although she remained uncertain about whether her supposition was correct.

In addition to having to face Leach and his supporters in a direct confrontation, the Kabalarian Philosophy also had to face further confrontations with those who were determined to maintain a belligerent and challenging attitude toward Parker and the principles he taught. Although Tylor often thought many of these people were “trouble makers” (Tylor, 1983:213) and brought them to her father’s attention, Parker himself “[could] not deny anyone
the opportunity to find wisdom. ... Who knows, maybe some day that individual could turn out to be another Jesus Christ” (Tylor, 1983:213). More often than not, they willingly left the organization without Parker’s prompting.

In 1941, Parker found the building that would house the Kabalarian Philosophy for the next several decades. Located at 1160 West 10th Avenue in Vancouver, the house was large enough to fit the growing organization, although it was in dire need of repair and renovation. With the help of his family and students, Parker returned the house to its original splendor and set up enough rooms for the printing equipment and charts that he relied on to disseminate his ideas, as well as a classroom, and living quarters for the family (Tylor, 1983:227; 230).

With a permanent center, Parker concentrated on teaching his principles to his students once again. In the 1940s, Canada, along with other nations, fought in World War II. In this atmosphere, Parker thought it his duty to teach his students about the difference between propaganda and truth, and how to think logically about the world that surrounded them. Teaching this distinction was of paramount concern to Parker because he saw that millions of people’s minds were out of balance and in a state of complete upheaval during the war (Tylor, 1983:231-232). The stresses involved with living during wartime could prove to be dangerous to many, and in Parker’s opinion, the resultant breakdown of the family sowed the seeds of juvenile delinquency (Tylor, 1983:231).

The members of the Kabalarian Philosophy expanded and commenced publication of a monthly newspaper named *The Kabalarian Courier*, during the war and post-war era. The purpose of the newspaper was to better inform students on basic elements that the movement taught, such as “question and answer columns, biblical translations, and topics of current events and interests” (Tylor, 1983:232). The paper also proved to be an opportunity to work with
others in the group on a worthwhile project, although the numbers in the group were never that large.⁴³

The Kabalarian Philosophy expanded further during the post-war period, founding several smaller groups that focused on specific areas or talents. These groups included the “Kabalarian Fellowship,” which promoted public speaking; “The Drama Circle,” which was the organization’s drama group; and the “Kabalarian Choristers,” which was the organization’s singing group. While all these Kabalarian-sponsored groups were invaluable to the members, later in his life Parker regretted not having formed a group specifically for the young people of the organization (Tylor, 1983:234). At the time, he believed there was no real necessity for targeting the young and providing a specialized program for them. Parker “too, was still growing mentally and as everyone does, [he] made his mistakes and learned as he went along” (Tylor, 1983:234). Tylor states, however, that the youth of the 1940s did not have to face what the youth of today⁴⁴ face. The youth of the 1940s did not have the type of pressures to cope with from the outside world that are so much in evidence today. We didn’t drink or smoke in principle ... [w]e had never heard of marijuana, and other drug influences never crossed our minds or our paths. ... There were not the same degrees of violent physical dangers, not the tremendously powerful mental hazards. ... [N]evertheless, we would have been envious of the lessons of life and knowledge of mind given to the young Kabalarians of today. (Tylor, 1983:234)⁴⁵

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⁴³ Tylor does not provide any specifics on group numbers during this period, but numbers are likely to have been between ten and thirty.

⁴⁴ The youth “of today,” to which Tylor refers, were the teenagers in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

⁴⁵ The young Kabalarian members have a strict code to which they must adhere, which includes regulations on how to dress and behave in public, for instance. Again, a later section focuses on the relationship between the Kabalarian teachings and members’ behavior in society.
Despite the absence of specialized groups, the young Kabalarian members were put in charge of running the dances and many social activities, and felt that they truly belonged to the organization.

Attendance at Kabalarian meetings continued to increase, so much so that people lined up in the halls, in the stairway, and in the entrance of the kitchen to hear Parker's teachings. As it was a monthly meeting, students felt that they could not afford to miss his lectures, and few did. In addition to these monthly meetings, Parker often had students over to the house on Friday and Saturday evenings, where they could sing, enjoy music, and be surrounded by a joyful group of people. Parker believed that these informal meetings broke “that barrier of self-consciousness” (Tylor, 1983:235) and helped foster a sense of community.

For many, the sense of community provided by the Kabalarians was one that lasted their entire lives. Although “[t]here were some who found what they were looking for and went on their way to live according to their preferences ... we still have a few among the continually growing number of new students who have been loyal, supporting students for forty years or more” (Tylor, 1983:245). Although Tylor claims that there have been some students who have kept “things stirred up occasionally” (Tylor, 1983:245) by criticizing and complaining about the Kabalarian Philosophy, the overarching feelings of community were strong among these students. As a precautionary measure against the spread of gossip, the Parkers “tried to keep our private matters to ourselves and it was many years before we allowed the information out about

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46 Again, there are no details available specifying the movement’s numbers at this time.

47 According to Angela Lewis, “the active membership of the Kabalarian Philosophy has not grown in the last thirty years, although recruitment has kept up with defection and death” (Lewis, 1994:92). While she does not cite any specific numbers, she suggests that the organization’s leaders now face the possibility that, since numbers are not increasing in a significant and substantial way, they may well have to anticipate a crisis in the movement because its aging members will be unable to form the critical mass needed to maintain the movement.
my father’s former marriage and the fact that I was a child of that union” (Tylor, 1983:245-246).

Despite the increase in privacy, a fierce loyalty existed between the Parkers and the members of the Kabalarian Philosophy. Believing that gossip, rumors, false statements, or vindictive words were the result of an uncontrolled mind, Parker remained steadfastly convinced that the Principle he taught should be of foremost importance in everyone’s mind despite any personal attacks on him. Although “the Teacher [Parker] was disappointed and occasionally deeply hurt to think that ... misunderstandings sometimes meant a loss in friendship and, what was even worse in his eyes, a loss in studentship, [h]e used to tell his students, ‘Never let anything or anyone come between you and the Principle, even me’” (Tylor, 1983:246-247). Parker’s daughter had great admiration for her father’s ability to transcend the feelings of pettiness that some students showed towards him while continuing to offer the wisdom and lessons that he learned to these same students.

During the 1940s and early 1950s, Tylor and her new husband moved to Portland, Oregon, away from her father. Because of this move, Tylor states that her information about the Kabalarian Philosophy is perhaps incomplete, but is nevertheless, a fair description of those years. In essence, we can characterize the period not only by the slow but steady growth of the organization, but also by Parker’s ambition and goals.

Parker began the Kabalarian Philosophy with the initial goal of learning and teaching to others the basic principles that supposedly would create a balanced and harmonious life. By the end of the 1940s, this dream took on tangible qualities since Parker had accomplished his initial goal and had taken his vision for the Kabalarian Philosophy even further. Parker now envisioned: the growth and spread of the Philosophy ... someday reaching into every corner and byway of the world. He visualized it reaching the minds of billions of people that one day ... [the Kabalarian members] might create a better place in which to live, a world
based upon Principle and the ideals of oneness of all people, of universal love and understanding and thus, peace and harmony. 

(Tylor, 1983:250)

Although Parker’s dream was ambitious and grand, in a practical sense, the movement’s philosophy did not reach far beyond the city of Vancouver in any great numbers: “The opening of … [the] very first centre … came about more as a fluke than a planned project” (Tylor, 1983:250). According to Tylor’s recollections, the center in Calgary, Alberta, opened in 1947 by accident, and the Edmonton, Alberta, center also began accidentally years after Parker had been a guest lecturer in the city.48

The new center in Calgary was both promising and problematic. While Parker was excited at the prospect of expanding the movement and hopeful about the enthusiasm he experienced when he guest-lectured there, he faced certain administrative obstacles. Since the Calgary center was not close enough for Parker to have direct and constant contact with his students, a student volunteered to “convert his recreation room into a classroom and to supervise the lessons” (Tylor, 1983:251). While this was a generous offer, it seemed that:

[n]o matter how willing, the man was not a teacher. He was not there as a lecturer, but merely to assist with studies. He … insist[ed] upon reading the lessons aloud, to be later followed by discussion of the lesson, and no one else was allowed to usurp his position of ‘reader.’ … As a reader, a third grade child could possibly have done better. He droned on monotonously, stumbled, stammered, and mispronounced words abominably, until people either fell asleep in self-defence, or left the class never to return. 

(Tylor, 1983:251-252)

48 The Kabalarian Philosophy established a center in Edmonton several years after the Calgary center started.
Furthermore, Parker was unable to create a course lesson on a regular basis, so there were long periods of time where the group had no new lessons from which to learn. This irregularity and lack of a strong leader could have been debilitating to the growing Calgary movement, but Parker learned from his mistakes and continued to improve upon the logistics behind the operation of a center outside of his direct control. Parker’s experience with the Calgary center provided him with valuable lessons that he synthesized when it came to founding more centers.

One of the first lessons Parker discovered was the value of a qualified instructor. While the telling of anecdotes helped break the monotony of a lecture, it was not a sufficient substitute for actual knowledge of the Principles. Second, Parker had to choose a teacher who was capable of handling the infringement on personal time and space. In the role of a teacher, there were many demands on time and privacy. Armed with this basic knowledge, Parker established the Edmonton center and then the Victoria center in 1959 (Tylor, 1983:252-253).

As centers were being located in Western Canada, Parker began wanting to establish a center in the United States. An American center, however, was little more than a dream, primarily because the Kabalarian Philosophy did not have enough money to support a teacher south of the border. Another financial obstacle was that a Canadian citizen had to have a considerable sum of money in his or her bank account to qualify for a working visa, as well as have a sponsor in the United States willing “to post a bond on his behalf” (Tylor, 1983:254). This was not a situation that fit many of the Kabalarian students. In 1957, however, conditions coalesced to make Parker’s dream a reality. A Kabalarian couple had just sold their house, which enabled them to satisfy the monetary aspect of a working visa, so they decided to accompany Parker to California to see if they could find a sponsor.

49 Tylor does not provide a date for the founding of the Edmonton center.
The trio started their search in Sherman Oaks, California, where they worked hard on presentations and on making contacts. Some students from the Vancouver center volunteered their time and labor to help out Parker and the couple. After two months, though, Parker began yearning for home and thought that his young assistant teacher possessed the skills and knowledge to be a good leader. Parker left the Sherman Oaks center under his assistant teacher’s guidance and returned to Vancouver. The couple that Parker had delegated to run the center stayed in Sherman Oaks for four years, trying to establish a strong and viable membership, but at the end of the fourth year, decided they were unsuccessful in their attempt and returned to Canada. The Kabalarian Philosophy claims, however, that the Sherman Oaks center was not a wasted experience because it laid the foundation for the active, San Luis Obisbo center. Furthermore, the organization continued to grow, and the Kabalarian Philosophy soon established additional Canadian centers in Dawson Creek and Saskatoon, and also overseas in Holland (Tylor, 1983:259).

It seems characteristic in the history of Parker’s life, that while the man experienced moments of great pride and joy, he also experienced moments of failure and disappointment. As the Kabalarian Philosophy grew and became increasingly successful, Parker’s second marriage to Alice failed. Tylor believes it was Alice’s dislike for Parker’s lifestyle and role as mentor that was the root of the discord, and that the constant interruptions and distractions became too much for her. Tylor goes on to say that there was an incessant parade of students who went through the family’s home seeking Parker’s counsel, which did not permit Alice to live the life she wanted. Interestingly, though, when the couple first married, Alice and her husband shared the passion of their spirituality and Parker’s role as teacher (Tylor, 1983:260). As a final gesture towards solving the problems of their failing marriage, Alice asked Parker to give up the organization and move back to the United States where they could live a peaceful life, “out of the public eye. ... Mother [Alice] knew within her heart what [Parker’s] answer would be” (Tylor, 1983:261) though, and left the marriage and
the children in Parker’s charge. Interestingly, Tylor believes that their divorce was in the best interests of her father and the growth of the movement. She says that:

this time [of divorce] had to come in [Parker’s] life, for if he was to go further in his work he had to be free from the tensions and restrictions of domestic disturbances and Mother’s inability to understand and cope with his studies of the mental world and its influences on [the] mind. Never would he have pressed for this situation to evolve, but had it not come about, his later work would likely not have come to pass. (Tylor, 1983:262)

Just as after the breakup of his first marriage, Parker refocused his attention on studying and concentrated on what he thought was his calling. To these ends, he realized the need for a class for the teenagers of the movement. Parker dedicated Friday nights to this cause and learned how to deal with this difficult age group when they met at his home (Tylor, 1983:262-263).

The Vancouver center was large enough to accommodate several teenage girls, and a lady named Dorothy⁵⁰ was put in charge of their daily routine, acting as both housekeeper and housemother. Some of the girls there were perhaps having problems at home and might otherwise have left to go out on their own, untrained, vulnerable, and not really old enough as yet to cope with life in the adult world. Different ones came for different reasons and while they received strict supervision, they were also recipients of love and understanding. There were no boys living in the house, for obvious reasons. (Tylor, 1983:263)

Parker believed the girls’ school work and Philosophy classes were to be tempered with fun and excitement. Excitement, in Parker’s view, was the enjoyment of the pool table that Parker bought the girls, or the music lessons he

⁵⁰ Again, Tylor provides no last name.
encouraged the girls to take. Parker believed that while mental stimulation was of great importance to the young, there had to be time set aside for play. For Parker, playtime was an important element in creating a balanced mind.

Tylor recalled that throughout her father’s life, he apparently never ceased looking for ways to explore the mind and what he thought was its relationship with the universe. He continued to look at the laws of nature as a starting point, wondering if, perhaps, humanity had its own set of laws (Tylor, 1983:267). He was convinced that organized religion had nothing to offer him on the matter because “[t]he church, the very place one should expect to contain wisdom and understanding of mind, found logic and a seeking, questioning mind to be sacrilegious — if it were probing into the doctrines of the church” (Tylor, 1983:267). While Parker found that the church institution squelched individual exploration, he did believe that church scripture echoed many of the stories found in other philosophies and traditions. Parker believed, therefore, that these common stories had to be symbolic to enable them to transcend generations and cultures (Tylor, 1983:267). In 1953, having been free from daily familial ties for several years, Parker decided to share with his students his new theories of the mind.51

Armed with these new theories, Parker wrote three books in rapid succession. His students were awed and impressed by Parker’s new insights, and sought out his counsel and assistance as often as possible. Although Parker’s critics suggested that if his theories were so successful he should have been a rich and famous man, Tylor stated that it was not his theories that were unsuccessful but Parker’s desire not to have a “sideshow or revival gimmick” (Tylor, 1983:272) that took precedence in how he wanted to live. He presented his theories and knowledge to those who wanted it, and offered numerous lessons to deepen that understanding. At this stage in his teaching, however,

51 These new theories receive greater explanation in the section that deals specifically with the organization’s beliefs.
Parker realized that not all of his students were ready to embrace his new theories. Consequently, Parker felt that he should hold back some of his lessons until a time when students were ready to learn, primarily because he felt that not everyone could understand the complexity of the previous lesson and how to apply it to everyday life (Tylor, 1983:272).

Parker believed that the lack of understanding and the sense of apathy some of his students demonstrated was the result of a bad name-combination, and he urged his members to change their names to something more appropriate. Those who did, allegedly succeeded, while those who did not, were less successful in understanding the Philosophy (Tylor, 1983:273). Some of his students even became knowledgeable enough to guide classes and deliver apparently moving lectures on their own. The late 1950s and early 1960s were times of increased growth in the movement that pleased Parker exceedingly. This state of growth and learning continued in the Kabalarian Philosophy for several years, and in anticipation of further growth, Parker decided to write future lessons for when his students were again ready to learn more (even though he expected no longer to be alive).

Parker also spent several years looking for his successor. Although he left the Kabalarian organization in trust to his daughter, Carollyne Tylor, he left the administrative duties to a man who met certain qualifications (Tylor, 1983:284). Tylor does not name her father’s successor, although she does include the requirements the new leader had to possess. He had to show that inner spark of dedication, a willingness for total commitment. This man must have the strength and drive to push his way through all obstacles as well as the ability to ‘sit at the feet of the Master (wisdom) in humbleness and respect.’ Not only must such a person be found, but he must have a wife who was equally dedicated, for this was not a position for a man to face alone. [Moreover, Parker believed that] [t]he couple who qualified for this position of leadership must ... be people who felt no need or desire
for parenthood [having experienced the struggle between choosing between children and Philosophy, himself]. (Tylor, 1983:280)

While arguments could be made that Parker’s requirements were all based on his personal experiences, there is a certain irony in the fact that he required his successor to be married, since he, himself, was unsuccessful in both of his marriages, and thought his time better spent when he was alone and without familial obligations. Additionally, at the time *Against the Tides* was written, the unnamed leadership candidate was unmarried, although Parker was determined to unite the candidate with a lady he thought would make a good wife (Tylor, 1983:281-282).

Also interesting is Tylor’s statement suggesting that Parker’s children did not assume that the leadership mantle would be passed on to them, nor did they even want the position (Tylor, 1983:281). While Tylor had been directly involved in the movement for decades before she moved to Portland with her own family, she had “no illusions that we [she and her brother] would qualify to assume the position [of leader] and its responsibilities” (Tylor, 1983:281). In the last few years of Parker’s life he made his selection clear. Ivon Shearing, who had spent the last several years learning how to be the leader, was to take on the leadership role of the Kabalarian Philosophy. After Parker’s death in 1964, Shearing did indeed take on the role and maintained it to the day he tendered his resignation: August 22, 1995.

**Shearing as New Leader of the Kabalarian Philosophy**

There are no books available to the public that chronicle Shearing’s role as leader of the Kabalarian Philosophy, so the details presented in this study are from the court transcripts of his criminal case. Using text analysis to explore the recurring themes of sexual violence and control that appear in the transcripts, witnesses for both the Crown (prosecution team) and the Accused (defense team) share their recollections of significant events and how these events related
to them personally. As such, the inherent biases contained in this testimony must be taken into consideration, and the information gathered should be looked at critically and evaluated based on this context.

With this codicil in place, the overall impression (notably with some dissenters) that Shearing leaves with his followers (according to the court transcripts) is one of being an ultimate spiritual leader, not quite at the same level of understanding as Parker, but a man who knew the Kabalarian Philosophy and its tenets well enough to be considered further along the path of spiritual development than any other living human. Although generally regarded as a man who was closely involved with his members’ spiritual development in a positive and healthy manner, his sexual desires and need for control and power overcame his spiritual sensibilities on numerous occasions. Shearing crossed the line between what society believes is religious and what it deems illegal actions. During his tenure as leader, Shearing clearly had periods of highs and lows, and this was demonstrated during his appearances in the British Columbia Supreme Court,\textsuperscript{52} juxtaposed against the support he continues to enjoy from current members of the Kabalarian Philosophy.

In the court transcripts, witnesses seem to view the transition between the leadership by Parker and Shearing of the Kabalarian Philosophy somewhat differently. There were those members who thought that the transition was seamless and predetermined by Parker:

Q When was [Shearing] generally, in your understanding and experience, recognized as the leader [of the Kabalarian Philosophy]? … So Mr. Parker dies at the beginning of ‘64.

A … I would say almost pretty well right away. He was the man at that time chosen to live in the house [where Parker lived and

\textsuperscript{52} The court transcripts used in this study are from the Supreme Court of British Columbia’s Court of Appeal. Shearing was convicted on two counts of rape, four counts of indecent assault, three counts of gross indecency, and three counts of sexual assault, a legal term that came into use during the span of time in which Shearing committed his sexually based crimes.
directed the Kabalarian Philosophy]. He was there when Mr. Parker passed away and we basically would discuss things a lot. …. [T]he leadership was something that evolved gradually as he earned it. And as he applied himself, he earned the right to be in that position. (Witness #18, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1872)  

As described by this witness, the leadership mantle was passed to the most worthy of Parker’s followers. Parker gave his approval and essentially gave the leadership to Shearing by letting Shearing move into the Kabalarian Philosophy’s headquarters (often referred to as “1160” — the number of the Kabalarian headquarters). We are left with the impression that Shearing rightfully earned his position and it came about gradually, Parker’s student eventually evolved into the natural leader.

For Kabalarians who were members under both Parker’s and Shearing’s leadership, however, the transitional experience was more administrative, rather than spiritual:

Q After Mr. Parker passed away, who took over the position of spiritual leader of the philosophy?
A Well, Mr. — Mr. Shearing took over, but not necessarily as a spiritual leader, as the administrator and leader of the organization. He wasn’t considered a spiritual leader, at least not at that time. … Gradually he was introduced as the administrator and spiritual leader of our society, but there was no real official announcement or anything of that nature. (Witness #2, R. v. Shearing, 1997:82)

Since it was widely expected that the new leader would be chosen from among the Kabalarian students, this view of Shearing simply filling an administrative role is in direct contrast to the testimony of many of the women he sexually violated. One witness, who lived her entire life in the Kabalarian Philosophy, grew up

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53 To protect the anonymity of the witnesses, I do not use the names of those involved in the trial. When the necessity arises, I do use pseudonyms in reference to particular witnesses in this study.
believing that Shearing was the ultimate spiritual authority, not even acknowledging that he was at first thought of by some as being an administrator. In her testimony, she says:

A Mr. Shearing was the ultimate authority. He was not to be questioned. He was the link to the spiritual consciousness. That was it. He — everything stopped with Ivon Shearing. ... [Moreover, Shearing] had knowledge of the mental realm and he had special connections with the universal consciousness.\(^{54}\) ... He definitely had additional power, that I didn’t have. (Witness #10, R. v. Shearing, 1997:891)

Despite the differing perspectives on how Shearing came upon his role as spiritual leader of the Kabalarians, he was the leader of the movement from 1964 until his resignation in 1995. During the 31 years that he served the movement as its leader, Shearing’s accomplishments include the following: he was able to maintain a fairly constant number of members; the Kabalarians bought a resort named Kalaway Bay where members could spend their summers,\(^ {55}\) and Shearing brought the Kabalarian Philosophy into the computer age by overseeing the creation of the official website and its online material available to the public.

Although the events of Shearing’s leadership are not as detailed as those Carollyne Tylor provided regarding her father’s tenure, the details are sufficient to present a picture of the new leader. He was a man who married a fellow Kabalarian in 1957, had no family of his own other than the members of the Kabalarian Philosophy, and was thought to be the supreme authority by his

\(^{54}\) The Universal Consciousness is akin to the concept of God. The concept, and its intricacies, receive further exploration in the following chapter.

\(^{55}\) Many of the women who brought charges against Shearing worked at Kalaway Bay Resort in various positions throughout the summer months, although not all the female members who did work there fell victim to Shearing. I make this point because the women whom Shearing abused mention several incidents of sexual abuse occurring on the premises.
devotees. To some, Shearing filled the role of teacher, employer, friend, and even a “father figure” (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:264). It is no surprise then, that the violence perpetrated against these very same members was thought by many to be an ultimate betrayal of trust on many levels.

The subsequent trial of their leader directly affected membership numbers (many devoted members withdrew their membership), but overall, the Kabalarian Philosophy has survived the loss of another charismatic leader. The movement continues to exist and provide spiritual services to its followers, under the direction of a governing board. As of the spring of 2004, the Kabalarians also continue to maintain centers in Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver — centers that operated while Shearing was the leader. The resiliency of the movement is clear when we look at the history of the group over the last half century, which suggests that the movement’s future was perhaps not as precarious as it originally seemed. If the Kabalarian Philosophy can survive the death of the founder and the imprisonment of the chosen successor, then

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56 The death of Alfred Parker is a somewhat contentious issue within the Kabalarian Philosophy. To some of the more devoted and life-long members of the movement, the death of Parker has a far more esoteric understanding.

A: Mr. Parker’s passing was of natural causes. Mr. Parker was master of his destiny. ... [In a Kabalarian booklet called Master of Your Destiny] we are taught to lern [sic] to be master of our destiny and that means right through our lifestyle, control circumstances in our life and to, even at the tend [sic] of life to control the passing of ourselves from the finite into the abstract.

Q: I’m sorry, [witnesses name], ... [a]re you saying that Mr. Parker made the decision as to when he would die?
A: Yes, I’m saying that.

Q: And it wasn’t as a result of disease?
A: No, it was not.

Q: If – I suggest to you that he died of prostate cancer, Are you aware of that?

From this passage, one could theorize that members found it more reassuring to believe that their spiritual leader chose to rejoin the Universal Consciousness out of sheer understanding and
perhaps its continued evolution will withstand these current changes. If nothing else, the Kabalarian Philosophy provides a unique window into the make-up of Canadian-founded religious movements.

will than to be afflicted with the same problems the unenlightened must face. If a member believes that there was a deliberate act of Parker choosing death, then this hope reinforces the validity of the doctrines and the ability to reach full spiritual understanding. This hope and belief are powerful motivators in the adherence to any theology.
Chapter Two: Kabalarian Beliefs

The most useful way to explore the Philosophy’s beliefs is to present major themes that comprise a variety of ideas. At times, however, it is nearly impossible to present a single idea at a time, primarily because the Kabalarian beliefs are complex and highly interwoven. As such, there is a certain degree of difficulty when we try to explore a single aspect of the movement’s belief system without referring to other elements. For instance, one theological point often depends on understanding another theological aspect of the group, or a specific term cannot be understood out of the context of the organization’s use of the term. While it is not possible to examine all the components that make up the Kabalarian belief system, I will examine major components fairly thoroughly.

The Kabbalah

When the Kabalarian Philosophy first attracted media attention, speculation surrounded the group, its leader, the movement’s beliefs, and perhaps most prominently, the movement’s association with the Jewish Kabbalah. Prior to Shearing’s criminal trial, the group received little outside attention, although those who did come into contact with the movement no doubt wondered about its name. As previously mentioned, Parker named the group after the Jewish mystical tradition as a way to pay homage to the Jewish tradition’s spiritual pursuit of mathematics (at least according to Parker’s understanding of the Kabbalah): “[The Kabalarian Philosophy] derives its name from the Hebrew word kabal which means to receive. In ancient Hebrew lore, numbers and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet were considered to represent the forces of creation. Kabal means to receive the esoteric knowledge of numbers and the letters of the alphabet” (Kabalarian Philosophy, “Origin of the word ‘Kabalarian’,” 2001, italics in original). This cursory explanation,
however, does not explore or explain any similarities and connections between the two religious traditions, which are, nevertheless, superficial at best.\(^57\)

One of the most basic points to address first is each religion’s esoteric tradition. When he describes perhaps one of the most established and renowned esoteric traditions that continues to thrive, Moshe Hallamish defines the Jewish Kabbalah as follows:

[The Kabbalah is] a religio-mystical point of view that impinges on every area of existence and seeks solutions to the mysteries of the world and the vicissitudes of life. At the very core of Kabbalah lies the mystery of the knowledge of the Godhead ... [and the secrets of the quest are] transmitted by whispering ‘from mouth to mouth,’ or rather from mouth to ear, so that [the secrets] reach only the elect. The things that are communicated in this way are things that by their very nature cannot be understood by everyone. (Hallamish, 1999:3-4)

The secrecy and means of transmitting Kabbalistic wisdom to followers over the centuries illustrates the degree to which the practitioners concealed their teachings from the masses, as well as depicts the importance of maintaining control over the dissemination of the knowledge.

The Kabalarian Philosophy, however, takes a different approach in understanding esotericism. Parker believed that all religions have something to offer humanity and that there is an underlying esoteric meaning behind most

\(^{57}\) Although this analysis compares the Kabbalist tradition and the Kabalarian Philosophy’s beliefs, it is not possible to examine the full complexities of the Kabbalist tradition in great depth. The examination of the Kabbalah presented here serves only to refute the Kabalarians’ claim that there is a significant connection between the two traditions. For this reason, the scope of the comparison is between certain principles that figure the most prominently in the Kabalarian Philosophy’s belief system. For further reading about the Kabbalah, see Gershom G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*; Moshe Hallamish, *An Introduction to the Kabbalah*; Perle Besserman, *Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism*; Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*; and David R. Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism*. 
religious traditions. He found this especially true regarding the writings of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, and he believed that it was his “vision to bring the knowledge of these [esoteric truths] to people all over the world so that everyone could have the opportunity to create a happy, balanced, successful, and purposeful life” (Kabalarian Philosophy, “History,” 1999). Clearly, Parker’s understanding of esotericism does not neatly fit within the paradigms of more established esoteric traditions, primarily because of the scale he envisioned for disseminating the secret knowledge he allegedly possessed. While one of the main tenets of esotericism is that only the elect should have access to the fundamental and secret knowledge of the universe (because many are not prepared for full enlightenment), Parker seems to have envisioned an exoteric tradition, to some degree, by having the principles he deems as fundamental and secret truths to be announced worldwide. The global scale Parker anticipated creating obliterates the basic principles of Jewish Kabbalah — that the mystery and secrecy of the Godhead cannot be known by everyone because the mystery is beyond most individual’s comprehension. Although some may argue that Parker and Shearing taught classes that supposedly revealed the esoteric secrets of both Eastern and Western religions following the traditional method of transmitting the knowledge “from mouth to mouth,” and in a strictly controlled classroom setting where one must register and be known, the Kabalarians’ subsequent advertisement of these courses on the Internet directly contradicts the supposed image of only the elect learning the wisdom that the Kabalarians offer. The contradiction comes when the movement suggests that the knowledge was accessible to all who were willing to pay for the class time and receive the

58 Parker focuses primarily on the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount as the basis for his argument, although he does mention peripherally other books of what he calls the Old Testament. Furthermore, Parker relies on the books of the Hebrew scripture as “the cornerstone of Christian theory” (Parker, 1970:4), the theological perspectives he analyzes and critiques the most.
appropriate written material\textsuperscript{59} for each class. This openness implies that the movement aimed to inform the uninitiated, and often uninformed, masses on the subject, without using the degree of discrimination that appears in traditional esoteric transmission,\textsuperscript{60} as long as the individual was willing to pay for the information.

A second point of comparison between the Kabbalah and the Kabalarian Philosophy is each tradition’s use of numbers. One of the most significant aspects of the Kabbalah, in its most basic form, is that of \textit{gematria}, or Kabbalistic “interpretation through the numerical value of the Hebrew letter, which elsewhere is not regarded as an independent level of meaning” (Scholem, 1965:56). To elaborate further on the complexities of \textit{gematria}, we could also say that \textit{gematria} is a type of “number mysticism (that is, inner- and outer-directed meditation techniques) [that] ... produce a condition of prophetic ecstasy” (Besserman, 1997:38). Although numbers figure prominently in the framework of the Kabalarian Philosophy’s religious foundation, there is no emphasis on the use of numbers as a means to reach an ecstatic state. For Kabbalists, meditating on numbers (and their corresponding letters) is a means of becoming one with God, rather than using numbers as the sole tool to reflect and shape people’s minds, and subsequently, the manifestation of their essence, as it is in the Kabalarian Philosophy.

There is, however, a superficial parallel between the Kabalarian Philosophy’s belief that numbers shape one’s mind and personality and Kabbalists’ use of numbers. In Kabalarian tradition, numbers and their

\textsuperscript{59} The written material that an individual receives upon registering for the courses offered by the Kabalarian Philosophy primarily includes workbooks and pamphlets that outline their teachings and the steps required to learn the teachings gradually.

\textsuperscript{60} While some may argue that even traditional Kabbalah has become accessible to the masses through the Internet and the available literature on the subject, traditional Kabbalah still requires a practitioner to experience the knowledge of the Kabbalah, rather than just reading about it and trying to understand it from an outsider’s perspective.
corresponding Hebrew letter,\(^{61}\) can be a means to “contemplat[e] [God’s sacred Names and God’s] inherent attributes” (Besserman, 1997:37). The main difference, however, is that Kabbalists focus on the intricacies of God’s name, which supposedly enables them to reach oneness with the Creator, whereas the Kabalarians focus their attention on attempting to see the connections between letters, numbers, and mind on a more individual level.

Another element that the two traditions seem to have loosely in common is the belief in the duality of the cosmos. Although this aspect of the Kabalarian tradition receives greater analysis in the section that deals with the movement’s theological beliefs and concepts of God, it is significant for this comparison to draw attention to the notion that God, as an entity, is comprised of both feminine and masculine attributes. In Kabbalistic interpretation, Adam\(^{62}\) shattered God’s unity into male and female when he chose to contemplate only one aspect of God, mistaking the last *sefirah* (majesty) for the Godhead as a whole (Scholem, 1965:108). Scholem argues that since this time, there has been “a cleavage between the upper and the lower, the masculine and the feminine. This cleavage is described in many symbols. [One example is] ... the separation of the Tree of Life from the Tree of Knowledge” (Scholem, 1965:108). One of the main purposes of ritual esoteric Kabbalah, then, is to reunite all of God’s aspects, or *sefirot*. Although the Kabalarians share the belief that there is a masculine and feminine duality in God and the cosmos, the movement’s main purpose is not necessarily to reunite God’s opposing attributes, but to understand that each individual belongs to and is a part of God’s ultimately dual cosmos, having qualities of both.

\(^{61}\) “The *Sepher Yetzirah* points out that not only did each letter of the Hebrew alphabet equal a number, but that these numbers could be used to permute the letters of the Tetragrammaton to induce mystic states of consciousness” (Besserman, 1997:37).

\(^{62}\) According to Scholem, “Adam’s sin is perpetually repeated in every other sin” that humanity does (Scholem, 1965:108).
In her examination of Kabalarian Philosophy, Angela Lewis suggested that the “Kabalarian Philosophy does, in places, bear some resemblance to Qabbalah, but it may be Qabbalah filtered through the metaphysical movement” (Lewis, 1994:79). Lewis bases her argument (in part) on fifteen characteristics that distinguish movements belonging to the metaphysical movement according to J. Stillson Judah’s, *The History and Philosophy of Metaphysical Movements in America.*† When we examine Judah’s proposed characteristics, there is little doubt that the Kabalarian Philosophy fits within these categories.

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† The basis of Judah’s argument is that fifteen characteristics apply to metaphysical movements. A summary of these characteristics, taken from his introduction, include: 1) the rejection of creedal authority of organized Christian religions; 2) the inner self, or one’s soul, is divine; 3) to avoid being considered theists, metaphysical movements see God as an impersonal entity and often use the term Universal Consciousness and Christ Principle to be both scientific and religiously oriented; 4) there is a superficial belief in the duality of the world, which “gives way to a monistic doctrine of God, who is all and in-all. The natural world of so-called matter is an error of our minds or is mind itself and really one with God, the Divine Mind” (Judah, 1967:13-14); 5) these movements have loose associations with Christianity and study the teachings of Jesus, although they view Jesus as a man who was more aware of his divine connection with Universal Consciousness than were others. The Christ Principle, however, is different from Jesus the man, insofar as the Christ Principle is within each of us, as part of our human nature; 6) metaphysical movements tend to reject the notion that man has a sinful nature that requires repentance, so grace and atonement do not figure into their belief system; 7) “As God is regarded as being all, in-all, and all good, so evil, including sickness, is often considered to be unreal or the absence of good; it is an error of our minds or due to the ignorance of our true nature or its laws” (Judah, 1967:14); 8) there is a quality of pragmatism that requires adherents of metaphysical movements to test the claims put before them; 9) in connection with the quality of pragmatism, there is an emphasis on self-discovery and realization, on the eventual gaining of the right scientific knowledge that will lead to the salvation of the mind and soul, rather than emphasizing that salvation relies on faith or works; 10) “[a]ll these movements try to demonstrate the scientific validity of different kinds of religious experience as proof of their philosophy which gives meaning to life ... [Some examples might include] the development of hidden powers ... [or] the amelioration of health or material conditions” (Judah, 1967:15); 11) these movements offer their adherents a “psychological approach to reality” (Judah, 1967:16); 12) the movements are highly
Although Lewis’ comparison illustrates how the Kabalarian Philosophy fits with Judah’s basic categories of metaphysical movements, her comparison does not directly address or explain how the Kabalarians viewed the Jewish mystical tradition from within this metaphysical perspective. Lewis does examine elements that the Kabalarian Philosophy seemingly shares with the Kabbalah, but it seems more likely that Parker incorporated elements from the Kabbalah that echoed his own ideology, rather than interpreting the Kabbalah specifically through a metaphysical perspective. The contention here is that the metaphysical movement did play a role in shaping the Kabalarian Philosophy’s belief system, and that Parker’s own interpretation and experience with the Kabbalah had the most significant impact on his movement.

**Basic Kabalistic Wisdom**

Parker designed the Kabalarian Philosophy to be a movement that taught interested individuals about principles that supposedly would affect each aspect of their daily lives. Parker developed classes and workbooks with this specific goal in mind. At the beginning of each of these workbooks (which tied in directly to the lectures that Parker created) was a statement of beliefs that told the Kabalarian student what basic principles they could expect to learn from their membership in the movement. This statement did not change for each separate class, primarily because Parker believed that knowledge had to accumulate over years, through many courses, in order for the student to get a complete understanding of the teachings. Although there were different levels of courses optimistic in that there can be discernible results in this lifetime if one follows and realizes their true nature; 13) “the acquisition of pleasant things under the guise of prosperity has become important” (Judah, 1967:17); 14) there is the belief that many words hold a meaning beyond the traditional dictionary definition and that it is revealed intuitively; and finally, 15) metaphysical movements share the belief that the power of the mind and spirit can heal the body (Judah, 1967:12-19).
(depending on familiarity and understanding of the material) the statement of beliefs included in all workbooks and course books is as follows:

The Kabalistic Wisdom contains the knowledge of the Basic Spiritual Principle behind all religions and secret doctrines. It teaches how the Divine Forces operate through human mind to create intelligence and destiny. It discloses the Spiritual Key to scientific and Spiritual Progress, and it is the only means through which mental balance may be attained. The Kabalistic Wisdom holds the key to the Cyclic Law, through which human destiny may be measured and arranged.

Through the channel of intelligence man must seek to understand the mystery of his own mind, for therein lies the secrets of Life. In understanding a Basic Spiritual Principle, man can measure and understand human mind and bring the Philosophy of Life down to a practical, understandable reality ... combining the exact science of matter, mind and consciousness, into a Universal Principle where both the scientific and the religious concepts are combined in just equilibrium. (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1966:cover page)

This statement of belief provides numerous elements to examine, including its context, its applicability to both members and non-members of the Kabalarian Philosophy, and its meaning in relation to the teachings and doctrines of the group.

The movement’s statement of beliefs declares the Kabalarians to be a movement of exceptional breadth and tolerance, as illustrated by the movement’s ability to elucidate the basic principles that underlie all religions, as well as the secret doctrines of a variety of philosophies and spiritual understandings. One would conclude, therefore, that these teachings could be used for the betterment of all of society, yet in a contradictory passage on the inside cover of the same workbook, there is a disclaimer which states that: "[the user of the workbook is] not authorized to show, loan, sell, or read these pages
to anyone, in full or in part, or divulge the instructions received, in any degree except to your partner in marriage, and then only if said partner is in accord with the teachings of the wisdom of the Kabalah” (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1966:inside cover). Furthermore, if any student would “withdraw from studentship in the Kabalarian Philosophy for any reason whatsoever, this book must be returned to Kabalarian Fraternal Organization ... within 10 days” (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1966:inside cover; emphasis in original). Despite the seemingly universal proposition stated on the front cover, there is an exclusivity in who can possess the knowledge the Kabalarian Philosophy has to offer, as well as under what conditions a student can have access to it.

Any possible explanation for the organization’s statement of exclusivity is not specifically stated, and therefore, we can only guess at the movement’s motivation for including such a strong statement against sharing this so-called secret of life that Parker wished to share with the world. One possible interpretation is that perhaps Parker felt that the knowledge contained within each of the workbooks needed to be presented to students when they were ready, otherwise the knowledge would either be lost on them or present unforeseen dangers to them if they were not ready for what the organization had to teach. This potential argument implies that the restrictions imposed on a student are for his or her own benefit, as well as for the benefit of those who have not yet been exposed to the information needed to process and understand the concepts.

Other movements contend that certain information should not be given to students until they are ready, including the Church of Scientology. This movement uses the Bridge to Total Freedom, a chart that both shows a member’s progression and plots out the levels that students have achieved, as well as those levels still ahead of them. Scientology designed the Bridge classification as a means of determining a member’s (or potential member’s) development and understanding in relation to Scientology doctrines. The Bridge “means that there are certain actions required to be done or conditions to be
attained before an individual is classified for a particular training level and allowed to progress up ... to higher states of existence” (Church of Scientology International, “Scientology and Dianetics Glossary,” 1996-2002). In the case of both the Kabalarian Philosophy and the Church of Scientology, a member’s progression is gradual and based on the member’s own speed of learning.

Since both philosophies supposedly teach the truth about life from their own perspectives, it is not surprising that these organizations believe that not everybody is ready for the knowledge. Some members even go so far as to argue, especially in the case of the Church of Scientology, that not following the path the organization has laid out for a member (meaning the Bridge to Total Freedom) is tantamount to spiritual suicide: “Man, in his religious heritage, has long imagined a bridge across the chasm between where one is now and a higher plateau of existence. Unfortunately, many of those attempting to cross that chasm fell into the abyss” (Church of Scientology International, “Bridge to a Better Life,” 1996-2002). The implied meaning here is that there is only one true and complete path to spiritual understanding⁶⁴ and it is presented in the doctrines of the Church of Scientology. Notwithstanding the Church of Scientology’s claims, the Kabalarian Philosophy shares the same fundamental belief in the supremacy of its spiritual path, while also believing in the potential

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⁶⁴ Although the Church of Scientology serves here as a direct comparison to many principles professed by the Kabalarian Philosophy (including the belief that it is the only organization that provides the correct spiritual path for people to follow), the Church of Scientology and the Kabalarian Philosophy are not the only religious organizations that make this claim. To speak in generalizations, many Christian traditions, Islamic streams, Jewish denominations, and numerous Eastern religions, including Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhist traditions, make similar claims. The point, then, is not to single out the Church of Scientology and the Kabalarians as the only movements that profess their superiority over other religious traditions, but to illustrate that as recently founded religions, Scientology and the Kabalarians specifically stated the religious pursuits humanity has made over the last six millennia have all been for naught. Only in the last five decades has any real understanding of the spiritual universe come to pass.
dangers of not adhering to the requirements laid out by the founder of the movement for reaching the goal of spiritual understanding.

Another interesting element to consider, however, is that both the Kabalarian Philosophy and the Church of Scientology claim to be compatible with other religions, so that members supposedly do not have to terminate their current religious affiliation.\textsuperscript{65} Although this point goes beyond the strict exploration of the Kabalarian Philosophy’s beliefs, this is an important point to address because it contributes to understanding the movement’s attitude towards other religions or philosophies. The Kabalarian Philosophy claims to be a movement that embraces the wisdom of other philosophies and spiritual understandings, but at the same time, sees other spiritual pursuits as incomplete, or lacking full comprehension of the complexities of the universe. What distinguished the Kabalarian Philosophy from other New Religious Movements, which also share this unique attitude, is that the contradiction clearly appears within their Internet sites, which is material that they have made publicly available. Here are several paragraphs taken from their website that

\textsuperscript{65} Many of the Church of Scientology websites discuss Scientology’s relationship with other religions quite extensively. The Church’s official and public position regarding other religions is that: “Scientology is all-denominational in that it opens its membership to people of all faiths. Part of the Church's Creed states that ‘all men have inalienable rights to their own religious practices and their performance.’ [Furthermore,] [m]embership in Scientology does not mean that there is any necessity to leave your current church, synagogue, temple or mosque” (Church of Scientology of Michigan, 2001-2002). Scientology critics, however, claim that membership in the Church necessitates a complete belief in only Scientology doctrines and does not permit affiliation with any other philosophical or religious organization. To have any spiritual beliefs other than those of the Church of Scientology is to demonstrate one’s ignorance of the Church’s teachings. A critic of Scientology explains this argument well: “Hubbard believed that religion was based on the implants from R6.... According to Hubbard, people throughout history have found pieces of R6 and used them to control or enslave other people. Thus, as a matter of Scientology doctrine, all religions are based on aberrations [sic] caused by the reactive mind. The purpose of Scientology is to free us from the reactive mind and thus by extension, all religions. In this way, Scientology is diametrically opposed to religion [quoted from Harrington]” (Scott, 2000).
indicates their underlying belief in the inferiority of other religions to teach true spiritual guidance:

Fundamentally, all religions have three objectives: to teach a theory of life to explain the various facets of life, to provide a code of conduct, and to unite the efforts of their adherents to fulfil their interpretation of the plan of life.

Towards the first of these three objectives, the Kabalarian Philosophy adds significantly to the understanding of mind. While all constructive codes of conduct are beneficial to the degree they are applied consistently, fulfilling the plan of life is incomplete without recognizing the role of mind.

The Mathematical Principle, as taught by Kabalarian Philosophy, has been known in many cultures and ages past. This principle is the means by which mind is created and balanced. What more important truth in seeking to understand the plan of life is there than striving to become a complete reflection of the universal potential of mind? (Society of Kabalarians, “What are the Differences,” 2003)

While the Kabalarians claim that all religions basically offer humanity three major components, the only true answer is to develop the mind — something other religions do not do, but the Kabalarian Philosophy does.

Another example illustrating the contradiction within the Kabalarian Philosophy is in Life and Religions, where Parker states that Christianity has somehow lost the path of discovery and “despite all attempts to block free and independent thinking through the useless amalgamation of churches that have not contributed one iota to Christian progress since their individual inception” (Parker, Life and Religions, 1968:23-24), there has been no significant understanding of the key to life. These Christian churches have lost (or never really possessed) the skills needed to understand their own scriptures and the mathematical symbolism contained in almost all of their important religious
scriptures. Only the Kabalarian Philosophy’s doctrines, based on mathematical principles, can truly decipher the esoteric meanings found in these Christian religious scriptures, and Parker uses the Holy Bible as an example to support his theory:

The Holy Bible starts with the first book of Moses (Genesis) based upon the creativeness of mathematics: the quantity and quality of days, their significance, and also the cyclic law of time as related to creation; to wit: how God created the world in seven days, and rested. A thinker must notice the predominance of numbers in the explanation of creation. Then there is the “Book of Revelation,” the last book of the Scripture, that is based upon mathematics; it concerns St. John’s vision in heaven, where he was permitted to view the lifting of the seals of the great book of life. “Revelation” is a book of mathematical symbology and it is considered the book of mystery that no man may logically translate. (Parker, *Life and Religions*, 1968:4)

The position taken by the Kabalarian Philosophy is one of religious supremacy through deeper and more meaningful understanding of not only the universe, but the scriptures of other faiths and religions. Although this supremacy is not stated outright, it pervades all of the Kabalarian teachings.

This supremacy of the Kabalarian Philosophy’s doctrines, which uses mathematical principles to understand scripture, returns us to the analysis of the meaning of the Kabalarian statement of beliefs. As I previously mentioned, the Kabalarians focus on mathematics as the key to understanding the cosmos. Their statement declares one of the most fundamental principles of the movement — the combination of “scientific and ... religious concepts ... in just equilibrium” (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1966:cover page) and in this aspect of the Kabalarian Philosophy one can see a clear relationship between religious pursuits and scientific principles, namely in the form of mathematics. Kabalarians believe that mathematics is the basis of the universe, and “[s]cience makes all its
progress through the exact measurement of mathematical formulae. So, too, a philosopher can make philosophical progress through the knowledge of mathematics and language, the two basic principles of life” (Delain, 2001). For Parker, there is little distinction between religion and science because both perspectives are the result of Divine Consciousness. 66 The scientific understanding of the universe through mathematics, however, can be accomplished only through the use of mind, a topic that receives significant attention in Kabalarian courses.

**The Mind**

According to Kabalarian understanding, the mind is perhaps the single most important element in realizing one’s own destiny and place in the cosmos: “Alfred Parker was convinced that mind is neither a manifestation of the brain’s activity nor the product of socialisation, but something which can be created” (Lewis, 1994:20). The process of creation is through one’s name, “man’s mathematical or finite link with the abstract plane, sometimes called spirit” (Parker, “What’s in Your Name?,” 1975:30). Name is dependent on language, essentially the “only channel of consciousness and man is merely an instrument through which it is expressed” (Parker, “What’s in Your Name?,” 1975:29). For Parker, language and mind are so closely interrelated and interdependent that the two terms appear together repeatedly throughout his writings and by extension, Parker relates both these concepts inextricably with the Kabalarian notion of an individual’s name. To further develop Parker’s beliefs regarding the connection of mind, language, and name, it is fundamental to note that “[w]hen a child is named at birth, the parents unconsciously use language to create its mind” (Parker, “What’s in Your Name?,” 1975:30; Kabalarian Philosophy, “The

66 I analyze and explore Divine Consciousness (or, depending on the context, Universal Consciousness) and the Kabalarians’ belief in God and other spiritual figures in a later section of the movement’s beliefs.
Power of a Name” 2001). Essentially, when parents name their child, their child’s destiny lies within that chosen name. Explained another way:

[a] child at birth has no mind; the mind is created when the child is named and when specific conscious energies, coordinated and given expression by the symbols in the name, stimulate the brain cells to respond accordingly — and thus a mental pattern develops. This pattern is recognized as the personality and reflects the qualities of intelligence expressed by the name. (Kabalarian Philosophy, “The Power of a Name,” 2001)

For the Kabalarians, therefore, a name chosen without the use of the Mathematical Principle is subject to a life of “sickness and suffering, because the mind (unbalanced) is not tuned to its higher consciousness and thus thinks wrongly, acts wrongly, eats wrongly, loses control of the natural functions of the body, and is thus forced to resort to artificial scientific formulas to balance the elements of the body” (Parker, “What’s in Your Name?,” 1975:30). The naming of a child, therefore, should be done with due consideration to the potential outcome because the result of the naming process has serious mental, physical, and emotional consequences, according to the Kabalarian Philosophy.

The Kabalarians deal with the practical application of such a theory succinctly by providing their members, as well as any interested party willing to pay for the service, with a name analysis that breaks down both the first and surname of an individual using the Mathematical Principle. In an ideal situation, parents choose a name combination for their newborn child that balances with universal consciousness and determines the child’s fate will be one of positive experiences: “When [a child is] named [his or her] destiny is created, and [he or she] merely unroll[s] the scroll day by day and records the experiences that are attracted to … [them] through the law of action and reaction” (Parker “What’s in

67 This concept is the focus of a later section.

68 Universal Consciousness, as meant in this context, is the underlying force that governs the cosmos.
Your Name?,” 1975:30). With the belief that name, language, and mind are all components that create and shape life, the process of naming children is paramount in determining their future: “Your name shows your every experience, it defines your weaknesses both mentally and physically, and interprets your whole nature as well as showing your position in life and your measure of success or failure” (Parker “What’s in Your Name?,” 1975:30).

The Kabalarians, however, do concede the point that if people change their name or go by a nickname, their future, both physically and mentally, then becomes altered according to the new combination. Parker renamed his daughter several times (or she willingly chose a different name and acted as a test subject for her father’s experiments) until Parker worked out the effects of name on behavior. In Kabalarian understanding, then, it is never too late to change one’s name to a more favorable combination. According to Parker, when his mother stopped being called by her nickname, her physical health improved, as a reflection of her new name combination. For Kabalarians, this example provides support for their theory of the power of language, name, and mind.

The selling of balanced name combinations (or name analyses) is perhaps the single most profitable service the Kabalarian Philosophy provides to both members and non-members, and is readily accessible through its website, or by ordering over the phone. If one has access to the Internet, then the Kabalarian Philosophy also provides a free sample name analysis (of your first name only) to entice a full name analysis at a later time. According to their website⁶⁹ (as of February 25, 2003) prices range from $45 to $135 depending on age and whether the movement performs the name analysis via e-mail or the phone.

Although Parker believed that a positive name combination could assist an individual to live a more healthy and productive life, Parker listed several mental conditions that are the result of an uncontrolled mind. Specifically, Parker viewed

⁶⁹ While I was writing this dissertation, the Kabalarian Philosophy updated their website and, as of February 25, 2003, offered a money back guarantee on name analyses performed, which the movement did not do previously.
one such mental condition to be out of control and almost to the point of plague proportions — schizophrenia, or as he calls it, split personality. Even though this mental imbalance afflicts large numbers of the population, Parker asserted that having a balanced name combination can play a significant role in relieving the tensions and afflictions that result from having an unbalanced mind.

According to Parker, little is known about the true function of the mind in both medical and religious arenas. As a means of explaining some of the complexities of the mind, Parker claims that “[a]n unbalanced state of mind creates discord in one’s desires, emotions, tastes, and appetites…. [In addition to these areas of discord,] … there are the many complexes such as fear, persecution, sex perversion, insecurity, kleptomania, alcoholism, [and] anti-social behaviour” (Parker, 1963:8) that result in an individual being deemed insane or “sub-normal” (Parker, 1963:8). He argued that these individuals, however, did not receive treatment by society, but rather are hidden from view. His explanation for these conditions and afflictions is that they are degrees of mental unbalance (Parker, 1963:9) and as such, can be addressed if one looks into the mind and its true nature. Schizophrenia, then, is a degree of mental imbalance, which is the result of “the present state of mind[’s inability] to cope with the terrifying tempo of modern civilization” (Parker, 1963:11). For Parker, the increase in society’s pace and demands directly contributes to what he believed was an increase in schizophrenia.

In his writings on the subject, Parker described numerous accounts where he personally encountered individuals with split, or dual, personalities. He claimed to have “cleared the mental channel and dissolved the interfering

70 According to Parker’s understanding of the mind, all mental problems and deficiencies fall under the more broad term of schizophrenia. As such, I use the term schizophrenia as Parker does, despite modern medical views and qualifications of this term.

71 Parker did not further detail this term or the process he used to clear the individual of the other entities, or the lasting results on his subjects. Because of this lack of information, the claims he makes remain dubious.
mental entity” (Parker, 1963:12) on several occasions, supposedly freeing the suffering individual of the other voices in his head. Parker’s descriptions of such examples, however, are vague and uncorroborated, making his claims difficult to assess. The underlying point of mentioning these examples, however, is to illustrate how Parker sees the mind and the conviction with which he maintains this belief.

**Theological Beliefs**

In addition to the statement of beliefs described in the section dealing with the basics of Kabalistic Wisdom, the Kabalarian Philosophy further describes one main creed that states the organization’s principles. As a member of the Kabalarian Philosophy, each individual should live in accordance with these proclamations, taking their meaning to fruition in all daily activities. This section examines the Kabalarian Creed in two ways: historically, as it has changed over the decades since its inception, and theologically, by exploring the meaning of the creed. Essentially, the Kabalarian Creed elucidates the foundational theological and spiritual basis of the group, while the statements found in the section dealing with the basic Kabalistic Wisdom focus on the connections between the group’s scientific understanding of the universe and the laws that apply to all humanity. Although both the Kabalarian Creed and Kabalistic Wisdom explore different facets of the movement’s worldview, the former outlines major tenets of the group in a codified form, using both esoteric and exoteric statements.

**The Kabalarian Creed**

I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE PRINCIPLE, which always was, is and always will be, from whence all things came.
I BELIEVE in the positive and negative forms of THE PRINCIPLE. “Male and female created HE them, without which there would be no manifestation of THE PRINCIPLE.”

I BELIEVE the positive (Male) manifestation of the PRINCIPLE (Spirit) becomes involved with the negative (Female) manifestation of THE PRINCIPLE (body) forming man on this earth.

I BELIEVE that the positive manifestation (SPIRIT) must control the negative manifestation (body) through perfect balance between Mind and Consciousness, thus making Mind a perfect channel of expression through the Word.

I BELIEVE all things created express [their true nature] through their own individual rate of vibration, and our minds also vibrate to their own overall or basic vibration.

I BELIEVE that our names provide that basic vibration.

I BELIEVE that the spoken word is the only channel of conscious expression.

I BELIEVE in the oneness of all things.

I BELIEVE in the involution of spirit into form, and its evolution back again to DIVINE CONSCIOUSNESS through the power of the Word.

I BELIEVE THAT “IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD AND THE WORD WAS GOD.” (Parker, qtd. in Lewis, 1994:18)

Although the Kabalarian Philosophy apparently ran this creed at the beginning of each of the organization’s magazines, it has since been altered, at least for inclusion on the Kabalarian Philosophy’s official website. The following is a later version of the creed as it appears on their current website:72

72 In the text presented on the movement’s website, there is no punctuation (specifically periods) beyond what I have included in the quoted material, although commas are in the original.
Creed I: I believe in God the Principle
Creed II: I believe in the Power of the Word
Creed III: I believe in a balanced name
Creed IV: I believe in obedience to the Spiritual Father and earthly parents
Creed V: I believe in daily deep breathing for a clear mind and healthy body
Creed VI: I believe my body is the temple of the spirit
Creed VII: I believe I must respect and care for my body through proper food and good habits
Creed VIII: I believe I must respect all nature and should not hurt in word or deed
Creed IX: I believe in universal love and tolerance through self-discipline
Creed X: I believe there is a time to sow and a time to reap and as I sow so shall I reap
Creed XI: I believe I am part of the great universe that never dies
Creed XII: I believe the teachings of the Kabalarian Philosophy will give me a happy, healthy, and successful life (Parker, 2001)

When comparing the two versions of the creed, it is significant to note that the creed on the Kabalarians’ website has been shortened and many of the theological references made to the duality of God and the nature of man have been replaced by statements dealing with health, tolerance, and a Kabalarian

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73 “Balanced name” contains a hyperlink in the original text and refers to the: “... harmonizing [of] your thinking to the natural qualities of your inner potential. Establishing a balanced name is an essential first step in overcoming the limitations and disharmony in your original names. Then, as you strive to understand and live to the natural laws of life under a balanced name, your ideals and experiences become relative to your true purpose. Living and expressing your intrinsic qualities brings greater happiness, peace of mind, and success into your life. A balanced name has the potential for the full expression of your inner potential” (Society of Kabalarians, “Purpose of the Balanced Name Recommendation,” 2003).

74 “[P]roper food” also contains a hyperlink in the original text.
member’s proper behavior towards others. Moreover, when comparing the two sets of creeds, both seem to illustrate the fundamental tenets of the group, although each creed has a different emphasis.

The earlier version of the creed does not emphasize any behavioral principles, nor does it focus on treating one’s body in a certain manner. The later creed, by contrast, describes much less explicitly the dual nature of the universe, the concept of involution and evolution\textsuperscript{75} that Kabalarians purport to believe in and refers to matters of a spiritual nature. Together, both of these creeds allow an outsider a glimpse of the underlying principles that guide the group, although we cannot understand the group fully by these creeds alone.

In addition, we must explore other religious perspectives and beliefs, since these allusions seem to be both direct and indirect. I argue that the Kabalarian Philosophy’s main creedal principles drew heavily from other religious influences, although for the most part, the traditions from which Parker borrows are not properly given credit anywhere within the movement’s writings. In the following section, therefore, I attempt to explore the origins of the allusions made in the two creeds, while examining and comparing reasons why the Kabalarian Philosophy chose to focus on some aspects of the worldview while ignoring others in each of its creeds.

To begin a comparative analysis of the Kabalarian Creeds, we must first examine the changes that the creeds underwent. Moreover, we must also examine possible reasons why any change in the creed occurred in the first place. The most obvious supposition that explains an altered version of the creed is that the Kabalarian Philosophy became aware that the audience currently reading the creed was different than in the past, whether or not these individuals were members of the organization.

Demographically, the target audience shifted from the exclusive audience familiar with the basic concepts and theological arguments of the group, to the

\textsuperscript{75} I examine this concept further later in this section.
far broader audience that the Kabalarian Philosophy can now reach through the Internet. These cyber-readers most likely have little or no familiarity with the Kabalarian Philosophy prior to their online exposure to the group, and, therefore, no knowledge about Kabalarian spiritual positions or the concepts the movement holds to be worthy of learning and teaching.

When comparing the two versions of the creed, it is clear that the earlier version more accurately and explicitly describes the theological beliefs of the group, which supports the argument that the creed was meant exclusively for members who already belonged to the Kabalarian Philosophy. The later version, accessible to millions via the Internet, is considerably less specific and elaborate in its theological stance, and presents the reader with a codified version of ways that any individual can “understand and apply the principles of constructive living” (Parker, 201) to one’s life.

More specifically, however, the creeds are a means whereby children can be “educated to understand the universal principles” (Parker, 2001) of the Kabalarian Philosophy, thereby potentially enticing a new generation to follow the movement’s principles. The breadth of the Kabalarian Philosophy’s dissemination via the Internet opens up new vistas for the small organization, possibly infusing the group with other interested individuals, and certainly broadening the group’s ability to present its worldview to a larger target audience.

The advent of the Internet, and the subsequently increased number of people potentially accessible to the Kabalarians via this means, leads to the possibility that one of the motivating factors contributing to the change in creed was the need to create a more general and appealing creed for non-members. While the theological aspects presented in the earlier version combine elements of several New Age philosophies and unique perspectives on understanding God and the universe, without some previous knowledge of the movement’s belief system, an outsider would have difficulties in fully understanding many of the esoteric aspects in the creed. For instance, there are numerous allusions made to
other religious precepts and worldviews: one such allusion seems to reflect the Taoist understanding of God.76

From the Kabalarian perspective, the first line of the earlier version of the creed states: “I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE PRINCIPLE, which always was, is and always will be, from whence all things came” (Parker, 2001).77 This statement describes what is known in Taoist thinking as Tao, “[t]he nameless [that] was the beginning of heaven and earth;/ [t]he named [that] was the mother of the myriad creatures. ... [And] [t]he myriad of creatures rise from [Tao] yet it claims no authority” (Lao Tzu, 1963:Book 1, Chapter 1, l.2; Chapter 2, l.7). The parallels between these two concepts seem remarkably similar, especially when one examines segments of the following lines of the earlier creed, which state that the Principle is comprised of “positive and negative forms ... male and female ... [s]pirit ... [and] body” (Parker, 2001; capitalization removed from original). Again, the duality described in the Kabalarian Creed seems to echo what Lao Tzu described as yin and yang — the manifestation of Tao in all aspects of life.

Yin and yang, which are concepts that have existed in Chinese thought for millennia, seem to illustrate the basic elements of the Kabalarian Creed — the duality found in the cosmos that is in everything and is everywhere. For instance,  

76 As meant here, God is a term that refers to the Supreme Ultimate entity, whether this entity is an anthropomorphic god, a force, a principle, or a concept. Unless otherwise specifically noted, one can understand ‘God’ using these broad parameters throughout this analysis.

77 In the later version of the Creed that appears on the Internet, this belief is more simplistically stated in Creed XI: “I believe I am a part of the great universe that never dies” (Parker, 2001). Although there is some similarity to the Christian Apostle’s Creed that states: “I believe in God, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth,” the contention held here is that the underlying tone of the Creed reflects Eastern religions’ conception of a more organic universe created by something beyond us that ebbs and flows in natural cycles. To deny the connections between the Kabalarian Philosophy and Christianity, however, would be a mistake, because Parker specifically used Christianity on more than one occasion to prove that religion (as a whole, he believed) no longer addressed humanity’s needs and was misunderstood now by all. This argument, however, will receive further attention later in this chapter.
Chinese thought has long made the association of lightness, warmth, brightness, maleness, activity, heaven, and life with the concept of yang, and the concepts of darkness, coolness, wetness, obscurity, feminality, passivity, earthiness, and death with that of yin. Although the Kabalarians personalize what they believe is the supreme force behind the dual universe by using the pronoun “He” to refer to this ultimate force, in contrast with Taoists who never ascribed any anthropomorphic qualities to the creating force, the parallels remain striking.

Lewis argued that the duality of God, or the Principle, described in the Kabalarians’ creed plays a large part in one of their fundamental understandings of the cosmos — the concept of involution and evolution. In addition to the esoteric references discussed previously, the concept also appears directly in their creed: “I believe in the involution of spirit into form, and its evolution back again to Divine Consciousness through the power of the word” (Parker, qtd. in Lewis, 1994:18). Lewis contended that the link between the duality of reality and the dual concept of involution and evolution reflect a process that humanity can only understand through an awareness and directed insight into the true nature of the mind:

God is seen as abstract, as universal consciousness. Through the process of involution, God [consciousness] enters the finite world. This process is seen as the union of “Father the Spirit with Mother Earth,” a union which creates life. While consciousness enters the world through this union, it is all but lost on the lower life forms but may be expressed through the mind of man. It is hoped through

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78 Generally, Tao is believed to be a formless and self-generating cosmic element that does not have a gender associated with it, although it is sometimes considered a non-judgmental mother.

79 This thought appears in a more simplistic and nebulous way in the later version of the Creed, where it is stated that: “I believe in obedience to the Spiritual Father and earthly parents” (Parker, 2001), although the official website does not provide any further explanation or context for the concept of a cosmic union.
the balance and growth of mind, man’s consciousness can evolve
to rejoin universal consciousness. (Lewis, 1994:19)

For Kabalarians, God becomes part of the finite world and can be known through the mind. As human beings, we can realize that God is consciousness and is all around us, even though most of the natural world will never truly know this. As such, the duality found in nature is also contained within each individual.

In addition to elements of Taoist thought influencing Kabalarian beliefs, another example of an Eastern religious tradition that appears to have made an impression on Parker when the movement started to coalesce its theology is Hinduism. If we were to examine basic Hindu beliefs, then we could argue that the process of involution and evolution bears similarities to humanity’s struggle to reunite with Brahman. This reunion with the godhead can be achieved only when we realize that all life emanates from Brahman, as well as realizing that Brahman is also universal consciousness. The Kabalarian Philosophy appears to echo the Hindu belief that “[i]ndividuality is … the opposite of universal consciousness, so the goal is to arrive at an understanding of oneness with God the Spiritual Principle” (Lewis, 1994:19).

While Parker claimed early on that he did plan on uniting elements from the Eastern and Western religious traditions, whether he successfully acted as the bridge between the two different paradigms remains uncertain. This uncertainty is the result of Parker’s complete lack of admission that he did borrow elements of his theology from other religious traditions. By neglecting to acknowledge that many of his basic principles derive from other well established faiths, Parker denied himself the role he believed he was born to fulfill — that of the chosen man who would act as a bridge between all faiths. Although Parker proclaimed himself to be well read and versed in both Eastern and Western religions, his inability or unwillingness to tell his followers that many of his ideas were, essentially, a synthesis of major theological principles in a variety of faiths, makes him appear narcissistic. For those individuals who do not have any familiarity with other world religions, Parker may have appeared to be a spiritual
fountain. They may not have realized that many of his ideas were likely drawn from a variety of other established theological sources.

Further examples of Parker utilizing other faiths’ understanding of the cosmos appear in the Kabalarian Philosophy’s earlier creed. For example, the notion that each of our minds, as well as “all things created” (Parker, 2001), have their own vibration\(^80\) shares some similarities with Sikh beliefs that all of creation reverberates God’s essence as a manifestation of God’s Name. By hearing and meditating on God’s name:

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\text{man becomes as Shiva, Brahma, and Indra.} / \text{... By hearing the Name the way of Yoga and the secrets of the body are obtained.} / \text{... By hearing the Name truth, contentment, and divine knowledge} \]

\(^80\) Throughout my analysis of the Kabalarian Philosophy, there has been no specific definition of what exactly vibrations entail. The closest definition available is in the form of an analogy to a piano whereby each note creates a specific sound vibration. When these vibrations are in tune, harmony results (Kabalarian Philosophy, “The Power of a Name,” 2001). This analogy is explained in a later footnote where the connection between name, language, mathematics, and vibrations is further explored. A further note on the topic of vibrations is that the Kabalarians mentioned the concept in their earlier creed but omitted it from the creed they have on their official website. The Kabalarians do not provide any reason for the change and there is only a brief mention of vibrations on their website, found within an article exploring the power a name has to affect one’s life. Moreover, there are also similarities between the Kabalarians’ understanding of vibrations and H.P. Blavatsky’s Theosophical understanding of vibrations. To a certain degree, the two share the belief that: “there is always the originating or causal agent for any specific instance of vibration; thus the thinker produces mental vibrational activity which we call thinking or thoughts, or emotion or feeling. Indeed, every entity in the universe is in incessant motion or vibrational activity arising from force inherent in the entity or the thing itself; and these interblending activities of vibration produce the vast diversity around us. Thus every atom, electron, molecule, or being anywhere, sings its own vibrational note” (“Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary: Va-Vih”, 1999). While Blavatsky developed the notion of vibrations in greater detail than did Parker, the shared belief that the universe is comprised of particles that vibrate and can be affected by other vibrations is somewhat interesting. One could hypothesize that during his interest in the occult, Parker absorbed some of the theosophical doctrines proposed by that group.
are obtained./ ... By hearing the Name the mind is composed and fixed on God. (Van Voorst, 2003:125)

Although the Kabalarian Philosophy contends that each entity has its own vibration, whereas Sikhs believe that the world universally vibrates with His presence, the similarity bears mention to support the position that Parker may not have been as unique in his worldview as he apparently envisioned himself to be.

While there are commonalities between Sikh and Kabalarian understandings of cosmic vibrations, the Kabalarian Philosophy develops this idea to a much fuller degree, often mentioning vibrations in a variety of contexts. Perhaps the most exhaustive explanation regarding vibrations is found in the *Kabalistic Wisdom and Breathing Exercise Book*. According to this workbook, vibrations can be either a positive or negative force. The Kabalarian student learns the proper way to breathe to be in tune with the vibrations of the universe and increase the spiritual self. The student must understand positive and negative forces surround each person, and proper breathing enables him or her to harness only the positive vibrations. One of the first and most significant points of the lesson teaches that “[i]f one understands the theory of correct breathing, the sensitivity of the nostril nerve to mental vibrations may be developed to sense correctly another’s state of mind or diagnose the mental plane of one’s environment” (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1966:9).

The Kabalarians feel that there is a practical application for this sensory skill because each of the nostril’s nerves is an instrument that the member should learn to interpret. Because there is a connection between an individual’s state of mind and the vibrations that the nostril can gather, it is of extreme importance to become attuned to such frequencies. According to Kabalarian theory, the “lower or instinctive state of mind is registered through the nerve opening the left nostril, called negative breathing. A mind filled with constructive thinking affects the nerve that opens the right nostril, called positive breathing” (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1966:9). The significance in distinguishing
between positive and negative breathing relates to the Kabalarians’ belief that the orientation of the vibrations (either positive or negative) differs during the day or night. The vibrations, in turn, affect behavior whether or not the individual is cognizant of their reputed effect:

The lower or emotional side of man is related to the negative or dark state of mind: ignorant of the true Spiritual Principle, a pawn of the emotions, irresponsible and ignorant, and therefore a destructive force. ... [In addition,] it will be found that the vibrations of nature during the night are negative, being more heavy and slow, while during the day the positive vibrations are quick and light and lift man’s mind. (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1966:9)

Of course, the more aware one is of the differing rates of vibrations and their resulting effects on a person’s personality and behavior, the better one is able to control the power of the vibrations, thereby directing them in a positive manner. Additionally, one also protects oneself from the negative forces that the vibrations create.

Parker taught that these negative forces have tangible manifestations in the world, and he gave examples of these manifestations to support his theories: “Murder, criminality, sickness, fear, loss of mental control, and all emotional upsets are far more prevalent at night during the slow and dark vibrations of nature” (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1966:9-10). Furthermore, only positive breathing skills and the understanding of the importance of positive breathing allow an individual to “build a positive wall around himself so that the strong pull of the earth does not affect man’s reasoning power” (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1966:10).

Closely linked with the Kabalarian theory of positive and negative vibrations is the idea that one’s name also reflects the “basic vibration” (Parker, 2001) of the individual. While the later version of the creed says that one should believe in having a balanced name (Parker, 2001), there is no mention of the
underlying belief in the interconnectedness of names, vibrations, and the oneness of all things. When one searches out a more detailed explanation on the Kabalarians’ official website, however, the concept of vibrations appears in an article written by the group. The organization briefly makes an analogy likening each note found on a piano to each letter of the alphabet that has a certain vibration\(^1\) (Kabalarian Philosophy, “The Power of a Name,” 2001) and recommends changing one’s name to one that better reflects the individual’s potential once the Principle is understood (Kabalarian Philosophy, “The Power of a Name,” 2001). “When the Principle is understood, a name can be changed to alter it to what we term a balanced name which when used will allow the inner potential to fully develop and express” (Society of Kabalarians of Canada, “The Power of a Name,” 2003).

One final point that offers insight into Parker’s supposedly unique theological perspective (as presented in part in his creeds) is an examination of the allusions made to Western faiths, specifically the Jewish and Christian religions. Although each creed contains distinct Jewish and Christian allusions, references can be either direct or indirect. In both cases, Parker did not acknowledge the religion from which he borrowed his statements, nor did he even seem to consider that he developed his ideas from a lifetime of rich

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\(^1\) To further explain this analogy as it appears on their website, Kabalarians purport that each letter in one’s name has a certain vibration, much like the vibration that each key has on a piano. To make music, or a harmonious personality if one follows the analogy, is to arrange the keys on the piano in such a way as to create something lyrical in its essence, as one does with the letters of one’s name. If one arranges the keys, and therefore the vibrations, in a chaotic manner, the result is discord. The natural comparison, the Kabalarians argue, is that if one arranges a name in a discordant manner, there are significant risks, including emotional instability, lack of mental balance, and health problems. Again, the use of their Mathematical Principle to choose a name is the best way to avoid these problems and create harmony and accord in one’s own life (Kabalarian Philosophy, “The Power of a Name,” 2001). This is similar to the concept of vibrations documented in the earlier, written Kabalarian material, but it is not developed to the same degree, nor is there the specifics of positive and negative vibrations.
religious activity, which included his experiences with his Christian upbringing, the occult, Hinduism, and his own readings. All of these influences directly affected the shape and character of his writings, and to illustrate the Judeo-Christian influence, we can look at the later version of the Kabalarian creed, which states that, “I believe there is a time to sow and a time to reap and as I sow so shall I reap” (Kabalarian Philosophy, “Kabalarian Creeds,” 2001). This part of the Kabalarian creed clearly refers to Ecclesiastes 3:2a, “[a] time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted,” and builds upon the notion that there is a cyclical nature to the cosmos — a major concept that runs throughout the Kabalarian Philosophy’s doctrines.\(^\text{82}\)

Another allusion made to the Judeo-Christian tradition in the early version of the Kabalarian creed appears in the last statement: “I believe that ‘in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God’” (Parker, qtd. in Lewis, 1994:18). Again, little doubt exists that Parker necessarily appropriated this statement from John 1:1 in the New Testament, and added the catch phrase, “I believe” before the verse. Although in the creed Parker does not attribute this Johanine passage to its original source, he does in other writings. In *Life and Religions*, Parker not only acknowledges the passage’s origins, but also uses it as an example of the power of both language and name. According to Parker, the verse is scriptural evidence that supports his argument that one’s name is a fundamental influence on one’s existence. Parker argues that Judeo-Christian scripture provided this evidence when the authors wrote about “the spiritual father of the Jews, Father Abraham. ... [He] changed his nature, ... his whole pattern of life by changing his name from Abram to Abraham. ... The same thing happened to Saul who changed his name to Paul, also James to John, [and] Naomi to Mara” (Parker, 1968:24). Having said that, though, Parker devoted little attention to further analyzing these biblical examples in his writing. For him, it seemed that simply mentioning the example is a sufficient exploration

\(^{82}\) The idea of cycles in the cosmos receives attention later in this section.
of the passage’s true meaning. The prominence and inclusion of the Johanine verse, however, reveals another facet of Kabalarian teaching that clearly relates to the Judeo-Christian religion — the Christ Principle.

According to the Kabalarian worldview, the Christ Principle refers to “the wisdom of the Christ Spirit ... [and] its ability to create fullness and completeness in one’s life and in all human affairs” (Kabalarian Philosophy, “History,” 1999). Furthermore, Parker believed “that all religious philosophies must be based on the same spiritual principle and the same ideal (although the principle had somehow become lost and thus the ideal distorted)” (Kabalarian Philosophy, “History,” 1999). Following this interpretation, then, the Christ Principle embodies all aspects that are ‘good’ in all religions, insofar as they benefit humanity, and the principle does not refer exclusively to the Christian tradition. When one juxtaposes Parker’s use of Christian iconography and scripture with Shearing’s strong anti-Catholic beliefs, a contradiction emerges. This contradiction, in part, reflects the attitudes of differing leaders and how inconsistencies infuse into a group’s theology.

Although Parker and the Kabalarian Philosophy do not mention that one of the movement’s main creeds and theological positions found its origins in a biblical verse that has existed for millennia, the Kabalarian Philosophy seems to continue to nurture the image that Parker acted as a bridge between Eastern and Western philosophical and religious traditions. In keeping with this carefully crafted image, the Kabalarians maintain that Parker reportedly understood and taught that all faiths were subject to the same universal laws. Additionally, Parker declared that it was not necessarily the faiths themselves that went askew, but that those individuals who later interpreted the tradition had done so incorrectly (Parker, Revelation, 1977:9). This is the reason Parker’s reinterpretation of both Eastern and Western religions, according to the Kabalarian Philosophy, is so crucial to humanity’s spiritual development. His reinterpretation leads to finding the unity and commonality between all religions, and this is what Parker claimed to have as his goal and purpose in life.
In furtherance of the theory that Judeo-Christian scriptures have been misinterpreted and now need correct interpretation, Parker stated in one of his later writings that:

I am not pointing out the lack of wisdom in the [Christian] Scripture [specifically], but am decrying the misinterpretation of same [sic] that has led man far down the trail to mediocrity, and left him hopeless and helpless in the face of atomic destruction. We find certain religious organizations becoming involved in national and international intrigue and deep in materiality in which finance instead of the light of wisdom has become the guiding force.

(Parker, Revelation, 1977:9)

While the Kabalarian Philosophy’s official position seems to support Parker’s contention that all faiths have a beneficial truth within them that needs rediscovery, evidence indicates that under Shearing’s leadership, the movement’s attitude towards this concept of universality and oneness soon began to reflect the new leader’s personal interpretations, rather than what Parker had envisioned for the movement.

**The Evolution and Development of Kabalarian Beliefs Under Shearing’s Leadership**

Developing slowly over the course of Shearing’s leadership and becoming public record at his 1997 criminal trial, was the circumstance that many Kabalarians came to share Shearing’s beliefs that the Kabalarians’ foundational creeds and teachings in general were to be the central beliefs members were to have, and these beliefs were relatively exclusive. Under Shearing’s leadership, members soon learned that their new leader did not necessarily follow in Parker’s footsteps, because Shearing saw his role as leader differently. Shearing chose to follow Parker in acting as a bridge between religions, but only those he deemed worthy of attention (rather than all religions, as his predecessor claimed). The
Kabalarian Philosophy soon took on what appears to be a tone of superiority in the face of other religions, especially towards the beliefs of Roman Catholicism.\textsuperscript{83}

During Shearing’s leadership of the Kabalarian Philosophy, an anti-Catholic sentiment undercut the very principles of universality that had been a cornerstone of the movement. Although evidence suggests that there was a shift in beliefs that occurred when Shearing took over the movement from Parker, the anti-Catholic sentiments were not publicly taught, nor do they appear on any of their official websites. Only during Shearing’s criminal trial\textsuperscript{84} did these sentiments surface, revealing an aspect of the movement that seems contradictory to its original teachings under Parker. If anti-Catholic sentiments had not been brought to light in such a public forum, then few people would have believed that the Kabalarian Philosophy taught such overt prejudices. The following statements (illustrating the anti-Catholic attitudes) are from the 1997 Oral Judgement of Judge Henderson at one of Ivon Shearing’s pre-trial applications. In these statements, it is clear that there is a contradiction between the supposed universality of the Kabalarian Philosophy taught in the movement’s formative period, and the outright berating of the Catholic faith after Shearing became leader. Shearing clearly considered the Catholic faith and its practitioners as inferior,\textsuperscript{85} as evidenced by the following dialogue:

Q: What would Mr. Shearing say about nuns and priests?
A: Well, as far as the Kabalarian Philosophy was concerned, the Catholic Church was viewed as the enemy, the evil menaces, and it

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[83]{There is no evidence to suggest that Parker shared Shearing’s anti-Catholic sentiments, but there is no documentation from this period.}
\footnotetext[84]{I devote greater analysis to Ivon Shearing’s criminal trial in a later chapter dealing with the sexual abuse allegations made against the Kabalarian leader.}
\footnotetext[85]{There is no mention in Shearing’s trial transcripts or in any other source why Shearing had a dislike for the Catholic faith, particularly. One could conjecture that he saw the Catholic faith as the largest single Christian group in society that had a powerful presence and influence, but again, this is merely speculation.}
\end{footnotes}
was always spoken of from the platform as being the culprit or the cause of any negative obsessions that, you know, people would fall prey to.

Q: What was it about the Catholic Church and nuns and priests that caused negative planes of mind?

A: I think that it was just the basis of the teachings of the Church itself, the history that the Church had of torture and control over people. ...

In teenage class and at other times, the discussion of the real incredible negative evil-possessed lives that priests and nuns live and that they, you know, tell the world that they’re celibate and that — that actually they’re having sex all the time, this is going on constantly, there’s a tremendous sexual plane of mind around the Church, around any priest that you might come across. ...

[Also, Shearing] said that [Catholics] were evil people and that if you ever left the Philosophy that you would probably end up marrying a Catholic. And he said that the Catholic priests kidnapped girls and raped them, put them in chains, made them come until they died, and that they were very evil people. (Henderson, 1997)

Clearly, although the Kabalarian Philosophy originally saw itself as a movement based on unique understandings of many religious principles and spiritual precepts, Shearing began to teach Kabalarian exclusivity and superiority.

Although contradictions often appear in religious organizations, the Kabalarians’ use of Christian material in their creeds, as well as in many of their basic beliefs, presents a paradoxical worldview. The numerous contradictions within the organization seem to be symptomatic of an inherently inconsistent belief system that is not necessarily solely attributed to Shearing’s leadership. During the movement’s seventy year existence, people’s attitudes change in response to the environment they find themselves in and the Kabalarians’ attitudes are not immune to these shifts in attitudes, either. During the course of
Parker’s tenure and then Shearing’s, certain attitudes towards the Roman Catholic faith specifically, intensified. While Parker clearly stated in his early writings that the Church (meaning here the entire Christian faith) was on the wrong path from the start, Shearing amplified Parker’s beliefs and focused exclusively on the contradictions that he believed existed in the Catholic Church. The simultaneous belief in general principles of the Christian faith built into the Kabalarians’ main theological principles, combined with the denigrating attitudes Shearing has towards the Catholic understanding of these same basic tenets\textsuperscript{86} echoes other inconsistencies that the movement demonstrates, specifically regarding the Kabbalah.

While the Kabalarian Philosophy named itself after the Jewish tradition and the wisdom the tradition demonstrates as a whole, Parker also claimed that the Kabbalah “[wa]s properly interpreted by only three men\textsuperscript{87} in the United States” (Parker, 1968:24). The implication drawn from his statement is that Shearing believed that he was in a position to criticize followers of the Kabbalah because he understood the Kabbalah better than all other practitioners, except for an elite group. The hubris of this statement illustrates the undercurrent of

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\textsuperscript{86} Although it is common for there to be differing interpretations and opinions concerning various doctrines within the entirety of the Christian faith, the point I wish to underscore is that Parker heavily borrowed from Christian doctrine believing the message to be fundamentally correct, yet thought that all other interpretations were incorrect. For Shearing to then develop such negative opinions towards only a single organization within the Christian faith demonstrates an inconsistency in the main tenets of the Christian faith they claim to have embraced in their own movement — tolerance, acceptance, and love for the other.

\textsuperscript{87} There is no numerical significance to the number three in this situation, except for underscoring Parker’s belief that no one except for an elite few truly had the capacity to understand the complexities of the Kabbalah.
superiority that runs through the Kabalarian Philosophy, a trait that Parker underscored and Shearing continued.  

Despite the tone of superiority exemplified by both Parker and Shearing, the two men share in the belief that ancient scriptures are valid, but they do deny the validity of the interpretation most people put forth. Both men suggest that the faiths in their pure form are correct, but that humanity has distorted the spiritual message over time. This claim of distortion is, of course, the reason behind the formation of the many existing religions, since humanity keeps searching for the universal truth that has not yet been fully revealed, at least according to the Kabalarian Philosophy. Perhaps if humanity embraced the Kabalarian understanding of religion and the cosmos, then people everywhere could rediscover the laws of nature and, therefore, religion as well.

**Law of Cycles**

The Kabalarians pay a great deal of attention to cycles, purporting that all of nature is subject to the Law of Cycles. Essentially, this belief underlies and outwardly represents the tenth tenet of the Kabalarian creed, as presented on its official website: “I believe there is a time to sow and a time to reap and as I sow so shall I reap” (Parker, 2001). Kabalarians argue that the “Cyclic Law deals with mathematics as expressed through the phenomenon of time ... [a topic that even the] greatest minds have failed thoroughly to define” (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1956:1; underlining in original). Indeed, the Kabalarians see such importance in the connection between time and natural cycles that they devote a long series of workbooks called, *Kabalistic Wisdom: Law of Cycles*, to teach their members how to discern the cycles of time.

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88 Worth acknowledging here is that this sentiment is common amongst many religious organizations and movements. Although strongly displayed in the Kabalarian Philosophy, Parker and Shearing do not have exclusive domain on such hubristic sentiments.
The Law of Cycles provides members of the Kabalarian Philosophy with the tools to understand and predict the constant movement of the cycles in nature and time. Basing their theories on the premise that growth, intelligence, and the human mind are all “governed by the one Divine Law, ... [the Kabalarians hold that] [t]he harmonies of the universe might be termed the mind of nature working through a universal plan” (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1956:2). As a result of this universal plan, the Kabalarians claim that there is a mathematical key to understanding time and its cycles, primarily because “[t]ime is mathematics, for as soon as time is discernible ... it becomes form [sic]: and form is mathematical. Everything that is discernible through human sense is mathematical because it is form, no matter what dimension it manifests in” (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1956:3). Recalling that the universe is a manifestation of God through the process of involution and evolution, according to the Kabalarians, mathematics (and language, another form of mathematics in Kabalarian understanding) is the best way to comprehend the universe and its cycles, while also acting as a channel for divine expression.

Although the mathematical formula for the cyclic law expressed by the Kabalarians is quite complex, the theory relies on the “basic Mathematical Principle of 9. ... The law of thirds [which is the Principle of 9 divided equally that] creates the perfect trinity of 9 (or 3x3) is the basic principle of life and mathematics” (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1956:3). This principle is then translated into a series of formulas that supposedly provide the key to discovering the cycle vibration, both on an earthly scale and an individual scale. The cycle that both the earth and an individual are in dictates the course of action the individual should take. According to Kabalarian theory, there are three basic periods that comprise a single cycle of time and reflect the stages of development seen every day in all forms of life, used analogously in the growth of plants. These periods include: the seeding time, the testing and proving stage, and the harvest or fruition period (Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, 1956:7-8). The characteristics present in each phase supposedly guide an individual to
greater personal harmony, in relation to pairing of the macrocosm and the microcosm that is unique to each individual.

While the workbooks provide the details that a member of the Kabalarian Philosophy learns, the development of the Cyclic Law appears in other Kabalarian writings. These writings include “The Cyclic Law” in A Selection of Writings on the Kabalarian Philosophy and Man’s Greatest Gift – Time. An ever-present belief underlying these writings suggests that if one knows about the cycles and the stage in which one finds oneself, then the decision-making process has predictability and certainty: “One can choose the appropriate time to buy or sell commodities, enter into a marriage, or even take a family vacation” (Lewis, 1994:28). In her research and personal correspondence, however, Lewis discovered that although theoretically a Kabalarian student should be able to predict things like economic and weather conditions, Kabalarian members concede that often they are unable to do so (Lewis, 1994:29). Interestingly, Lewis and her Kabalarian representative, Hilton Ramsey, gave no further explanation for why dedicated Kabalarians were unable to predict such phenomena accurately, since Parker claimed that anyone, with the proper guidance and instruction, could achieve this goal. The most likely supposition, then, given that Parker boldly argued the supposed discernibility and predictability of the cycles, is that the student simply does not possess the degree of knowledge needed to use the formulas accurately, or the student applied the formula incorrectly. In either case, the fault lies with the student’s understanding of the Cyclic Law, rather than on the Law as presented by Parker in his teachings.
Planes of Mind

One of the most widely interpreted and controversial beliefs of the Kabalarians is that the human mind has various planes. This belief is again closely linked with the more general theory of mind, which in turn contains a discussion of schizophrenia and its relation to additional theories.

In *Thoughts are Things*, Parker advised his readers to “create a simple picture of the gradations of mind as related to a scale — or to an elevator rising or descending, the floors of the building representing the different degrees or planes of mind as passed by the elevator” (Parker, *Thoughts are Things*, 1975:9). Moving upwards along the gradation scale depends on one’s grasp of logic and reason, as defined by the Kabalarian worldview, and theoretically results in the loss of ignorance about one’s own nature and Divine Consciousness.

While the mind was an area about which Parker theorized and studied throughout his life, he claimed that “[m]an represent[ed] either good or evil: both are planes of mind” (Parker, 1968:23). As Parker developed his belief, many of his other theories dealing with language and its relationship to mind, as well as the duality of the universe, played a significant role in shaping his understanding of the various planes of mind that supposedly existed. According to Parker, the universal duality exemplified by involution and evolution, spirit and matter, male and female, positive and negative, also existed in a mental realm. For Parker, mental duality was another facet that molded an individual and, therefore, needed to be controlled. Without complete control of one’s mind, an

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89 Although Parker developed this belief and it does not seem to be particularly controversial in the context presented here, negative planes of mind and Shearing’s interpretation of Parker’s theory became one of the most discussed and explored aspects brought up during Shearing’s criminal trial. While this section deals with the belief as presented by the organization, a later section explores how Shearing used this theory to gain sexual favors from his female devotees.

90 Parker does not delve into specifics about planes of mind, suggesting only that there are positive and negative ones that affect an individual.
individual could be susceptible to outside influences and possess negative planes of mind, as Parker purported in his discussions regarding schizophrenia. Without the proper mental balance then, serious diseases of the mind and body could occur.

As I discussed earlier, Parker believed that schizophrenia resulted not only in negative “mental phenomena, but is the basis of all sickness and disease” (Parker, 1963:5). According to him, mental interference, or split personality,91 “destroys the rhythm of the body and causes sickness and disease. It creates nervous tension and depletes the vitality of the bloodstream and the bodily functions” (Parker, 1963:5). Schizophrenia, then, weakens both the body and the mind because there are supposedly “two minds inhabiting one brain92 [and] the stronger [brain] takes over almost completely in time, and then [an individual] registers a state of complete insanity” (Parker, 1963:14). This is the battle that goes on in the different planes of mind that each individual has.

As applicable to his theory regarding different planes of mind, schizophrenia is mental duality that manifests itself as an individual having two or more dissimilar trains of thought (Parker, 1963:11). These two minds do not represent the good thoughts and the evil thoughts that one mind contain, as Parker claimed both the psychiatric profession93 and the Christian Church

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91 Again, the term ‘split personality’ is used here in accordance with Parker’s understanding of the concept, rather than in accordance with modern medical definitions.
92 Parker distinguishes between brain and mind by saying that the brain is the organ that we can touch, feel, and identify, but mind is something much more elusive and complex. As a result of this confusion, “science ... is spending much time and money in experimentation on man’s brain cells” (Parker, 1963:6) without addressing the true source of humanity’s problems — the mind (Parker, 1963:10-11).
93 In Schizophrenia, Parker wrote critically about the psychiatry profession, saying that the theories the field espouses are “flimsy” (Parker, 1963:29). Parker argued that this scientific field has no understanding of the human mind, and provides nothing in the way of answers for those who suffer from the imbalance.
teaches\textsuperscript{94} (Parker, 1963:14). Rather, these minds are disembodied entities, although Parker does not cite with certainty the origin of these disembodied minds.\textsuperscript{95}

**Reincarnation**

The concept of reincarnation receives attention in this analysis because of its association with Parker's theory on the various planes of mind. Although Parker wrote comparatively little on the subject, primarily because "[a]lthough cyclical in his worldview, ... [he] rejected the notion of reincarnation. In addition to feeling that the theory absolved man of a personal responsibility in this life, Parker ... [b]eliev[ed] that the ... [original theory behind] reincarnation [wa]s to allow a mind to continue its spiritual progress" (Lewis, 1994:29). The theory was an attempt to "account for the growth and perpetuation of intelligence and mental evolution" (Parker, 1976:8), and as such, Parker was not convinced of the concept. He believed that there were too many flaws in the theory, namely that it directly contradicted his theory that one's name created one's mind, and subsequently, how one lived one's life.

\textsuperscript{94} Parker argues that the Christian Church in general had been teaching its followers an erroneous understanding of split personality. Split personality is not, as the Church claims, the "positive and negative expressions of one mind" (Parker, 1963:14), but rather is two minds sharing one brain. Parker sees the Christian Church's teachings as doing a disservice to its followers, primarily because the Church deems many of its followers to be negative or evil, rather than understanding that the problem is a result of outside mental interference. Parker continued his theory by saying that if the Church were to share his perspective on split personality, then the "mental status of almost every child could be lifted to a more constructive plane, thus establishing Christian tenets by basic principle instead of by blind faith" (Parker, 1963:15).

\textsuperscript{95} Although he does not specifically cite the origin of these disembodied minds, Parker theorizes the only way to control them is through positive thinking. He claims that the scientific community does not know the cure for split personality and that they only prescribe drugs that dull the mind, but do not cure the disease (Parker, 1963:15).
Parker’s argument centered on the premise that former and present minds cannot exist in a new body, because each mind creates a different set of vibrations and patterns that form one’s personality and individuality. Parker stated that there is an obvious contradiction between his theory of mind and the theory of reincarnation when he questioned the underlying principles of reincarnation:

What would be the use of the former mind reincarnating to continue progress, when the extent of his former progress was due to his mind through the previous name? How is he going to continue the same mental paths under a different name, under a different degree of intelligence, association, and environment? Mind does not need to be carried over; it is always created through the Power of the Word by the parents through the name given at birth. (Parker, 1976:30)

Clearly, Parker’s argument reveals his disbelief in reincarnation, while reinforcing his perspective on the power of language and the importance of realizing the connections between mind and name, and focusing on one’s spiritual progress in this life (rather than waiting for the next). Lewis did point out, however, that Parker did not reject the notion that one should learn from the preceding generation, saying that the “Kabalarian Philosophy teaches that each generation ought to advance a step beyond the previous one” (Lewis, 1994:30). Perhaps as a demonstration of his open-mindedness, Parker included a codicil to this statement, saying that an individual can only learn from previous generations by using and acknowledging “the proper qualifications for the establishment of balance and harmony in life. ... [This establishment] thus consciously bring[s] about a heaven upon earth ... [allowing] Divine Consciousness ... [to be] incorporated into human existence ... thus free[ing] [each subsequent generation] from the evil karma of its predecessors” (Parker, 1976:27).

A second objection that Parker held was that there was no qualitative way to judge if each life was a progression or regression as far as mental evolution
was concerned. Parker questioned the supposition that if an individual could not judge whether there was progress in his or her mental evolution in each lifetime, then what was the standard that an individual had to meet? He argued that it could be a number of things, one example being the number of reincarnations one goes through (Parker, 1976:10-11). For Parker, there was no way to determine spiritual progress, and as a result, the theory held little weight in his philosophical worldview. The most probable reason that he felt he needed to address the issue was because many of his other beliefs drew from Eastern religions, and karma and reincarnation cannot be ignored because of their significance in many of these religious traditions, especially Hinduism.
Part Two: Charisma, Violence, and Power
Chapter Three: Defining ‘Cults’ and New Religious Movements — A Question of Perspective?

Significant confusion exists when we try to define the terms ‘cult’ and ‘New Religious Movement’ (NRM). The heart of the issue is whether these terms refer to the same type of religious group. Closely related is the issue of what, if any, distinction exists between the two terms, and if perspective plays a role in the debate. Essentially, we must ask if the term NRM refers to the same religious groups that cult does, and if so, why some researchers use two different terms. For the purposes of this study, I argue that while the meaning of the word cult has evolved over the centuries, taking on different meanings related to the social concerns of the time, the movements that the general public currently identifies and stereotypes as cults are the same organizations that academics more broadly and neutrally refer to as New Religious Movements (NRMs). Although numerous reasons exist for academics to want to change to the public’s perception of the word cult, perhaps the two most significant reasons are to bring greater precision to the study of NRMs and to try to shed the negative stereotypes associated with the word. The main difficulties with the more inclusive and neutral language, however, is that there is no standardized criteria to apply to religious organizations when trying to define them, nor is there uniformity in how researchers and the public use more neutral language. Many scholars (especially those writing from a faith-based worldview), members of the media, and popular writers continue to use the word cult to mean a variety of

96 Throughout this study, I use the term New Religious Movement (NRM) to refer to what is commonly understood as a ‘cult,’ unless the context dictates the appropriateness of that specific word. As developed in greater detail later in this chapter, the term is a problematic one, but one that researchers often use to refer to religious movements that fall outside the mainstream understanding of a religious institution, even though researchers are trying to bring greater precision and understanding to the term. See page 106 for examples.
religious or secular movements along a wide spectrum of religious organizations. As James Beckford notes, in the popular sense, the term ‘cult’ refer[s] to groups considered small, insignificant, inward-looking, unorthodox, weird, and possibly threatening. ...[However, there is] no universally acceptable, hard-and-fast distinction [that] can be made between NRMṣ and other religious collectivities. For, just as the term ‘religion’ and its cognates can be conceptualized and defined in vastly different ways ... , so there are disagreements about the kind of boundaries that could or should be drawn around NRMṣ. (Beckford, 1985:13)

Moreover, many of these writers rely on the negative images to illustrate the point that any groups that do not fall within the mainstream must be deviant.

To dispel some of the stereotypes about many of these negatively labeled groups we need only look at the history of the word cult. One of the earliest meanings of the word referred to “popular religious practices devoted to a specialized aspect of a larger liturgical system” (Smith, 1995:298). Not until the twentieth century did the word cult “become the designation for nonnormative religious practice, at least in the West” (Smith, 1995:298). During the last century, cult became imbued with the negative connotations it now evokes. Even attempts to restore the neutrality of the word’s original meaning seem doomed to failure. As James T. Richardson states:

[scholars have] made ... valiant effort[s] to define the term cult in a useful, non-stereotypical way ... [but] I [Richardson] would take the regrettable position that the term should be abandoned by scholars as currently misleading and not very useful. For scholars to attempt to make use of a term with such strong and negative popular meanings seems to be folly, and it plays into the hands of those who would oppose the development of new religious forms in our society. (Richardson, 1996:35)
In essence, reclaiming a misunderstood and pejoratively used term is a battle that should not even be fought, since negative associations will always be linked with the term cult.

To society in general, Beckford noted that a cult was any religious or ideologically motivated group that seems to possess ideas, doctrines, or behaviors that are outside mainstream acceptance or understanding. After the media exposure that groups such as the Branch Davidians, Solar Temple, Heaven’s Gate, and Peoples Temple received, it is little wonder that the public immediately evokes negative images when the word cult surfaces. The images conjured of death, abuse, brainwashing, and loss of personal control in the public’s imagination creates a picture of religious movements that are both destructive and evil. For the most part, the media has convinced the public that a cult is a dangerous and feared organization.

With this stereotype underlying society’s consciousness, Richardson’s assessment does seem to have merit. Despite the increasing use of more neutral language in academic fields, however, it is clear that the negative stereotypes and confusing terminology continue to convey powerful associations and mixed understandings in the secular and academic worlds. To illustrate this point, examine the titles of recent academic works by leaders in the study of New Religious Movements: Bromley and Melton’s *Cults, Religion, and Violence* (2002); Zablocki and Robbins’ *Misunderstanding Cults* (2001); *Comprehending Cults* (1998) by Lorne Dawson; Robbins’ *Cults, Converts and Charisma* (1988); and *Cult Controversies* (1985) by James A. Beckford, are only a handful of examples. While these academics are trying to present a less negative image of NRM, they rely on the term 'cult' in the titles of their books to serve as a place to start meaningful discussions on the subject. It is not surprising then, that the term cult evokes such a wide range of responses — as well as misunderstandings — that are difficult to combat and define.

Moreover, Richardson’s fears about the misuse and misunderstanding surrounding the word also seem to extend to the legal arena, since his research
suggests that when lawyers (and related individuals, including judges and researchers) use the word cult in legal proceedings, “many of those hearing the term can be expected to assume the ‘baggage’ which often accompanies the term in its popular usage” (Richardson, 1996:35). Conjointly, many lawyers use the term as a “social weapon” (Richardson, 1996:35) to influence the jury and judge’s impressions.  

One such example emerges when we look at the court transcripts of Ivon Shearing’s criminal case. The word cult and its negative, stereotyped associations appear numerous times in discussions of the Kabalarian Philosophy, both in prosecution and defense arguments. Although there was a witness who clearly stated that he would not “consider [the Kabalarian Philosophy] a cult” (Witness #2, R. v. Shearing, 1997:161) during the defense’s cross-examination of a prosecution witness, when asked in cross-examination by the prosecution to define what the witness meant when he used the cult term, his response included stereotypical aspects. The witness said:

My understanding, without any expert knowledge, would be a cult that would — people would blindly do what the leader would say, rather than follow their own minds and question it. This is my

97 In a case involving The Family (formerly known as the Children of God) in the provinces of Victoria and New South Wales, Australia, a similar occurrence transpired after the government instituted systemic raids on several homes The Family owned, based on allegations of child sexual abuse (see Richardson, 1999:180-181). The judge, who ruled against the government’s actions, did not use the term ‘cult’ during the proceedings, rather referring to The Family and other NRMs as “groups, organisations or sects” (The Family, 2005), to reduce the stigmatization The Family members and their children had to endure (Richardson, 1994:187).

98 The court transcripts form perhaps the most significant source describing the sexual abuse that Shearing, the leader, perpetrated on the members of the Kabalarian Philosophy. Although the transcripts contain expert testimony discussing the nature and boundaries of ‘cultish’ behavior (only on voir dire, however), the Crown did rely on the jury’s impressions of a ‘cult’ to influence its perception of the leader’s capacity for engaging in illegal activities.
understanding. And would, I guess, follow certain directions blindly without thought. (Witness #2, R. v. Shearing, 1997:188)

Both sides brought up the stereotypical image of cults deliberately to elicit a certain mental image of what a new religious group supposedly entailed. On the one hand, if the defense got the jury to believe that the witnesses were not ‘crazy’ and subject to indoctrination, then the charges brought against Shearing must be wrong. On the other hand, if the prosecution got the jury to believe that the victims had fallen prey to a cult leader, then a conviction would certainly seem more probable.

Without question, the implication that Shearing was the leader of a cult pervaded the trial. Prosecutors used the stereotype to portray Shearing as deviant, a man capable of abusing both women and children in the name of spiritual growth. Given the witness’ testimony, and the Kabalarian writings presented throughout the trial, however, it is doubtful that the negative characterization was the sole element on which the jury based its decision. The impact that the negative implication carried is crucial, though, because it demonstrates the power of preconceived beliefs and underscores scholars’ desire to redefine NRMs neutrally.

Scholars who study NRMs believe that the public’s perception of such groups is both erroneous and oversimplified. To categorize all newly emerging spiritual movements as cults that are necessarily ‘bizarre’ or destructive disregards each movement’s unique beliefs and rituals, making it difficult to see the potential value and positive attributes of the group. Moreover, by oversimplifying the theology and practice of cults, we then lack a true understanding of how these groups relate to other movements along the religious spectrum.

To attribute a rigid set of characteristics to a group believed to be a cult is also problematic. We need only look at the numerous definitions proposed by

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99 Shearing was, most likely, a nonspecific pedophile.
scholars to see the difficulty of such a task. Perhaps, though, if we compare some definitions, we might at least be able to distinguish some common features while simultaneously developing an awareness of the complexity surrounding the preconceived notion of cults and NRMs.

**Defining ‘Cult’**

To begin to appreciate the variety of religious movements that exist, and the difficulty of defining them, William Sims Bainbridge provides a definition that includes three major classifications of religious organizations from which we can start to look at the commonalties and differences among them:

A *church* (or denomination) is an organization with traditional beliefs and practices. A *sect* movement is a deviant religious organization with traditional beliefs and practices. A *cult* movement is a deviant religious organization with novel beliefs and practices. (Bainbridge, 1997:24)

Bainbridge’s definition thus attempts to distinguish between mainstream religious movements and non-mainstream religious movements, but he seems to use cult in a paradoxical manner. While Bainbridge points out the issue of deviancy in this classification of movements, he tries to maintain a more neutral perspective regarding the type of beliefs and practices in which new spiritual groups engage. Moreover, there are also other issues to explore in his definition that specifically deal with the terms he uses and the implied suggestion that cults are defined only in relation to other religious organizations that are in existence at the time.

Specifically, Bainbridge uses the words ‘deviant’ and ‘novel’ when defining cult, while failing to address directly the historical context of such movements.

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100 Bainbridge is probably one of the scholars Richardson refers to, because he attempts to use cult in a useful and non-stereotypical manner. As such, cult here refers to the same type of newly emerging religious groups that the more neutral term, NRM, refers to, unless otherwise specifically stated.
In a contemporary understanding of the term, the historical period in which a religious group emerges plays a significant role, primarily because cults are a religious phenomenon which gains distinction in relation to mainstream religious thought and organizations of the day. As Bainbridge implies, cults are religious movements that have new ideas and beliefs, but only when compared to the larger religious streams of thought circulating at the time. What was novel in the mid-1950s, for instance, might not be novel in the twenty-first century, which directly affects a movement’s classification. If Bainbridge had specifically stated the element of religious relativism, then his definition would allow for greater precision in distinguishing among the variety of movements in existence. Moreover, if a movement’s historical context were to be made an explicit part of the definition, then we could establish a crucial link to perhaps one of the most apparent and fundamental aspects of a cult: its founder. Whether a religious organization has a living leader often provides insight into the nature of the group, but what must be kept in mind is that while this issue of a living leader is a fundamental aspect when exploring cults, it is not the movement’s sole defining characteristic.¹⁰¹

Lorne Dawson addresses the characteristic that NRMs most often have a living founder when he builds upon Bryan R. Wilson and J. Milton Yinger’s theory that cults (or NRMs) “are almost always centred on a charismatic leader and are subject to disintegration when the leader dies or is discredited. ... Not

¹⁰¹ When we examine New Religious Movements and their place in history, we should acknowledge that new religious groups have emerged throughout the millennia. As many have pointed out, Christianity started out with cult status within the cultural context of the Jewish and Hellenistic world, then evolved into an accepted, mainstream religion that has a great many adherents worldwide. This example serves to illustrate the process that religions may undergo: beginning as a cult and evolving into a mainstream religion. As a result, we cannot continue to apply the term NRM to all religious movements that have emerged within the last four millennia and continue to endure. For this reason, it is significant to explore the definition and boundaries relating to NRMs in order to acknowledge that the term connects to a specific historical timeframe that continues to evolve.
surprisingly, then, the vast majority of cults are short-lived and small” (Dawson, 1998:31). Above all, the main component to the argument is that NRMss exist in a relatively contemporary historical setting, which Dawson further emphasizes when he suggests a subcategory to this broader understanding of cult: the “established cult” (Dawson, 1998:32).

Dawson also purports that the recent studies focusing on what many scholars classify as cult are “actually atypical” (Dawson, 1998:31) of the genre. When these cults are studied further, we find that these well-known movements adhere more closely to the subcategory best described as “established cult.” He argues that the movements that draw the most attention from researchers (Scientology and Krishna Consciousness are primary examples) have survived their founders and are far more organized and “ideologically and practically sophisticated in their relations with the larger world. ... Originally, though, each of these groups displayed markedly the traits of a cult. Moreover, they continue to display many cult-like attitudes and practices, such as the emphasis on esoteric teachings and the satisfaction of individual needs” (Dawson, 1998:31-32). This addendum, then, leaves us again uncertain of how to categorize an NRM/cult accurately, although Dawson’s theory does present an interesting argument that is especially relevant when examining the Kabalarian Philosophy and its evolutionary progress on the continuum of religious organizations.102

The obvious confusion in which any definition of an NRM becomes mired, is, on a very basic level, the result of confusing terms. If we go back to the definition presented earlier by Bainbridge, then we see that for him, one of the critical points he wished to make clear is that the most substantial differentiation between a cult and a religion is the relative novelty of the organization’s beliefs and practices.

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102 A detailed exploration of this point, along with other comparative examinations of the specifics of the Kabalarian Philosophy, must wait until a later chapter.
Strictly speaking, the definition of novelty suggests qualities of newness and unconventionality, but how do we determine an organization’s newness, insofar as it relates to belief and practice? According to Ecclesiastes 1:9, “there is no new thing under the sun,” which, if true in a religious sense, suggests that novelty in spiritual matters cannot exist. If, however, we assume that there can be novelty in spiritual matters, then researchers must decide what a novel belief entails. Do age-old spiritual beliefs that have been reconfigured in a contemporary format and in innovative ways qualify as novel? Would this criteria be sufficient or does novelty necessarily imply there cannot be any connection with mainstream theological perspectives? If the latter seems closer to the meaning implied in the definition, then the emergence of a new religious movement based solely on novel and original beliefs would be rare, indeed. Underscoring the arguments that religions have a theological context, and that humanity’s constant pursuit of understanding of the divine is not a recent phenomenon, we are again left to wonder about the novelty of beliefs and how to interpret Bainbridge’s definition.

Perhaps the answer to the definition problem is to focus on an organization’s practices and consider the means by which a group reputedly communicates with the divine, thus relying solely on interpretations of the reverential acts. Perhaps the rituals themselves reflect a novel quality, leading members to a new approach and experience with the divine. We can find hints supporting this idea in Dawson’s discussion of NRMs in what he calls, “discerning a New Religious Consciousness” (Dawson, 1998:162). Drawing on the work of Donald Stone, Dawson suggests that “new religions are marked by a pronounced religious individualism ... [and] these religions are religions of experience. ... ‘The emphasis is on experience and faith rather than doctrine and belief’” (Stone qtd. in Dawson, 1998:163). If we understand Bainbridge’s meaning of novelty to refer to a member’s experiential connections with a divine source, then perhaps the issue of novelty is a wholly personal matter, relying not so much on prescribed theology, but rather on emotional sensibilities.
Novelty in spiritual practice and understanding are two aspects that emerge when we explore the beliefs and ritual practices of the Kabalarian Philosophy. Members of the Kabalarian Philosophy believed that Shearing’s knowledge and connection to the divine source was absolute, thereby reinforcing the idea that the rituals he performed and asked them to engage in would also link members vicariously to the Universal Consciousness. To members who had previous experience with other faiths, Shearing’s ritual approach to the divine seemed to be an innovative method of connecting with the supernatural. Since members held Shearing in such high regard, it seemed reasonable for them to adhere to the rituals that he proposed, in order to become closer to understanding cosmic mysteries. Although, in retrospect, many members came to believe that the rituals in which they engaged were somewhat questionable and even criminal (leading to the members bringing charges against Shearing), the novelty of Shearing’s approach was convincing enough to maintain his position in the Kabalarian Philosophy for over three decades. Even after he tendered his resignation, many members continued to believe in the rituals, but began to have doubts regarding Shearing’s underlying motives for performing them. Shearing built upon members’ initial willingness to embrace the

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103 Shearing never officially declared himself the divine leader of the movement, but many members, especially the women, did believe that he represented something more than man. Many members believed he was closer to God than they would ever be. This divine persona enabled Shearing to manipulate female members into having sexual relationships with him, the specifics of which are the focus of a later chapter.

104 The novel rituals referred to here involved female members either being fondled by Shearing or being told that stroking Shearing’s penis would rid these women of negative planes of thought. Chapter seven, which is the Kabalarian Philosophy case study, explores the details of these rituals and their significance to the movement’s theology, organization, and power structure.

105 The faith that members practiced before joining the Kabalarian Philosophy is of secondary importance to the suggestion that the role of rituals in their previous religious environment and the parallels these members saw in the Kabalarian Philosophy was, in part, what these new members found to be attractive in Shearing’s movement.
rituals that he claimed would bring them a greater understanding of the basic universal laws of nature, as well as their acceptance of his assertion that he was ridding members of negative forces that were influencing their behavior in adverse ways. Presented in this manner, no other movement offered the same accessibility and spiritual worldview that the Kabalarian Philosophy did.

Conceivably, however, the very novelty of beliefs and rituals (the cornerstone of many NRMs) draw the most attention from non-members. To non-believers, often the very rituals that seem to be the most attractive and enticing to members (and potential new recruits) of a movement are those that are thought of to be the least understandable, and oftentimes, the most bizarre. To some degree, perspective dictates how NRM ritual activity is interpreted by non-members, even though these rituals have a purpose within the movement’s worldview.

One example that arguably crystallizes the issue was the sexual practice of David Koresh. Allegedly, Koresh made “graphic public instructions concerning how young, relatively undeveloped girls should use tampons to prepare themselves for sexual relations with him” (Ellison and Bartkowski, 1995:129). In the Branch Davidian worldview, underlying this seemingly profane practice was a spiritual message that these girls had been chosen by God (since Koresh claimed that he was the Christ prophesied in the Bible) and that “it was a privilege for them to [have] become old enough ... to have sex with him” (United States Department of Justice, 1993:217). For the young girls belonging to the Branch Davidians, “the ultimate honor in life ... was to become [Koresh’s] wife” (Breault and King, 1993:78; Thibodeau and Whiteson, 1999:109-110), so they could bear “babies for the Lord” (Breault and King, 1993:113).

Seen from the Davidian perspective, this ritual (i.e., sex with Koresh) was not only acceptable to the members, but was also a reverential act. In the context of Davidian theology, Koresh was part of the divine, so when he chose certain female members to be his consorts and the mothers of a spiritual flock, it was an extraordinary blessing and honor. It therefore is not surprising to learn
that when he presented the sex ritual as necessary for the women to become God’s chosen bride, it was accepted and understandable to the members. They all shared a common worldview and few Davidian members ever considered these rituals negative in any way, and members whose views did change, did so in the few months prior to the 51-day siege by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or soon thereafter.\textsuperscript{106} It comes as no surprise that during the media coverage, many salacious details were broadcast about the group, piquing the public’s interest and challenging the beliefs of the members who had begun to doubt Koresh and the rituals he instituted. After the siege, several members and former Davidians spoke out against Koresh (Thibodeau and Whiteson, 1999; United States Department of Justice, 1993; Breault and King, 1993),\textsuperscript{107} expressing doubt about his interaction with the female devotees, believing that his actions could no longer be considered within the scope of spiritual behavior.

The existing parallel between the actions of Shearing and Koresh is that both leaders presented their rituals to their members as being unique and for the benefit of the members, themselves. Certainly, the leaders’ tacit goals of sexual gratification and power were never spoken of overtly, although they underlay much of the two men’s actions. Moreover, there is enough supporting documentation to suggest that Koresh and Shearing are not the only spiritual leaders to have instituted novel rituals enabling them to engage in violence against their members. The NRMs that become the focus of media attention seem to showcase some thread of violence in their organization, on either a

\textsuperscript{106} The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms — as it was known then — was the initial government organization to raid the compound. The FBI took jurisdiction after the initial confrontation and it was under its auspices that the siege occurred.

\textsuperscript{107} Marc Breault (with Martin King, 1993) was one of the first Davidian members to speak out against Koresh’s abusive actions towards members, although many of his statements predate the 1993 siege. Kiri Jewell (in the transcripts of the United States Department of Justice Report) and David Thibodeau are two Davidians who spoke out against Koresh.
smaller (such as the Manson Family murders) or a larger scale (such as the Peoples Temple deaths).  

Although the next chapter focuses on violence within NRMs specifically, it is important to reiterate here a point that Dawson makes: when violence and sexual abuse in NRMs is put into “proper cultural context, then the crimes of most NRMs are rather ordinary. ... the tragedies of Jonestown, Waco, the Solar Temple, and Heaven’s Gate [for example] call out for special attention precisely because they are extraordinary, even within the context of other known incidents of cult violence” (Dawson, 1998:131). Essentially, the point to draw from Dawson’s argument is that NRMs do not have exclusive domain over violent behavior, and the rituals the movements practice are not always violent — even those with a sexual component.

A further point to acknowledge is that when allegations surface of sexually based violence within religious settings, they are most often shocking events that draw more attention than other violent incidents, primarily because of the belief that there is a contradiction in associating religion and violence. As Richardson states, “[a] number of journalistic treatments of new religions have suggested that violence of various kinds is fostered by new religious groups in general” (Richardson, 2001:103). There is also no denying the power of the media in shaping public perception (Richardson, 1995:157; 164-166; 2001:103-105), and this power to influence can take advantage of NRM’s vulnerabilities.

The stereotyping in which the media routinely engages brings us back to another aspect of Bainbridge’s definition that needs clarification: what does he mean by “deviant religion”? Taken literally, to be deviant implies being outside of society’s generally accepted norms. When contrasted with most established or mainstream religions, many NRMs may seem deviant for any number of reasons. In 1982, Robbins and Anthony proposed a definition of cult (as quoted in

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108 “Smaller” or “larger” scale here refers solely to the number of deaths that occurred during these incidents.
Richardson’s article) that drew fairly rigid boundaries between mainstream and new religions, based on common perceptions at the time. The definition clearly shows biases when it describes cults as:

- certain manipulative and authoritarian groups which allegedly employ mind control and pose a threat to mental health. ... These groups are usually: (1) authoritarian in their leadership; (2) communal and totalistic in their organization; (3) aggressive in their proselytizing; (4) systematic in their programs of indoctrination; (5) relatively new and unfamiliar in the United States; and (6) middle class in their clientele. (Robbins and Anthony, quoted in Richardson, 1996:33)

Issues of authoritarian control, forced indoctrination, and the movement’s aggressiveness all demonstrate the public’s desire to have a clear delineation between mainstream religions and those thought of as dangerous or deviant. The definition responds to the public’s need for both classification and assurance that a new (and by implication ‘deviant’) religious organization has salient and identifiable features.

Although the definition mentions the leader only in relation to the leadership style he or she employs, another characteristic that likely leads to the perception of cults as being deviant is that members seemingly adhere, without question, to the demands of a living leader who often makes claims of being a prophet or divine. Additionally, this living leader communicates directly with followers, rather than through institutionalized and hierarchical means. The institutionalization of religious ideals and authority is a significant element that each spiritual organization must face, and it hints at the movement’s ability to survive beyond the original (and often charismatic) leader. A movement’s ability to continue after the founder’s death is a significant feature that contributes to the movement’s classification, while also significantly affecting society’s perception of the movement.
Weber wrote extensively on the subject of religious (specifically charismatic) institutionalization and routinization, and theorized that there were several ways that movements and their leaders could approach the crucial transitional phase between a movement being led charismatically or under a more institutionalized leadership. Two situations describe the transitional phase, and the first scenario seems to be particularly relevant to the Kabalarian Philosophy’s situation:

[Transference of authority can occur] ... [b]y the designation on the part of the original charismatic leader of his own successor and his recognition on the part of the followers, ... [or by the] [d]esignation of a successor by the charismatically qualified administrative staff and his recognition by the community. ... [T]his process should quite definitely not be interpreted as “election” or “nomination” or anything of the sort. It is not a matter of free selection, but of one which is strictly bound to objective duty ... [and designating] the right person who is truly endowed with charisma. (Weber, *On Charisma*, 1968:55-56)

As charisma gradually becomes institutionalized, and less dependent on the vision of a single leader, the public’s overall impression of the movement as being less deviant increases. Roy Wallis stated that the process allows for more traditional and stable structures to replace the unpredictability found in the original movement, “constrain[ing] not only the followers, but the leader as well” (Wallis, “Charisma,” 1982:115-116). The presence of boundaries and constraints not only serves to stabilize the group’s structure, but also to provide society with certain expectations of the group. In the public’s mind, mainstream religions are more predictable and therefore less deviant, in comparison to a cult.

Moreover, institutionalization affirms the organization’s desire to survive the leader’s death, but the bureaucracy that gradually replaces the charismatic style is one that projects a greater air of rationality and uniformity: “The followers wish to ensure the maintenance of the collectivity into which they have
thrown themselves, and this demand encourages ... [o]fficials [to] establish rational procedures for operation” (Wallis, “Charisma,” 1982:116). For the Kabalarians, the slow process of institutionalization that began after Parker’s death resulted in the movement’s writings (considered scriptures by the members) becoming solidified and unchanging, thus removing the capriciousness inherent in the movement’s former style.

Thus Shearing’s leadership in what, theoretically, was a more stable environment, should have been less innovative and more administrative. According to Weber’s theories, Shearing’s main responsibility and role as the leader was to apply and consolidate the doctrine and policy that Parker established, rather than creating new theological understandings and positions. Under Shearing’s leadership, however, the Kabalarian doctrines did evolve and change through his charismatic proclamations, which suggests that even under the second leader of the movement, there was still an unpredictability in the movement. Although Shearing did have to contend with the foundational principles that Parker established, Shearing was able to alter the doctrines to reflect his own charismatic understanding of the movement’s future.

Under Shearing’s leadership, the Kabalarian Philosophy was close to being considered what Dawson previously outlined as “established cult,” rather than being classified as a cult in its most pejorative understanding. Though typically the new incumbent’s goal is to solidify the movement’s foundational principles, maintain or increase the membership and group cohesiveness, and develop a hierarchy to deal with the new beginnings of routinization, often the leader desires to demonstrate the movement’s growing conventionality. Whether or not society shares this new perception of a movement’s evolution, remains problematic. In the case of the Kabalarian Philosophy, Shearing’s conviction on

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109 According to witness’ testimony, members of the Kabalarian Philosophy did not perform any rituals that removed negative planes of mind during Parker’s tenure as leader. This ritual was a theological position that Shearing developed and used to manipulate many of the female members of the movement. For further explanation of these clearing rituals, see chapter seven.
multiple sexually related offences confirms the public’s belief that new religious groups are deviant and exploitative. The Kabalarian Philosophy reinforced the negative stereotypes, making any distinction between a cult and an established cult irrelevant.\footnote{This argument presupposes that an NRM wishes to be a more socially acceptable movement, with the benefit of less stigmatization that comes with it. There are, of course, examples of NRMs or less established cults who embrace their ‘deviant’ status, the foremost example being the Church of Satan.}

The question we must ask, then, is how best to classify the Kabalarian Philosophy. Does the definition of established cult seem more appropriate for the Kabalarian Philosophy, and does it influence the public’s impression of the group and the category in general? Bainbridge (1997) must certainly have been aware of the difficulties in his delineation between church, sect, and cult, but intended his definition to provide a guideline for classification, rather than a definitive criterion against which all religious movements could be compared.

**Definitional Limitations**

Now that I have explored several of the intricacies involved with defining NRMs, it seems that every definition has limitations in its applicability to the Kabalarian Philosophy. George Chryssides’ approach is to define the term NRM by exploring the implications of the acronym itself. The acronym, NRM, “signals three key components: ‘new’, ‘religious’ and ‘movement’” (Chryssides, 1999:11). Initially, Chryssides purposefully leaves the implications of his classification rather vague to allow for maximum flexibility and non-exclusiveness in interpreting the terms. When compared to Bainbridge’s definition, Chryssides’ characterization of NRM focuses on understanding the components of the term as they relate to the larger body of religious organizations. In addition, Chryssides addresses an issue that Bainbridge only implied: the historical context and relativity of a movement.
Chryssides interprets the nebulosity of ‘new’ in quite a revealing manner, suggesting that the word uncovers an essential component that helps to characterize NRMs. For him, there is an implied acknowledgement that one cannot set specific time constraints and dates on what is ‘new’ and what is ‘old,’ for ‘newness’ is ever-changing (Chyssides, 1999:13). Moreover, by allowing for a certain vagueness when attempting to date religious movements, there is a degree of adaptability that acknowledges the ongoing metamorphosis of spiritual movements from new to established. This adaptability allows for a certain flexibility when identifying each movement’s relationship to other religious organizations within a larger theological context. It also echoes Dawson’s contention that within the cult paradigm (vague as it might be) there is middle ground: the classification of being an established cult.

As for defining the term “religious” as it relates to NRMs, Chryssides further argues that despite the numerous definitions that attempt to explain what “religious” means, we should look at this type of organization as “a group of people … [that] operate functionally as a religion — that is to say, [one should consider a group religious] if they [sic] offer a means of coping with the key events and adversities and misfortunes of life, using the key characteristics of religious practice which are identified by scholars such as Smart” (Chryssides, 1999:15). At first glance, and using these characteristics as a guideline, the Kabalarian Philosophy may not seem to fit the definition exactly, but certainly there are numerous commonalities between the characteristics that Smart

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111 Barker’s 1989 definition of cult uses World War II as the historical dividing line between what is ‘new’ and ‘old’. As Chryssides points out, this overlooks the fact that one day, several decades or centuries later, the 1950s will be considered ‘old,’ leaving the previous classification of ‘new religious movement’ outdated. In addition, Beckford notes that in a social scientific perspective, 1960 is often used as the defining line for what academics consider ‘new’ (Beckford, 1985:13), although acknowledging that in reality, whether a religious organization dates from the 1940s or the 1960s matters little in a definitional sense (Beckford, 1985:14).

112 Smart identifies the following dimensions as important in distinguishing religious worldviews: experiential, mythical, doctrinal, ethical, ritual, and social (Smart, 2000:55-144).
outlines and those demonstrated in the Kabalarian actions, beliefs, and behaviors. Paying special attention to the experiential, ethical, and doctrinal aspects, we can convincingly argue that the Kabalarian Philosophy is a religion. By exploring these aspects of the movement using Smart’s characteristics, we learn valuable insights on the nature of the group.

Members of the Kabalarian Philosophy experience the world with the firm belief that the universe is knowable and predictable through the consistent use of the movement’s unique mathematical understandings. Reinforcing Smart’s theoretical contention that religions demonstrate an experiential component, the Kabalarians believe that Parker discovered the laws operating behind each aspect of the universe, thereby providing those who understand the laws with an element of control and predictability. This is one of the primary reasons why choosing a harmonious and beneficial name is so fundamental in Kabalarian doctrine: you experience life first and foremost through the vibrations your name creates, so it is crucial that the name balances with universal vibrations. As a result of the stress that Kabalarians put on finding the right name, members often change their names to reflect the cosmic vibration better, believing that this change will improve their lives.

Two other characteristics that Smart outlined appear within the Kabalarian Philosophy’s organization: ethics and doctrine. Kabalarian members display their belief in ethics and doctrine in a variety of ways, one of the most obvious of which is by creating and funding numerous groups and organizations that teach their basic principles. The Kabalarian Young Philosophers Class, for instance, is the Kabalarian Philosophy’s group for teenage members. In this group, boys and girls (often in separate groups) learn about the basic Kabalarian principles, as well as about the proper way to behave and dress. The rules taught to these impressionable youths, however, are far more stringent for girls than for boys.

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113 Kabalarians also knew this group as the Teenage Class.
Generally, Shearing made stricter prohibitions for girls, especially in the area of unacceptable hairstyles and styles of dress. For example, girls should avoid all: styles that draw attention to any particular part of the body ... such as large zippers, buttons, belts out of place, plunging necklines, see-through blouses or any design that is suggestive in any way, fly fronts on the slacks. [For boys, the standard was] that their hair has to be cleaned and well-groomed and a certain style of dress.” (Crown, R. v. Shearing, 1997:108)

These lessons and prohibitions, developed and outlined less formally by Parker, and then expanded and enforced more strictly by Shearing, discuss topics ranging from skirt lengths to cosmic truths in order to prepare teenagers “to meet the challenges of life” (Crown quoting Parker, R. v. Shearing, 1997:107).

Parker and Shearing believed that Kabalarian teenagers would more readily accept the lessons when the members of the class were all within the same age range and shared similar beliefs. The regular meetings and participation of the youths combined enjoyable events and shared stories, and also stimulated feelings of community and togetherness, lessening the feeling of isolation that many members of the Teenage Class felt in public schools. Many of the teens also found it difficult to interact with teenagers of their own age at school, simply because these individuals did not necessarily share the same beliefs. When the Kabalarian correspondence school began, Kabalarian youths associated almost exclusively with other Kabalarians. While there is most certainly a quality of social or institutional reinforcement in the Teenage Class and correspondence

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114 Testimony at Shearing’s trial suggests that the Kabalarian elite strongly discouraged members, especially teenagers, from having non-Kabalarian friends. One witness testified that Shearing intimated that she should quit the Brownies (an organization for young girls) (Witness #8, R v. Shearing, 1997:669). Moreover, there is also the suggestion that Shearing established the Kabalarian school (with another member acting as the school’s director) to segregate impressionable teens from non-Kabalarians and, therefore, also from any potentially challenging or derisive comments.
school (which Smart also mentions as one of the main characteristics of religious groups), the main purpose of the Kabalarian Young Philosophers Class (along with other group-sponsored organizations and events) is to teach teenagers how they should live according to the doctrines of the Kabalarian Philosophy, by demonstrating the advantages of the movement’s discovered truths. Parker strongly thought that living according to the fundamental principles that he discovered would greatly increase the quality of life an individual would enjoy, so teaching these principles to young minds would clearly provide them with the tools to live balanced and harmonious existences. Parker, and subsequently Shearing, also saw that the community ties nurtured in these shared events strengthened the members’ adherence to the leader, fostering a certain dependency on his writings and lectures. The group-sponsored events and organizations certainly contributed to the Kabalarians’ overall dedication and willingness to live out the principles they proclaimed and subsequently taught their children.

The Kabalarians so strongly believed in the value of their understanding of the principles of harmony and balance that they felt a strong need to disseminate their ideas worldwide. With the advent of the Internet, the group created an online name analysis service that indicated whether an individual possessed a balanced name. As a result of their convictions, the Kabalarians provide free, introductory analyses to convince readers of the validity of their claims, enticing them to pay for the fuller, more detailed analysis. Basing their actions on the belief that an individual cannot live harmoniously and in accordance with natural, cosmic laws unless his or her name is attuned to universal forces, the Kabalarians endeavored to reach as many people as possible. This worldwide market also significantly contributed to the group’s finances,\textsuperscript{115} which has a twofold advantage. First, the group increases its

\textsuperscript{115} Although there is no official documentation available to this researcher reporting the Kabalarian Philosophy’s yearly earnings, the organization owned a resort in the British Columbia region, several rental properties in Vancouver, as well as other businesses, such as Kal Printers,
financial prosperity and ability to fund other projects and organizations. Second, it perpetuates the movement’s mythos that it is having a universally beneficial effect on humanity.

While there are similarities between Smart’s characteristics of religious groups and the Kabalarian Philosophy with regards to the experiential, ethical, and doctrinal, notable differences also exist. The two most significant areas of difference are the Kabalarians’ lack of ritualized life and their lack of a well developed mythical framework. Although members regularly attend meetings, seminars, and classes expounding the Kabalarian doctrines, the ritualized actions prescribed by the movement and its leader do not figure prominently in members’ lives. Indeed, within the organization ritualized ceremony is nearly absent. Moreover, the group disseminates little information about its cultural and spiritual mythos, beyond the narrative dealing with Parker’s journey in discovering the laws of nature.

In addition to this brief narrative, there are also short statements suggesting that the spiritual mythos of other religions have led humanity astray. However, by presenting the (fairly ambiguous) Kabalarian mythos as the only one that truly addresses humanity’s search for answers, the movement does lend itself to being characterized as a religion. The movement’s basic theology is that Kabalarian Philosophy provides the only spiritual path to harmony and peace with the Universal Consciousness. The element of understanding forces greater than ourselves is the cornerstone of religious thought, and it clearly pervades the basic Kabalarian tenets. The foundational message the Kabalarian Philosophy holds is that through their doctrine, members can gain an understanding of the forces that are beyond our everyday awareness.

that were either owned outright or were funded in part by the organization. Shortly before Shearing’s trial began, however, it was reported that Shearing had transferred $2,560,000 to the United States (no further details were provided) in November 1994 and February 1995 (Crown, R V. Shearing, 1997:2493). The exact financial state of the group, however, is beyond this researcher’s knowledge.
The final component of the term NRM that Chryssides defines is the question of what combined qualities constitute a movement, especially in comparison to what qualities comprise an organization: “A movement, strictly speaking, is distinct from an organization. ... While an organization is clearly defined, with a definite structure, leadership and hierarchy, making it obvious who are inside and who are outside, a ‘movement’ is much more nebulous” (Chryssides, 1999:16). According to Chryssides, there are no specifics that define the exact characteristics of a movement, leaving the definition of the term unusable. Chryssides’ argument regarding organizations, however, does add another dimension to Bainbridge’s classification of church, sect, and cult, but addresses the issue using structural criteria instead of theological and ritualistic guidelines. The advantage of creating a definition based partly on a group’s structure is that it reflects the degree of institutionalization found within the body of people (Chryssides, 1999:17) and provides some insight into the group’s acceptability in the larger society. As we have seen, the more established and stable the group, the greater is the likelihood that the group has society’s approval.

Marc Galanter’s definition of cults and NRMs also presents the reader with another perspective on qualities such groups display. Galanter states that:

Cults and new religious movements ... may be subsumed under a broader phenomenon which can be termed charismatic groups. ... Participants adhere to a consensual belief system, sustain a high level of social cohesiveness, are strongly influenced by group behavioral norms, and impute charismatic (or divine) power to the group or its leadership. This phenomenon includes most of contemporary cults [sic] and new religious movements. ... Such groups may operate for the good or the detriment of their members, depending on the nature of the particular group and the observer’s perspective as well. ... The concept of a cult, more
specifically religious, connotes religious deviancy and, often, transcendental experience. (Galanter, 1989:25)

This definition seems to characterize cults as different from NRMs, in the sense that cults are more likely to be outside societal norms, engaging in nefarious behavior. NRMs, by contrast, have a less spiritual quality to them and are less likely to be seen as deviant. Although Galanter distinguished between a cult and a new religious movement in the opening paragraph of his article, he does not further qualify the distinction anywhere else in his book. Moreover, he suggests that a cult is really part of the larger category that he has termed the ‘charismatic group’, which can also include such movements as “self-help groups to radical political organizations” (Galanter, 1989:250), which contain groups that others might define as NRMs.

One of the main stumbling blocks to applying Galanter’s definition to all NRMs is that it is more dependent on the biases and perspective of the interpreter than other qualitative definitions. In addition, like Bainbridge’s definition, we must question what actions or beliefs Galanter considers to be deviant. What standard does Galanter employ to measure socially acceptable or unacceptable theological positions, and can the answer be absolute or is it relative to other spiritual and non-spiritual movements? While Galanter’s definition suggests that “[m]ost cults … fall within [a category he defines as a] … charismatic group” (Galanter, 1989:25), his definition offers no clarification of what a charismatic group is, nor does he explain specifically how cults and NRMs each fit into this “broader phenomenon.” What the reader is left with is a vague description of organizations that can be religious or non-religious in nature, that seem to fall under the rubric of the ill-defined “charismatic” group. Although the questions asked of the definition expose its potential shortcomings, Galanter has not failed to provide an adequate definition for cults and NRMs. Rather, the questions identify and underscore the fundamental aspects that most definitions fail to distinguish clearly, underscoring the general difficulties in categorizing religious groups.
As we will discover in a subsequent chapter which explores the nature of the charismatic figure, Galanter’s umbrella category of “charismatic phenomenon” is far more complicated than simply addressing a leadership style. In addition, there are other issues that contribute to the complex dynamics found in cults, making any definition difficult to apply to all groups. Clearly, while a shared understanding of the term is a requirement for meaningful discussion, the existing definitions will be somewhat inadequate in some respects. We cannot deny that a definition tries to create a rigid description of something, but NRMs by their very nature are ever-changing. Because such groups tend to push society’s limits of acceptability, there will be constant tension between a socially legitimate and tolerable understanding of what is a religion and what is a cult.

Towards An Absolute Definition?
As the study of NRMs evolves, general paradigms and definitions can become more exacting. While novelty may continue in emerging groups’ practices and theologies, society may come to accept the novelty more readily. To define NRMs for the purpose of this study, however, these groups must demonstrate the following characteristics, to a greater or lesser extent. First, there must be some display of charismatic and authoritarian power within the group, which allows the living leader to create new doctrine or alter existing doctrine at his or her discretion. This authoritarian power allows the leader to make such changes without having to consult with or address the membership because decision-making is the sole responsibility of the leader and members are generally not seen as an equal to the leader. Second, as Galanter suggests, an NRM must “sustain a high level of social cohesiveness … [and members must be] strongly influenced by group behavioral norms” (Galanter, 1989:25). Third,

116 Although I present a working definition of the term NRM here, in chapter seven, I analyze how the Kabalarian Philosophy compares with the definitions presented throughout this chapter.
because NRMs have novel approaches to spiritual understanding, as Bainbridge suggests, they will usually possess few direct doctrinal connections with larger, and more established religious organizations.

Beyond these basic characteristics, though, there is considerable flexibility in defining NRMs. The one certainty that holds true in defining NRMs is that there are movements that better the lives of their members and there are others that have a detrimental effect on their members. To suggest that all NRMs fall into one category or the other, however, is over simplistic, and even dangerous. Moreover, if we create strict boundaries and definitions for religious movements that do not allow for, or recognize, the process of change and growth within movements, then we limit our own understanding of religious groups that are both intriguing and complex.
Chapter Four: Sexual Violence within New Religious Movements

Undoubtedly, one of the most often perpetrated NRM myths is that they are all violent and dangerous organizations that prey upon their members and society in general. When the public hears of, or reads, media accounts of violence within a religious movement, the scandal that ensues usually focuses on salacious details (whether or not there actually are any) rather than on understanding the true unfolding of events. As a result of the negative portrayal of the NRM, the public then assumes that the worst has happened: an evil organization has manipulated and taken advantage of innocent victims, or has otherwise injured them. This common impression does not allow for critical thought and nurtures an uninformed and prejudicial view of NRMs. More importantly, this impression often receives little analytical or explicative discussion in a public forum, thereby eliminating the possibility of enlightening the public.

To try to contradict this stereotypical view of NRMs, a review of the existing documentation on violence within NRMs needs to be done, as well as an examination of several examples of religious violence that have drawn the public’s attention and the intricate dynamics involved with the issue. In addition, sexual violence within NRMs, as a specific sub-category of violence, needs to be addressed, since it is a topic that receives far less attention from both scholars and the public, unless the sexual violence involves children, and is the area that specifically applies to the Kabalarian Philosophy. While Jeffrey Kaplan emphasizes that violence within NRMs is the exception rather than the rule, he theorizes that there are five distinct patterns of violence that typically occur within the broader category of religious organizations: (1) expansionary violence [the only category that does not specifically occur within NRMs to some degree], (2)

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117 Kaplan does not limit his classification to violence that occurs only within NRMs; rather, he suggests that violence is a phenomenon that exists within all types of religious organizations, and is a historical element that figures into the evolution and development of many religious groups.
millenarian and antinomian violence, (3) violence attendant on questions of sexuality and moral crusades, (4) youth rebellion violence, and (5) self-destructive or suicidal violence” (Kaplan, 2001:480).

To add to the theoretical framework, the interpretive model of violence of Robbins and Anthony (1995) figures prominently and provides the basic foundation upon which the discussion of sexual abuse within NRMs rests. The primary reason for this heavy reliance on their model is that it deals mostly with the unique characteristics present in charismatically led movements, while allowing for other dynamics to factor into the paradigm. This chapter establishes a fairly coherent and comparative model against which we can then assess the Kabalarian Philosophy’s level of violence and the underlying causes for it.

Although this chapter focuses more specifically on the sexually violent component, in many NRMs the other patterns of violence do have an effect on how sexually violent acts manifest within NRMs. Kaplan’s classification serves to deconstruct the stereotypical belief that all NRMs are violent, while acknowledging that, nevertheless, violence does exist within such movements. Dawson echoes this sentiment stating that, “the number of incidents of cult violence is not exceptional, especially in comparison with the remarkably high levels of violent crime in America” (Dawson, 1998:131). Despite the numerous examples that exist supporting society’s generalized and stereotypical notion that NRMs are violent, it is important to recognize that the contradictory evidence does not receive as much attention or exposure in public arenas. For these reasons, we must acknowledge that while violence is not the norm in the religious make-up of North American NRMs, there have been instances of leaders (sexually) abusing members that cannot be ignored; to do so would be academically dishonest. The atrocious accounts of the events leading to the deaths of the Peoples Temple members, Aum Shinrikyo’s organized sarin gas attacks on the Japanese public, the ritualistic deaths of the Solar Temple members in Europe and Canada, and the sexual abuse allegations that contributed to the untimely deaths of 74 men, women, and children in the Waco,
Texas, compound of the Branch Davidians, all serve to illustrate that tragic instances of violence involving NRMs do occur. These events propel us to examine the religious and secular factors that contribute to the level of violence associated with these groups. They also motivate scholars to explore the dynamics that may help identify situations where violence is likely to happen, whether it be an internal dynamic where violence occurs against a group’s own members, or if the dynamics of the group require there to be a “causal factor” (Hall, Schuyler and Trinh, 2000, 46) that will instigate violent actions or behavior.\footnote{As defined by the authors, a “causal factor” is a factor that intensifies the struggle that NRMs and established religions are constantly engaged in when both entities are “competing … for members, legitimacy and public acceptance, various sources of funding, and even political support” (Richardson, 2001:104). Robbins and Anthony’s model of violence, which is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, incorporates a similar point in their analysis of exogenous factors.} We must acknowledge, however, that any paradigm that does emerge is not an absolute guide for predicting violence.\footnote{Specifically referring to the Branch Davidians and the People’s Temple, Hall states that ”no conclusions can be drawn in advance about the trajectory of an apocalyptic sect. For groups that have not established a stable heaven-on-earth, the play of events is especially contingent on the interaction of the group with the wider social world” (Hall, 2002:150).} It can be, in the end, only a collection of characteristics that seem to help identify violent situations.

As Kaplan states, numerous factors related to religious violence often merge two or more patterns together. A frequently occurring pattern is when apocalyptic tendencies appear together with aspects of violent sexual abuse and self-destruction, as demonstrated by the Branch Davidian example,\footnote{The violence associated with the Branch Davidians is a complicated example of both internal violence and violence that resulted from the group’s interaction with external forces, namely the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF). The perspective this study attempts to underscore is that despite the tragic confrontation between governmental agencies and the Davidians, acts of physical, emotional, and sexual violence linked with Koresh’s theological worldview and charismatic presence were occurring within the group before the BATF and the FBI ever initiated any action against the group (see}
different way, in David Berg’s organization, the Children of God (COG). Under Berg’s leadership, allegations of bizarre sexual practices, which many believed were no longer simply improper but criminal, combined with millenarian expectations to form an intriguing composite pattern. The commonality that underlies these instances is that religious violence manifests itself differently as a result of a variety of factors merging. These factors include (but are not limited to) a movement’s fundamental beliefs, group structure, and interaction with the rest of society, especially governmental agencies, which often have considerable resources. With each incident involving publicly exposed violence in a religious setting, however, comes societal fear of such groups and misunderstanding of the reasons leading up to the (often) tragic event.

Despite the widespread social acceptance of the value of religious freedom, the public’s concern about violent NRMs and academics’ attempts to understand the actions of these groups, lend themselves to the polarized debates that characterize the dialogue found in this field of study. Moreover, it underscores the dichotomy between established religions and newly emerging ones. Bromley and Melton purport that:

[NRMs] not only offer radical resistance to the dominant social order, they sacralize that resistance. The challenge these movements pose is therefore, fundamental in nature, as they threaten the logic and organizational forms through which the dominant social order is maintained. At the same time, these movements typically possess few allies and consequently are

Breault and King, 1993; United States Department of Justice, 1993; Ellison and Bartkowski, 1995). Although most academic research suggests that the government made significant errors in the handling of the situation and acted as the catalyst for the resulting fatalities (see Gallagher 2000; Ammerman, 1995; Tabor, 1995) — a perspective that certainly holds merit — one can not dismiss the evidence suggesting that Koresh physically and sexually abused several children and female members of the Branch Davidians (see Breault and King, 1993; United States Department of Justice, 1993; Hall, 2002).
vulnerable to imposition of social control. Given the challenge posed by the movements, on the one side, and the imperative to maintain the existing social order, on the other side, the likelihood of tension and conflict is considerable. (Bromley and Melton, 2002:2)

The juxtaposition of the struggling religious organization that challenges the public’s expectations with the institutional order that reinforces the status quo, compels us to take note of the often extreme actions in which NRMs are engaged. To a certain extent, NRMs symbolize the unknown and the unexpected, and when violence occurs within such marginalized movements, then our own vulnerabilities surface.

**Collective and Individualistic Violence**

Bromley and Melton believe that violence within NRMs is either collective or individualist in nature. The most reliable way of distinguishing between collective and individualistic violence is by determining who the intended victim of violence is. In “Violence and Religion in Perspective,” Bromley and Melton explore collective violence and suggest that:

> even if violent acts are committed by individuals, the [se acts] are undertaken in the name of the movement or control agent, and the violence is legitimated in terms of some organizational purpose. Collective does not presume consensus, however, and dissent within both movements and control agencies may well occur in the course of violent exchanges. ... It also follows that violence may be directed either inward or outward — suicide or homicide, to invoke legal terminology. (Bromley and Melton, 2002:2)

Collective violence has, at its core, the purpose of inflicting harm on those that the group believes are deserving of it, in some way. Individualistic violence, by contrast, typically has the leader focusing his violent tendencies on individuals he
has specifically chosen, as a means of punishment, control, or emotional release. Although the leader may not necessarily see his actions as violent — even going so far as seeing them as helpful to the individual — the victim may be left scarred and damaged by the acts of violence perpetrated against him or her.

Leaders justify their violent tendencies using the precepts found in the movement’s worldview. For this reason, the actions (as understood by the leader) were not violent, but disciplinary in intent, and were always for the benefit of the member or the movement. David Koresh, for example, focused his individualistic violence towards those members of the group whom he believed needed guidance. He corporally punished an eight-month-old child to the point where the child’s bottom bled because he thought that it was the only way to teach the child (and by proxy, his parents) respect for authority and his place within the organization.

Vernon [David Koresh] teaches a very hard method of disciplining children ... entailing that you only inform the child once that you [the parent] disapprove of their behavior, and if this bad behavior reoccurs then they [the child] are to be spanked with a wooden spoon or paddle. ... These methods are instigated by Vernon Howell and they are in turn carried out by more zealous followers after they have been convinced that this is the only way it should be done. (United States Department of Justice, 1993:224-225)

Tragically, however, the underlying strain of collective, apocalyptic violence exacerbated the individualistic nature of the abuse within the Davidian compound, culminating in the deaths of the members either who believed in Koresh and his worldview or who were not able or allowed to leave once the siege began. As John R. Hall states, “... we need to recognize that ... the conflagration at Mount Carmel was the product of religious conflict between a militant sect and opponents who, wittingly or unwittingly, helped fulfill the sect’s emergent apocalyptic vision” (Hall, 2002:150).
Ivon Shearing’s abusive behavior towards some female members of the Kabalarian Philosophy resulted in significant media exposure for the movement, especially when the media publicized Shearing’s unusual justification for his actions. Although the details of Shearing’s sexual abuse are now public record, many questions remain. Should the individualistic nature of Shearing’s abuse have been predictable? Was there any clear indication that the leader had violent tendencies? Why did these apparently victimized members continue to adhere to Shearing’s demands and authority? Could anyone have prevented the abuse? Although Shearing’s actions relied heavily on his stature within the movement, this was not the exclusive explanation behind his ability to engage in such behavior. One significant factor that contributed was his proficiency at interpreting and creating the group’s theology to meet his own needs. Although society ultimately deemed Shearing’s behavior illegal, many current members of the movement continue to support him and claim that society (and therefore the police and legal system) completely misunderstood his actions, taking them out of context and without the proper interpretation of the group’s underlying principles. According to these Kabalarian members, Shearing’s actions underscored their basic theological position that one must live in harmony with the cosmos, and only those who are attuned to the cosmic vibration can do this. Other than Parker, Shearing was the highest example of someone able to live

121 Certainly, the headline, “Witness: He told me his sperm was spiritual” drew considerable scrutiny and ridicule by non-Kabalarians, especially since it was used as a refutation of the rape and related sexual abuse charges he faced. The Family justified their sexual practices as a manifestation of God’s love for one another. A former member, Miriam Williams, recalls how she responded to non-Family members questioning her about the movement’s openly sexual behavior: “we believe that God supplies all the needs a man has. And if we say that we love someone, then why should we not give that person sex as an expression of God’s Love? ... Anyone interested in knowing more about God’s Love can be shown through sex” (Williams, 1998:135). These examples present another perspective on understanding sexuality within NRMs, although in Williams’ case, she left the movement when issues of child abuse surfaced, not wanting that future for her own children within the group (Williams, 1998:xiv).
out these basic principles. Before exploring these arguments, however, we must first explore sexual violence as a correlative subcategory of religious violence.

**Exogenous and Endogenous Factors**

Perhaps the most detailed and enlightening research focusing on violence within NRMs comes from the efforts of Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony. One of their most compelling articles, “Sects and Violence: Factors Enhancing the Volatility of Marginal Religious Movements,” identifies two major sets of factors that are significant to being able to predict a movement’s potential level of violence. Basing their work primarily on the Branch Davidians (but also taking into account other violent NRMs, including the Solar Temple, the Hare Krishnas, and the Manson Family), Robbins and Anthony observed that there were exogenous and endogenous factors that significantly influenced a movement’s overall disposition toward violent actions:

[Exogenous factors] include [those] related to the hostility, stigmatization, and persecution that “religious outsiders” often receive at the hands of forces in the social environment in which they operate. … [Endogenous factors] denote properties of a movement: its leadership, beliefs, rituals, and organization. Exogenous and endogenous variables are interrelated … ; indeed, the separation and mutual autonomy of these factors may ultimately seem illusory. (Robbins and Anthony, 1995:237)

Although they establish what seems to be two stable categories, Robbins and Anthony emphasize that there are no absolutes in predicting and analyzing violence, nor can the model guarantee that the catalyst for initiating violence in one group is the same in any other group. The threshold for initiating violence in NRMs is arguably relative, depending on the attitudes and perceptions of the

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122 Both men are renowned authors who do research on NRMs.
leader. For this reason, the leader is the single most important element in assessing an NRM’s potential volatility.

Though exogenous factors are more difficult to identify and do not have as direct an impact on a movement’s fundamental characteristics, they do significantly influence an NRM’s position within society, insofar as they influence how society perceives religious organizations. Historically, the religious landscape in North America was in large part due to society’s stigmatization, hostility, and persecution (exogenous factors) of less established movements, especially in the United States. The situation in Canada, although similar to the United States in some respects, takes on a different tone regarding NRM’s, primarily because:

- the evolution of Canadian religion has followed a European rather than an American model, in keeping with a characteristic Canadian reluctance, both French and English, to abandon the ties of ancestral authority in a revolutionary American manner. Steeped in the heroic mythology of religious dissent and constitutionally celebrating the separation of church and state, the United States has long accommodated the sect as its predominant and paradigmatic mode of religious organization. In contrast, Canadian religion boasts manifestly establishmentarian roots. (O’Toole, 1996).

Clearly, Canadian and American society embrace NRM’s differently and, as a result, society’s hostility and stigmatization of NRM’s in Canada is likely less fervent than it is in America.

Young Canadians typically find newly emerging religious movements attractive because of:

- their presumed ability to deliver what mainline clerics, politicians, cultural elites, economists, planners and constitutional lawyers have been unable to provide. [However,] it seems far more likely that those who abandon mainline churches will avoid all formal religious
attachment than that they will assume the demanding obligations of NRM membership. (O'Toole, 1996)

The Canadian mindset towards NRMs is significantly different from that found in the United States, especially in people’s desire to find alternative and fulfilling spiritual movements: “Though Canada can boast some indigenous creations such as the Kabalarian and I AM organizations, most of its NRMs are branch-plants of well-known international bodies such as the Moonies, Scientologists, Hare Krishnas, Rajneeshis and Wiccan ... ” (as quoted in O'Toole, 1996). Because most NRMs that emerge in Canada already have a more established history in another country, Canadians maintain only an underlying tone of wariness towards new religious groups that emerge.

The degree of tension between society and NRMs differs significantly with American NRMs, however, where American wariness grows quickly into distrust and finally, into hostility. Jeffrey Kaplan posits that in the United States, the “First Amendment Clause (‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof’) reflected the founders’ determination to avoid the bloody wars of religion which had ravaged Europe ... yet religious violence has taken place in the United States” as a direct result of societal pressure and conflict (Kaplan, 2001:480).

Avoiding societal stigmatization is often difficult for American NRMs, but Canadian counterparts must endure these same pressures in differing degrees. Hostility and persecution towards NRMs in Canada and the United States depends in great measure on the social context, but generally, the less antinomian the movement, the more likely the group can maintain its existence among the larger society without conflict. Canadian movements seem to cling to accepted and establishmentarian roots (O'Toole), whereas NRMs operating in the United States play the role of testing society’s limits.

By continually pressing the boundaries of tolerance, and doing so in the name of religious liberty, new and emerging denominations have found themselves in the vanguard of constitutional
development. If the [United] [S]tates are the laboratories of
democracy, then the sects and cults play a like role for the freedom
of religion. (Jenkins, 2000, 237)

Of greater impact on a movement’s existence and evolution, however, are
perhaps the endogenous factors that combine with the exogenous factors to
create situations where violence is a likely outcome. Robbins and Anthony outline
three main areas that comprise the endogenous category: “(1) ... apocalyptic
beliefs and fervent millennial expectations; (2) [the potential] ... volatility of
charismatic leadership, and (3) ... the significance of some social movements as
communal-ideological *systems* with 'boundaries’” (Robbins and Anthony,
1995:238). These interconnected aspects echo, in part, Kaplan’s classification of
religious violence, although there is considerable overlap within the distinctions
when compared to Kaplan’s model. Fundamentally, though, the classifications of
Kaplan and of Robbins and Anthony stress that violence in NRMs is neither one-
dimensional nor dependent on a single characteristic of a movement. Essentially,
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**Familial Parallels and Sexual Control**

New Religious Movement researchers Robert H. Cartwright and Stephen A. Kent have noted, however, a startling comparison between NRM violence and
the violence found in abusive family situations (1992). They argue that
“[a]uthoritarianism and erratic control ... continually keep dependents at a
disadvantage [and] are key similarities between charismatic leaders and controllers in abusive relationships” (Cartwright and Kent, 1992:348). This comes as no surprise, however, when one factors in Jacobs’ theories which suggest that the charismatic leader acts as the female members’ father, the patriarchal figure representing love, protection, and wisdom (Jacobs, 1989:75-77). Furthermore, the familial substitute and related affective bonding found especially in charismatic movements seems to account for the fundamental reason why female members do not leave the religious movements (or families when we look at domestic abuse) that engage in abusive behavior (Jacobs, 1989:76; Cartwright and Kent, 1992:349).

According to the theories of both Jacobs and Cartwright and Kent, affective bonding is the creation of relationships based on emotions that are especially important to maintain a strong family unit: love, power, and dependence. Just as female members (most often) look at their leader as a sort of patriarchal father-figure whom they adore and love, members of NRMs also experience feelings of love toward other members of the group, in a situation analogous to a family. Members love the leader as a father and other members as siblings. The dedication shown by members of NRMs with familial traits demonstrates the intense bonding that can occur within relatively closed systems, and provides a theory that explains the phenomenon of women enduring sexual abuse by either a family member or their spiritual leader. Women endure sexual abuse because they are reluctant to leave an environment where they have developed a high degree of emotional bonding. If the women even identify that they are victims of sexual abuse, it may seem to them that the sexual demands placed on them are of less importance than maintenance of their ties to the leader and the group that (in their minds) is their support network. Additionally, if we understand sexual abuse within the context of familial abuse, then it underscores the importance of members’ relationships to others within their closed community. The relationships that develop within this specific environment "reveal ... that members of abusive relationships form
‘symbiotic’ relationships, [and] each [participant] reciprocally contribut[es] to the conflict” (Cartwright and Kent, 1992:354). The reciprocal nature of abuse, in turn, creates an ‘us against the world’ mentality (Shupe, Stacey, and Hazelwood, 1987:60 qtd. in Cartwright and Kent, 1992:354). Despite the abuse they suffer, women paradoxically believe that their abuser shares their interests and beliefs, and that the abuser has superior judgment and wisdom, which supposedly explains or justifies the violent behavior.

A further observation supporting the theory that several charismatic movements have a parallel structure and organization to a family emerges when we examine processes related to decision-making. In most traditional families, decision-making responsibilities rest with one or both of the parents. If we juxtapose this image against well-known charismatic NRM leaders, such as Jones, Koresh, and Berg, then we see that striking similarities exist between the two paradigms. Jacobs (1989) and Cartwright and Kent (1992) argue the charismatic leader represents, and even acts, as a father figure to members. This parental role exists more strongly between leader and female members (where it is reinforced strongly), but the overall role the charismatic leader creates for himself is to decide what is in the best interest of the members, based on his theological and philosophical understanding of the cosmos.

On behalf of members, leaders make decisions — including the standards for acceptable dress, behavior within the group, and conduct outside of the group setting. Michael Langone, editor of Cultic Studies Review, highlights these characteristics of control, stating that: “[t]he leadership dictates sometimes in great detail how members should think, act, and feel (for example: members must get permission from leaders to date, change jobs, get married; leaders may prescribe what types of clothes to wear, where to live, how to discipline children, and so forth)” (Langone, 2003). The leader’s judgment supersedes the members’

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123 Janja Lalich also mentions this parental quality found in charismatic movements in her study of the Democratic Worker’s Party, where she states that the leader “behaved like a harsh, authoritative parent” (Lalich, 2004:207).
decisions, a phenomenon that bears striking similarities to what occurs in familial settings, where parental judgment controls the actions and behaviors of the child (in most circumstances). One significant difference between an NRM and a family, however, is that in family situations, as the child grows, decision-making eventually becomes the child’s right, whereas in charismatic NRMs, members rarely gain the ability to control their own decision-making as long as they belong to the NRM. Within authoritarian NRMs, the leader does not tolerate members choosing their own lifestyle, but rather, “[i]ndividual choice ... becomes a matter of choosing from a set of ‘givens’” outlined by the charismatic leader (Lalich, 2004:258). Moreover, “we see that a person’s options are constrained by these givens ... [and in many charismatically led movements,] members of cults ... are constrained even more by the interlocking nature of the structural configuration of the charismatic authority, the transcendent belief system, and the systems of control and influence” (Lalich, 2004: 258). Lalich underscores that as a result of this “confluence of factors, ... the cult member [is brought] to [the] point where he or she will consider alternative possibilities only within the group framework” (Lalich, 2004:258).

An example of the control that charismatic leaders possess to dictate members’ clothing, job opportunities, and child-rearing techniques, for instance, clearly emerges when we examine both the Branch Davidians and the followers of Jim Jones. In these cases, the leaders’ expectations and demands formed the guidelines for members’ behavior and lifestyle. For Koresh, leading the Branch Davidians autocratically and prescribing all members’ lifestyle choices gave him power within the movement and reinforced his sense of being the chosen, divine

124 Lalich defines the transcendent belief system as:

[a] the overarching ideology that binds adherents to the group and keeps them from behaving according to the group’s rules and norms. It is transcendent because it offers a total explanation of [the] past, present, and future, including a path to salvation. Most important, the group also specifies the exact methodology, or recipe, for the personal transformation necessary to qualify one to travel on that path. (Lalich, 2004:17)
leader of his flock. Numerous studies and reports document the ways that Koresh controlled his devotees, and the methods that he used echo Langone’s statement. The Department of Justice\textsuperscript{125} reported, for example, that: “[Koresh] told them what to eat, where to work, where to sleep, and what to think” (United States Department of Justice, 1993:206). Moreover, Koresh controlled aspects of sexual behavior within the group by “annul[ing] all marriages of couples who join his cult... [so he then] has exclusive sexual access to the women (United States Department of Justice, 1993:218; see also Galanter, 1999:169 and Breault and King, 1993: 78; 113-114; 131-136). Part of belonging to the Davidian movement included complete adherence to Koresh’s demands and an unflinching dedication to him. This characterizes a totalitarian organization that has the potential for violence, in large part because the leader has absolute authority over every aspect of a member’s life.

This brief description of the demands that Koresh made on his followers, however, does not convey the overall sense of necessity or the compulsory nature of the demands. Members of the movement had to comply with his demands, and perhaps the most striking example of this obligation to comply exists in Koresh’s demands on children. According to witness statements found in the Department of Justice’s report on the Branch Davidians:

Vernon [Koresh] spanked [a member’s] daughter for forty minutes because she did not sit on his lap. She was eight months old at the

\textsuperscript{125} Although I use the Department of Justice’s report as a primary source of information regarding the internal dynamics of the Branch Davidians (specifically with regards to the demands Koresh made of his members), the statements made in the report have support in at least one other publication — Breault and King. While I acknowledge that there is an obvious bias in these documents, the consistency in the statements and the level of detail mentioned therein suggests a strong likelihood of truthfulness. Moreover, although there may be a political motivation to exonerate the government’s actions in confronting the Branch Davidians, Kiri Jewell and Marc Breault would not likely be motivated by this when making their statements, especially since Breault had made claims that Koresh was abusive and authoritarian before the siege occurred (see Breault and King’s chronology of events in \textit{Inside the Cult}, 1993:364-375).
time. Her bottom was badly bruised and he made her bottom bleed from spanking her so much. ... Vernon performed this assault on my child in front of a room full of people, consequently I tried to keep her away from him as much as I could. Nearly every time he [Koresh] saw her he would spank her .... (United States Department of Justice, 1993:225)

Assuming that this story is a true account of the event, performing this violent act in front of other members clearly demonstrates Koresh’s dominance, his need for complete obedience, and his intolerance for dissent. It also serves as a vivid example to all members of the movement (not just the woman whose child Koresh was spanking) that his word was absolute and superseded even personal familial affiliations. In essence, he was the parent to all members of the movement, albeit an abusive one.

Jim Jones, who also demanded absolute loyalty, took his need to dominate and control the members of his movement even further by relocating his religious commune to Guyana. Rather than simply dictating people’s work situation and living arrangements, Jones physically created an environment where members’ obedience and adherence to his demands was uncompromising. What became known as Jonestown was the physical creation of a 42-acre compound set apart from what Jones believed was the demonized world. Cut out of acres of Guyana’s rainforest, Jonestown was the manifestation of Jones’ ideological and theological will. The compound represented “the fulfillment of shared aspirations for the creation of a heaven on earth that would liberate a collective utopian space from the imprisonment, pollution, oppression, and the entire web of entanglements that characterized American society in the worldview of the Peoples Temple” (Chidester, 1988:95). Jones envisioned the
move from San Francisco to Guyana as the completion of the group’s fundamental utopian goal.126

Although the move to Guyana was (on one level) the fulfillment of the members’ utopian ideal, Jones also did it to distance himself and his followers from negative media attention, the public’s concerns about the group and its leadership, and the government scrutiny that began growing while Jones operated the Peoples Temple in the United States. Jones faced numerous allegations of fraud, misuse of power, and questionable sexual practices, all of which had the underlying goal of furthering his own delusions of grandeur and importance. These actions did not subside in Guyana, where Jones continued his bisexual practices that “became something like a currency that [Jones] used, supposedly, ‘for the cause.’ With [his sexual practices,] Jones gave some people intimacy and controlled or humiliated others” (J. Hall, 2000:24). For Jones, sex was primarily a tool that he used to achieve a sense of control over his followers. As a means of determining loyalty, though, differing perspectives exist on the subject. Mary McCormick Maaga asserts that sexuality and:

love for the male charismatic leader [Jones] grew out of love for the movement [unlike] [t]he basis of [Janet] Jacobs’s argument [that suggests] that a woman’s involvement in a new religious movement is a reflection of her unmet emotional and sexual needs, which she finds temporarily met in her involvement with the male charismatic leader. (McCormick Maaga, 1998:19)

Contrary to Jacobs’ position, McCormick Maaga believes that Jones surrounded himself with female followers, for the most part, where:

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126 Scholars assert that Jones precipitated the move earlier than planned because of a custody battle over Jones’ son that was occurring at the time. While the custody battle must necessarily have influenced Jones’ decision to realize his utopian goal earlier than previously decided upon, Jones’ underlying motivation was to create a heaven on earth in an area safe from outside pressure.
sexuality and love in the Peoples Temple [were] expressions of loyalty and commitment between the women in leadership [the elite cadre closest to Jones] and Jones, who represented Peoples Temple and the hope for a just world. ... [In addition, these women were also] the foundation for Jones’s authority in the movement through the power these women exercised as conduits, information officers, and managers of the various tasks in which Peoples Temple was engaged. (McCormick Maaga, 1998:73)

McCormick Maaga’s argument seems to suggest that for the women in authority within the Peoples Temple, they performed sex with Jones willingly. Those acts were not humiliating and degrading rituals in which Jones forced them to engage in order to gain control over them. Although McCormick Maaga’s argument appears convincing, it focuses on a relatively small group within the Peoples Temple organization. We must question whether the willingness that McCormick Maaga asserts characterized the majority of the women in Jonestown who did not seek out or enjoy an authoritative position in the movement’s top hierarchy. Moreover, although there exists contradictory perspectives regarding the sexual behavior occurring in Jonestown, the recurring themes of control, dominance, absolute authority, and familial references also existed.

According to David Chidester (who in turn relies on accounts given by former Jonestown members), Jones seemed to have used sex as a means of breaking down personal barriers among members so that they had a stronger commitment to him than to anyone else within the movement:

[Jones] would elicit confessions of homosexuality, accounts of sexual performances, admissions of child molesting, and so on that would translate the most personal and private areas of sexual body space into the public arena. These sessions may have served to purge, as well as intensify, feelings of guilt, shame, and inhibitions relating to sexuality, but the performative impact of the catharsis
sessions was the dissolution of the private sphere of body space represented by personal sexual expressions. (Chidester, 1988:102)

By breaking down these barriers, rival allegiances could not be formed among members that would have thereby compromised Jones’ authority. Additionally, other accounts spoke of Jones’ promiscuity and affinity for having sexual relationships with both female and male members of the group. As “noted by [Jones’] son Stephan ... nearly all his father’s partners were white ... [but] Jones affirmed that he was the only truly heterosexual male in the settlement, and alleged that many of the other members had not come to terms with their homosexual feelings. ... [In all circumstances] sex with Father [Jones] was generally reported as an incomparable experience” (Storr, 1996:9). Jones’ sexual exploitation of members reinforced his power and authority within the organization by establishing him as the standard by which all others were judged.

Jones and Koresh shared the ability to control the parameters within which sexual behavior was and was not permissible among devotees, making the most fundamentally intimate aspect of an individual’s behavior a sacrifice for the collective good of the movement: “In the formula for revolutionary sex that Jones devised, sex was not an activity that should serve to bind personal, coupling, marriage relationships, but a revolutionary act to be utilized in the interests of the cause represented by the Peoples Temple as a whole” (Chidester, 1998:102-103). For Koresh and his devotees, “when he formed the compound’s women into a harem and breeding ground for his next generation” (Galanter, 1999:169) to fulfill his own understanding of biblical prophecy and the creation of the New Jerusalem, members’ willingness to follow his proclamations demonstrated their emotional dependence on him and their dedication to his vision of the future. As Elizabeth Puttick states: “[Koresh took the followers’] wives and daughters to be his own ‘wives’ because God had instructed him to father many children, which women and men accepted because they were consecrated to doing God’s will” (Puttick, 1999:50). In the minds of the Branch
Davidians, fulfilling Koresh’s vision brought about their own collective salvation, as long as they adhered to his wishes.

The members of the Peoples Temple and the Branch Davidians willingly gave their respective leaders control over their sexual relationships in order to achieve a larger and more ephemeral goal. For one group, it was a utopia gained through revolutionary activity, and for the other, it was the expected, apocalyptic Second Coming of Jesus. It is, perhaps, an unanswerable question whether the victimized members ever recognized the ongoing sexual abuse that their leaders perpetrated against them or if their own conviction in the leaders’ supreme wisdom was indeed absolute.

Exploring the sexually abusive behavior found in Jonestown and in the Branch Davidian compound alone, however, does not establish a rigid paradigm of characteristics that clearly indicate whether other similar movements engage in violence, sexual or otherwise. Where the movement is led charismatically or where the leader has authoritarian control in a closed community, for example, are not two characteristics which guarantee that a group will eventually become abusive towards its members (see Mills, 1996:388-395). These characteristics however, do seem to contribute significantly to the dynamics that foster violent behavior. The main obstacles to predicting abusive behavior within NRMs are twofold. First, and perhaps most fundamentally, most religions lack open discussions about the topic of sexual abuse for a variety of reasons. Second, many individuals who suffer abusive situations do not consider themselves to be victims, for they fail to recognize any acts of manipulation or duplicity. Part of understanding violence in NRMs involves assessing at what point a leader’s control over members is detrimental to their well-being. The Branch Davidian and the Peoples Temple examples allow researchers to gain some insight into sexual violence within NRMs primarily because these are two of the most well-researched instances of abuse available. While these two examples are not sufficient to create a definitive model of sexual violence, they do present a useful working model upon which further research can expound or refute.
Some researchers may argue that defining sexually abusive behaviour in NRMNs is a subjective interpretation that cannot be understood by those outside the organizations themselves, especially not apart from the members’ theological worldview. There may be some validity to this position since the compensators that devotees are willing to accept for rewards that are often unseen or misunderstood by outsiders. Differing opinions exist on what constitutes abuse, because members’ interpretations of a leader’s demands are different from non-members’ interpretations. Without the context of the movement’s core beliefs, the leader’s demands may seem overly exacting and severe, but the women of the NRMNs may see the leader’s demands as a part of the spiritual growth that the leader predicted.

Both Puttick and Jacobs explore this point when they examine women’s desire to gain spiritual insight, acceptance, and paternal approval from their leader, the latter often stemming from a sexual relationship with the charismatic leader. As Puttick claims, the confusion between sexual and spiritual fulfillment often leads to members’ being exploited by the divine leader figure (Puttick, 1999:53). Many women in NRMNs willingly engage in a sexual relationship with their leader because, in their minds, this intimate relationship opens up spiritual avenues previously unavailable to them.¹²⁷ Not all women are ready to exchange

¹²⁷ Susan Palmer explores the different roles women play in NRMNs, ranging from “a celibate ‘sister,’ a devoted Hindu ‘wife,’ a domineering, promiscuous ‘lover,’ a pure, yogic ‘daughter,’ a veiled ‘Nubian bride’ in polygamy, a sensually aware ‘playmate,’ a fertile ‘procreatrix’ ushering in the Endtime, or an asexual shaman” (Palmer, 1994:2), but her views do not incorporate the perspective of those female members who have experienced sexually violent leaders. While I do not suggest that all women in NRMNs play subservient roles or that they must all be victims of abusive leaders, the possibility exists that within NRMNs, women can be exploited by their leaders, as the cases documented in this study attempt to illustrate. To explore the dynamics surrounding violence within NRMNs, Jacobs (1987; 1989), Puttick (1997; 1999), and Cartwright and Kent’s (1992) approach addresses the key factors that suggest (or at least allow for) violence against female members to occur.
sexual favors for expected spiritual enlightenment, however, even though spiritual enlightenment often becomes interwoven with sexual fulfillment.

Puttick explains that for many women, the perceived connection (or confusion) between sexuality and spirituality and the supposedly divine religious leader reinforces a popular image often used in the process of socializing women: the “fairy tale stereotype” (Puttick, 1997: 53). This stereotypical image presents the leader as “the knight in spiritual armor, a hero who will save the female devotee from her own weakness and feminine liabilities” (qtd. in Puttick, 1997:53). Linked closely with issues arising out of power differentials, sexual violence, and the exploitation of women devotees is a pattern of leaders relying on the emotional foundation of their relationship with their devotees in order to create “a special intimacy combined with a sacred bond of trust” (Puttick, 1999:55). This kind of relationship can be manipulated easily to the leader’s own advantage. Len Oakes claims that, “[t]he charismatic relationship is characterized in its earliest stages by trust and surrender, but in time the follower projects his or her ultimate concerns onto the leader” (Oakes, 1997:188), creating a situation where the leader has the opportunity to exploit the members’ vulnerabilities if he or she so desires. Since some charismatic leaders may see themselves as the embodiment of perfection and wisdom, they predicate their sexual indulgences

An additional comment that seems relevant to address here is that despite the polemics discussing women’s role in NRMs, there is no justification for (sexual) violence against children. Despite the ability of women to choose their role(s) in NRMs (to a greater or lesser extent depending on a variety of contextual elements that form the basis of this study), children do not possess the ability to make informed choices about engaging in a sexual relationship, especially in high-demand environments. In the Branch Davidian and Kabalarian cases, this is a fundamental aspect that cannot be overlooked, or minimized.

Chapter six more closely explores the dynamics involved in power differentials between charismatic leaders and women devotees and the potential for exploitation within that framework. In this chapter, the focus of the power differentials serves to illustrate interaction between charismatic leaders and female followers in order to demonstrate the potential for sexual violence within an organization where such differences exist.
on a foundation of supposedly superior knowledge and abilities. If female members’ believe in this superiority, then this may allow the leader’s sense of importance to overwhelm them, so that any hesitation or doubts devotees may have initially felt about a sexual relationship with the leader may disappear. While this need not be the case in every situation where female devotees have a charismatic leader, it is a situation that does occur in certain charismatic relationships.

Other views of women in NRMs do exist, however. In Moon Sister, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers, Susan Palmer posits that, “[n]ew religions can be vaunted as the harbinger of women’s power ... , or deplored as the last refuge of male chauvinists” (Palmer, 1994:8), depending on the group being researched. According to Palmer, NRMs provide a variety of roles for women, such as lovers, mothers, wives, and leaders, but states that “in ... [many] communities¹²⁹ are women expected to bear the triple (or even quadruple) burden of parenting, bread-winning, and housekeeping ... and sometimes sexy, attractive wife” (Palmer, 1994:218). Her study of women in NRMs suggests that women’s role in authoritarian led movements may not be as subservient as many models propose, saying that the balance of power between men and women sways throughout the history of the movement. While this may be true, Palmer also concluded that women in the NRMs she studied were all “seeking ... a safe and sacred environment where [the women] c[ould] explore their sexual identity and/or pursue their relationships with men” (Palmer, 1994:232, italics in original). I argue that within movements that demonstrate a higher potential for sexual violence, such as the Branch Davidians and the Peoples Temple, the safe and sacred environment that women potentially could have sought did not exist. Since a safe environment was seemingly lacking in these movements, a different perspective examining the role of women in sexually volatile groups is required.

¹²⁹ Groups included the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Rajneesh Movement, and the Unification Church, for example.
While Palmer states in her study that she found that “... new religious women [were] ... seeking to avoid accountability in their love life” (Palmer, 1994:215) by entering into an organization where there are strict guidelines governing the relationship between members, this is not a similar case when dealing with the sexually exploited members of charismatic groups.130

The Children of God (COG), which later changed its name to The Family, is another clear example of an organization whose leader engaged in sexually abusive behavior with members. What is of particular significance about David Berg’s behavior was the divine justification on which he based his sexually exploitative relationships. Moreover, he engaged in sexually abusive relationships not only with the women of the group, but also with the children: “Berg announced that his followers had the responsibility of bringing Jesus’ message of love into the world ... [and] [s]exual relations (claimed by the group as a manifestation of God’s love) ... [became] rampant among all members, even extending to sex between some adults and children and among some children” (Kent, 1994:30; Puttick, 1997:142; Williams, 1998:220-221). The group became one of the:

most wide-scale example[s] of sexual abuse in ... NRM[s] ... [primarily as the result of] the leader ... [having] multiple sexual relationships with his female followers and encourag[ing] the membership to follow his example. The practice for which the movement is most notorious is “flirty fishing”, a recruitment technique devised by Berg and his wife for female members to bring in converts through prostitution. (Puttick, 1999:148; see Williams 1998:76-78)

130 Palmer does mention that women in the Rajneesh movement did have “sexual contact with Bhagwan for the purpose of ‘stimulating our lower chakras,’ ‘rewiring my circuits,’ and ‘orchestrating our energies’” (Palmer 1994:54 quoting James Gordon), although she does not explore the sexual relationship in greater detail.
Although this practice ended when concerns about the HIV virus and the spread of AIDS became prominent, with potentially devastating implications for the membership, flirty fishing lasted over a decade and had a distinctly negative impact on female members of COG. Many women who proselytized in the name of the religion contracted sexually transmitted diseases or endured great hardship with numerous pregnancies and children. The foundational principles of sexual freedom that characterized Berg’s vision were the same principles that ended up inflicting the greatest harm on his devotees.

To this end, an understanding of sexual abuse must include a discussion of authoritative figures demanding sexual behavior (not necessarily with that figure) that is dangerous and harmful to a person’s well-being. Tobias and Lalich define sexual violence as:

... the misuse of power in a cult or cultic relationship whereby a member or partner is sexually exploited to meet the conscious or unconscious financial, emotional, sexual, or physical needs of the leader, other partner, or group. Sexual abuse can range from unwanted touching to rape ... [and] reproductive and sexual control through enforced celibacy or mandated relationships are also forms of sexual abuse. (Tobias and Lalich, 1994:172)

In The Family’s case, then, it is not only the individuals who engage in sex with the women who are the abusers, but also Berg himself, since the theology he espoused required the women of the group to adhere strictly to prescribed behaviors that he created through supposed divine guidance.

To a large extent, members’ willingness to follow Berg’s demands rested on the belief that he was a divinely-inspired leader and father-figure, who was the sole authority within the movement. As Kent notes:

many deviant group leaders ... assume familial titles. ... [A] partial explanation for this ... [is] that many groups establish ideological and social-control systems in which members misattribute divine powers to their leaders, and then receive affective rewards and
punishments from them in a manner analogous to power-imbalanced “parent-child” relationships. (Kent, 1994:39)

Berg relied on his image as the wise “father” of the group not only to recruit members into the movement, but also to secure members’ allegiance to him. As the sole individual who possessed knowledge and understanding of the End-Time prophecies, Berg assured himself of the attention and devotion of his followers. Through the *MO Letters*, Berg conveyed the theological dictates of the movement and discussed the importance of sexuality, while interestingly, having little to no direct contact with “the rank and file members, most of whom never met him at any point during their membership” (Chryssides, 1999, 137). One example of Berg’s emphasis on sexuality is in the *MO Letter* entitled, ‘Revolutionary Sex.’ In this letter Berg proclaimed that “the only prohibitions on sex were on fornication, adultery, incest and sodomy; masturbation and nudity were declared acceptable, and even lesbianism, [Berg] declared, was not explicitly forbidden in the Bible” (Chryssides, 1999:137 indirectly quoting Melton).

Intense emotional commitment, authoritarian control of members’ lifestyle choices, supposedly divine-based authority, and the use of familial terminology by the leader are common characteristics that emerge when we look at religious movements whose leaders sexually abused members. Although it would be inaccurate to suggest that all groups possessing these specific characteristics are likely to have sexually abusive leaders who exploit their members, these characteristics do present certain markers that may help *indicate or suggest* potentially destructive groups.

Building upon the exogenous and endogenous characteristics of Robbins and Anthony discussed earlier, together with the commonalities exhibited between the Branch Davidians, the Peoples Temple, and the Children of God, more factors that contribute to a movement’s potential volatility may emerge.

131 The core beliefs of the Children of God centered on the apocalyptic notion that Jesus would return and his followers would usher in a utopia of love. Members considered David Berg to be the End-Time prophet, whose divine revelations were to guide the faithful in the last days.
For instance, the public’s stigmatization of each of the NRMs discussed in this study, as well as the negative media reports about the organizations, caused extreme boundary tension between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. In the Children of God example,

[i]t was around 1972 that Berg’s movement began to attract unfavourable media publicity. His followers had staged public demonstrations, mainly publicizing their firm belief in the world’s imminent end, declaring that a massive earthquake would destroy the entire city of Los Angeles. [Moreover, when] [m]embers [became] concerned that only a limited number of people could be reached by way of direct ‘witnessing’ ... the practice of ‘litnessing’ was adopted, whereby members engaged in widespread literature distribution [that also involved] ... videos show[ing] CoG members somewhat scantily dressed: no doubt ... designed to arouse viewers’ attention. (Chryssides, 1999:136-137)

Consequently, COG’s theology and practices came under extreme scrutiny, and the public grew increasingly leery about the members and their message. Despite attempts to lessen boundary tension by opening up certain COG centers to the media, the movement could not distance itself from the notoriety it had garnered previously.

A similar situation of social stigmatization occurred in the case of the Peoples Temple. As government officials and the Concerned Relatives132 began

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132 "Concerned Relatives included family members of residents of Jonestown and former members” (McCormick Maaga, 1998:4), who sought the utter disbanding of Jonestown. The Concerned Relatives had been able to draw media attention to the Peoples Temple, as well as the attention of United States Congressman Leo Ryan. When the group traveled to Guyana to talk with Jones, the visit ended with perhaps the most renowned instance of religious violence in American (and Canadian) consciousness, where 918 members died as part of a ‘revolutionary suicide’ or were murdered by other members, and where Jonestown members murdered five more individuals belonging to the Concerned Relative entourage at the Guyanese airstrip. See
to examine Jones’ activities more closely, Jones’ paranoia increased and he quickly began to move the members of the Temple out of the United States, away from what he considered a demonized and oppressive world: “It became apparent to Peoples Temple that its enemies [the outside world] were successfully persuading the news media and agencies of the United States government to investigate the organization in ways that threatened [the movement’s] livelihood” (Moore, 2000:124). The attacks directed against Jones and his closely-knit organization by outside forces necessarily heightened the sense of persecution that the group felt. The persecution, in turn, increased the potential for violence (although not necessarily violence of a sexual nature), especially heightening the potential for apocalyptic, world-ending action. In essence, the “increase[e] [of] external threats [such as government involvement] ... escalated the violence internal to the organization” (Moore, 2000:122), and resulted in a catastrophic ending.

The Branch Davidians’ interaction with and stigmatization by ‘religious outsiders’ is fairly consistent with what occurred in the Children of God and Peoples Temple examples. Although the media played a significant role in the disastrous outcome of the Davidian confrontation by portraying the group as

David Chidester’s *Salvation and Suicide*, Rebecca Moore’s “American as Cherry Pie,” and Mary McCormick Maaga’s *Hearing the Voices of Jonestown* for differing perspectives on the event.

Once Jones was in Guyana, the sense of persecution he felt intensified because of a custody battle he was engaged in with two high ranking members of the Peoples Temple who had defected: Tim and Grace Stoen. According to Moore,

> the couple sought to regain custody of the six-year-old son, John Victor, whom they had legally entrusted to Jim Jones. ... When Tim defected [one year after Grace] ... he and Grace joined forces to try to get John Victor out of Jonestown. ... The custody issue was complicated by the fact that Tim had signed an affidavit that said that Jones was the biological father of John Victor. (Moore, 2000:126)

The pressure that the Stoens’ exerted on Jones was significant, especially when combined with outside forces such as the U.S. Embassy, the Guyanese government, and the Concerned Relatives organization.
fanatical and undeserving of any public sympathy — especially once the death of the four BATF agents became news\textsuperscript{134} — the government’s tragic mishandling of the situation does not excuse or diminish the supposedly theologically justified sexual violence that underscored the movement’s worldview or its reaction to the government attack. In essence, Jim Jones and David Koresh had been engaged in sexually manipulative and violent behavior against the members of the group for several years prior to the final confrontation with government officials, thereby suggesting that the externally violent acts perpetrated against the movements escalated the groups’ internally violent dynamics and worldview. As Robbins and Anthony’s (1995) model suggests, the endogenous qualities of each movement exacerbated the government’s actions against the movement and acted, at least in part, as catalysts for the violent deaths of the groups’ members.

Another factor that certainly must have contributed to Koresh’s reaction to the government’s attack and his subsequent behavior during the siege, was that Koresh contemplated his future after the siege. In light of the further allegations of child sexual abuse that surfaced,\textsuperscript{135} one could speculate that if Koresh were ever to have surrendered and left the compound, he would have been arrested, prosecuted for child abuse (amongst other charges, no doubt), and likely convicted of the charges. Once the government confronted the Davidians and became aware of the systemic sexual abuse Koresh engaged in on theological grounds, Koresh would have realized, in all probability, that he would never be a free man again. Assuming this speculation is even in part accurate, certainly this realization must have intensified Koresh’s resolve to understand the situation as an apocalyptic battle that would end in violence, without the possibility of surrender. In addition, Koresh would have preached this understanding to all the

\textsuperscript{134} See Anson Shupe and Jeffrey Hadden’s (1995) article for further detail.

\textsuperscript{135} Kiri Jewell, David Thibodeau (with Whiteson, 1999), and Marc Breault’s (with King, 1993) allegations of child sexual abuse would certainly have been enough testimony for the government to start another investigation into Koresh’s sexual proclivities and behavior.
members who remained in the compound. Once the government had attacked the compound, Koresh had little hope of enjoying his freedom again. As a wounded leader engaged in a battle against the forces of evil, members would likely interpret Koresh’s declarations as prophetic insight, rather than as self-serving proclamations.

**Can a Paradigm be Created?**

If we re-examine the characteristics and factors that enhance (or contribute to) a movement’s volatility as parts of an interconnecting puzzle, then determining why these specific elements seem to have a significant impact on the manifestation of sexual violence within NRMs could provide further insight into identifying potentially destructive situations. The following characteristics and factors seem to indicate, affect, or allow for abusive situations to happen in relatively closed communities.

First, intense emotional commitment and a strong degree of affective bonding significantly contribute to violent situations, and the use of familial terminology by leaders and members and the emphasis placed on adhering to the demands of the ‘father’ of the movement, partially seems to identify groups that share a tightly-knit and potentially dangerous environment. In addition, within communal religious settings, the movements that “exhibit ... the most extreme, deviant, and ephemeral patterns of sexuality [usually] ... develop ... under the direction of a charismatic founder-leader, originating from his ... creative imagination” (Palmer, 1994:241), suggesting that charismatic leadership plays a role, as well. The supposedly divine authority of the leader inextricably links the structure, nature of the leadership, and the possibility of violence together, creating increased opportunities for violence. Moreover, the group’s

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136 Palmer does not discuss sexual religious violence specifically, but her description of “extreme, deviant and ephemeral” sexuality certainly applies to charismatically led NRMs.
theological foundation (for example, whether the group has apocalyptic beliefs) is a factor in religious violence, as is the overall consistency between a group’s proclaimed theology and the subsequent behavior demanded by the leader. Societal factors indicating potentially violent situations also include relative boundary tensions with the larger society, the group’s level of antinomian belief, and the impact of “[a]ccusations of sexual misdeeds — in particular, homosexuality, orgiastic revels, incest, and pedophilia” (Kaplan, 2001:493). To some degree, each of these aspects significantly influenced the movements that I examined and the way that they functioned in society.

Extrapolating from these cases, the endogenous and exogenous factors of Robbins and Anthony still form the foundations of a model that helps explain situations where sexual violence may occur. The key to building upon these foundations is incorporating the distinctive use of familial imagery, and including the dissonance that members must endure between the demands placed on them by society in combination with the theological and behavioral demands required for full participation within the movement. Although many of these characteristics fall within the endogenous categorization by Robbins and Anthony as either qualities of leadership style or group beliefs, these aspects should be singled out here as elements that have a substantial effect on understanding the sexual dynamics of abuse and manipulation.

Is it simply coincidence that sexually abusive leaders often mimic a father’s sense of authority and wisdom? Is it coincidental that the double standard of behavior that the leader creates seems to involve (although not necessarily exclusively) matters of sexual behavior and conduct? The predictive and explanatory quality of a paradigm that specifically addresses these issues contributes to an overall understanding of the puzzle around NRM violence. Perhaps the reason familial imagery lends itself to furthering a paradigm dealing specifically with sexual violence is because this characteristic deals most directly with the intimacy of the relationship between a leader and follower. Even though the leader can have multiple sexual relationships with numerous devotees in a
movement, the perceived intimacy that a female devotee believes she shares with the leader may be of supreme importance in her life.

The validation and increased status in the movement that the women gain from sexual relations with the leader confirms that the sexual relationship has tangible benefits to them, if we are willing to see the advantages as well as the disadvantages. A child gaining parental approval and acceptance is analogous to a female member receiving the attention and, in the devotee’s mind, the admiration of the leader. When the leader uses familial terminology, a member might attribute to the leader the qualities associated with intimacy — trustworthiness, deference, and wisdom — all traits that are present in a strong father figure. Moreover, in movements where a leader and his followers maintain a familial undertone in the relationship, members are less likely to criticize extreme behavioral demands because of their underlying trust and their conditioned responses of deference to the leader’s demands. When dealing with spiritual matters, female members of NRMs might truly believe that “Father does know best.”

Charismatic leaders ultimately desire and end up controlling the most intimate aspect of a member’s life — his or her sexual relationships — in order to gain and maintain power within the organization. Frequently, leaders create rigid and strict controls that discourage members from developing intimate relations with anyone, while they engage in multiple sexual relationships with the same members whose sexual behavior they restricted.

There is a strongly manipulative quality to this possible scenario, a quality that seems to echo in sexually abusive movements. A certain difficulty arises when trying to ascertain the number of NRMs that have sexually abused members. The main difficulties are the lack of research conducted in this area that specifically focuses on the sexual abuse of women in NRMs, the devotees’ reluctance to make claims of sexual abuse against the offending party (be it the leader or another member within the movement) for a variety of reasons, coupled with trying to define what sexual abuse is, taking into account group theology. As we will discuss with the Kabalarian Philosophy, the women
entitlement may stem from his charismatic authority (a point discussed in chapter five), sexuality may become the leader’s supposed means of fulfilling the collective’s vision. In all three of the examples discussed, a utopian goal was the promised reward for the sexual constraints. For Jim Jones, revolutionary sex between him and Temple members gave rise to extraordinary power that he then could use to supposedly eradicate the oppressive outside world. Jones claimed that using such powerful sexuality merely to strengthen a couple’s relationship was wasteful. Koresh used biblical hermeneutics to justify his sexual abuse and the control that he had over relationships by saying that his sexual actions were the only way to bring about the paradisiacal kingdom of God. For Berg, sexual control was the way to usher in the communal, Edenic heaven on earth. In each scenario, leaders linked sexuality with the power to change the world for the better.

The certain conclusion about a model predicting sexual violence is that “the separation and mutual autonomy of [endogenous and exogenous] factors [even those related to sexuality] may ultimately ... [be] illusory” (Robbins and Anthony, 1995:237). Indeed, the Branch Davidians, the Peoples Temple, and the Children of God are cases that demonstrate that endogenous and exogenous factors by themselves cannot individually indicate potential situations of abuse, even when familial dynamics, sexual prohibitions, and double standards are factors. Only when taken together does a dynamic model indicate a higher probability for sexual exploitation or abuse. Within these highly controlled environments, a leader has the ability, the spiritual justification, and the

Shearing sexually manipulated did not view his behavior as sexually abusive until many years later in some cases, and then, only after they had distanced themselves from Shearing’s influence and theological justifications. Another aspect of sexual abuse that makes quantifying the number of sexually abusive movements difficult is trying to delineate between the sexual abuse of children versus adults. To this researcher’s knowledge, there has not been a comprehensive study that quantifies sexually abusive movements, and the material available on sexual violence within NRMs is limited.
perceived authority to manipulate members’ worldviews in such a way as to reflect his own sexual desires and proclivities.
Chapter Five: The Charismatic Paradigm

Charismatic individuals have long held our attention and fascination, but what is it about them that is so captivating and compelling? What qualities do these individuals possess that enable them to ensnare us with their charm? Although it is no surprise that such individuals appear throughout history, Lorne Dawson identifies a few of the most recognizable figures in history to illustrate his argument that charismatic figures affect millions of people and can even change the course of history. These charismatic figures include such individuals as the:

great military figures ... [of] Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. But of course one [must] also think ... of the founders of the world’s great religions: ... the Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, and many other prophets, sages, and saints from Saint Francis to Madame Blavatsky.
(Dawson, 1998:140)

When casually reading the names of such influential and memorable individuals, it seems clear that charismatic men and women all have the power to affect the world positively or negatively, leaving behind them either a legacy of love and understanding or a wake of destruction and violence.

A fundamental observation from readings about the charismatic figure is that charisma can not be limited to those individuals who supposedly ‘do good,’ nor can it be limited to individuals in either political or religious spheres. Because of the difficulties exploring all types of charismatic figures, this study focuses on the qualities generally present in those individuals who claim to be spiritual teachers, are gifted with charismatic qualities, and sometimes are referred to as gurus\textsuperscript{138} in contemporary society. From this point of departure and with an

\textsuperscript{138} Guru is a Sanskrit word meaning “one who brings light out of darkness” (Storr, 1996:xi). Although the term has a specific etymology linked with Hindu traditions, it has come to be more
acknowledgment that the charismatic figure can engage in behavior that can be either shocking or inspiring, manipulative or selfless, the positive and negative aspects of charismatic leadership receive further analysis.

In an effort to set the boundaries of this study and to avoid maligning all charismatic religious organizations with broad generalizations, it is important to note a point that Dawson\textsuperscript{139} makes in his analyses of violence within NRMs: “there is nothing intrinsically violent about charismatic leadership. All institutions ... actively cultivate and reward its presence in some measure as an effective way to achieve their ends” (Dawson, 2002:40-41). The observation serves to draw attention to the connections between charismatically-led movements and situations where violence could potentially occur, but it does not necessarily follow that violent tendencies always exist within these types of movements. Violence, especially sexual violence, cannot be confined to predictable instances, but rather, we must look for characteristics that can indicate situations of possible violence.

To further define the parameters of this study, Anthony Storr provides us with a basic definition of the charismatic and spiritual teacher (and leader), or as he says:

[although] [g]urus differ widely from each other in a variety of ways, ... most claim the possession of special spiritual insight based on personal revelation. Gurus promise their followers new ways of self-development, new paths to salvation. Since there are no schools for gurus, and no recognized qualifications for becoming one, they are, like politicians, originally self-selected. Anyone can

\textsuperscript{139} Although Dawson examines violence within NRMs with a specific focus on leaders who led their members to death, he contends that many of his arguments provide insight into the dynamics of potentially abusive charismatic groups whose leaders do subject their followers to violent and harmful situations.
become a guru if he or she has the hubris to claim special gifts.
(Storr, 1996:xi)

From this brief description comes one of the main goals of this chapter — to outline characteristics of the charismatic guru figure in order to create a general model against which I will endeavor to compare the leaders of the Kabalarian Philosophy. Once I have established general qualities of the charismatic individual, I will make a further comparison between the Kabalarian leaders and other religiously-based charismatic figures. Such figures include David Koresh and Jim Jones for several reasons. First, a considerable amount of research exists on these men and their charismatic gifts. Second, both leaders were sexually inappropriate with their members. Third, there exist followers who were both positively and negatively affected by their membership in these groups and by the tragedy that befell these leaders and their groups. The significance of these multi-layered comparisons is to demonstrate the power these spiritually driven charismatic individuals (or teachers) have in their relationship with others, especially their followers. In addition, the comparison serves to examine how leaders in a religious setting can use their power of charisma to gain control over members, securing their adherence to the leader’s demands, as well as illustrating members’ willingness to relinquish a certain amount of control at the leader’s behest. Although history has not yet made a final determination as to whether Parker and Shearing belong on the side of the righteous or the villainous — especially in the eyes of their followers — there is little doubt that each of these men profoundly affected the members of the Kabalarian Philosophy, especially when members were forced to contend with Shearing’s sexually based criminal convictions.

\[140\] From this definition, Storr seems to suggest a strong connection between a guru and a charismatic individual. For that reason, in this analysis I use the terms interchangeably, unless otherwise specifically noted.
An Overview of Charisma, Commitment, and Connection

Despite a lack of universalism in creating a definitive model of the charismatic figure, researchers have established a solid framework upon which I base my analysis. The fairly consistent set of characteristics outlined in this study, however, does not suggest that it is an exhaustive list, nor are these characteristics the only factors influencing a charismatic individual’s thoughts, actions, and personality. The paradigm that follows, therefore, serves as a foundation for understanding the charismatic individual and provides a basis for further, more detailed analysis. To this end, we must first define charisma, examine charismatic individuals and the qualities that they exhibit, and explore the inner dynamics of the groups that these leaders rule. After establishing generally recurring characteristics of the charismatic personality, we can then apply the general model to the specific case study of the Kabalarian Philosophy.

Weber and Charisma

Building upon Weber’s foundational analysis on the nature of charisma, we must necessarily examine his writings, since he was the forerunner to most contemporary sociological and religious analyses dealing with the subject. The core of Weber’s argument was that charisma is a certain quality that an individual personality possesses that:

- sets him apart from ordinary men and [who is then] treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These [qualities] are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is [often] treated as a leader [to those who recognize and accept the individual’s uniqueness]. (Weber, On Charisma, 1968:48)
Weber purported that charisma is an overarching term that describes characteristics or “all those ‘extra-ordinary’ powers for which ethnology ... has a large number of stock labels. ... [These extraordinary powers] are ascribed to persons who consequently acquire the status of ‘leaders’” (Joas, 1996:44-46).

Weber closely associated charisma with personality and suggests that the domination of others and the internal group structures based on these ‘extra-ordinary powers’ reflect the need for the continued presence of the leader it upholds (Joas, 1996:47; Collins and Makowsky, 1989:151). His argument further illustrates the anti-democratic nature of charismatic leadership because of the exclusive dependency of the internal structure on the leader’s personality — or charisma — rather than on previously existing, and therefore stable, structural supports (Parkin, 1982:84). Essentially, “Weber counterposes charismatic domination to both traditional and legal-rational or bureaucratic domination” (Parkin, 1982:84). As defined by Weber, charismatic authority is a recognized and legitimate source of power that becomes reflected in the internal structures of the group. Following this premise, the internal structures must, therefore, evolve with the leader. Weber’s analysis of the dynamics within charismatic groups significantly illustrates the connection between a leader’s charisma and the resulting anti-democratic — but ultimately legitimate — religious authority.

Weber further believed that charisma, and therefore charismatic personalities, played an integral role in periodically infusing society with new

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141 Charismatic, traditional, legal-rational or bureaucratic domination are classifications that Weber proposed were legitimate bases for authority. He defined each in the following manner:

Rational grounds: resting on a belief in the ‘legality’ of patterns of normative rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands (legal authority). Traditional grounds: resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of the status of those exercising authority under them (traditional authority). Charismatic grounds: resting on devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him (charismatic authority) (Weber, 1964:328).
ideas, an unexpected occurrences that challenged the set patterns of routinized democratic life:

[Weber] saw Western civilization as moving toward greater and greater rationalization of all aspects of life. This, he feared, made modern life an “iron cage,” turning daily existence into an alienated, mechanical, meaningless routine. But [he] also believed that ideas — especially religious ideas — can profoundly influence society, and that they cannot simply be dismissed as a function of underlying social processes. (Oakes, 1997:27)

Theoretically, Weber thought that the charismatic figure was a catalyst for change and challenging the status quo by provoking new ideas within that stable framework. Furthermore, he believed that the charismatic figure embodied society’s need for otherness, although the charismatic individual’s goals might or might not be self-serving (depending on perspective and personal interpretation).

An additional argument that Weber expressed in his research was that charismatic leadership could not be a rationally-based leadership style because followers believed that the leader possessed an otherworldly gift rather than the mundane attributes found in most competent and democratically elected leaders. Since rational arguments cannot necessarily explain an ability or supernatural gift that lies beyond the understanding of most, leadership authority relies solely on the power the charismatic individual has over others.

According to James V. Downton, once people give authority to a leader by attributing a special gift to him, he then relies not on traditional or rational-legal authority, but on the authority given the leader by “a transcendental realm. ... [As a result,] [t]he leader lays claim to the loyalty of his following through his personal magnetism rather than by articulating an ideology that offers a concrete program of action” (Downton, 1973:210). In addition, charismatic leaders base their authority on the “sheer force of [their] personality” (Oakes, 1997:28), and
generally maintain the position that followers sought them out, rather than that they sought devotees, further supporting these leaders’ claims of possessing an extraordinary gift. Once a relationship between leader and follower develops, however, charisma alone is not sufficient to maintain the position of leader within a group. Weber “alludes to the fact that charismatic leaders must produce concrete returns for their followers or they will lose their right to lead” (Downton, 1973:211). While charisma is a powerful and attractive quality to possess, leaders endowed with this supernatural power must engage in an ongoing process to maintain a group’s loyalty and their authority within the group, for their authority is not absolute and unchangeable.

**Other Perspectives of Charisma**

With the foundation that Weber laid, scholars have continued building upon his arguments. Len Oakes, a psychologist who developed ideas found in L.K. Hall’s dissertation (1983), posits that charismatic leadership is a combination of “two components. ... [T]he first — charismatic being — includes those aspects of personality that inspire compliance with the leader’s will ... [and the second] — charismatic action — includes leadership strategies that compel compliance” (Oakes, 1997:115). Similarly, in *Feet of Clay*, Storr describes ten characteristics that religious charismatic leaders generally possess, supporting Oakes’ basic argument. Although presenting different yet complementary models, their basic classifications both try to address the unique qualities that comprise the charismatic figure.\(^{142}\)

\(^{142}\) In his introduction, Storr does say that not every charismatic figure is going to possess all of the characteristics that he outlines, but suggests that many charismatic leaders in a religious environment do share a majority of the traits.
Oakes contends that researchers can examine the charismatic figure through two basic categories: charismatic being and charismatic action. The components of charismatic being includes such aspects as “personal integrity, awareness of others, style of thinking, energy and alertness, lack of inner conflicts, physical appearance, and certain beliefs and attitudes such as a sense of calling” (Oakes, 1997:115). Charismatic action, by contrast, includes such qualities as “good communication skills, future vision, acting as change agents ... [and possessing] an interpersonal style of generosity, warmth, optimism, and inclusiveness” (Oakes, 1997:115).

Storr outlines ten fundamental characteristics that a charismatic leader exhibits, which share several similarities with those later proposed by Oakes. The following list briefly describes these characteristics. First, a charismatic individual claims to have been “granted a special, spiritual insight which has transformed his own life ... [with the revelatory declaration often stemming] from God or from his angels” (Storr, 1996:xii). Second, charismatic leaders often maintain a certain isolation from others, thereby having few, if any, close friends (Storr, 1996:xiii). Third, leaders who rely on charismatic attributes tend to be “intolerant of any kind of criticism, believing that anything less than total agreement is equivalent to hostility” (Storr, 1996:xiii). Fourth, echoing the argument posited by Weber, Storr argues that charismatic leadership tends to be “elitist and anti-democratic, even if they pay lip-service to democracy,” saying, “[c]onviction of a special revelation must imply that the ... [charismatic leader] is a superior person who is not as other men are” (Storr, 1996:xiii). Fifth, these types of leaders also share the common occurrence of “new insight[s] follow[ing] a period of mental distress or physical illness, in which the ... [leader] has been fruitlessly searching for an answer to his own emotional problems” (Storr, 1996:xiv). Sixth, charismatic individuals are convinced that they possess an unerring understanding of the world’s truth (Storr, 1996:xiv). Seventh, Storr quotes Eileen Barker’s argument because it succinctly states another common feature: “[a]lmost by definition,
charismatic leaders are unpredictable, for they are bound by neither tradition nor rules; they are not answerable to other human beings” (Barker, qtd. in Storr, 1996:xv). Eighth, charismatic leaders often invent a mysterious background to lend credence to their claims of superior knowledge and wisdom (Storr, 1996:xv). Ninth, these individuals often feel that they deserve special privileges that do not apply to other members of their organization, including having to deal with financial concerns, as well as believing that any of the sexual proscriptions for members do not apply to them because of their special status within the group (Storr, 1996:xvi). Finally, tenth, leaders often feel the need to dominate and exercise the power and control\textsuperscript{143} they have over members by requiring them to perform chores or tasks (Storr, 1996:xvi). As the substantive elements of the charismatic paradigm that I use in this study, Storr’s characteristics reveal distinguishing qualities that many self-proclaimed charismatic individuals possess. This chapter deconstructs each of Storr’s characteristics, and explores in detail the theories and perspectives that expand or limit Storr’s understanding. In addition, any alternate theories that contribute to a fuller explanation of charisma and the charismatic leader appear within the discussion of each characteristic.

There is clear acknowledgment that Weber was the most influential researcher theorizing on charisma. As Oakes states, “[m]odern usage of the term ‘charisma’ derives from [him]” (Oakes, 1997:27), thereby suggesting that although there has been some debate and alternate interpretations about his

\textsuperscript{143} Power and control within (religious) movements is a complex issue that combines interpersonal dynamics with factors including structure and leadership style. A full discussion of these concepts requires far greater analysis than is possible in this chapter, which focuses on an overview of the charismatic paradigm. Chapter six, therefore, addresses the complexity of these concepts more fully, delving deeper into the subject to demonstrate that although there is a general understanding of power in relation to group organization, the concept is far more nuanced than most people acknowledge. For the purpose of explaining the charismatic paradigm and the concept of power that surfaces throughout, however, I use power and control in a non-traditional way, unless I specifically note otherwise.
theories, there has been little change in the essential concepts he developed. One example supporting this contention follows William Sims Bainbridge’s unique interpretation of charisma. Arguing from a sociological perspective, Bainbridge understood Weber’s theory to mean that “[i]n religious terms, charisma is a divine gift, typically for Christians meaning that the person has received supernatural power from the Holy Spirit, or that the Holy Spirit actually dwells within the individual” (Bainbridge, 1997:220-221). Although Bainbridge agrees with Weber’s claim that charisma is an extraordinary gift, he argues that in a religious setting, a Christian charismatic leader’s gift would stem from the Holy Spirit. Weber, however, made no such specific contention in his analysis.

Storr’s examination of charisma as a psychiatric phenomenon also relies heavily on Weber’s foundational premises but seems to add another perspective. While Storr contends that a leader’s supernatural gift could possibly be the result of an infusion of the Holy Spirit, he also (facetiously) suggests that in some cases, a leader’s special gift could just as easily be “attributed to mysterious beings residing in the Himalayas [for example,] or even to the inhabitants of other planets” (Storr, 1996:xii). While Storr and Bainbridge draw on Weber’s analysis of charisma and share significant elements, both researchers contend that many leaders “believe that all humanity should accept their vision” (Storr, 1996:xii-xiii) and acknowledge the uniqueness of their gift. Again, Weber does not go so far as to make such claims in his work.

Important to note regarding the Kabalarians, however, is that they do not specifically attribute their leaders’ special insight to any direct source, whether mysterious or alien, although members did believe their leaders possessed a

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144 It would be inaccurate to say that Kabalarians necessarily believe in the Holy Spirit as a manifestation of God in the same way that most Christians understand the concept. It is more accurate to say that God, otherwise understood as the Christ Consciousness or Universal Consciousness in their theology, is the underlying source of wisdom and understanding. A deeper understanding of cosmic unity and harmony (as Parker and Shearing claim to have had) might be seen by devotees as a supernatural gift — which is an important element in religious charisma.
deeper insight into the universe than did any other individual. Although one could argue that Parker began his spiritual quest with the goal of sharing his special wisdom and understanding of the universal religious principles\textsuperscript{145} that he believed existed with all of humanity, obviously Parker and his successor have not yet achieved their desired goal. While Kabalarian theology currently lacks worldwide acceptance, its lack of popularity does not negate members’ belief in their leaders’ special insight. Rather, the lack of acceptance suggests to members that revelation and dissemination of Kabalarian principles are simply ongoing processes and manifestations of the divine. In time, members believe, the world will come to acknowledge and accept the fundamental principles espoused by their leaders.\textsuperscript{146}

The second characteristic that Storr proposes is that charismatic leaders often isolate themselves from others, ostensibly as the result of one of three possible scenarios. The first scenario is that the isolationist tendencies found in many charismatic adults is the direct result of feelings of isolation felt during childhood (Storr, 1996:220-221). Isolationist behavior in charismatic adults is a remnant of unaddressed childhood experiences when the individual believed that no one cared for him. The second (and more probable) scenario is that the

\textsuperscript{145} According to the Kabalarian Philosophy, these universal religious principles are natural laws of harmony that are found in both Eastern and Western religions. Parker believed that by understanding the elements he thought were shared by all religions, he could establish universal harmony and health for all humanity.

\textsuperscript{146} Although the general theory exploring charismatic leaders and how they create movements posits that there usually is only one charismatic founder in a movement, the Kabalarian Philosophy seems to be the exception to the rule. According to available sources, both Parker and Shearing demonstrated charismatic traits, including such features as the ability to create new doctrine, being intolerant of criticism, and maintaining a special status within the movement (along with other common traits). How each of these leaders compare to the charismatic paradigm outlined in this chapter is the focus of chapter seven, which deals exclusively with the case study of the Kabalarian Philosophy and how this group possesses and demonstrates the various elements explored throughout my research.
charismatic leader has deliberately set himself apart from those around him, both physically and emotionally. This willful separation results from the charismatic individual’s belief in his superiority over others and their inability to either understand or appreciate his special insight. The isolation imposed on the charismatic individual is, therefore, a self-made prison of sorts, although it does not preclude potential or current members from being drawn to the charismatic figure. When we analyze material on the charismatic figure, we find that the very image of isolation contributes to the charismatic individual’s mystery and aura of distinctiveness — essentially, his appeal to others.

Oakes’ understanding of the isolation that charismatic individuals feel and why these types of individuals rarely have close relationships clearly lends validity to Storr’s characteristic. Oakes states that:

> [p]rophets are self-contained and autonomous, seeming to need little or nothing from others. ... The prophet always holds himself slightly apart from others, revealing little of his true feelings and seeming to be something of a mystery even to his long-term followers. This may mean that he is unable to have close friendships. (Oakes, 1997:16)

The charismatic leader’s inability to see himself as an equal to others translates into a solitude that is self-imposed and, to a certain degree, necessary, since he believes in his uniqueness as the single recipient of the wisdom and understanding of the divine.

Dawson, however, purports that “[t]rue charisma ... is not so much an attribute of someone’s personality as it is a quality that people socially attribute to someone. No charisma exists in the absence of the recognition of a group, which then grants authority to the person on that basis” (Dawson, 1998:140). From a sociological understanding, charisma is a relational concept that requires others to recognize and grant authority to the charismatic individual before he can assume a leadership role based on that charisma. The extraordinariness that
followers attribute to the charismatic individual must be continually accepted and acknowledged for the charismatic to maintain authority and power.

The third scenario that possibly explains a charismatic individual’s tendency towards isolation is that isolation is a characteristic that those with a narcissistic personality often display. This perspective is closely related to the first scenario, and further develops an explanation for the feelings of isolation that the charismatic individual felt during his childhood. Storr argues that individuals who “are more interested in what goes on in their own minds than in personal relationships ... [are] in other words, ... introverted and narcissistic” (Storr, 1996:xiii). The feelings of isolation that a child experiences might be the result of having certain qualities found in those with narcissistic personalities that is not fully developed until adulthood.

Storr quotes Freud to further support the likely connection between charisma and narcissism: “[t]he man who is predominantly erotic will give first preference to his emotional relationship to other people; the narcissistic man, who inclines to be self-sufficient, will seek his main satisfactions in his internal mental processes” (qtd. in Storr, 1996:xiii). When examining the arguments made by Ronald Clark, however, in his study of Rajneesh as a narcissist, he offers an additional perspective of a narcissistic personality disorder to those made by Storr and Freud. He seems to suggest that further characteristics include:

- a grandiose sense of self-importance or uniqueness; preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success; exhibitionistic need for constant attention and admiration; characteristic responses to threats to self-esteem; and characteristic disturbances in interpersonal relationships, such as feelings of entitlement, interpersonal exploitiveness, relationships that alternate between extremes of overidealization and devaluation, and lack of empathy. (American Psychiatric Association qtd. in Clark, 1988:33)
Although there seem to be several similarities between charismatic and narcissistic personalities, it would be inaccurate to say that if one were charismatic, then one must necessarily have this disorder.¹⁴⁷ The commonalities, however, are significant enough to mention and contribute to the overall paradigm of charismatic personalities.

The third characteristic Storr claims charismatic individuals possess is that they are often “intolerant of any kind of criticism, believing that anything less than total agreement is equivalent to hostility” (Storr, 1996:xiii). When looking specifically at charismatic individuals who act as spiritual leaders, a member’s

¹⁴⁷ When we compare Parker to the characteristics presented in Clark’s article, numerous similarities emerge, suggesting that Parker had qualities of a narcissistic disorder. First, and most obviously, Parker claimed that he was going to successfully act as a bridge between all Eastern and Western religions (Kabalarian Philosophy, ”History,” 1999:1-2), which would create worldwide harmony and understanding. His sense of grandiose (and self proclaimed importance) together with his belief in his “unlimited success” (Clark, 1988:33) supports the contention that charismatic and narcissistic personalities share numerous qualities. Furthermore, Clark’s proposal that narcissistic individuals possess an “exhibitionistic need for constant attention and admiration” (Clark, 1988:33) seems apt when one examines Parker’s living and teaching arrangements. Throughout his life, Parker surrounded himself with devotees, as depicted by Carollyne Tylor in Against the Tides. In it, Tylor clearly states that after establishing the Kabalarian Philosophy, her father’s house was filled with students requesting personal meetings with him at all hours of the day. The continual focus on the movement rather than on his personal life suggests that as leader of the Kabalarian Philosophy, Parker was in a position where he could fulfill his need for attention, although (like narcissists generally) he could not maintain his personal relationships. Moreover, Parker’s failed marriages further suggest he had a narcissistic disorder. His lack of empathy in understanding his second wife’s need for privacy and intimacy in their relationship was an underlying cause for their subsequent separation and divorce. Even Carollyne Tylor, Parker’s daughter, says that she had difficulties with her relationship with her father, primarily because Parker was never present in their lives. Instead, he focused all his attention and energy on founding and expanding the Kabalarian Philosophy. Although not conclusive when examined individually, each of these incidents, when examined collectively, contribute to the overall image of Parker possessing certain qualities of a narcissistic personality disorder. Shearing, in comparison, is a figure that I will explore further in chapter seven.
agreement with the leader’s worldview is crucial because his or her agreement with the leader’s claims reinforces the leader’s belief in his own uniqueness and gifted understanding. In many charismatically-led NRMs, contradicting, or even questioning, the leader’s vision implies that he has less than a divine understanding, thus suggesting that he is like all others rather than exceptional. Essentially, when questioned by members, the leader begins to lose the perceived stature of being extraordinary, falling from the realm of possessing supernatural gifts into the realm of being ordinary and part of the profane. Since charismatic authority depends on the leader’s ability to set himself apart from ordinary individuals based on the sheer force of his supernatural gift, disagreement cannot be tolerated for fear that it will lessen his authority within the group. Dawson develops this idea more fully in *Comprehending Cults*, as a strategy used by charismatic leaders to maintain their leadership positions.\textsuperscript{148}

In his research, Dawson found that when there was a challenge to the charismatic leader’s authority, the “dissent [wa]s stifled through the careful control of information, ... the public use of ridicule [as well as] other means of peer pressure” (Dawson, 1998:146). In accordance with Storr’s assessment of the charismatic figure, the use of ridicule and peer pressure tactics to achieve

\textsuperscript{148} Briefly outlined, Dawson’s six strategies include, first, the need for leaders to keep their followers’ attention, thereby encouraging a leader to “alter the doctrines and policies of the NRM, sometimes very suddenly” (Dawson, 1988:144). Second, “Some charismatic leaders may need to seek constant reaffirmation of the loyalty of their followers. This leads to an escalation of the demands they place on members for personal service and sacrifice to the group” (Dawson, 1998:145). Third, leaders tend to demonize enemies (Dawson, 1998:146). Fourth, “Charismatic leaders will often call into question the inspired messages of all competitors for authority, both external and internal to the group” (Dawson, 1998:146). Fifth, leaders will often control sexual relationships and coupling within the group (Dawson, 1998:146). Sixth, in order to maintain a sense of control over a group, the charismatic leader may change the location of his movement (Dawson, 1998:147). There is significant overlap between the strategies he proposes and the ten characteristics that Storr believes charismatic individuals possess, but Dawson’s interpretation presents another useful perspective for explaining the dynamics of charismatic leadership.
control is significant in two ways, because only a powerful group leader would have the power to use these types of tactics and have people adhere to them. First, by personally attacking and essentially vilifying challengers, individuals who harbor any doubt about the leader’s ability begin to question whether their dissent is worth the chastisement by the leader and the rest of the group. As such, the individual endures considerable pressure from both the leader and the group members either to conform or to leave the movement. The process of purging dissenting opinions serves a twofold purpose: the spread of such opinions within the organization is eliminated and the leader maintains his absolute authority over group opinion. If doubting individuals were to remain within the organization, then uncertainty about the leader would inevitably spread. If the leader catches the challenge in its formative stages, then the threat can be downplayed and contained.

Dawson’s second point is that a small challenge to the leader’s authority provides him with a valuable opportunity from which he can benefit. Challenges “are often seized upon as a pretext for fomenting a sense of crisis, effecting a shift in practices, justifying the movement of people in and out of the inner circle of the leader, and discrediting or expelling lieutenants who appear to be too popular or influential” (Dawson, 1998:146). Although the restructuring of the group’s elite can lead to some disaffected members, the value of maintaining control and absolute authority in the organization is of far greater importance to a charismatic leader. To this end, the leader meets criticism with harsh retaliation, whether through derision, coercion, or expulsion.

Joseph Bensman and Michael Givant develop Weber’s observation that a crisis in a movement can be beneficial to leaders, but they approached the issues more theoretically. One of the observations they noted was that internal strife and crises are hallmarks of charismatic leadership, primarily because:

149 Richard Ofshe and Margaret Singer address similar themes of maintaining a unified group theology in their article, although their focus is more on issues of coercive behavior in extreme situations (Ofshe and Singer, 1986:15-20).
charismatic leadership ... usually arises in times of crisis in which the basic values, institutions, and legitimacy of the society are at least in question. War, revolution, military defeat, foreign domination, natural domination, natural disaster, or unexplained natural phenomena all shake the faith in the legitimacy of the established order and established belief system. (Bensman and Givant, 1986:29)

Extrapolating from Weber’s original discussion, Bensman and Givant inferred that in smaller, charismatically-led religious organizations, a crisis tends to incite members to search out the one individual who can seemingly provide meaning and direction for them during the chaos. Members of the group especially focus their attention back toward the charismatic figure, who appears to demonstrate the ability to adapt to the members’ needs, overcoming challenges and continuing to emerge as a figure of reassurance and guidance. The members’ search for order and meaning plays into the leader’s need for attention and control, and returns the members’ focus to the leader, once again surrendering power to the leader. The crisis strengthens the leader’s authority and reinforces the validity of his claims, while allowing him to eliminate any challengers. The resulting restructuring of members within the organization then reflects the leader’s overall worldview and group purpose more directly.

Further connections shared between examinations of charisma by Weber and Storr include aspects of totalitarianism. While Storr proposes this aspect as the fourth characteristic that appears in charismatic leaders, the notion builds upon Weber’s oft-quoted analysis that presents the charismatic as “elitist and anti-democratic” (Storr, 1996:xiii). Although touched upon earlier in this discussion, this aspect of charisma deserves further exploration because it contributes to deepening analysis of charismatic leadership and the charismatic leader’s authority within a movement.

As briefly mentioned earlier, Weber contended that charismatic leadership was a source of power within a movement that directly opposed the relatively
stable and permanent societal institutions of bureaucratic structures.\textsuperscript{150} The opposition occurs because (in its formative stages, at least) charismatic authority builds upon the leader’s personality rather than requiring the leader to possess expert knowledge or specific occupational requirements (Weber, \textit{On Charisma}, 1968:18-19). Without any specific requirements or skills, those individuals who claim authority broadens within movements. Furthermore:

the charismatic structure knows nothing of a form or of an ordered procedure of appointment or dismissal. It knows no regulated ‘career,’ ‘advancement,’ ‘salary,’ or regulated and expert training of the holder of charisma or of his aids. ... Charisma knows only inner determination and inner restraint. (Weber, \textit{On Charisma}, 1968:19-20)

Since charismatic authority lies beyond the rules and regulations of traditional bureaucratic institutions, there is no process to initiate the checks and balances that are the cornerstone of democratic authority. In short, Weber “considered the principle of free leadership selection to be the essence of democratic rule under whatever circumstances” (Mommsen, 1989:16). No such selection process exists within the charismatic framework.

As Storr purports, in agreement with Weber, charismatic authority must be elitist because there cannot be a free selection of the leader within that paradigm. Premised on possessing an extraordinary gift, the charismatic leader necessarily elevates himself in status and purpose above all others. The divine or supernatural realm sanctions the leader’s mission and allows him to operate outside the traditionally upheld rules, regulations, and requirements that dictate the thoughts and actions of the mundane world. Essentially, there is no applicable democratic model that could possibly fit the anti-democratic nature of charismatic leadership, and as such, charismatic leaders necessarily function beyond the set boundaries delineating democratic authority.

\textsuperscript{150} Weber also discusses patriarchal societal institutions, but for the purpose of illustrating the dichotomy between charismatic authority and democratic authority, the exploration focuses solely on the group structures that lend themselves to the implementation of bureaucratic authority.
The fifth characteristic in Storr’s model deals with the process of the leader’s discovery of new revelations. Storr purports that any “new insight [a leader receives usually] follows a period of mental distress or physical illness, in which the ... [leader] has been fruitlessly searching for an answer to his own emotional problems” (Storr, 1996:xiv). Although Storr states that this is a common feature in many charismatic leaders, his argument seems overstated. In retrospect, it is difficult to ascertain whether a charismatic leader truly manifests this characteristic, primarily because it is problematic to identify this process by observation alone. One possible way to explain the difficulty in identifying this characteristic is that, according to Storr, this “Eureka pattern [of an emotional or physical crisis being followed by sudden revelation or insight] ... is likely to take place in the subject’s thirties or forties, and may warrant the diagnosis of mid-life crisis” (Storr, 1996:xiv). Researchers analyzing the actions and behaviors of charismatic individuals can potentially mistake a mid-life crisis151 for the charismatic leader’s apparent search for, and subsequent discovery of, the answers to his own highly personal problems.

Despite the problems surrounding Storr’s easily misconstrued characteristic, Oakes seems to support his analysis of the Eureka phenomenon when he acknowledges that a similar characteristic emerged during his own research into theories of charismatic personalities.152 Oakes’ analysis describes this life-altering event, or series of events, as a type of emotional and spiritual awakening (Oakes, 1997:21-22). He suggests that the process of ‘awakening’ “solves some problems for the prophet [or charismatic figure by] ... changing his view of himself and the world. ... After awakening, the prophet’s mission

151 Although Storr is a psychiatrist, his mention of a ‘mid-life crisis’ is not a valid medical diagnosis, but rather a mundane phrase that encompasses traits that society associates with middle age.

152 Although there are similarities between Oakes’ argument and that of Storr, Oakes does not directly refer to, or acknowledge, Storr’s “Eureka pattern” at any time in his research.
becomes clear. ... [The mission becomes the] recruit[ment of] followers ... [by claiming] to be the source of ultimate good for others” (Oakes, 1997:22).

The comparison of these similar perspectives holds that in both the Eureka pattern and the apparent mid-life crisis, a resolution results that has charismatic implications: “Relief comes with the solution of problems ... and the distress of chaos [is] followed by the establishment of a new order” (Storr, 1996:xiv). Once the guru figure successfully works through his tumultuous personal circumstances, the chaos of his personal life gives way to a new sense of universal order and understanding. According to the charismatic individual, this new order is the result of divinely inspired revelation that the individual now promulgates to his devotees as being special insight. Furthermore, the religiously inclined charismatic individual “tend[s] to see [the solutions to his problems] as unshakeable and permanent” truths, without conceding that there are few solutions to the world’s problems that are absolute (Storr, 1996:xiv).

In an earlier study, William Sims Bainbridge and Rodney Stark (1979) developed several parallel arguments to those presented by Storr that helped identify recurring characteristics found in many NRMs, as well as those characteristics found in the leaders of these groups. While the study by Bainbridge and Stark does not specifically explore the characteristics of charismatic leadership, focusing instead on the process of formation, the two issues are closely connected because the formation of an NRM results directly from the charismatic leader’s vision of the group, thereby linking group formation and leadership as two aspects of the process. For this reason, we can argue that the NRM formation theory of Bainbridge and Stark provides some insight into the qualities of the charismatic leader, especially in two areas: the charismatic leader’s apparent mental or physical crises and what appears to be promulgated

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153 Whether or not the leader actually believes that the revelation is divinely inspired, once he begins proselytizing these insights to others, he reinforces his carefully crafted image of being divinely chosen. Moreover, as his proselytizing increases, so, too, does his apparent belief in his own infallible authority.
insights that follow those crises. The following is a summary of their main theory of cult formation that bears strong commonalities with the model presented by Storr:

1. Cults\textsuperscript{154} are novel cultural responses to personal and societal crisis.
2. New cults are invented by individuals suffering from certain forms of mental illness.
3. These individuals typically achieve their novel visions during psychotic episodes.
4. During such an episode, the individual invents a new package of compensators to meet his own needs.
5. The individual’s illness commits him to his new vision, either because his hallucinations appear to demonstrate its truth, or because his compelling needs demand immediate satisfaction.
6. After the episode, the individual will be most likely to succeed in forming a cult around his vision if the society contains many other persons suffering from problems similar to those originally faced by the cult founder, to whose solution, therefore, they are likely to respond.
7. Therefore, such cults most often succeed during times of societal crisis, when large numbers of persons suffer from similar unresolved problems.
8. If the cult does succeed in attracting many followers, the individual founder may achieve at least a partial cure of his illness, because his self-generated compensators are legitimated by other persons and because he now receives true rewards from his followers. (Bainbridge and Stark, 1979:285)

While Bainbridge, Stark, and Storr focus on slightly different aspects of NRM leaders in relation to the groups that they lead, their theories suggest that new

\textsuperscript{154} As used by Bainbridge and Stark in this study, the word “cult” refers to any New Religious Movement.
insights are the result of mental crises. During the period of mental crises, the leader is more susceptible to believing that his visions are true, if for no other reason than that others also share in the belief and veracity of the visions. Moreover, both theories argue for the significance of the leader’s vision by purporting that the visions resolve problems for the leader as they also do for those who believe that the leader’s visions directly respond to their own needs. In this sense, Bainbridge and Stark’s model of cult formation ties directly into Storr’s proposed sixth characteristic of charismatic leadership: charismatic individuals are usually convinced that they possess an unerring understanding of the world’s truth (Storr, 1996:xiv).

This sixth characteristic is perhaps one of the most fundamental of all the distinguishing characteristics of charismatic individuals. As a hallmark quality of such figures, the charismatic leader possess an absolute belief in his interpretations of the world. In Cults in Our Midst, Margaret Singer and Janja Lalich develop this point in detail. In their view, the crux of the argument is that these:

self-designated gurus seem ... ready to step in and offer answers to life’s problems. They claim they have the only and sure way of life ... [and] touting ... a special mission and special knowledge. ... Cult leaders usually claim that they have access to either ancient knowledge that they alone have reclaimed or new knowledge that they alone have discovered, or some blend of these two, and this circumstance qualifies them for their special mission in life. (Singer and Lalich, 1995:29-30)

The commonality between Singer and Lalich’s findings and Storr’s model clearly identifies a leader’s absolute belief in his ability to know the truth and understand life’s purpose, without doubt or question. In the leader’s

155 Cult is used here in the sense intended by these authors.
understanding, those who do not follow his proclamations are forever lost, mired in confusion and ignorance.

Other researchers support Singer and Lalich’s contention. In Oakes’ study of prophetic charisma, one of his main contentions is that even in the most simplistic actions and conversations with a charismatic individual, the individual seems to demonstrate a quality of ‘knowing’ (Oakes, 1997:17) The charismatic leader behaves with a certain air of superiority, as though he knows something that others do not. Oakes describes this quality as congruence (Oakes, 1997:16), whereby there is:

- a simplicity and an immediacy [to a leader’s actions, as well as] an economy of movement and a directness of response, with an absence of pretence, flourish, or style, that creates a seemingly divine aura. ... Prophets [referring here to charismatic leaders] seem to immerse themselves within their ideals so totally, to subordinate themselves to — and identify with — the Good so completely, that they appear to abandon all superfluous functions and to become the living, realized forms of their truths; in short, the incarnate God. (Oakes, 1997:16-17)

This simplicity manifests itself as certainty in all the leader’s actions, giving him the appearance of connectedness to the universe and the divine. The aura of self-confidence exhibited by the leader appeals to members and potential recruits alike with the “boldness of the claim [to know the ‘truth’] induc[ing] a fascinating effect, arousing faith, hope, and love in the hearts of those who become his followers” (Oakes, 1997:22).

Essentially, the charismatic leader exudes authoritative conviction in his own beliefs that is both attractive and appealing to those who lack such certainty in their own lives. Storr and Oakes both argue that gurus possess an ability to convince others of their place in this world, which is reassuring because it presents an image of belonging somewhere. The sense of belonging and wanting to belong is so enticing that members (or potential members) are not even
dissuaded by the possibility of a leader demanding some form of payment for having shared his insight with them. The strength of members’ belief in the leader further reinforces the leader’s own belief in his proclamations and ability to know the truth. As a result, the self-perpetuating cycle continues.

Despite charismatic leaders’ assertions that they know the ‘truth,’ Storr acknowledges Barker’s position when he presents his seventh characteristic: even the ‘truth’ is changeable and based on the leader’s whims, because “[a]lmost by definition, charismatic leaders are unpredictable, for they are not bound by neither tradition nor rules; they are not answerable to other human beings” (Barker, qtd. in Storr, 1996:xv). No established boundaries confine the charismatic leader’s actions, nor is there any established recourse available for followers if the ‘truth’ that the leader proclaims suddenly and unexpectedly changes.

Dawson describes the unpredictability found within charismatically-led groups as a function of preserving the leader’s authority within the movement. The leader’s changeability in his understanding of the world necessitates a follower’s focused attention on him because policies are not stable and certain. Rather, they shift unexpectedly, so it is imperative that a member continually listens and adheres to the most recent proclamations. Dawson illustrates this point convincingly when he states that:

alter[ing] the doctrines and policies of the NRM, sometimes very suddenly ... keep[s] followers off balance and their attention on the words and wishes of the charismatic leader. This [sudden change] may come about through the announcement of new visions or revelations, or, more simply, with the claim that the group is ready to experience a deeper level of understanding of its beliefs and practices. (Dawson, 1998:145-146)

By constantly changing the core beliefs of the group, the leader establishes both his authority and the unpredictability of his link with the divine. Due to the constant shifts, the promulgated revelations cannot be recorded as dogmatic
writings or learned by rote, because the leader’s actions and utterances are the only true source of divine wisdom. As the revelations occur, the leader shares them with believers, amending or even contradicting the proclamations that he previously espoused.

While the unpredictability creates the need for continued attention to the leader, it also serves to:

- attract new resources ...
- forc[ing] some of the old guard to the margins of the movement ...
- while elevating new people to the inner circle of devotees. The shifts have a leveling effect ...
- [because] the new structures of training, administration, and rewards that accompany the shifts fracture the patterns of influence and the personal and professional alliances that had been established within the organization. (Dawson, 1998:145)

With the shift in policy comes the opportunity for internal restructuring, since there are no expectations on the leader other than to provide answers to members’ questions and concerns. Weber echoed this point, stating that “charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules” (Weber, On Charisma,, 1968:52). To this end, “traditional authority is bound to precedents handed down from the past … [but] charismatic authority repudiates the past, and in this sense is a specifically revolutionary force” (Weber, On Charisma, 1968:52), unfettered by maintaining the status quo. The freedom that the charismatic leader enjoys is when he acts as an agent of change\(^{156}\) within the movement, directing it to suit his own purpose, and subsequently, maintain his authority.

The constant struggle to maintain leadership, however, is only one aspect contributing to the unpredictable nature of charismatic leadership. Since it is clear that the charismatic paradigm often is a revolutionary force that rejects regularity or predictability, “[w]hen a leader develops [the] belief … that he is infallible and indispensable to a social movement, … then the institutionalization

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\(^{156}\) I borrow this term from Oakes, 1997.
of charismatic authority is inhibited or made impossible except by ... involuntary means” (Downton, 1973:231), such as a mutiny or removal of the leader from his position. The need for constant change suggests that the charismatic leader endeavors to fight the process of routinization and institutionalization and uses unpredictability as a tool against boundary creation and defined expectation. Once the leader becomes predictable, the seemingly rapt attention that the leader once enjoyed from his followers diminishes, as does the devotees’ reliance on his proclamations. The leader loses the aura of the extraordinary that once surrounded him, resulting in his loss of authority.

The leader’s authority also depends on the image that he cultivates within a movement, since it is associated closely with his extraordinary charismatic gift. To enhance his uniqueness, according to Storr, charismatic leaders often will invent a magical or mysterious background to lend credence to their claims of superior knowledge and wisdom (Storr, 1996:xv). Storr presents this point as the eighth characteristic of charismatic figures, and suggests that the mysterious background can include such things as having lived in or visited remote locales while learning to harness special skills, or claiming that they come from other worlds entirely. The underlying purpose of creating a mysterious background is to reinforce the charismatic individual’s uniqueness and provide a reason (although perhaps at times an unbelievable reason) for the existence of his special gift.

Additionally, a certain attractiveness exists in ‘otherness,’ which appeals to an individual’s sense of the exotic. Often, in Western society, the quality of foreignness is associated with enlightenment, as though the sacred exists exclusively within the extraordinary, rather than ever having any connection with the familiar. When Irvine Schiffer explored charismatic personalities in a political context, he purported that the “attitudes of any cross-section of humanity show [that foreignness appeals to people and] ... even the most sophisticated people reflect those transitional reactionary dynamisms wherein the foreign or foreigner is given top status and the familiar bottom status in our personal values”
(Schiffer, 1973:27). This is to say that although a foreigner can be looked upon as either possessing the best or the worst qualities of humanity, depending on personal interpretation, “there is [still] a stereotyped presumption that the foreign expert is more competent than the home-grown and home-educated talent” (Schiffer, 1973:27).

Although Schiffer’s examination dealt primarily with charisma and its connection with political figures such as Adolf Hitler and Nikita Khrushchev, there certainly does seem to be a common theme between his theories and those posited by Storr. The invention of a mysterious background aids a charismatic man in cultivating a certain aura of authority and enlightenment. Mystery creates intrigue and sets the charismatic leader apart from others. To be in proximity to such ‘otherness’ allows for the unfamiliar and exotic to be brought into an otherwise mundane existence. Moreover, an unexplained background provides justification for the unknown to exist within the charismatic individual. The special gift that the leader claims derives, in whole or in part, from a potentially mysterious source, unknowable and beyond others’ comprehension.

Storr also makes the suggestion that the invention of a mysterious background “ha[s] … been promoted as [a] prologue … to the acquisition of esoteric knowledge and mystical experiences” (Storr, 1996:xv). Again, the charismatic leader cultivates the belief that the exotic and the esoteric connect on a level that is all but unreachable for ordinary individuals, reinforcing his own distinctiveness when he recounts his alleged travels to strange and distant lands. Despite the allure of creating a mysterious background, Storr does point out that there are increasingly fewer places in the world that remain unexplored — if not westernized — thereby making the claims of mysterious travels less wondrous and unusual. The “other worlds” to which Storr refers, however, remain unexplored, leaving open the possibility of the unfamiliar (Storr, 1996:xv).

The charismatic individual’s specialness also emerges in his behavior within a movement, especially the manner in which he acts upon the unique
privileges that he believes apply exclusively to him (Storr, 1996:xvi). According to Storr’s ninth characteristic:

[i]Like other humans, gurus risk becoming corrupted by power.

Although a guru may begin his mission in acetic [sic] poverty, success often brings about a revision of values. It is intoxicating to be adored, and it becomes increasingly difficult for the guru not to concur with the beliefs of his disciples about him. If a man comes to believe that he has special insights, and that he has been selected by God to pass on these insights to others, he is likely to conclude that he is entitled to special privileges. (Storr, 1996:xvi)

These special privileges most often deal with matters of a financial nature and, more controversially, with matters dealing with the organization and permissibility of sexual relations for group members.

To illustrate the pervasiveness and importance of controlling sexual relationships within a relatively closed group, one need only look at the theologies of many charismatically-led NRMs that endorse the need for sexual behavior to be controlled. Dawson clearly argues a similar point, positing that the privileged nature of many charismatic leaders within their movements supports, and even nurtures, a double standard when it comes to the issue of sexuality and sexual relationships. The double standard emerges in the leader’s efforts to regulate and reinforce what Dawson calls “the emotional dependence of followers [on the charismatic leader by] … generally disrupt[ing] potential sources of alternative authority” (Dawson, 1998:146). To achieve the control that they desire, charismatic leaders typically separate any individuals who have a close bond, including couples or friends (Dawson, 1998:146). The explanation for this course of action is that “[t]he bonds of romantic love or even just good friendship must not be allowed to take precedence over the affective tie of each individual to the charismatic leader” (Dawson, 1998:146). Essentially, the charismatic leader may set himself up as the sole regulatory authority within a movement, telling devotees with whom and when they are allowed to have
sexual relationships, if he permits any such relationships within the movement at all. Needless to say, these regulations do not apply to the leader himself, for there is no greater authority within the group to dictate proper behavior (see also Tobias and Lalich, 1994).

Although Dawson acknowledges that there is a long history in many religious movements and orders “recogniz[ing] the need to regulate and suppress sexual attachments if higher spiritual ends are to be served” (Dawson, 1998:146), the specific manner and motive behind some charismatic leaders’ policies and actions can occasionally seem dubious. Circumspect behavior may include leaders who wait for a certain period before informing them of the many restrictions placed upon them. This delay suggests that groups see recruitment as openness about its theological and organizational framework. Moreover, often the proclamations are proffered to devotees in a somewhat “ad hoc manner” (Dawson, 1998:147). The haphazard manner of delivering these revelations implies that the process of receiving these revelations from the divine source is outside of his immediate control, which does not lessen his own authority, since he is still the divinely-chosen instrument to deliver and enforce the revelations. A further dynamic of receiving the divine wisdom is that the leader proclaims that the rules given to others cannot apply to him because he is beyond the profane, belonging instead in the sacred realm (unlike ordinary people).

The circumspect nature of these sexually limiting proclamations in charismatically-led NRMs is well illustrated when one examines the extreme examples of Jones and Koresh, who denied their male followers the right to have any conjugal relations, while they simultaneously indulged in sexual relationships with numerous female group members. When one critically assesses the role and purpose of the double standard in practice — which seems to be to separate the leader’s permissible behavior from that of his devotees — the separation seemed only to reinforce Jones and Koresh’s own need to distinguish themselves from others. Once again this separation proves the leader’s superiority over the followers of the movement. In essence, this double standard serves to sustains a
twofold distinction. First, the devotees should never consider leaders as peers among group members, but rather, they are superior to them in all spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual matters. Second, because of this underlying conviction in his own superiority, the leader believes that he is entitled to special treatment as a result of his connection with the divine. For the charismatic leader, the underlying presumption is that with special gifts come special privileges. When devotees acknowledge and support the existence of this double standard, it shows loyalty and faith in the leader’s actions and gifts.

A double standard also appears in the charismatic individual’s manner of exercising control over the group. Storr claims, as the tenth and final characteristic of gurus, that these individuals often feel a need to dominate and exercise the power and control they have over members by having them perform chores or tasks (Storr, 1996:xvi). Said another way, gurus may have their members “perform meaningless and unnecessary tasks, ostensibly as spiritual exercises, but in fact as a proof of the guru’s power over them” (Storr, 1996:xvi). The devotees’ performance of such tasks demonstrates a certain level of submission to the leader’s authority, which serves, in turn, to strengthen the possibility of controlling members’ behavior.  

Moreover, in Cults in Our Midst, Singer and Lalich use an inverted “T” image to help illustrate the distribution of authority in many NRMs (Singer and Lalich, 1995:8-9), further illustrating many leaders’ need for having devotees demonstrate their submission. These two researchers argue that these demonstrations of submission solidify the leader’s authoritarian position by stressing the distinction between the followers who have no control or power within the movement, and the leader who possesses all the control and power within the movement. The inverted “T” reflects the leader’s understanding of the distinction between him and his followers, a position similar to that of Dawson in his examination of charismatically-led groups.

Moreover, in Comprehending Cults, Dawson suggests that for charismatic leaders to maintain their authority, they cannot delegate authority to others, nor can they routinize and institutionalize their power, because this may “set in place the means for alternative sources of power to arise within the organization” (Dawson, 1998:142). Moreover, Dawson states that while there may be the appearance of “concentric circles of delegated authority radiating out from the
such tasks further serves to create an outward display of members’ affection and loyalty to the leader, providing a demonstrative confirmation of the power the charismatic leader can possibly hold within the movement and over his followers.

In general terms, one important aspect of the charismatic leader’s need to have public demonstrations of love and devotion is that he derives both pleasure and a sense of power through his control over those who believe in him. Without the usual checks and balances limiting the use and potential abuse of power that are traditionally part of institutionalized and democratic movements, the charismatic leader has no external boundaries confining his power or the use of it. Within this charismatic paradigm, absolute control can rest in the leader’s hands. While the leader may maintain that a member’s performance of these tasks eventually leads to spiritual growth and advancement, this situation can also easily be exploited by the charismatic leader, so that the performance of tasks is not a sacred act, but one that is profane, having the leader’s gratification as the purpose.

This argument, however, does not address the potential benefits that devotees enjoy when they demonstrate their supplication and adherence to the charismatic leader. While others have made the argument suggesting that the performance of apparently meaningless tasks is solely for the leader’s gratification, this position ignores the importance of ritual tasks, or at least tasks that appear to the follower as ritualistic. The performance of seemingly ritualistic tasks serves a twofold purpose. First, “[t]he [ritualistic] practices may ... hav[e] to do with social cohesion, identity formation, initiation, [and] boundary maintenance. ... [Second, ritualistic tasks may] also perform the crucial psychological functions for ... members ... as proof of the validity of their vision and of the legitimacy of their leader” (Oakes, 1997:150-151). Although we can

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charismatic leader, ... [r]eal power ... tends to reside with an inner cadre that is in close contact with the leader” (Dawson, 1998:143). See Tobias and Lalich (1994) for further discussion on the authority structures in NRMs and chapter six for additional consideration on the role of the elite in NRMs.
critically analyze the features and components of belonging to a charismatically-led group, this analysis undermines both the power of attachment that devotees have for their leader and the members’ personal experiences. For these reasons, the power of the relationship among the charismatic leader and his followers, as well as the strong interpersonal relationships between members of the group, also deserve more detailed exploration, because these dynamics directly affect the power structures within the organization.
Chapter Six: The Structure of Power: Charisma, Commitment, and Connection

Among most charismatically-led New Religious Movements, there is an undeniable, and often obvious, connection between group structure, power, authority, and the subsequent relationship that a leader has with his devotees. The interrelatedness of these elements is perhaps one of the most compelling areas of research within the field of new religions but it is also very difficult to distinguish clearly how each element affects the others. While the sheer volume of analysis on the subject suggests most scholars recognize that there is a connection between power, authority, and group structure, there is a distinct lack of foundational research that comprehensively explores how these elements manifest themselves in certain movements. Because the varied dynamics that contribute to an understanding of power within charismatic religious movements are so interrelated and interdependent, this chapter presents arguments about power through analyses of group structure, leadership style, and the level of commitment. Once we are equipped with the most significant and integral aspects comprising each of these elements, I will discuss how each of these elements affects the power that a leader wields in an organization.

One of the most distinctive and widely recognized features of charismatically-led movements is that these groups often appear to have very dedicated and fervent followers. Dawson identifies this feature when he discusses aspects of charismatic authority, and he also provides some insight into the formative elements of charismatic group structure when he states that “charismatic authority ... rests on a relationship of great emotional intensity, which typically leads followers to place an extraordinary measure of trust and faith in their leader” (Dawson, 2002:82). The devotion that a member demonstrates towards his leader reflects an all-encompassing relationship that can be, the most significant and important relationship a member ever has as an adult. The strength of the relationship also serves as perhaps the single most
influential factor in the provision of direction and a sense of purpose in members’ lives, sustaining them with goals and a worldview shared with others. For devotees, the importance of the relationship between them and the leader, however, often takes on a tone of complete reliance on the leader’s vision, resulting in the devotees’ lives being significantly affected. In most cases, the devotees’ thoughts, actions, and attitudes change, illustrating the unparalleled influence a leader has on followers.

As I explained in chapter four, Janet L. Jacobs explored the potentially fanatical commitment many devotees have to their charismatic leader, and she revealed the possible consequences of their devotion. She examined the issue from the opposed perspectives of a current member and a former member of a charismatic movement, and concluded that the relationship between a leader and follower (especially for women) is akin to a familial connection. As such, it is an unequalled type of bonding that affects members’ and former members’ understanding and the meaning of long-term commitments.¹⁵⁸

Through her research, Jacobs also explored the strength and impact that deconversion from authoritarian religious movements has on members. She discovered that a strong connection exists between commitment and a member’s ability to deconvert from charismatically-led organizations. The emotional bond that forms between a leader and his follower establishes the “most significant ... [element] in determining the strength of continued commitment to [a] movement” (Jacobs, 1987:294). To narrow such a large and complicated subject she clearly defines her boundaries and primary research focus, indicating that her study concentrates on devotees belonging to “an authoritarian religious movement that was characterized by a rigid discipline of behavior, a hierarchical structural arrangement, and devotion to a charismatic leader within a patriarchal religious tradition” (Jacobs, 1987:295). Jacobs argued that group structure, leadership style, and member commitment contributed to the overall dynamics

¹⁵⁸ See chapter four for further development of the familial analogy of power.
and interplay of power and authority within the leader/follower relationship. Furthermore, she examined the effects of an individual’s participation in charismatically-led movements, including the potential for abuse. Jacobs’ basic contention that many factors contribute to the complex dynamics of charismatic religious movements applies to other situations where it is clear that the same dynamics create or allow situations of abuse to occur.

Worth reinforcing here is that charismatic leadership does not necessarily lead to violence, but it is an important aspect when looking at NRMs with violent tendencies, as Dawson (2002:40-41) purports. There seems to be a significant connection between charismatically-led movements and NRMs where abusive behavior occurs, so it is important to understand the characteristic without suggesting that the link is absolute. Moreover, I underscore the point that charismatic leadership is not in and of itself a predictor of violence, but it is a recurring aspect when many violent NRMs are examined.

Now that I have established the limits of this study, Dawson’s contribution to an understanding of charisma and its association with violence is significant, because he helps unravel the internal group processes and dynamics that often indicate abusive situations. He claims that the “near–absolute trust [that a member has] in the leader means that groups formed by charismatic authority tend to display unusually high levels of cohesion, value congruence, and task performance. Charisma is an extremely effective means of galvanizing commitment to a cause or an organization” (Dawson, 2002:82), while reinforcing the fervent dedication members have for their leader. This echoes Jacobs’ (1987) research, and addresses arguments made by other researchers, including Singer and Lalich (1995) and Downton (1973). Although each of these researchers present varying interpretations of the material, the commonalities found in their theories suggest areas upon which to concentrate. The interpretations seem especially true when we examine the commonalities in the context of religious settings where power and violence often sustain, and even nurture, each other.
When we identify the group structure that results when charismatic authority is the legitimating and organizing force, we can see clearly that the devotion of the members to their leader is the most foundational element contributing to the overall framework of the group. As Richard E. Emerson states about an early exploration into the complexities of what power is and what it means in group settings: “power resides implicitly in the other’s dependency” (Emerson, 1962:32; italics in original). This dependency emerges prominently when we deconstruct the relationship between a leader and his followers more closely. In the process of exploring the levels of dependency found in this specific type of relationship, we also can broaden our understanding of the use of power in charismatically-led movements by both leaders and followers. Although this study focuses on a more general framework outlining the connections between group structure and power, the framework will later apply to the specific case of the Kabalarian Philosophy.

To this end, the discussion in chapter five touched upon elements of charismatic legitimating and authority that I need to explore again here, but with a shifted emphasis. One major argument reintroduced here is Weber’s analysis of charismatic authority and its role in the formation of revolutionary, anti-democratic, and elitist movements. Charismatic authority, as opposed to traditional and rational-legal authority, operates beyond the “every-day routine control of action” (Weber, On Charisma, 1968:51) that both traditional and rational-legal authority try to regularize. Combining this insight with Emerson’s belief that power stems from dependency results in an overall model of the charismatic group that supports Singer and Lalich’s image of charismatic power as an inverted T. Moreover, underlying the inverted T image is a certain recognition that “pure charisma [and the authority and group structure that results from it] involves more than merely acknowledgement, but rather complete surrender on the part of the disciple. ... [This surrender supports Weber’s earlier contention that categorized charisma and its legitimating authority is] ... by its very nature ... revolutionary or, at the very least, potentially
“subversive” to the established order (Bell, 1986:59). Because of its unpredictability, coupled with “the fact that pure charisma cannot recognize any competing claim, including that of the state, as legitimate” (Bell, 1986:59), the structure of charismatically-led groups suggests a more authoritarian sensibility, which calls for increased member participation\(^\text{159}\) and a certain degree of

\(^{159}\) A member’s participation and degree of willingness to participate in the group and the leader’s demands tangentially touch upon the controversial and hotly debated question surrounding ‘brainwashing’ and coercion in NRMs. While I do not advocate that one can be "brainwashed" as understood by the 'anti-cult’ camp, I also do not advocate that devotees always possess absolute discretion to make decisions and participate with unrestricted freedom in charismatically-led, high-demand, authoritarian groups, as many in the 'cult apologist' camp seem to argue (see Lalich, 2004:4-5). Since the purpose of this research is to explore the commitment and power dynamics within charismatically-led movements, and not to discuss whether the concept of brainwashing has validity in general, I delve into the topic only briefly.

Essentially, the debate centers on the convert’s role in NRMs, with two main theories: an activist perspective and a thought-reform model. The activist perspective suggests that “people decide to play the role of convert ... [and] they are not tricked or trapped into becoming members” (Richardson, van der Lans, and Derks, 1986:100). Richardson states that members willingly commit themselves to a leader or group ideology and “[t]here is little evidence that actual physical coercion occurs in recruitment situations, although there have been a limited number of reports of food and sleep deprivation in a few groups” (Richardson, 1993:77). From this perspective, members always have a choice to act as they wish in group settings.

The other main perspective is best illustrated by Margaret Singer, who believes that cults often use thought-reform as programs of "systematic manipulations of social and psychological influences under particular conditions ... [with he goal of] chang[ing] a person’s way of looking at the world, which will change his or her behavior” (Singer, 2003:62). Singer suggests that these programs are gradual and difficult to discern because there are no dramatic events that lead up to the transformation of self (Singer, 2003:62). This perspective appears not only in religious settings, but also in political and other social arenas, making its applicability quite broad in its scope.

Despite these dichotomous approaches, there is yet another perspective that allows for a more moderate position. The “bounded choice” argument (Lalich, 2004:14) takes into consideration members’ willingness to commit to their leader’s worldview and all that that commitment entails, while acknowledging that there can also be a set of factors in some
charismatically-led NRMs that influences a devotee’s freedom and ability to make choices which are alternative to those made by the leader of the movement. Lalich describes the “bounded choice” perspective as one that results from:

the combination of a transcendent belief system, an all-encompassing system of interlocking structural and social controls, and a highly charged charismatic relationship between leader(s) and adherents results in a self-sealing system that exacts a high degree of commitment (as well as expressions of that commitment) from its core members. A self-sealing system is one that is closed in on itself, allowing no consideration of disconfirming evidence or alternative points of view. (Lalich, 2004:17)

I submit the bounded choice model as one that seems to best explain the behavior of the members within the Branch Davidians, the Peoples Temple, and the Kabalarian Philosophy who engaged in a sexual relationship with their leader. In these cases, the charismatic leaders were able to employ a set of theological, social, and emotional factors that created the situation where the leaders were able to exploit their members’ desire to achieve spiritual goals to engage in sexual relationships with the female members of the movements. While these members did have the choice to join the group (with the exception of the children born into the movement), as their commitment to the leader grew, their ability to make their own choices – independent of the leader and the group’s worldview – diminished.

According to Lalich (2004), the contextual factors that may influence a member’s behavior in charismatically-led groups and lessen his or her ability to have absolute freedom of choice include the following dynamics: recognition and acceptance of charismatic authority; commitment to the theological beliefs of the group; systems of control within groups, including the rules and regulations formulated by the leader; and the “network of interactions and methods of influence residing in the group’s social relations. This is the human interaction and group culture from which members learn to adapt their thoughts, attitudes and behavior in relation to their new beliefs” (Lalich, 2004:17). These dynamics combine with the other factors to provide a structured and comprehensive worldview that members adhere to, with a certain level of willingness, but also a willingness that they have been taught repeatedly to accept, in part out of fear of spiritual, emotional, or physical repercussions.

Relying, in part, on Lalich’s model of bounded choice to understand perhaps why members of the Branch Davidians, the Peoples Temple, and the Kabalarian Philosophy engaged in sexual relationships with their leaders, the members’ participation in such acts was neither completely passive nor active. Powerful influences existed that shaped members’ behavior and beliefs and each chapter of Part Two touches upon these factors, to varying degrees. In keeping with this more moderate approach, a member’s participation in his or her leader’s demands is
willingness to give the leader control over lifestyle choices. When discussing the charismatic authority in the Democratic Worker’s Party and the Heaven’s Gate movements, Lalich makes the point that “[d]ecision making was centralized; the leaders made all substantive organizational decisions, as well as many decisions affecting individuals, such as where they worked, whether or when they could visit families, what kinds of intimate relationships they could or could not have, and what they were to do with their time” (Lalich, 2004:28). Similarities exist between these examples and those of the Branch Davidians and the Peoples Temple, which underscore that members were required to demonstrate a certain level of obedience to their leaders, as part of the expectations of the group. The recognition of the leaders’ authority is a significant aspect of charismatic leadership, and one that is a common feature in many NRMs.

When framing the structure of charismatically-led groups, an important feature, however, is also the role of the elite within the authoritarian structure. As Singer and Lalich state, “[t]he leader is regarded as the supreme authority although he may delegate certain power to a few subordinates for the purpose of seeing that members adhere to his wishes and rules” (Singer and Lalich, 1995:9). Having the leader as the sole controlling figure in the group, with only his selected cadre surrounding him, reflects his constant need for members’ dependence, which grants the leader authority and legitimacy. Moreover, this social arrangement is a means through which he can monitor\textsuperscript{160} members’ devotion and implement the necessary changes he believes will help maintain his position of importance within the movement — which is a clear argument against part of belonging to the group, as is giving up a certain level of personal control over his or her own life.

\textsuperscript{160} Monitoring, according to Galanter, is one of four characteristics that NRMs display when they are analyzed as social systems. Although monitoring is the one that I focus on, it is worth mentioning that it is but one of the techniques used by charismatic leaders to maintain their position of power within a movement. For a more detailed examination into NRMs as social systems, see Galanter (1999:92-109).
routinization. The elite act as watchdogs within the movement, scrutinizing members’ actions, discussions, and conversations, and then reporting their observations to the leader.

Marc Galanter discusses charismatic movements as social systems that require monitoring in *Cults: Faith, Healing, and Coercion*. His research into the monitoring feature found in systems, and by extension, charismatic movements, suggests that the system “must transform input from the environment into a form that meets [the movement’s] ... needs, but [the monitoring system] must also observe and regulate the actions of its component parts, thereby assuring that their respective activities are properly carried out and coordinated” (Galanter, 1999:96-97). Ideally, the monitoring function serves to identify and observe the actions, behaviors, and concerns that members have with group doctrines or the leader himself, while the leader, in turn, responds to this input by making adjustments to his actions, stabilizing the movement, and reducing tension within the group (Galanter, 1999:97). With a comprehensive monitoring system in place, a charismatic group can respond quickly to any perceived shifts in members’ attitudes or behavior by altering its practices or beliefs. If the monitoring system works effectively, then the movement operates smoothly, identifying and reacting to any discernible changes within the group. Although this kind of surveillance is a useful tool, Galanter suggests that monitoring group members is not the only characteristic needed to maintain cohesiveness and loyalty among followers. Other means also contribute to the leader’s efforts to solidify his position and authority within the movement, as well as maintain control over his members’ interaction with each other.

When viewed as part of a social system that relies, to a great extent, on the dependence of members, the religious charismatic leader cannot *assume* (although he presents himself as having absolute authority and power within the movement) that his position is absolute, nor can he idly hope that he will maintain his authority without effort and awareness of the ongoing concerns of his members. While the gift of charisma can establish him as the leader of a
movement, “[e]ach of ... [the charismatic leaders’] actions [can] either [continue to] establish, ... reinforce, ... or undermine ... their own authority” (Dawson, 2002:85) in the eyes of his members. Insofar as leaders attempt to sustain their position of supremacy among devotees, they must suppress any deviant opinions that they believe threaten the stability and unified direction of the movement. Galanter asserts that an individual member’s autonomy must give way to the group’s needs, and any aberrant thought or action must be quickly dealt with and dissipated (Galanter, 1999:101). Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony seem to support aspects of Galanter’s argument when they state that “a charismatic leader will be tempted to use his authority to try to simplify the environment within the group by eliminating sources of dissension ... [and] normative diversity” (Robbins and Anthony, 1995:246). Moreover, “[t]he responses that charismatic leaders make to perceived threats to their authority will often tend to embellish this authority and extrapolate it in an increasingly authoritarian and absolutist direction” (Robbins and Anthony, 1995:245-246). Seemingly, a pattern emerges indicating that charismatic leaders tend not to tolerate deviance because deviance detracts from the leader’s ability to significantly influence devotees, which then destabilizes group unity.

Another technique the charismatic leader uses to strengthen his authoritarian position within a movement stems from his ability to nurture and control the relationship between him and his followers. Jacobs’ likens the relationship and commitment between a leader and his follower as:

affective ties that closely parallel the bonds between parent and child. These bonds, unlike the social ties to the ... [movement], are formed at deeper levels of the unconscious and therefore have a greater impact on the individual than the adoption of the social identity associated with group affiliation. [Moreover,] ... the leader is identified with three representations in the unconscious: the symbol of the divine; the idealized parent image; and the idealized
The notions of surrender and submission become dominant themes in the charismatic relationship. (Jacobs, 1989:73) Evidently, many followers idolize, revere, and obey the leader because the relationship between them is one of deep devotion and commitment on their part. These feelings of commitment manifest themselves as a willingness to submit to the demands of the leader in an attempt to gain approval and acceptance by him — an act that is reminiscent of a child trying to earn a parent’s approval. Those that renounce their association with the group, however, likely never made what they thought was a deep connection with the leader, since “the leader’s actions have the greatest influence in determining the likelihood of disaffection” (Jacobs, 1989:9).

For a charismatic leader, an important factor in creating and sustaining the relationship he has with his members is an awareness that his “[c]harismatic authority hinges on ... [the devotees’ actually] knowing the leader ... [o]r at least ... on the pretense [that there is] ... a personal relationship between the leader and his or her followers. To this end, the leader must be seen and heard from with regularity” (Dawson, 2002:86) to foster a sense of connection with new recruits and current members alike. The line between too little and too much exposure, however, is a fine one, and Dawson points out that if members have too much exposure to the leader, then his flaws begin to emerge, detracting from the aura of mystery that previously distinguished him from others (Dawson, 2002:86). This scenario, however, occurs only after considerable exposure to the leader and, as Dawson claims, “the most loyal followers surrounding the leader, those with the strongest personal identification with the leader and investment in the leader’s power, have a strong incentive to limit the exposure of the leader and to systematically suppress undesirable information about the leader” (Dawson, 2002:86).

Even if there is too much contact between a leader and his devotees and the devotees begin to see flaws (or perhaps simply inconsistencies) in the leader’s character and behavior, some members may continue to express
reluctance and even unwillingness to acknowledge any of them. To acknowledge flaws in a divine and revered leader is an admission of imperfection, this admission necessarily negates, or at least lessens, the follower’s own connection with the divine (Jacobs, 1989:74). Jacobs’ research suggests that the connection and religious affiliation that a follower has with his or her leader is more than simple belief in a person: the religious “affiliation provides a structure to one’s life which is manifested not only in rules and regulations but in a theology that gives meaning to the concepts of salvation, immortality, and the nature of human experience” (Jacobs, 1989:74). Commitment and belief in the leader’s worldview and the organization, therefore, directly relates to the individual’s own sense of spiritual fulfillment and investment. It seems to follow that as long as the devotees identify the leader as the accessible representation of the divine on earth through whom they can gain spiritual fulfillment, then it seems probable that they may overlook his perceived behavioral or spiritual incongruities to further their own spiritual gains.

When we examine the level of commitment that a member has towards his or her leader and identify the member’s need to overlook any incongruities, a significant hypothesis emerges. A strong likelihood exists that members find greater value in continuing to believe in (what others might see as) an imperfect leader than in acknowledging his flaw and distancing themselves from him. Said another way, “[i]f individual choices can be conceived as products of a cost-reward calculation, then commitments [to the leader, for instance] ... must be understood as behavior that has become consistent because it promises to be more gratifying than costly” (Downton, 1973:61). Although there is a certain simplicity in this perspective, the basis of the argument convincingly suggests a certain rationale for the devotee’s continued willingness to disregard the leader’s imperfections. Few are prepared to trade the feelings of salvation, belonging, and spiritual understanding for the realization that the leader is simply ordinary. The cost of devotees’ disbelief may be the entirety of their spiritual framework,
that is, perhaps what devotees hold as the most fundamental aspect of their lives.

While Downton's cost-reward analysis presents at least a partial insight into a member's seemingly blind commitment, Jacobs advances the argument that the emotional investment that a devotee makes into his or her relationship with the leader is the most fundamental reason for the enduring attachment, instead of there being a conscious decision weighing out the advantages and disadvantages of the situation. As previously mentioned, “[f]or the majority of followers, merging with the leader is experienced as a primary connection to an omnipotent parent on whom the devotee relies for love, protection, and external control” (Jacobs, 1989:76). The emotional and spiritual investment made by the devotee into his or her leader may be so complete and encompassing that, over time, a member’s distinction between the leader figure as symbol of the divine and the actual embodiment of the divine lessens. As a result, members may open up in worshipping the charismatic leader as the divine (Jacobs, 1989:78). Once the dissolution of the human/divine boundary occurs, commitment to the leader becomes unconditional.

Insofar as the process of attachment continues, Oakes suggests that projection is the final phase towards complete commitment to the leader, which seemingly restates Jacobs’ argument succinctly. Oakes asserts that as followers continue to be in contact with the leader, they “come to see the prophet as the embodiment of their ultimate concerns, that is, as the exemplar of a sacred lifestyle, the fount of divine truth, or, as Christians put it, God incarnate” (Oakes, 1997:128-129). Members no longer see the leader as a fallible man, but rather, as an entity beyond the ordinary. In contrast with the previous arguments, however, Oakes believes that there is a certain co-dependency and a “far greater degree of reciprocity and mutuality involved in the leader-follower relationship than is commonly thought” (Oakes, 1997:129). The conclusion that emerges from this observation parallels a point made by Emerson earlier in this chapter: “power resides implicitly in the other’s dependency” (Emerson, 1962:32; italics in
original). Although the charismatic figure needs followers to elevate himself to the status of leader (thereby having power over them), the followers, in turn, need the leader to be an example of achievable spiritual perfection and salvation. If, however, the followers cannot achieve the complete spiritual perfection that the leader demonstrates, then at least they can be in his presence and achieve a sense of salvation through him. Clearly, the underlying theme of emotional investment that Jacobs expressed earlier reappears here, which suggests some commonalities between charismatic attachment and co-dependency between the leader and follower. Both parties need to maintain a connection to fulfill their respective needs.

The degree of symbiosis and co-dependency in a leader/follower relationship, however, is not always equal. Oakes makes this point when he declares that “follower and leader use each other, each for his own ends. ... [P]erhaps even [establishing a relationship] of mutual exploitation ... [although not necessarily meaning] that each party is equally responsible for everything the other party does” (Oakes, 1997:129). This assertion forces us to re-examine the relationship in terms of the unequal positions of power and, subsequently, the techniques that charismatic leaders use to monitor and control the behavior of members. The acknowledgement that there are power differentials within a leader/follower relationship makes it necessary to assess critically the impact of the inequality and how the leaders use monitoring in social systems to gain an advantage.

Although research clearly demonstrates members’ willingness to seek out the charismatic leader to satisfy their own needs (Jacobs, 1987, 1989; Downton, 1973; Oakes, 1997), research also demonstrates that there is a greater propensity for leaders to secure their position of power within a movement by using techniques designed for this purpose (Singer and Lalich, 1995; Galanter, 1999; Dawson, 2002; Robbins and Anthony, 1995). When one examines this statement in combination with the model of charismatic authority, the underlying theme of authoritarianism illustrates the relationship between power and
structure. A leader’s need for control directly affects group organization since it reflects the movement and the leader’s attempts to solidify his followers’ dependency. Once the leader establishes his devotees’ dependency, the unequal power he has within the movement serves as a tool he can use to further reinforce and manipulate his status and needs.

In all discussions dealing with the inequalities found in the distribution of responsibility and status between leaders and followers, the concepts of power, its manifestation, and its rippling effects surface, albeit imprecisely. As Emerson succinctly states, “the importance of power is widely recognized, yet considerable confusion exists concerning the ... concept” (Emerson, 1962:31). To clarify his understanding of power and its interrelatedness with aspects of authority, Emerson further posits that, “authority appears quite naturally to be legitimized power, vested in roles, and ‘legitimation’ is seen as a special case of the coalition process through which norms and role-prescriptions are formed” (Emerson, 1962:31). Indeed, from this perspective, the power held by the leader is a function, on one level, of his role as leader, rather than as a manifestation of his charismatic personality. For Emerson, the distinction is meaningful because it illustrates one of his main premises: “power is a property of the social relation; it is not an attribute of the actor” (Emerson, 1962:32). Insofar as this perspective presents one possible understanding of the concept of power, numerous scholars have different understandings of the concept and how power operates within movements.

Robbins, for instance, argues that power should be understood as a quality that can “less[en] internal resistance in instigating violence” (Robbins, 2002:68). Robbins sees power and authoritarianism as potential precursors to violence within movements, and as directly related to a leader’s ability to create an atmosphere where violence is an acceptable means of control and expression.

Another perspective of power is that within patriarchal charismatic movements, power might be construed as the leader successfully establishing himself as the idealized and imitated father-figure to members. Power resides in
the leader’s possession of this patriarchal power that affects not only the followers’ behavior, but also the perceptions and boundaries that guide their worldview. The perceptions likely include the foundational and personal aspects of a member’s life, such as intimate relationships and issues of morality. A patriarchal charismatic leader has the power to shape and control these aspects of a member’s life to reflect his own worldview, whether it is positive or negative. Although definitions of power help illustrate the differing factors that contribute to an overall understanding of the concept and its effects on members’ lives, there is no definitive and universally accepted understanding of the subject. Seemingly though, many charismatic leaders have the potential to wield power as a tool of control and as a reflection of their own inner desires, purposely taking advantage of the inequality that exists within authoritarian movements.

Benjamin Zablocki makes an astute observation regarding power in his research on American communes (1980). The underlying premise he thought it necessary to challenge was the generally accepted assumption that “charisma ... assures equality among the leader’s followers. If an individual is going to surrender a portion of his autonomy, he or she will want at the very least to be very sure that an equivalent commitment is required from others” (Zablocki, 1980:290). Zablocki tried to argue against the assumption that the leader is the sole individual who possesses the power to control the movement’s direction and purpose. The research he compiled bears out his hypothesis and contradicts the stereotypical notion of an equal distribution of power in commune members. He found that “[c]harismatic authority in communes does not level ... [but rather,] propagates inequality” (Zablocki, 1980:290). The comparison between charismatically-led communes and authoritarian charismatic groups serves to illustrate that a leader’s power results from and depends upon both members’

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161 Although Zablocki’s research deals specifically with communes, and not authoritarian charismatic movements, his research does shed light on the stereotypes surrounding power and religious leadership roles. For this reason, it is significant to include his observations to serve as a contrasting interpretation of power and leadership vis-à-vis group structure.
investment in the movement and the leader’s ability to elicit compliance and conformity from them. The greatest source of power that a leader can harness is his capacity to change members’ behaviors and attitudes to reflect his own ideals.\textsuperscript{162} Zablocki quotes Amitai Etzioni, who succinctly states that: “authority, as usually understood, implies only that the subject holds in abeyance his own criteria for decision and action, and accepts as legitimate the directives of his superiors, [whereas] charisma implies that the subject has been influenced to modify some of his own criteria” (qtd. in Zablocki, 1980:11, emphasis added by Zablocki). The element of behavior modification, and even coercion, suggests that power, especially in charismatic movements, greatly affects a member’s ability to make choices and a leader’s ability to create an idealized and uniform movement.

Now that we have established the inherent power inequality found within charismatic movements, James A. Beckford’s article on religion and power provides some insight into why new members continue to join movements that often change their perspectives in both positive and negative ways. He starts by asserting that when recruits join a religious movement, they believe that the organization “empowers them to cultivate and to achieve a number of things more easily than through other ... [movements]. The chance to cultivate various spiritual qualities, personal goals, or social relationships is the [initial] attraction” (Beckford, 1990:55). Most importantly, the members choose to join. During the course of their involvement with the movement, “once members have invested

\textsuperscript{162} Zablocki has a slightly different interpretation of the power of charismatic authority within communes when he posits that “[c]harisma is a rather widespread phenomenon in communes. Often it is embodied in a single charismatic leader, but sometimes the collectivity itself (or some portion of it) is the charismatic factor” in the sense that “charisma ... is a collective state resulting from an objective pattern of relationships in a specific collectivity that allows the selves of the participants to be fully or partially absorbed into a collective self” (Zablocki, 1980:10-11). Again, although there is a slight difference in the understanding of charismatic authority, Zablocki does acknowledge that charisma and power are intertwined forces that shape the behavior and actions of group members.
time, resources, personal reputation, and even self-respect in the attempt to tap the power to cultivate all the things on offer from NRMs, they are unlikely to abandon them lightly” (Beckford, 1990:55) when the organization fails to provide them with the answers and self-fulfillment that they originally expected. At this stage, however, members typically display a certain unwillingness to take back the power that they invested in the leader, because a strong connection has developed between them and the leader, thereby binding them to the decisions that he makes. As a result of their unwillingness to leave the movement, members essentially give up control of their lives in the hope that one day the leader and his movement will fulfill their initial goals of spiritual development. The authoritarian leader, by contrast, uses this sense of hope to maintain his power and continue his role by threatening to sever ties with any member who abandons him and his group. Even though the promises that the leader made are not being fulfilled, denying the members the opportunity to fulfill their original desire for spiritual enlightenment is a high cost for them to bear. This cost, in turn, lessens a member’s willingness to disaffect from the group by taking back the power that he or she invested in the leader and his promise of gaining experiential understanding of the world.

Fundamentally then, when we look at the concept of power, the theme that seems to underlie the concept is that it is an ephemeral quality that leaders can use to manipulate, guide, control, and even instill in people a worldview that reflects the possessor’s desires and philosophy. Although for someone to have power, it necessarily requires another’s submission, the inequalities that arise in such relationships create opportunities for unequal commitments and investments of trust and belief.
Part Three: Theoretical Application
Chapter Seven: The Kabalarian Philosophy as Focus Case Study

Now that I have established a theoretical framework that presents significant features and dynamics that contribute to a New Religious Movement’s organization, structure, and volatility, my purpose in this final chapter is to examine how these components manifest themselves uniquely in the Kabalarian Philosophy. The most reliable sources available to create a solid analytical foundation are Ivon Shearing’s criminal trial transcripts, which are an informative record documenting his leadership style, the inner workings of the movement, the sexual abuse endured by his victims, and the dissension that ultimately led to his conviction. Worth underscoring at this time is that Shearing himself did not testify at his trial, nor did other key figures such as his wife and the instrument.\textsuperscript{163} Their absence is conspicuous because Shearing does not defend his actions in a public forum. In addition, the two members closest to him — his wife and the instrument — were not called either by the defense or prosecution team. The reason behind the silence of the three top Kabalarians is perplexing given the severity of the charges being brought against Shearing, but answers to this question remains an unknown element. The transcripts, the National Parole Board of Canada report on Shearing, and the Kabalarian writings do, however, provide enough primary material\textsuperscript{164} to allow for a careful analysis and

\textsuperscript{163} This term is discussed in much greater detail later in this chapter, but it is another term the Kabalarians use to refer to a medium or channel.

\textsuperscript{164} While the transcripts offer a unique insight and specific detail into the Kabalarian Philosophy, they do have their limitations. The transcripts cannot provide answers to all the possible questions we could ask about the movement, but they do offer a penetrating look into the sexual violence that figured so prominently in the movement. Also, given the severity of the charges brought against Shearing, a point worth addressing is the potential biases of the witnesses. Stephen Kent, who incorporates former members’ testimony when adequately supported, acknowledges that “d]isgruntled former members often bring … [legal suits] against their former spiritual leaders for a variety of reasons” (Kent and Krebs, 1998:48), but the acknowledgment does not necessarily invalidate all claims made about a particular movement or the leader. Often,
The Kabalarian spiritual and philosophical writings referred to here are those that are available publicly online, as well as the written workbooks available only to members of the Kabalarian Philosophy.
and the people involved, for it provided a wealth of information and an opportunity to learn more about the inner workings of the group. Although a trained sociologist would be better suited to analyzing the quantitative data the trial generated to garner another perspective, to this researcher’s untrained eye, the numbers seem to demonstrate some interesting patterns and areas where future research would be worthwhile.

Overall, out of the thirteen witnesses for the prosecution (referred to as the Crown in the internal citations), eleven of the women had had sexual contact with Shearing. These women had also been members for a significant period of their lives. Witness #3 was a member of the Kabalarians for twenty-nine years, joining at the age of nine and leaving the Kabalarians at the age of thirty-eight. Witness #4 was a member for eighteen years, joining at the age of twenty and leaving when she, too, was thirty-eight. Witness #5 joined the Kabalarians with her family at the age of five and a half, and left at the age of forty-two, making her a member for thirty-seven years. Witness #6 had a twelve-year membership, joining at the age of eighteen and leaving at the age of thirty. Witness #7 joined the movement at the age of seven with her family, left at the age of thirty-two, and had been a member of the Kabalarian Philosophy for twenty-five years. Witness #8, who had the shortest membership period — ten years — joined with her family at the age of ten and left at the age of twenty. Witness #9, a seventeen-year member, joined the movement with her family when she was eight years old and left when she was twenty-five years old. Witness #10, the witness with the longest membership, was born into the movement, and left forty-six years later. The last witness to testify for the prosecution was a twenty-year member, who was also born into the movement, but left the movement when she was twenty. While these numbers indicate a low attrition rate, it also seems to indicate members’ significant commitment to Shearing and the Kabalarian Philosophy.\textsuperscript{166}

\textsuperscript{166} The commitment displayed by members figures prominently later in this chapter.
Other evocative details gleaned from examining the transcripts is the age of first sexual contact between the devotees and Shearing. The age Shearing first sexually exploited these followers ranges from twelve years old to twenty-seven years old, an age range that covers a fifteen-year age difference. Five witnesses testified that they were under the age of sixteen when Shearing first made sexual advances towards them (not exclusively meaning sexual intercourse, but including kissing, fondling, and other inappropriate sexual contact), and the other six women had just turned sixteen, were in their late teens, or were in their twenties. Couple this data with the witnesses testifying that they endured Shearing’s sexual violence for, on average, a little over five years, and Shearing’s actions warrant greater critical attention, for he demonstrated a capacity for sexual violence that ranks him amongst the worst offenders, at least in Canada.

Ultimately, Shearing’s trial concluded without him ever taking the stand to justify his actions. Moreover, the twenty-six witnesses who testified portrayed the Kabalarian Philosophy and Shearing’s sexual violence in precise detail — an occurrence that is both exceptionally insightful and relatively uncommon in NRMs. To researchers, however, Shearing’s conviction provides solid evidence of systematic sexual abuse in NRMs, which helps shed light on a topic that remains in need of continued study.

How Does The Kabalarian Philosophy Compare?

My analysis of the Kabalarian Philosophy begins by establishing the movement’s organizational classification. At the outset, I must acknowledge that one of the main difficulties in classifying the Kabalarians is that the movement has an atypical leadership history: the Kabalarians have had two charismatic leaders — the founder, Alfred Parker, and Ivon Shearing, the most recent
leader. The Kabalarian Philosophy having been led by two charismatic leaders presents significant difficulties in defining the movement, most notably as a result of the movements having a distinct authoritarian structure. Little institutionalized, rational-legal, or bureaucratic authority exists to limit leaders’ powers, thereby allowing them to have significant control over every aspect of the movement, ranging from theology to organization. Thus, because the Kabalarians have had two leaders who display the characteristics of a founding charismatic leader, the movement’s evolution is unlike most other NRMs.

According to Bainbridge’s definition of religious organizations, the Kabalarians do not qualify as a church (or denomination) primarily because neither their beliefs nor their practices are traditional, especially in the context of Canada’s religious landscape of the 1930s. Parker’s unique fusion of Eastern and Western spiritual thought broke with conventional understanding of organized religion and presented a limited challenge to what society thought was a fulfilling spiritual movement.

In the late-1930s and 1940s, Eastern spirituality drew little public attention, especially Indian theories on pranic energy and the power of breathing exercises. Moreover, there was an overall ignorance about millennia-old Taoist

167 Although Shearing tendered his official resignation to the Kabalarian executives, many members continue to believe in his authority, albeit less publicly than before. One example that demonstrates the movement’s open reluctance to acknowledge Shearing’s continued authority and influence in the movement’s operation is the distinct absence of his name anywhere on the website. Although there are discussions and professions of Parker’s ideas, Shearing’s influence on the Kabalarian Philosophy appears indirectly in such prominent areas such as the core Kabalarian Creed that appeared on their website in the late 1990s onward.

168 The characteristics of a charismatic leader include the ability to promulgate new doctrine, change existing doctrine, lead the movement with authoritative control, and claim unique abilities and skills. I will develop all these characteristics more extensively later in this chapter.

169 Each of these elements figures prominently in the Kabalarian Philosophy’s theology. See Kabalarian Fraternal Organization, Kabalistic Wisdom: Breathing and Exercise Book, by Parker, for a more detailed discussion.
notions of yin and yang, as well as Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, which Parker
drew upon when he created his theology of harmony and peace. Essentially, few
Canadians had any exposure to the non-linear thinking that characterized many
of the Eastern religions that Parker drew upon to form his theology. For this
reason, the Kabalarian Philosophy represented the unknown to a conservative-
thinking nation like Canada. Insofar as the Kabalarians represented the unknown
religious ‘other,’ applying the definition of sect to the movement is somewhat
inaccurate, as well. The Kabalarian Philosophy had no parent organization from
which it broke away, and the movement maintains that its particular theological
worldview is unlike any other. This leaves us with Bainbridge’s final category —
cult.

Bainbridge’s cult category is characterized by a group’s deviancy and
novelty in beliefs and practices, qualities the Kabalarians demonstrate,
specifically with regards to their core beliefs and reliance on a charismatic
leader’s divine proclamations. The Kabalarian Philosophy’s members believed
that both Parker and Shearing acted as conduits and proselytizers for God the
Principle and the Truth, and thus unofficially deified Parker and then Shearing.
Each leader promulgated a worldview that expressed his divine understanding of
the cosmos, its universal laws, and the purpose and cause of the vibrations
found in nature that affect each living organism, either positively or negatively.
Although the Kabalarians have some common spiritual beliefs with other religious
organizations, many of their basic principles are unique in their application and
ritualistic performance.

Certainly, the most controversial and widely criticized belief discussed at
Shearing’s trial that illustrates both the group’s deviancy and novelty, was the
negative planes of mind that Shearing purported existed in the mental realm.
During the trial, witnesses claimed that Shearing taught members that negative
planes of mind (also described and referred to as disembodied minds), formed:
whenever somebody die[d], then the mind is released from the
physical body, so it’s set free, and that mind can either be at peace
or it can be in discord and not able to leave the physical trappings of life, and so disembodied minds are the minds that haven’t found peace and so they’re still attached to the physical parts of life. ... Disembodied minds are what they call a negative mind, [and they] can’t bother you if you don’t open yourself up to it. If you do, you can send it away, you can get rid of it, dispel it, just through a deep breath ... [and] a happy thought. (Witness #19, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1504)

While Shearing taught members that they had the ability to dispel negative planes of mind, this was not what Shearing’s actions demonstrated, nor was it what members believed. The overriding sentiment of the devotees testifying at the trial was that Shearing himself was the only one capable of truly eliminating negative planes of minds from those affected by them. The negative planes of mind were too powerful for others to dispel, since many of them were the result of an apparently evil and all-powerful Catholic Church. According to the witnesses, “the Catholic church represent[ed] a very dark and dead plane of mind. It was believed that the Catholic church actually sent dead minds specifically to people to interfere with [members of the Kabalarian Philosophy]” (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:245). What members understood from these teachings was that the resulting disembodied minds could not be eliminated with a “happy thought,” for they were too strong. Consequently, members needed Shearing’s

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170 The distinct anti-Catholic sentiment Shearing purported is a significant example illustrating the change in doctrine that occurred during his tenure as leader of the Kabalarian Philosophy, as compared with the Parker’s theological position on the Catholic faith. Parker, as demonstrated in chapter two, used considerable Christian iconography when creating the Kabalarians’ theological worldview, saying that there were positive elements within the tradition, but that they had somehow become distorted over time. This is a considerably different understanding of the Christian faith than we see here, in Shearing’s overt denigration of the Catholic faith.
supernatural abilities to remove the planes of mind for them — an act that served to strengthen members’ dependence on Shearing.

The ritual of clearing disembodied minds was often precarious in nature, as described by one witness during Shearing’s trial. She stated that a typical ritual involving disembodied minds required Shearing to channel, console, and finally clear the disembodied mind from the affected woman. During one particular ritual that she observed, Shearing was not alone, but was in the company of a channel, or what he called his instrument. 171

[Once Shearing contacted the disembodied mind,] he would often say to [it] “tell us why you’re here. How did you get here?” Very often there was a lot of fighting between [the instrument] and Mr. Shearing because once the dead mind came in it didn’t want to be there because it had been exposed so there was a lot of physical

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171 In Kabalarian vocabulary, ‘the instrument’ is a Kabalarian woman who supposedly possessed the ability to act as a channel for disembodied minds, and is a term that can be interchanged with the term channel. According to Kabalarian beliefs, the instrument only had the ability to channel disembodied minds in the leader’s presence, and when Shearing deemed that he needed to contact a disembodied mind or negative mental interference (Witness #3, R v. Shearing, 1997:237). There is no information in the Kabalarian literature describing the official process of becoming a channel, nor is there any information concerning the selection process. One could infer, however, that the instrument would need to be a loyal and dedicated member of the movement, since she was constantly in the leader’s presence, and in intimate situations with Shearing and fellow Kabalarian women (as described in numerous examples throughout this chapter).

Interestingly, the instrument referred to here acted as an instrument to both Shearing and his predecessor, Alfred Parker, and there are no records indicating the existence of any other woman who fulfilled the role of instrument on a consistent basis as she did. There is, however, evidence that Shearing enticed Kabalarian women to increase their level of intimacy with him so they could become his instrument, as well. (See testimony presented on page 242 for further discussion on the topic.) Despite the level of intimacy Shearing required from his potential instruments, there is no evidence supporting the contention that a sexual relationship between Shearing and the instrument he regularly used existed.
fighting and [the instrument] would be wrestling and hitting [Shearing] and swearing and there was a lot of high trauma, but once [Shearing] consoled it ... he would say [to the dead mind that] you’re okay, your body is no longer there, you know, alive and but you’re okay and you know, [Shearing] would console the mind, ... dispers[ing it] by snapping his fingers. (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:239-240)

The clearing ritual\textsuperscript{172} that Shearing performed supports the argument that members needed Shearing to rid them of interfering minds and contradicts the suggestion that a happy thought was sufficient to eliminate an interference. Moreover, the witness who made the initial claim that deep breathing and happy thoughts could rid a person of the negative planes of mind affecting her, agreed with the defense’s question that “it [was] a belief in the Kabalarian Philosophy, to [her] knowledge, [that] ... Mr. Shearing had the ability to remove ... negative or disembodied minds” (Defense, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1504). Her agreement with the Crown’s question clearly indicates that a positive thought was not sufficient to remove negative planes of mind and the difficult planes required a powerful outside force to eliminate them, a power that Shearing alone reputedly possessed.

Through ritual channeling, Shearing allegedly provided a measure of peace for the Kabalarian member, as well as the disembodied mind. There was, however, an element of coercion underlying the ritual, especially in those cases where Shearing used the ritual to create an environment where he could

\textsuperscript{172} Although some may notice a similarity between the Kabalarian clearing ritual and exorcisms, as did one witness when she stated that she thought that Shearing “was attempting some form of exorcism” (Witness #3, R v. Shearing, 1997:231), no evidence exists suggesting that the Kabalarian ritual specifically drew on any previously known exorcism ritual.
instigate sexual advances towards female members. This was the case for one witness who recounted one of her visits with Shearing.

Having set up a meeting with Shearing (who was accompanied by his instrument) to discuss career choices and the possibility of going on to post-secondary schooling, Shearing, the instrument, and the witness engaged in casual conversation for a short time. After several minutes, Shearing sidetracked the conversation by telling the witness that she “seemed to have emotional problems” (Crown, R. v. Shearing, 1997:959). In what appeared to be an effort to help the witness, Shearing suggested that since the instrument was already in the room, that “maybe he could help [her] with [the problem] a bit” (Witness #11, R. v. Shearing, 1997:959) by seeing if there were any negative minds influencing her. The channeling ritual soon began, at which time Shearing allegedly started talking to “a [dead] priest … [who] was supposed to have [caused] all [her] sexual hang-ups … [and who] was supposed to have been with [the witness] since [she] was very little, since [she] was born” (Witness #11, R. v. Shearing, 1997:960).

Already caught off guard by Shearing telling her that she had emotional problems, sexual hang-ups, and the disembodied mind of a dead priest affecting her, the woman was further taken aback when Shearing told her that there was also a dead nun and another priest causing problems for her (Witness #11, R. v. Shearing, 1997:960-961). The result was that the witness found herself having to deal with spiritual revelations for which she was unprepared. Her uncertainty and confusion about the news created a situation that Shearing could ultimately manipulate for his own benefit. Relying on the member’s trust in him, Shearing

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173 Male members of the Kabalarian Philosophy played a secondary role in the both the attention that Shearing paid to them, as well as their role in the organization. While there were ongoing Teenage Classes for boys, it was not stressed by Shearing to attend, nor did Shearing demand that they adhere to the same stringent regulations that the girls followed. In addition, there were no sexual allegations made against Shearing by any male member, nor has there ever been any indication that he sexually coerced any male followers of the group.
asked the instrument to leave the room, because the witness had problems that were “deeper than [the instrument] could reach ... [but that] he [alone] could help [her]” (Witness #11, R. v. Shearing, 1997:962; italics mine). The witness testified that she was “[v]ery confused. [She] didn’t expect any of this” (Witness #11, R. v. Shearing, 1997:962), especially since she only went to see Shearing to discuss career options.174

In this situation, and others where similar events occurred, Shearing clearly used his spiritual authority to reinforce his coercive behavior. He was particularly careful, however, to present his actions that led to any sexual contact as part of a ritual that supposedly benefited the member, rather than presenting the rituals as they truly were—criminal acts. Although Shearing’s controlling behavior and reliance on esoteric spiritual interpretations175 clearly fit with Bainbridge’s definition of a cult, there are other aspects of the group that make its inclusion in this classification less clear. One difficulty stems from the nature of the leader and the historical timeframe in which the movement emerged—what Chryssides calls the ‘newness’ of a movement. Reiterating his argument, Chryssides claimed that ‘newness’ was an evolutionary process (Chryssides, 1999:13). When arbitrary historical markers are applied to the Kabalarian Philosophy, however, the nature and development of the group becomes subject to an artificial timeline. To classify the Kabalarian Philosophy, then, perhaps Dawson’s categorization of “established cult” (Dawson, 1998:32) best suits the

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174 By “this,” the witness means finding out that she had negative planes of mind and Shearing’s supposed attempt to rid her of them. She describes the event during which Shearing fondled her breasts and vagina, rubbed her body, and had her rub his penis under his clothes—events for which she clearly was not prepared. Moreover, there is no evidence suggesting that she knew about the specific details of the cleansing ritual—referring here to the overt sexual touching and the need for such intimate contact—before she went to see Shearing, another aspect of the meeting that undoubtedly caused her distress.

175 These esoteric interpretations were essentially a means Shearing used to justify his sexual behavior. Also, these interpretations were created by him as a tool to manipulate his devotees.
group. The term seems to be the most precise, because it acknowledges the gray area between an NRM and an established religion.

Recognizing that there is a transitional period between an NRM being considered an established religion, the timeframe between Parker and Shearing could have signaled the end of the movement, if members were unable to adjust to the new leader. Instead, the movement seems to have been strengthened by the charismatic succession. The continuation of the movement seemed assured by Parker having chosen his successor, a clear acknowledgment of Shearing’s charismatic authority. The public recognition of Shearing’s authority resulted in only minor leadership conflicts, a few dissenting opinions, and little factionalism. Shearing’s authority within the group was, in essence, the same as Parker’s, and this reinforced the sense of continuity between leaders that members needed.

Trial testimony confirmed this perception, as exemplified by these statements: “Q: When [Parker] passed away, … Mr. Shearing, took over … in effect … Mr. Parker’s place; is that right? A: That’s correct” (Crown and Witness #12, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1068). Another statement echoing this sentiment states that, “[Shearing] was almost invariably introduced as our administrator, leader, and spiritual teacher. Q: Was that a term … [often] used to describe Mr. Parker; spiritual teacher? A: That’s correct, yes” (Crown and Witness # 2, R. v. Shearing, 1997:197). One last statement succinctly encapsulated members’ feelings toward Shearing:

Although the transition between the two leaders was relatively smooth, some dissention did exist. A select few believed that Shearing was not old enough to become the Kabalarian leader, and in a letter submitted by an anonymous author that was read during the trial, “Shearing was in his early 30’s … [and] there were older men in the [Kabalarian Philosophy] who had been loyal to Parker and who were discontented at being passed over in favor of this young man” (Defense, R. v. Shearing, 1997:182). Their protests, however, were not significant enough to stop Shearing from taking over the role as leader of the Kabalarian Philosophy.
[W]hen Mr. Parker died ... I remember [my mother] explaining to us then that Mr. Shearing was going to be taking over the role of leader, that Mr. Parker had left. Q: And as a teenager, how did you regard Mr. Shearing? A: I loved and respected him. I adored Mr. Parker and so when Mr. Shearing came into the role, to me it was a transfer. (Crown and Witness #5, R. v. Shearing, 1997:403)

The loyalty members felt towards Parker transferred directly to Shearing after Parker died, as did his authority. The transference members experienced allowed the movement to withstand the founder’s death and a change in leadership. The members’ support for Shearing coalesced group unity and viability as a religious organization, supporting Dawson’s notion of an established cult more closely than the strictest understanding of NRMs.  

Despite the potential accuracy of the term ‘established cult,’ use of the word cult in any context still conjures up stereotypical images. Although the prosecution attempted to minimize the debatable religious status of the Kabalarians as a ‘cult’ by focusing mostly on how Shearing led the spiritually-based charismatic movement with an authoritarian style, it was Shearing’s attorney who first asked a member of the Philosophy whether he considered the Kabalarians a cult. Once the witness voiced his understanding of cults, the stereotypical interpretation became an element that influenced (in part) the jury’s deliberations to incarcerate Shearing. To Shearing’s detriment, the witness’ definition played upon many of the generally held beliefs about cults:

Outside of academic discussion, however, the term “established cult” (Dawson, 1998:32) has little or no significance, especially to the public. Nonetheless, the Kabalarian Philosophy best fits with the definition of cult, although the term New Religious Movement is a more comprehensive and meaningful concept that can slowly begin to replace the negative perception that lingers with the term ‘cult’. Interestingly, however, when Shearing’s attorney asked a longtime Kabalarian member if he thought that the Kabalarian Philosophy was a cult, his response was: “No, I wouldn’t consider it a cult. There were certain things where I felt that some of the students weren’t thinking as well as they should, and [that they were] acting more on emotion rather than on analysis and logic” (Witness #2, R. v. Shearing, 1997:161-162).
[my understanding [of a cult], without any expert knowledge, ... [is that] people would blindly do what the leader would say, rather than follow their own minds and question it. This is my understanding. And [members] would, I guess, follow certain directions blindly without thought. But as far as I was concerned, basically within the Philosophy I never really considered us a cult in so many words because there was, generally speaking, a fair amount of freedom of discussion and questioning, within reason. We couldn’t question the leadership so much as questioning any concepts that were under discussion. (Witness #2, R. v. Shearing, 1997:188)

Despite the member suggesting that the Kabalarians were not a cult, his statement seems to indicate otherwise. By his own admission, members were not allowed to question the leader’s authority, many members blindly followed the leader’s directions, and members only had permission to question the topics Shearing chose to discuss, rather than the core Kabalarian beliefs. Furthermore, the witness testified that Shearing placed limitations on the questions he allowed, stating that the questions had to be “within reason” (Witness #2, R. v. Shearing, 1997:188; italics mine). The restrictions placed on members’ ability to question and challenge the movement’s doctrines undoubtedly reinforced the Kabalarians’ cult image in the jury’s understanding, thereby making the movement seem less like an established religion, and more like a deviant one.

Once the jury heard that even some of the Kabalarian members thought the group was a cult (or at the very least had cult-like qualities), its perception of the Kabalarian Philosophy as a ‘cult’ was strongly reinforced. The negative impression the jury formed about the Kabalarians necessarily influenced its final deliberations, especially after the inner workings of the group and Shearing’s behavior towards female members was revealed. The members’ inability to question the Kabalarian doctrines, coupled with Shearing’s sexually manipulative
rituals, served to confirm the public’s worst fears concerning cults — charismatic leaders did prey upon their own members to satiate their own desires.

Although Shearing was the second leader of the Kabalarian Philosophy, his personal magnetism and authoritarian leadership style typified a charismatic leader, especially since he had been given explicit authority by Parker at his death. Moreover, Shearing’s leadership was a paradigmatic representation of charismatic authority that was not lessened by his role as successor, but rather was strengthened by it. Shearing maintained his power, the group’s unity, and strict control over the devotees for decades: “[He] was the ultimate authority. He was not to be questioned. He was the link to the spiritual consciousness. That was it. He — everything stopped with Ivon Shearing” (Witness #10, R. v. Shearing, 1997:891).

This is a powerful testament to Shearing’s charismatic endowment, authority, and power within the Kabalarian Philosophy, and these statements clearly demonstrate some members’ belief that Shearing possessed special qualities that separated him from others. The recognizable aura that set him apart from his followers also raised him to the level of infallible. Weber and Storr’s basic theories suggesting that charismatic leaders have special qualities and knowledge that others do not emerges throughout the transcripts, figuring prominently in each witness’ testimony. Members believed that Shearing “had evolved himself … [and was now] very mentally strong. … [Supposedly, he also possessed] universal love and understanding” (Witness #9, R. v. Shearing, 1997:799) beyond that of any other individual (except perhaps, for Parker). Part of the Kabalarian mythos included teaching members that Shearing “was the only individual or man in the universe that can connect to the conscious plane of mind”\(^\text{178}\) (Witness #4, R. v. Shearing, 1997:316), and that he alone possessed

\(^{178}\) Presumably, it was Shearing himself who explained to the members of the Philosophy this particular belief, which is significant because there is no mention of his predecessor’s supposed ability to do the same thing. One theory that explains this omission is that by excluding any mention of Parker’s supposed gift as well, Shearing’s own uniqueness and value to the group
the link between the sacred and the mundane world. The implication was clear — only through Shearing’s divinely inspired teachings, wisdom, and rituals were members able to access the Principle, the force that bound the universe.

The charismatic figure’s supposed ability to connect with the sacred realm and know the Truth, strengthens his omnipotent and omniscient image in the minds of his followers.

Q: Do you recall what the purpose of the mental demonstrations was?
A: It was to prove Ivon’s power and ability to contact the negative realm and the principle. ... [H]e would bring through these ... negative, debauched, you know, planes of mind and then it would always end with a message from God, God the principle.
Q: From?
A: God the principle, to show [Shearing’s] ability to communicate with the truth. (Crown and Witness #8, R. v. Shearing, 1997:681)

Believing that Shearing could communicate with God and know universal truths created a connection on members’ behalf between them and the divine. A connection to the universal truth instilled in them a sense of belonging to something larger and more powerful than themselves.

Shearing skillfully created an environment where he was “the only living vehicle for positive [energy] ... in the world. So [all his members believed that they] were all living in a negative state [and] that [they] were trying to — he was trying to ... raise us all up to follow this route to the principle, to God” (Witness #8, R. v. Shearing, 1997:675). In one sense, members’ followed Shearing because they believed that he possessed qualities that inspired faith and hope, enticing them to have faith in his vision of world harmony and peace. In another sense, Shearing’s alleged ability to know the answers to universal

 increases. Shearing’s supposed ability to remove negative planes of mind ensures that members seek an audience specifically with him, rather than relying on any written source.
questions and problems seemed limitless compared with a member’s ability, whether or not Shearing personally believed in his own proclamations.

Moreover, Shearing’s proclamations carried the same weight as those Parker made, establishing that there was very little difference between the claims that Parker made and those espoused by Shearing. The theory that there was little distinction between their proclamations remains unchallenged, according to member testimony: “would it be fair to say that basically you accept and adopt Mr. Shearing’s teachings as they’re found? A: They are the teachings of the Kabalarian Philosophy, yes. Q: And they’re Mr. Shearing’s ... words? A: Yes” (Crown and Witness #18, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1914).

That Shearing’s teachings had the same importance as Parker’s fortifies the image of absolute authority that Shearing had in the Kabalarian Philosophy and provides insight into the absolute power he had in controlling members’ beliefs and behavior. Even though Shearing based much of his teachings on those already established by Parker, a probable explanation for Shearing’s ability to maintain a charismatic style of leadership was that he continued to significantly create, embellish, or reinterpret doctrines. The unpredictability and newness infused by Shearing’s changes were sufficient to stave off institutionalization and routinization — two processes that eventually erode the absolute power of charismatic leaders.

By establishing himself as the link to the universal consciousness and the only conduit through which members could communicate with the divine, Shearing also ensured that members did not rely exclusively on the substantial legacy of writings that Parker left. Followers depended on Shearing’s unpredictable proclamations for spiritual enlightenment, resulting in a situation where Shearing held power over every aspect of their lives, both spiritual and temporal. Since Shearing acted as the link between the sacred and the mundane for members of the Kabalarian Philosophy, devotees needed to stay in good standing with Shearing to achieve their goals of spiritual harmony. Members
could not simply rely on the writings of the group because Shearing was the connection to the Principle, rather then just the messenger of the divine.

Shearing’s status as Parker’s successor was reinforced one evening when a message from Parker was spoken through his former channel in the presence of Shearing and other Kabalarian members. The channeled message (reputedly from Parker) spoke of Shearing’s ability to guide the group spiritually and gave his support for Shearing to take over the role that he had held.

[Kabalarian members] were encouraged to apply the philosophy and to work hard, to keep the ideals and standards and the principles as taught by Mr. Alfred J. Parker to keep them alive and to dedicate [them]selves to furthering the concepts that had been taught ... in the writings of Alfred J. Parker. ... [At his time] it was brought out that Mr. Shearing would lead the organization ... because [the Kabalarian Philosophy] needed the guidance to keep [members] — if you can imagine, you know, the leader of the family is no longer there. The children need a guidance type of thing, so [too did the Kabalarians] need guidance and direction ... .

(Witness #18, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1893)

Allegedly, the continuation of the organization under Shearing’s authority was part of the overall plan Parker envisioned, so it was natural that Shearing would have the same privileges and stature in the Kabalarian Philosophy that Parker enjoyed.

According to the witness, Parker also envisioned ending his life once he felt he had accomplished his mission of understanding the laws of universe and spiritual truths. Evidence supporting this assertion, however, rests solely on one dedicated member’s testimony, a woman who lived in the same house as Parker, who claimed to have

179 Supposedly, the witness had a special insight into Parker’s private life and death because she lived in the Kabalarian headquarters with Parker. I am deliberately vague about her role within the Kabalarian organization to protect her identity.
attended to [Parker] until he passed — passed away. He was not ailing. He was not ill. And he actually contr — controlled [sic] himself to the point ... where he stopped eating and stopped drinking for a period of time. And he told his daughter earlier that he had so much [time] ... to accomplish his mission in life. ...

[Parker then] said he accomplished — that he — he had accomplished his mission and within a certain length of time and at that time ... [his daughter] said he finished his lifestyle.\textsuperscript{180}

Q: [Out] of his own volition?

A: Consciously and of his own volition, yes. (Crown and Witness #18, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1898)

Interestingly, there are no other instances in the transcripts that describe Parker’s death in this way, and the prosecution’s mere suggestion that he died of prostate cancer was denied vehemently by the witness (Witness #18, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1897). The witness’ steadfast belief in Parker’s ability to choose the time of his death indicates the power she attributed to him and how she viewed Shearing — as a worthy successor and knower of the Truth.\textsuperscript{181}

From the testimony presented at trial, Shearing seemed to support the need for choosing a successor to continue spreading the Kabalarian teachings, but only insofar as it served his own purpose. Outwardly, Shearing seemed to support that: "This is not a one-man organization. The limitations one man has will hold the Philosophy back and therefore we need many leaders, and these leaders are those that come from the present membership"\textsuperscript{182} (Witness #2, R. v.

\textsuperscript{180} According to the witness, “finishing his lifestyle” means ending his life.

\textsuperscript{181} Parker’s medical records were not presented during Shearing’s trial, so the cause of Parker’s death is not certain. However, given the two explanations presented during the trial, there is a greater likelihood that Parker died of cancer rather than willing himself to die without any cause.

\textsuperscript{182} Worth noting here again is that Shearing did not testify during his trial. All the statements attributed to Shearing are witnesses’ recollections of lectures, conversations, or other interactions that they had with him.
Shearing, 1997:164). However, Shearing’s authoritarian leadership style seems to directly contradict the utopic line of succession he described, especially when one considers the prohibitions against members questioning Shearing, his authority, or the Kabalarian doctrines.

Storr (1996) stated that leaders who denied their members the opportunity to question their authority and judgment (be it through direct or indirect prohibitions) are definitive characteristics of an authoritarian and charismatic leader. Intolerant to members’ criticism, even though publicly the leader encouraged criticism and questions, an authoritarian leader does not allow his authority to be challenged. Averse to the (negative) opinions of members or critics and unyielding to the suggestions of others, Shearing typified the charismatic leader by displaying these same inclinations and demanding complete obedience from the Kabalarian members.

Q: In the family home or while you attended classes did you ever observe your parents ... challeng[ing] Mr. Shearing’s authority on any issue?
A: No, never.

Q: Did you share your parents’ regard of Mr. Shearing?

This passage underscores several significant elements: Shearing’s dominance in the movement; the member’s deference to Shearing’s teachings — learned, in part, from her parents; and a clear example where it seems apparent that members do not refute or disagree with any of Shearing’s teachings. The witness further testified that “if we didn’t understand something that [Shearing] said or did or whatever, [he said] that it was [due to] our smallness of mind or our lack of being able to understand our own journey towards the principle, towards spirituality” (Witness #8, R. v. Shearing, 1997:670). Evidently, Shearing reinforced his authoritarian position in the movement by denying members the opportunity to question him, and convincing his devotees that it was their
deficiency in understanding spiritual matters that impaired their ability to learn from his teachings.

To further strengthen his authority and elevated status within the Kabalarian Philosophy, Shearing demanded that members perform chores without requiring their consent. One of the most obvious chores Shearing demanded from female Kabalarian members was to work at Kalaway Bay, a resort owned by the Kabalarians at Kalamalka Lake in the lake country, in British Columbia.\(^{183}\)

Open to the public and operating throughout the summer months, Shearing staffed the resort with members of the movement — a job for which the women and girls of the movement were not paid. Many of the female witnesses testified that they would work at the resort from early morning until late evening, during which time the girls:

... cleaned cabins or worked in the orchard or worked at the fruit stand or worked at the gift shop. ... You were expected to work. I mean, when they said that you could stop and take a break, fine, but if there was work to be done in the Kalarama,\(^{184}\) you know, preparing meals or making beds or cleaning bathrooms ... we just did nothing but work. [We worked] 75 percent [of the time].

Q: Did you get paid?

Although Shearing expected the chosen members of the movement to stay at the resort,\(^{185}\) and devote their vacation time to the operation of Kalaway Bay

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\(^{183}\) The lake country is a region in southern British Columbia, Canada, noted for its beautiful lakes, serene mountains, and fruit orchards. The warm temperatures also make it a favorite destination for tourists.

\(^{184}\) An area of Kalaway Bay resort.

\(^{185}\) Shearing separated the Kabalarian girls from their families when they stayed at the resort. The girls “would stay in the communal Teenage Class girls’ place called the Kalarama” (Witness #8, R v. Shearing, 1997:683). When questioned about whether the girls wanted to stay in a
resort (Witness #8, R. v. Shearing, 1997:683), he did allow for some time when the devotees did not have to work. They water-skied or lay on the beach, often under Shearing’s direct supervision, and Shearing’s constant presence ensured that the followers were fulfilling his demands and adhering to the Kabalarian rules of behavior.

Moreover, the presence of female Kabalarian members also afforded Shearing an opportunity to create sexually abusive situations. While Shearing demanded that the young women spend all of their long weekends and summer vacation with him, he had virtually unrestricted sexual access to the members because he created the schedules that they had to follow. During periods where there were no scheduled activities, he often met with devotees at his cabin, where he took advantage of his role as mentor and teacher. The following is one witness’ account of her experiences in the Oasis, the name of Shearing’s private residence at Kalaway Bay.

Mr. Shearing took my hand and we got up and he led me down the hallway to a bedroom … [where he] indicat[ed] towards the bed. … [H]e came where I was on the bed and he had me lay down on the bed and I thought he was going to perform another relaxation session on me. I remember feeling very nervous, very scared. I didn’t understand why we had to be in – in the room alone instead of the living room … . He kissed my lips, he kissed my face. He started touching my breasts. … [H]e took my hand in his hand and he put it on his genital area. And then he took his hand and put it on my genital area. And he – I understood it to be a linking power, he explained that a bit later. … [H]e rolled on top of me …

room separate from their parents, one witness said: “It was expected. I wouldn’t have — it wouldn’t have been any other way” (Witness #8, R. v. Shearing, 1997:683).

186 The witness had previously described a “relaxation session” that involved him kissing her while he stroked her breasts and thighs (Witness #9, R. v. Shearing, 1997:788-789). The purpose of these relaxation sessions was to deal with a concern the member had about having masturbated. No explanation of how these actions were to help her was ever given to the member.
[and began] press[ing] himself into me for about 20 minutes. ... [Then,] he just stopped and he rolled off of me and he got up ... . (Witness #9, R. v. Shearing, 1997:790-792)

Shearing’s abusive manipulation of esoteric Kabalarian doctrine clearly appears here as a justification for his actions, but more shockingly, he engaged in such actions with an impressionable sixteen year old devotee.

One reason the devotees kept returning to meet with Shearing in his cabin, therefore, is most likely that they were both confused and fearful. Taught from a very early age by their parents and the rest of the Kabalarian community that Shearing’s demands should always be adhered to because he knew what was best for each member, the young women did as they were told: “... it was drilled into me from a very young age that he was an ultimate authority, that anything Mr. Shearing said or did was in your best interests” (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:248). Moreover, Shearing told each of his victims that the relationship that he had with them was to be kept a secret since the relationship was special. “[Shearing] told me that this was an extremely special occurrence between us and that we – I mustn’t ever discuss it, or tell anyone, or speak of it in any way” (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:233). As a result, the devotees did not share their experiences with other Kabalarian members, and Shearing managed to hide his abusive relationships from others.

These examples of control and manipulation create an image of a leader who displayed his dominance over the members of the movement in a variety of circumstances and by a variety of means. Another example of public demonstration of power involved Shearing publicly embarrassing members for the sole purpose of entertaining himself. According to witness’ testimony, during many of the Kabalarians’ musical evenings, Shearing allegedly “work[ed]187 with

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187 In the witness’ understanding, “working” with students meant that Shearing hypnotized the students to act as he wished. Whether there is any validity to this claim is beyond the scope of
students to make them do different things that he thought would be funny. Things like making people act drunk or making people lash out there [sic] arm to the individual sitting next to them hitting them or having them fall down on the floor unable to stand up” (Witness #6, R. v. Shearing, 1997:534). Members believed that Shearing had the power to control their actions through hypnosis, and the display of his powers became “a huge part of [an evening’s] entertainment” (Witness #6, R. v. Shearing, 1997:534).

On these evenings, members went to the meetings knowing that they could be part of the group that Shearing brought on stage to ridicule. When asked if they had a choice as to whether they wanted to participate in an evening’s supposed fun, the response was that they did not. People participated at Shearing’s “discretion only. … Q: Did you think it was funny? A: I didn’t have any control over what my body was doing at that time. … It would be like someone punching me in the stomach” (Crown and Witness #6, R. v. Shearing, 1997:535). Clearly, members did not enjoy being the evening’s entertainment, but their feelings did not concern Shearing. His desire to control the members, the group, and the situation were of paramount concern to him, despite the feelings of embarrassment and humiliation his members experienced. The purpose of these shows was to make his authority and power known to all the members, by making members publicly submit to his will.

While the question of the members’ agency emerges here — as members were not necessarily in a physically isolating environment, such as

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188 There is no mention in the transcripts whether this form of entertainment occurred at the resort or only in Vancouver.

189 In the case of the pre-pubescent and young teenage girls that Shearing victimized, the question of agency did not apply since these girls did not possess the requisite understanding needed to appreciate Shearing’s malevolent intent. Moreover, they did not have the capacity to choose a different lifestyle than their parents, all of whom were dedicated members of the Kabalarian Philosophy.
Jonestown, Guyana — there is considerable evidence suggesting that there was significant pressure on devotees to adhere to Shearing’s demands for numerous reasons. One reason is that although followers lived in the middle of a busy city (as close to Shearing and the Kabalarian headquarters as was possible), there was a fairly rigid boundary between the Kabalarian world and the non-Kabalarian world. Having been taught that the Kabalarian worldview was unique and the only true understanding of the universe, members were willing to accept (under the pressure of being denied access to Shearing and his divine wisdom) Shearing’s demands. Members were willing to suffer relatively temporary embarrassment for the sake of increasing their spiritual and eternal enlightenment. The option to leave the movement and the worldview that devotees fully adopted was, therefore, a choice that few would embrace.

Another instance that illustrates Shearing’s dominance over members, especially the young women of the group, involves eliminating a member’s ability to choose even simple daily lifestyle choices. As Langone (2003) states, one of the most profound ways to exercise authority over another is to regulate personal expressions of self: how one dresses, styles one’s hair, makes food choices, chooses friends, and entertains oneself. For members of the Kabalarian Philosophy, Shearing outlined the choices they must follow. As one Kabalarian stated:

I became a vegetarian. I stopped drinking any alcohol and tried to maintain the standards set out by the organization. ... [I followed] an extremely conservative dress code which meant that absolutely no blue jeans, no revealing types of dress, skirts had to be at a standard height which was just below the knee. So no short skirts or mini skirts or that type of thing. ... [P]eople do not watch television, no “X” rated movies, “R” rated movies, no parties with any alcohol involved or going to bars or pubs. ... [I] didn’t listen to the radio, even like rock and roll music was completely taboo.

(Witness #6, R. v. Shearing, 1997:515-516)
In addition to these requirements, another witness testified that Shearing prohibited members of the Teenage Class from smoking, drinking, and swearing, as well as having long hair, coloring their hair, wearing make-up or nail polish, wearing fashionable or black clothing, and reading titillating romance books (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:217-219). These prohibitions supposedly “created a standard of refinement and it was believed that refinement was the stepping stone to spiritual attainment” (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:217), but another plausible explanation for these restrictions was that it demonstrated the devotee’s subordination. By restricting a member’s ability to choose between even the smallest aspects of their appearance, for instance, the devotee’s sense of dependency on the leader’s decisions increased dramatically. In essence, members substituted the leader’s judgment for their own, since members believed that the leader’s decisions were right and that they led toward the path of enlightenment, a significant example of “bounded choice.”

The need for control that charismatic leaders often display — in their physical environment, their interaction with others, and their self-image — can be a reflection of their narcissistic personalities. According to Storr, charismatic leaders knowingly isolate themselves from others because their narcissistic and introverted behavior causes them to be more concerned with their own thoughts and relationships than with making many friends (Storr, 1996:xiii). The boundary that leaders create between them and their members, for instance, assures leaders that they are never seen as equals with their members, but rather as individuals who command authority and respect. The extreme self-interest that narcissistic charismatic leaders display is a trait that the National Parole Board of Canada’s psychologist identified in Shearing during her interviews with him. In her assessment of him, she found that Shearing was “remarkably selfish, egocentric and narcissistic. ... [Moreover,] she found that [Shearing’s] insight was shallow and self-serving ... [and concluded that he] was an entrenched sex offender, who was both dangerous and predatory” (National Parole Board, 2003:3).
Shearing’s undeniable absorption in his own image and focus on his own gratification certainly provides at least a partial explanation for his social isolation, and sheds light on his desire to remain somewhat distant from his followers. In addition, Shearing was no doubt aware that he needed to protect his image, so he skillfully minimized the opportunities for members to be exposed to his potential flaws. One could argue that Shearing seemed to know (or had somehow learned from experience) that if he ever displayed a less than perfect image, then members, in turn, would begin to question him and their role as a follower. From the trial testimony, Shearing’s demand for secrecy about his actions clearly demonstrate that he controlled his interaction with members and the opportunity members had to discuss their experiences amongst themselves. By suggesting to female devotees that other members would become jealous of, or simply not understand, the special relationship he had with them, Shearing effectively restricted members’ ability to discuss their experiences with others and perhaps realize that their relationship with the man was not unique.

“[Shearing] told me ... that people in the Philosophy – that the other students, they wouldn’t understand. And [he also said] that you do not – you absolutely do not tell anyone about our – [our] special work [together]” (Witness #4, R. v. Shearing, 1997:315). Assuredly, Shearing seemingly minimized any cracks in his flawless image to avoid members questioning his authority and exploring his duplicitous behavior. If members did question his actions and authority, dissension would inevitably follow — events that Shearing had managed to skillfully avoid for twenty years.

The first step a leader often employs to achieve a flawless image is to limit and control his interaction with members. In Shearing’s case, he carefully regulated his living arrangements and who surrounded him. Shearing successfully isolated himself from most members of the Philosophy by creating an unwritten rule that he was the only man who could live at the Kabalarian headquarters (Witness #18, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1911). In addition, by allowing only the most dedicated women devotees to live there (who, not coincidentally,
fulfilled other roles such as housekeeper, assistant, and instrument, for example), Shearing surrounded himself with loyal followers who would protect his image and attribute any flaw they might discover to their own lack of understanding. This situation provided Shearing with the opportunity to monitor his elite’s behavior, while in turn, the elite would restrict his interaction with other members. Since these devoted members acted as gatekeepers to Shearing’s inner sanctum, they always announced any visits and awaited permission to grant members’ access – members were never allowed to simply visit Shearing in his den, (considered by some to be equivalent to a church’s inner sanctum) “without an invitation and only a few privileged people [ever] got an invitation into his den” (Witness #6, R. v. Shearing, 1997:529). In addition, the den acted as an even more intimate space that members felt extraordinarily privileged to be invited to. The feeling of privilege Shearing instilled strengthened the member’s belief that they were special individuals because he intimated in the revered space that he had their spiritual interests foremost in his mind.

Perhaps the most telling incident recorded in the transcripts that illustrates Shearing’s duplicity and ability to manipulate members for his own gratification was an incident where Shearing told a young woman that he had chosen her to become an instrument.

I didn’t know what it took to be an instrument. I didn’t understand that it would involve any kind of psychic ability or what the requirements were. It was never clear to me. [Shearing] just said that he thought I was sensitive and that he’d like to develop my potential and then he explained. I said well … what does the sex have to do with [becoming an instrument] and he explained that in order for the instrument and the operator – he considered himself the operator, in order for the instrument and the operator to be one mentally they had to be one physically. (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:236-237)

Convinced that she was special to Shearing, the young woman felt “tremendously honored and … that [she] had a future role within the
organization” (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:237). Shearing had invited her into the inner sanctum of the Kabalarian Philosophy (literally the den and symbolically the elite of the organization), and the woman believed it was to further her spiritual enlightenment. What she did not realize until years later, was that Shearing used his position of authority to gain sexual access to her.

Shearing (and Parker before him) ruled the Kabalarian Philosophy in a dictatorial manner, and what he proclaimed became truth to the Kabalarians. Shearing's teachings were elitist and anti-democratic and were heeded as though God had spoken them: “I put [Shearing] on a level of God and you don’t question God” (Witness #6, R. v. Shearing, 1997:523). The special status and charismatic insights Shearing reputedly had raised him above the status of any other Kabalarian member, which served to reinforce his authority within the group. The court transcripts underscored that members believed he was on the same level as god, and as such, Shearing had the ability to rule the Kabalarian Philosophy as he deemed fit.

However, Shearing’s belief in his superiority over other members, allowed him to think that he was entitled to special privileges that others in the Kabalarian Philosophy were not — a belief that was his ultimate downfall in the eyes of disillusioned members and the judicial system. While his charismatic gift enabled him to enjoy the benefits of being the exclusive leader of the Philosophy, Shearing used the privilege to create and reinterpret doctrines to fulfill his own sexual needs. He also created a clear double standard on sexuality within the Kabalarians, which emerged on numerous occasions in the court transcripts. The following is one account:

Q: Did you know at [the time of the sexual encounter] ... that Mr. Shearing was married?
A: Yes, I did.
Q: Did that make you uncomfortable with respect to [what] had occurred?
A: I don’t think you can put the two things together. He was a married man but he was a spiritual leader and what he did to me was as a spiritual leader not as a lover or a fling. …

Q: … [D]id you ever hear Mr. Shearing lecture on the subject of sex outside marriage?

A: … [T]here was no question that sex outside of the marriage was an absolute no but even sex inside of the marriage should be restricted on, you know, at most a monthly basis or as the need arose. (Crown and Witness #6, R. v. Shearing, 1997:524-525)

In another account, one victim testified that when Shearing was speaking to the members about fidelity and the importance of maintaining sex for reproductive purposes only, Shearing “said that he had never slept with anybody but his wife which [the victim] knew was wrong” (Witness #12, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1070). Shearing excluded himself from rules he established for his members’ sexual behavior, believing either that he was entitled to unrestricted sexual activity or that the sexual acts he engaged in were really spiritual in nature. Again, the double standard appears in the following quote:

Q: Now, … you know at 40 years of age that when a man French kisses a woman, fondles her breasts, touches her vaginal area, that those are sexual acts?

A: That’s right.

Q: When Mr. Shearing did that to you then, did you regard those acts at that point in time as sexual acts?

A: Oh, no. No, not at all.

Q: When Mr. Shearing did those acts to you what did you think those acts represented?

A: That he was using his power, which he was already linked to the spiritual plane and he was using that power to help me get closer to that plane, that he was making my life better.
Q: Did you believe when he was doing those things to you that he was doing those things for the purpose of him receiving sexual gratification?
A: Oh, no, absolutely not.
Q: Why not?
A: Because he was beyond that. We knew that. He didn’t get pleasure from physical — the physical plane. He was living and existing in the spiritual plane and he was our link to that plane.
That is why his existence was so important and why the Kabalarian religion or philosophy was, you know, the key to life and why we were so special. (Crown and Witness #8, R. v. Shearing, 1997:700)

Convinced that Shearing had only their spiritual interests in mind, the pattern of abuse that Shearing relied on begins to emerge.

Each witness who testified to being sexually abused by Shearing described his authority over them as a main motivator in their compliance. Witnesses testified that they adhered to his wishes because he possessed spiritual authority and his theological arguments seemed to fit with the overall principles they had been taught during their Kabalarian membership.

Q: Did you stop him … when he kissed you on the mouth, when he touched your breasts, or did what you’ve described to your vaginal area [stimulating her clitoris digitally], did you grab his hand and pull it away, or did you tell him to stop or anything like that?
A: I don’t recall. I don’t think so because I didn’t understand — I mean I was quite positive … that he was attempting to do some form of exorcism [by performing these sexual acts with me]. I didn’t know where it was leading and I didn’t feel that I had any right to question him because he — I felt he was just the ultimate...

190 Although many of the women did not see Shearing’s actions as abusive at the time, the process of acknowledging what they later realized was sexual manipulation varied. The women’s decision to bring their allegations to the police did not coalesce formally until 1995, though.
authority and I never questioned him so I never would have said stop ... . (Crown and Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:231)

The victims believed that they were not in a position to question Shearing’s authority and their feelings of powerlessness and submission allowed him to capitalize on their vulnerability. Since the victims assumed that Shearing was assisting them in becoming better Kabalarians, and therefore, closer to the Principle, they set aside their confusion and substituted Shearing’s judgment for their own.

Even when members did ask Shearing to explain his ability to remove the negative planes of mind, however, his answers were vague and shrouded in esoteric rhetoric. The prosecution made Shearing’s unwillingness to discuss the true nature of his techniques obvious when he asked a defense witness:

Q: Isn’t it true that the few times that [Shearing] may be asked [about clearing planes of mind], [he] in effect says to the questioner, “Look, it’s really a little bit above you. It’s not important for you to understand how, the only thing of importance is that you believe it can be done.” That’s how he — he answers by not answering, doesn’t he? ... He deflects the question, doesn’t he?

Relying on his purportedly charismatic understanding of esoteric universal truths, Shearing eliminated the potential for members to criticize the veracity of the claims he made (and the special status he enjoyed) by saying that the answers the questioners sought were in the realm of the sacred and beyond their mundane comprehension. Accepting the claims that Shearing made, therefore, was a testament to a devotee’s dedication to him, and a public display of support.

The support members displayed also contributed to their dependence on Shearing’s judgments, thereby giving Shearing power in the members’ lives. As Emerson stated, “power resides implicitly in the other’s dependency” (Emerson,
Kabalarian members depended on Shearing to guide them spiritually, to nurture them emotionally, and to teach them how to live a harmonious life. Not surprisingly, then, that as a result of their need for Shearing’s judgments, Kabalarian followers believed that their relationship with Shearing was the most significant and influential relationship they had ever formed in their adult lives. Members acquiesced to Shearing’s demands and even feared him, because to jeopardize the relationship or to challenge Shearing was too risky. This submission, in turn, provided Shearing with enormous influence over devotees.

One witness recounts her mother’s feelings about Shearing and the power he held in their daily lives:

A: [My mother] was very afraid of [Shearing].
Q: Can you indicate to the jury your mother’s reaction at the prospect of being told that she might not be welcome to live at 1160 West 10th and would have to move out [if her children did not act like good Kabalarian students]?
A: My mom believed … [that] if she ever left the philosophy or left the house that she would become a cripple. She lived in fear of either my sister or myself leaving the house, that we were taught that because we lived in the house that we were targets for the disembodied planes of mind and that horrible things would happen to us if we ever did leave. (Crown and Witness #12, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1070-1071)

The control Shearing exercised over his devotees shows the importance of maintaining a favorable relationship with Shearing. If one did not adhere to his demands, the results would be catastrophic. Shearing threatened physical disability or debilitating mental interferences — threats members were not inclined to dismiss.

Although Shearing inspired feelings of fear in many members, many women in the movement also thought of him as a father figure, and adhered to
his demands out of feelings of love and devotion. Known as affective bonding, members endow their spiritual leader with the paternalistic qualities of wisdom, love, protection, and devotion. Jacobs (1989) and Cartwright and Kent (1992), theorized that the strength of a relationship depended significantly on the bond created between leaders and their followers, often taking on a connection that seemed to be parental in nature. A former member of the Kabalarian Philosophy testified that the relationship she had with Shearing was really “a mixture of him being a father figure. He was my teacher. He was my employer ... he and I were very good friends” (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:264). In a sense, she “kind of felt like [Shearing’s] daughter” (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:222).

Clearly, Shearing figured in every aspect of the woman’s life, and her relationship with him affected both her private and public lives. Although she claimed that they were “good friends,” friendship typically implies that the individuals in the relationship are peers, a feeling one does not get from her description of the relationship. The woman knew she was not his equal. He was her boss, her spiritual teacher, and an authority figure whose proclamations were absolute.

Furthermore, Shearing predicated all his relationships on the claim that he possessed a greater spiritual wisdom than anyone else did, thereby establishing that all subsequent relationships were unequal. Since witnesses who saw Shearing as a father figure also sought his spiritual counsel, they willingly surrendered control of their personal decision-making to Shearing in return for the enlightenment he promised. While female members supposedly gained spiritual advancement from their leader and symbolic father, Shearing gained the power to shape and modify their choices and behavior to assure himself of their complete loyalty.

While Shearing’s ability to subjugate members undoubtedly stemmed from his projected image of superiority and perfection, the image was so convincing that even when female members began to doubt the purpose of the ritual, they assumed that Shearing still was acting in their best interests.
Q: ... When Mr. Shearing kissed you, touched your body or had you touch his body, at the time he did those things, did you regard those acts as sexual acts?
A: I knew intellectually that they were sexual acts, but I regarded Mr. Shearing as a spiritual person and I felt that somehow because he was a spiritual person and he was my spiritual leader, that they were spiritual acts. (Crown and Witness #10, R. v. Shearing, 1997:890)

The member’s complete submission illustrates her belief in his superiority and infallibility, a sentiment echoed in this passage:

A: It did not occur to me [that Shearing was engaging in such actions for his own sexual gratification] because, to my point of view, Mr. Shearing was my spiritual teacher. He was, he was somebody to be admired and respected because he knew so much more about life than I did, and therefore, that obviously he must know what he was doing more than I did, and that he did have a definite reason for why he was doing what he did, and that was how I viewed him. I saw him stand on the podium and give, you know, philosophical speeches all my life, and so I looked up to this man as somebody that I trusted and respected as my teacher. ... [T]alking about my problems with him was a good thing that [wa]s helping me and [that made] a difference in my life. (Witness #7, R. v. Shearing, 1997:605-607)

Shearing’s believability directly influenced his power within the Kabalarian Philosophy and though devotees regarded him as God personified, he needed to preserve his credibility to maintain his authority, thereby allowing him to continue to manipulate members. Shearing was skilled in furthering his own agenda while appearing to act in the member’s best interests.

The domination an authoritarian and charismatic leader possesses, however, is not without its perils. Dissension within a movement, for instance,
can erode a charismatic leader’s authority, which can subsequently lead to members leaving the movement, or worse, criticizing it. Perhaps the most worrisome pitfall to such a leader would be dissension, which ultimately leads to disaffection or criticism. Robbins and Anthony state that “a charismatic leader will be tempted to use his authority to try to simplify the environment within the group by eliminating sources of dissension ... [and] normative diversity” (Robbins and Anthony, 1995:246). These leaders react to a member’s dissension “in an increasingly authoritarian and absolutist direction” (Robbins and Anthony, 1995:245-246), a pattern that Shearing followed, as well.

On the rare occasion that a member did challenge Shearing’s authority and mystical insight — especially regarding matters of a sexual nature and prior to the eventual breakdown of Shearing’s authority once allegations of sexual abuse surfaced — Shearing’s reaction was swift and emotionally severe. One example of Shearing attempting to eliminate dissension recorded at his trial occurred during a supposed therapy session between Shearing and a young Kabalarian follower. Having gone to see Shearing to get help clearing the deep-seated negative planes of mind she believed she had, Shearing put the girl’s hand on his erect penis. Recoiling out of shock and disbelief, she began to believe that he was not helping her spiritually, but rather, was using her for his own sexual gratification. When she confronted him, he calmly stood up and said that “obviously [I] couldn’t help [you] and ... because [I] couldn’t help [you, you are] going to be frigid for life, but if [you] ever wanted ... help with this [problem], [you] could come back and meet with [me] another time” (Witness #11, R. v. Shearing, 1997:964). To someone outside of the Kabalarian worldview, Shearing’s attempt to threaten her appears obvious. To members sharing the Kabalarian belief that one needs a positive plane of mind to be able to progress spiritually, however, Shearing’s threat holds significant weight. To deny a member spiritual advancement because they did not comply with the leader’s demands is a devastating punishment, and is one that acts as a powerful means of coercing members into conceding to Shearing’s demands.
In addition to barring enlightenment to members who challenged his authority, Shearing was also known to tell members that harm would befall them if they ever left his protection and the protection the movement afforded them. One witness testified that Shearing had told her that her brother’s fiancée had been murdered because the fiancée “had chosen not to live a principled [and therefore, Kabalarian] life” (Witness #8, R. v. Shearing, 1997:677). Shearing depicted the world outside of the Kabalarian Philosophy as dangerous and precarious, especially for the young girls in the movement. Shearing specifically taught the young girls that the threat of being kidnapped, sold, sexually abused, and murdered in white slavery rings was real, and a likely occurrence if one lived outside the security the Kabalarian doctrines provided (Witness #18, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1907-1908).

Authoritarian leaders often use the threat of physical harm or lack of spiritual development to guarantee devotees’ compliance, but Shearing also created and manipulated specific theological arguments to support his actions. Shearing’s charismatic abilities also allowed him to create new doctrine and practice for which devotees were unable to find textual support. The unpredictability this created increased the potential for abuse within the Kabalarian Philosophy because members could not rely on any of the group’s writings to contradict the leader’s actions. If the leader deemed a sexual act (for example, the member being fondled to eliminate a negative plane of mind) as a part of the movement’s spiritual composition, there was no evidence to disprove the assertion. Numerous claims were made during the trial which support this argument.

Q: Are you aware of any Kabalarian literature that discusses the subject of negative sexual planes of mind specifically?
A: No, I’m not aware of any.
Q: Do you know of any literature that says in order for a woman to have a negative sexual plane of mind cleared she has to be touched sexually?
A: No, I have never heard that. (Crown and Witness #19, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1547)

Another statement echoes this testimony: “Q: To your knowledge, is there any body of writing or teachings about the actual process or techniques of mental work? A: Not to my knowledge” (Defense and Witness #19, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1504). The absence of material indicates the level of reliance members had on Shearing’s proclamations and the power a charismatic leader possess to be able to convince members of a recently proclaimed (although unknown) doctrine.

Although one could suggest that Shearing did not intentionally abuse the Kabalarian women during the spiritual clearing rituals, this position is weakened by the following testimony.

Mr. Shearing and I ... were eating [together] and he said that he had noticed that I was extremely uncomfortable around him. I mean, throughout the years I’ve had a dreadful time of it, of trying to be natural around him [after him having sexually molested her]. So he said that he noticed this, that he had noticed I had extreme discomfort. And I said, yes, I was very uncomfortable. And he said to me, with regards to past events where we were — when I was young, do you feel like I’ve abused or molested you in any way? And he used the words abused and molested. ( Witness #9, R. v. Shearing, 1997:812-813; italics mine)

Certainly, this testimony indicates that Shearing knew that his actions were abusive and suspected that the young woman had not completely accepted that what he had done was spiritual in nature. Since Shearing seemed to have had the intention of receiving sexual gratification from his victims from the beginning of his relationship with them, he always looked for signs of disenchantment in his victims after he had abused them. Despite the evidence suggesting that not all of the women with whom he engaged in sexual activities even realized that he was
molesting them until years after the fact, Shearing’s motivations appear clear each time he entered into a sexual relationship with a Kabalarian student.

To tailor the ritual of removing negative planes of mind into an opportunity to create a sexual encounter, Shearing often chose to involve his instrument — one of the Kabalarian elite — to assist him in presenting a convincing ritual. He did so for a variety of reasons: the instrument was one of the few Kabalarian members to have lived with both Kabalarian leaders at 1160, so he knew that she was extremely loyal; she was the secretary and bookkeeper of the organization, a position that afforded her respect within the organization; her proclamations helped reinforce a transfer of authority between Parker and Shearing, thereby ensuring her importance to Shearing; and she was the one member who was most frequently in Shearing’s presence, including going with

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191 Shearing had begun engaging in sexually abusive behavior with members of the movement very early in his tenure as leader. Many of the girls he abused were in their early teens but did not press charges for years, even decades, after their molestation (see testimony of Witness #9 and #8 in R. v. Shearing, 1997:816; 667, for example). The reasons for this delayed reaction on the part of the victims extends somewhat beyond the scope of the actual sexual abuse endured by the women, falling more into the area of deconversion theories and why abused members stay in a movement. Generally speaking though, one could theorize that affective bonding (Jacobs, 1989) played a significant role in the women’s slow acceptance of what happened to them, as did Shearing’s charismatic power and members’ unwillingness to admit their belief in an unworthy spiritual teacher. To some degree, each of these factors contributed to their ongoing abuse, but there needs to be much more study concerning the decades of silence that some members maintained to uncover fully the complex dynamics surrounding the issue.

192 Interestingly, Shearing’s instrument also acted as a channel for Parker. Allegedly, soon after his death, Parker spoke to the Kabalarian membership through the instrument and said that Shearing was the new leader of the Kabalarians. The justification used to support this transference of authority was that Shearing displayed an ability to use the instrument as a channel for other minds (Witness #18, R v. Shearing, 1997:1871; 1899-1991), a gift that only the true leader of the movement reputedly had. Despite the instrument being involved as a channel for both Parker and Shearing, there was no consistency in the rituals that she participated in. The rituals that Shearing used with the women followed no set pattern, and changed at his discretion.
him on business trips and vacations.\textsuperscript{193} Furthermore, her role in the Kabalarian elite was twofold: to keep abreast of the inner workings of the movement by monitoring members’ behavior and opinions, and to help maintain Shearing’s public persona of a flawless and dedicated leader. Her function was crucial in sustaining Shearing’s public image of divinely inspired leader, and she fulfilled her dual role by acting as a gatekeeper between Shearing and his members.\textsuperscript{194}

Victims’ testimonies also seemed to indicate that the instrument facilitated the situation of abuse, either directly or indirectly.\textsuperscript{195} On certain occasions she actively helped to create situations where Shearing could take advantage of the movement’s women by starting to channel alleged negative planes of mind, but then leaving Shearing alone with the member under the pretense that it was

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{193} Although Shearing was married, his wife does not figure prominently in the court transcripts, nor was she ever called to the witness stand. One must wonder at her role in facilitating Shearing’s abusive behavior, especially in light of the National Parole Board’s comments that said that Shearing had “admitted to being sexually unfaithful to [his] wife ... [but] that she understood that [he] would use [his] sexual behaviour to [reputedly] help needy women” (NPB, 2003:3).

\textsuperscript{194} In her function as gatekeeper, the instrument maintained a fine balance in members’ exposure to their leader. Galanter (1999) discussed the need for members to believe that they had a personal relationship with their leader, but at the same time, the relationship had to be controlled to lessen the possibility members would see the leader’s flaws. In the case of the Kabalarians, the instrument had the role of maintaining the boundaries so that Shearing was personal and approachable with members, yet was not seen too much, thereby lessening the chance that members would see his imperfections.

\textsuperscript{195} Although no criminal charges were ever brought against the woman Shearing used as an instrument, there were civil proceedings where she was named as a co-defendant, along with Shearing and the estate of Alfred Parker (Supreme Court of British Columbia, 1997:1). In the proceedings, the instrument was said to have “participated in some of the said sexual assaults, batteries and mental and physical abuse committed by Parker” (Supreme Court of British Columbia, 1997:18). While Shearing was not specifically named as the instrument’s associate in these civil proceedings, the plaintiffs described only the allegations involving Parker’s sexual abuse (except for one woman who was said to have been sexually abused by both Parker and Shearing (Supreme Court of British Columbia, 1997, 16). The case was settled out of court, however, with the findings sealed to the public.
\end{footnotesize}
beyond her abilities and Shearing needed time alone to work out the interference. By maintaining that negative planes of mind could be removed through the channeling ritual, the instrument enabled Shearing to capitalize on a fraudulent act to gain sexual access to the women. Moreover, her ignorance of what occurred during Shearing’s private sessions could not be absolute, given her monitoring function within the movement. From the evidence presented at trial, Shearing used her as a means to gain sexual gratification from young women, but he also relied on the trust those women had for her. In essence, Shearing took advantage of his victims’ naïveté, trust, and belief that he and his instrument were acting in their best interests, and of the instrument’s ability to convince members to continue to participate in the clearing rituals.

The believability of the clearing rituals and Shearing’s credibility in the eyes of his followers, however, did reach a critical point in 1995. A grassroots insurrection had begun to form that would, in due course, cause Shearing to lose his revered position as spiritual leader of the Kabalarian Philosophy and be charged with sexually based offenses. Although he had managed to maintain a high level of secrecy around the exploitative relationships he had with the Kabalarian devotees, dissension spread throughout the movement as disenchanted women began to break the bonds of confidentiality that they had sworn to Shearing as dedicated members.

As described in the court documents, the genesis of the disharmony Shearing’s victims felt can be traced back to a single women who felt as though she had been “living a lie” (Witness #4, R. v. Shearing, 1997:318). Believing that this lie was having a negative effect on her life, she had become depressed and highly emotional. Having never spoken of her anguish to anyone before, when her friend, a fellow Kabalarian woman, noticed her friend’s depression and asked her if she was all right, the woman confided some startling news.

[T]he depression was so bad and it was evident so [my friend] asked me what was wrong and I said “I can’t tell you. I don’t know ... I don’t know what’s wrong.” [My friend] said “Does it have anything to do with your
friendship or your association with Ivon Shearing?” And at that point it was like hitting the nail on the head and I burst into tears and proceeded to explain that yes, it was. (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:251)

The woman who first admitted the abuse, however, was filled with anxiety and fear after her candid disclosure. The threats Shearing had made to her over the years flooded back to her, and she became unsure of the consequences of her confession. As she was crying, she reportedly began apologizing to her friend, saying that she was “... so sorry. I’m not allowed to say anything to you because [Shearing] told me if I did I would destroy the person that I told and I would destroy the Philosophy” (Witness #4, R. v. Shearing, 1997:383).

While the impact of Shearing’s threats haunted the woman, her fellow Kabalarian friend began to feel that Shearing had been duplicitous with the members of the group and that she now wanted “[t]o find out the truth” (Witness #4, R. v. Shearing, 1997:318) about Shearing’s claims of fidelity and honesty. Believing that “if [Shearing] in fact had a relationship with a woman such as [her friend], as he did, that [it] ran contrary to the teachings of the Philosophy and therefore he couldn’t have been the spiritual person that ... [everyone] took him for” (Witness #4, R. v. Shearing, 1997:338). Shearing’s hypocritical behavior caused the woman to doubt his sincerity and the purpose of the clearing rituals that were at the heart of the sexual relationship her friend had with Shearing.

Once the woman made the confession though, it was a matter of time before members started to see the flaws in Shearing’s image. As Lalich points out, dissension within a tightly-knit group begins with “br[eaking] the bonds of silence: first with each other; then revealing to the rest of the members what really had been going on behind the scenes” (Lalich, 2004:204). The result of the disclosure was that Kabalarian women began to disobey Shearing’s demand for secrecy about their relationships with him. The Kabalarian devotee who first heard her friend’s revelation began to approach other female members of the Kabalarian Philosophy who had “come to her [earlier] with problems linked to
sexual abuse ... [but] [a]t the time didn’t think that it was with Shearing” (Defense Quoting Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:278), asking them is their sexual abuse was linked to Shearing. Interestingly, although the other women the witness approached never originally claimed that they had any sexual involvement with Shearing, it appears that these women did recognize that their relationships with Shearing were abusive. Support for this argument emerges in the transcripts when reading about the women having spoken their concerns about sexual abuse to another member of the group, without disclosing Shearing’s name.

At this point, however, Shearing’s dominance over the Kabalarian devotees and the demand for secrecy that he had reinforced was still a stronger factor motivating them than was revealing the true nature of their relationship with him. While the feelings of uncertainty and confusion were starting to erode Shearing’s authority, the stability of the group began to wane, which consequentially began to adversely affect group unity and cohesion (see Lalich, 2004:207-218). Even when there was a group of six or eight women who had all admitted that Shearing abused them, these women did not want to involve the police in the matter, preferring to confront Shearing on their own terms. To accomplish this goal, the women approached a well-respected member of the movement, who was also a lawyer, to gain advice.

The lawyer, a member loyal to Shearing and the movement, took “sworn statements from [the women and] ... state[d] that he was [going to] try ... to contain the situation with regard to complaints being made to the police” (Witness #1, R. v. Shearing, 1997:27). Not surprisingly, the lawyer did not offer to bring these statements to an outside authority, believing that he should report the dissension amongst members directly to Shearing. By informing Shearing of this growing dissatisfaction within the group, Shearing could then choose how best to handle the situation to his advantage. While it appeared that Shearing would have to placate the women in some sense to regain his control over
Shearing likely believed that this was not an unlikely possibility since the disenchanted members continued to demonstrate some allegiance to him by wanting to deal with him within the confines of the Kabalarian Philosophy.

Continuing to act on Shearing’s behalf, the lawyer recommended to the women that they declare what they would like to see as a final resolution to the situation. In response, the women believed that if Shearing, his wife, and the instrument “resign[ed] as members of the Philosophy ... [and] that Ivon [Shearing] le[ft] Canada and [did] not return” (Witness #1, R. v. Shearing, 1997:28), then the situation would be resolved. At the same time that the lawyer was trying to deal with the women, however, he also was advising Shearing that “if he had any travel plans abroad, now would be a good time to take them” (Witness #1, R. v. Shearing, 1997:12). The lawyer’s loyalty to the women, therefore, seems to be in Shearing’s favor since his actions suggested that his main concern was protecting his leader from police action.197

Although Shearing proclaimed “that a conspiracy was being formed to see him ousted from the organization” (Witness #1, R. v. Shearing, 1997:18), and he admitted to no wrong-doing, he was anxious to meet the demands of the group to avoid police involvement. In a shocking turn of events, however, Shearing and the women both lost control over the situation when a single devotee did not believe that Shearing should be dealt with internally. “It wasn’t something [the

196 Although mere speculation, it seems probable that Shearing realized that even if he did not regain his control over them that the allegations would prove to be disastrous to him personally. The transcripts record a conversation that Shearing had with a witness that demonstrates his willingness to “to be assessed [at an undisclosed but reputable clinic] ... if that’s what, you know, it took to meet [the women’s] demands” (Witness #1, R. v. Shearing, 1997:23). Shearing appeared to be aware that if the women brought the allegations to the police that the consequences to him would be detrimental.

197 To my knowledge, the police did not bring any charges of obstruction of justice against the lawyer either. Perhaps the lack of any other charges being laid suggests that the prosecution did not believe that there was a high degree of probability in convicting any of Shearing’s accomplices.
members] could fix any more [sic] inside the organization. I didn’t want to be
dragged into that kind of situation. It needed to be in the hands of the law”
(Witness #8, R. v. Shearing, 1997:703). Moreover, the woman felt that “[i]t
[w]as time [Shearing’s abusive acts] came out into the public forum for debate.
It [wa]s so wrong” (Witness #8, R. v. Shearing, 1997:705). The woman did not
tell the other victimized women what she had done, but they soon discovered
that she had approached the police when the CBC\textsuperscript{198} broke the story. The media
account reported that the leader of the Kabalarian Philosophy had been sexual
abusing his female devotees (Witness #1, R. v. Shearing, 1997:23), and from
that moment on, police involvement was guaranteed, resulting in all the
members within the complainant group eventually pressing charges against
Shearing.

While the transcripts of Shearing’s criminal trial present him as a man who
embraced charismatic authority and the power and opportunities that the role
afforded him, the transcripts also show him as a manipulative leader who
exploited his members’ vulnerabilities and faith in him. Although the violence
Shearing perpetrated manifested itself solely against the women of the
Kabalarian Philosophy and not to anyone outside the group, Shearing’s sexual
abuse left a wake of damage that extended far beyond his victims’ pain:
members who had allegiance to the movement’s spiritual principles were forced
to re-evaluate their beliefs in the face of their leader’s criminal conviction and to
reassess the relationships they had with family and friends.

Moreover, Shearing’s actions demonstrate religious violence in the context
of charismatic leadership while adding to the canon on religious violence. The
group also presents researchers with another opportunity to view the dynamics
of religious violence and examine the internal dynamics influencing Shearing’s
abusive behavior. Although few people seem to remember Shearing’s criminal

\textsuperscript{198} An acronym for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the CBC is a national television station
whose reporters have a significant reputation for investigative journalism.
acts and his conviction, the Kabalarian Philosophy shaped Canada’s diverse, and often misunderstood, religious landscape by drawing the public’s attention to this movement’s predatory and opportunistic leader, as well as to the parallels found within other violent New Religious Movements.
Conclusion

Throughout this research, my aim was to establish a solid theoretical foundation from which to examine the Kabalarian Philosophy and its leaders, Alfred J. Parker and Ivon Shearing. By tracing the history of the movement from its foundation to the present — a seventy-year evolution — and exploring the major milestones of the movement, including the death of Parker and Shearing’s ascension to leader of the movement, the resulting picture demonstrated a coherent understanding of the movement. This historical framework, coupled with a systematic analysis of the movement’s fundamental theological principles, revealed the worldview within which Shearing operated, and established the context for his later manipulation and abuse of members. Using his supposedly divine understanding of esoteric teachings to remove negative planes of mind, Shearing skillfully justified his sexually exploitative behavior by relying on his charismatic authority and unchallenged status within the movement.

According to the characteristics and traits presented in Max Weber, Len Oakes, and Anthony Storr’s theories with regards to charisma, both Parker and Shearing displayed charismatic qualities that set them apart from other individuals. Moreover, the devotees of these men recognized their leaders’ unique qualities, and attributed supernatural and extraordinary abilities to them as a result. Once others identified and acknowledged the charismatic individual’s qualities, an unequal relationship developed where the leader was no longer seen as a member’s peer, but rather as someone with a higher status. Charismatic authority, therefore, derives in part from others’ recognition of ‘specialness’ and their willful dependence on what they perceive is a leader’s divine understanding. As Richard M. Emerson states, “power resides implicitly in the other’s dependency” (Emerson, 1962:32; italics in original). When a charismatic leader relies on this dependence to coerce female members into engaging in sexual acts, this dependence is detrimental to the member’s overall well-being, as it was to the victimized Kabalarian women.
The sexual exploitation perpetrated by Shearing, however, also depended on endogenous and exogenous factors coalescing, allowing potentially abusive situations to occur and, in Shearing’s case, targeted towards those women that he felt would keep the secret. Robbins and Anthony provide compelling theories and elements that can often indicate situations of violence, and these elements prove to be enlightening regarding the Kabalarians’ movement. Notably, the Kabalarians had an authoritarian and charismatic leadership structure and style; the rituals performed in the movement provided a theological basis for abusive behavior; and the degree of social stigmatization the members of the Philosophy endured from non-Kabalarians contributed to the Shearing’s ability to create an environment where he could sexually exploit the female members of the group.

Shearing’s secretive abuse of young Kabalarian women, beginning as early as 1966, was an undercurrent that ran through the leader’s two-decade-long tenure. While he skillfully manipulated his devotees’ trust and the movement’s esoteric teachings to his sexual advantage, Shearing publicly professed the spiritual advantages of sexual restrictiveness and mental control. The contradiction between his actions and his proclamations, however, only became public record during his 1997 criminal trial, when it became known that he systematically abused at least eleven female Kabalarian members. Shearing’s ability to ensure secrecy concerning his abusive behavior and keep members from discussing their circumstances with other members through the use of esoteric doctrine, monitoring activities, and threats, led each of his victims to believe that she was alone in experiencing Shearing’s sexual attention, rather than being one amongst a group of almost a dozen other women. The secrecy Shearing demanded from his victims, however, could not be maintained in the face of their disenchantment at discovering his long-standing, hypocritical, sexual attitudes and behavior.

While only eleven women came forward to testify against Shearing, there is a strong possibility that other members in the Kabalarian Philosophy did experience a sexually exploitive relationship with Shearing, but chose not to come forward.
Other than those women who suffered Shearing's sexual acts, no one outside of the group realized the underlying and ongoing sexual violence occurring within the movement. Certainly, the movement had drawn little attention from the public prior to the news of the leader being charged with sexual offences against his followers. The Kabalarians, overall, remained relatively unnoticed by society. Despite the public trial, though, the movement has regained its anonymity. Indeed, only a short time after the leader’s conviction, few people even remember Shearing’s exploitative behavior, and even fewer, anything about the Kabalarians. It stands to reason then, that Shearing’s actions (however illegal) and the Kabalarian Philosophy have not been the focus of continued or significant periods of extreme social stigmatization, persecution, or long-lasting outward hostility.

So what were the circumstances surrounding the victims’ abuse? How was Shearing able to engage in manipulative sexual acts with his devoted followers for extended periods of time without anyone realizing what was occurring within the movement? A partial answer stems from the confluence of several factors, including charismatic leadership, power differentials, the use of esoteric doctrine, and endogenous and exogenous restrictions, but Shearing’s ability to sexually exploit his female members also relied significantly on his skill at convincing his victims to remain silent about their relationship with him. With the court transcripts acting as a primary source documenting the sexual abuse and the dissension within the Kabalarian Philosophy, while secondary academic sources provide the theoretical framework against which the Kabalarians’ situation was compared, Shearing’s spiritual rhetoric reveals itself as a collection of opportunistic and self-serving proclamations.

To establish an environment where Shearing could take sexual advantage of his members, he created the situation where members felt both socially isolated and dependent on his involvement in every aspect of their daily lives. Consequently, Shearing demanded that members of the Kabalarians maintain a publicly quiet life, limiting their interaction with non-members, and that members
live close to the Kabalarian headquarters. In addition, Shearing also required that members participate in as many group-sponsored events as possible, and embrace his lifestyle and theological demands completely. Since members were taught that it was a privilege to spend time with Shearing, every event was an opportunity to learn from the divinely-inspired leader. Shearing also taught members that the Kabalarian Philosophy offered members protection from the dangerous and ignorant outside world, so long as they dedicated themselves to the Kabalarian worldview.

As a consequence of Shearing’s teachings and requirements for membership in the Kabalarian Philosophy, the Kabalarians were a unified group that was closely monitored by him and his elite. Shearing managed to keep his members from discussing their sexual experiences with him by convincing them that they were unique amongst his other followers. The devotee’s sense of being selected as special by the leader of the movement was a compelling reason to maintain the secret, especially since they believed that revealing their secret would cause them to lose their special status in the group if others learnt about their relationship. The result of restricting members’ capacity to interact with other members while monitoring their behavior was that Shearing’s sexual behavior towards female devotees remained virtually unknown to outsiders until one of the sexually abused Kabalarian women approached the police to press charges against Shearing. Had she not approached an outside agency, it seems possible Shearing could have continued his secretive abuse for decades, since the general consensus of the other women he abused was to deal with the situation internally. Although the women would likely have demanded that Shearing step down as leader of the movement, it seems probable that all but one of the women would have taken their complaints to the Kabalarian elite to deal with, rather than the police.

For the short time that the Kabalarian Philosophy drew the public’s attention, the media followed the trial and the accounts of abuse with great interest. The fervor that Shearing’s actions caused, however, was short-lived. In
this respect, the Kabalarian Philosophy under Shearing’s tenure specifically, was fairly unremarkable, neither challenging society’s overall stereotypical understanding of cults significantly, nor broadening society’s appreciation for the complex dynamics that can lead to religious abuse. Ultimately, however, the Kabalarian Philosophy presented researchers with an unfortunate opportunity to add to the growing understanding of sexual violence perpetrated by charismatic and authoritarian leaders.

Figuring prominently in the analysis of religious violence, therefore, was Shearing’s ability to create and capitalize on his female followers’ commitment and devotion to him. The intimate nature of his relationships and the affective bonding that he nurtured with his devotees (specifically with the women), provided situations where Shearing capitalized on his followers’ vulnerabilities. Idealizing their relationship with Shearing, female devotees thought that he was the head of their spiritual family, where all the members came together and belonged to a larger, meaningful organization. Since (female) members of the Kabalarian Philosophy conceptualized Shearing as the “father figure” (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:264) of the group, they thought that he offered them support, protection, and guidance in a world filled with disembodied minds and negative mental interferences.

To the members of the Philosophy, Shearing (and before him Parker) was the embodiment of love, wisdom, and perfection, under whom they could experience spirituality, safety, and nurture. Acting on their convictions, whole families became members of the Kabalarian Philosophy with the hope that their membership would lead to spiritual advancement. As head of the movement, Shearing reinforced the familial imagery found in the group by telling his children/members what to wear, how to behave, where to work, with whom to socialize, who to date, and most significantly, when to have sexual relations — even for married couples. The restrictions that Shearing placed on his members — most prominently regarding sexuality, but also including members’ beliefs, behavior, and interaction with non-Kabalarians — not only increased his control
over their daily lives, but also, disempowered his followers by diminishing their ability to make choices.

In part because of the familial tone underlying members’ interaction with Shearing and the other members, he met little resistance as he sought to convince females to engage in sexual activities that he claimed were for their spiritual and emotional welfare. The primary purpose (according to Shearing) for the rules and regulations that he established for the members was, ironically, to gain control over one’s own body, mind, and sexuality. Shearing always taught that sex “depleted [an individual so] [i]n order to be ... a strong student in the organization [an individual] needed to be vital. ... [A]ny sexual activity, [including] having an orgasm or ejaculation would deplete that vitality” (Witness #6, R. v. Shearing, 1997:525). For Shearing’s followers, the obvious consequence that resulted from sexual depletion was that spiritual enlightenment suffered.

The connection that Shearing created between spirituality and sexuality became so blurred, that sexual acts became the means through which he ultimately dominated his followers. Since the rules concerning sexual interaction were solely at Shearing’s charismatic discretion, his spiritual justifications about sex with members were virtually infallible ways to achieve his own sexual gratification. Moreover, Shearing permitted or forbade sexual activity, depending on the positive or negative feedback he received from his monitoring activities of potential and ongoing victims.

Examples of Shearing’s unpredictable attitude regarding sexual behavior, and the supposedly esoteric justifications that he used to explain his own sexual behavior, appeared throughout the trial transcripts. Perhaps the most riveting testimony presented during the trial was when one of his victims stated that Shearing: “didn’t need ... sexual gratification, [since] ... he could control his seed. ... [T]he very thing that makes the rest of us women pregnant, ... [Shearing] could control that. That he — his sexual power he could direct with his mind to the higher plane [of existence]” (Witness #8, R. v. Shearing, 1997:700). This
statement exemplified Shearing’s hubris, while also demonstrating the level of believability and trust that Shearing commanded within the Kabalarian Philosophy. Without the dedication and faith that members had in Shearing, he would have been unable to convince members of his otherwise implausible claims. Shearing’s recognition that many non-Kabalarians would have found his claims problematic, however, was a compelling reason for him not to write down his esoteric theological teachings.

While Shearing based his actions on supposedly spiritual insights and the alleged existence of negative planes of mind, his victims relied solely on his interpretations and what he declared they needed to achieve enlightenment. The dependence that the members demonstrated gave Shearing power over their lives, and made them vulnerable to his suggestions. When Shearing made statements about the followers’ mental fortitude, therefore, his proclamations were taken seriously. Shearing, in the company of his instrument, told one seventeen-year-old member during a:

mental demonstration ... [that] they [had] picked up a disembodied plane off [her] that had a desire to be raped. And then they brought out a couple of other [negative planes of mind], but that one is the one [she] remember[ed] because when [the instrument] left [Shearing] told [her] that [she] must have [had] a desire to be raped. (Witness #12, R. v. Shearing, 1997:1085)

By suggesting that the dedicated Kabalarian member was somehow responsible for the negative planes of mind that affected her, Shearing was able to justify his sexual behavior towards her as a cathartic and clearing ritual.

Shearing capitalized on and manipulated the victim’s trust in him by implying that unless she rid herself of her desire to be raped, she would always suffer from debilitating mental interference. The pretense of relieving the member’s fears permitted Shearing to act in ways that the devotee would not criticize or object to, since Shearing had convinced her that positive results
depended on her compliance. For devotees, the esoteric rhetoric with which Shearing justified his actions was beyond critical analysis or rational explanation.

The familiarity of this pattern in charismatically-led movements suggests that trust and dedication can lead to exploitation, even in a religious setting. The emotional impact that Shearing’s sexually abusive actions had on members was undeniably detrimental to the members’ ability to make informed decisions and to function critically in society. Under Shearing’s control, the women of the Kabalarian Philosophy submitted to sexually manipulative acts that affected their relationships with their families, their classmates, their boyfriends, or in some circumstances, their husbands. In one case, the victim had a sexual relationship with Shearing “from 1978 till 1994 ... [with the] last encounter [being] a week before [her] wedding” (Witness #3, R. v. Shearing, 1997:255-256). Clearly, the woman’s vulnerability demonstrated the dedication and loyalty that she felt for Shearing, as well as the pervasiveness of his influence in shaping her worldview and affecting her daily life.

As leader of the Kabalarian Philosophy, Shearing’s position of power afforded him unparalleled involvement in members’ daily lives, control over their beliefs, virtually unrestricted sexual access to women (and girls) convinced of his special abilities and insights, and the authority to change the group’s theology or practices to suit his own needs. Building upon the charismatic foundation laid out by Parker through a direct transference of charismatic authority by designation (Weber, On Charisma, 1968:55-56), Shearing systematically took control of the Kabalarian movement, manipulating and reinterpreting several of the group’s fundamental principles to elicit sexual gratification from his devotees without their direct consent.200

200 Important to underscore here is that a jury found Shearing guilty on multiple sexual offenses, where the victims all said that they would not have consented to the sexual interaction they had with him if they had known that it was for his own sexual gratification (cf. Witness #11, R. v. Shearing, 1997:797; 966). This illustrates the systematic way he manipulated his authority and position to achieve his self-serving goals. In addition, consent in this example, is understood
Although Shearing attempted to justify his actions to his victims by saying that he was trying to establish a link between them and the Principle on a spiritual level, he also said on occasion that “he was trying to replace [the victim’s] negative, distorted concept, sexual concept with a positive concept…. [H]e needed to do th[o]se physical things to [his victims] in order to replace the negative entities with positive — with a positivity [sic]” (Witness #9, R. v. Shearing, 1997:813). By hiding his actions from the public and the other members of the Kabalarian Philosophy, Shearing clearly demonstrated reluctance in revealing certain doctrines from both non-Kabalarians and Kabalarians, alike. Similar to the sexual violence demonstrated in the Branch Davidians and the Peoples Temple, the Kabalarian Philosophy’s leader used esoteric doctrines and charismatic authority to rationalize the sexual manipulation and abuse that he perpetrated against his own members. As with those two leaders, Shearing needed to satiate his own sexual desires at whatever cost, and demonstrated little concern for the damage that he caused to his devotees.

The National Parole Board of Canada’s 2003 report best expresses Shearing’s lack of concern for his members, denial of wrong-doing, and his lack of remorse for his actions (NPB, 2003:3). As part of an evaluation concerning Shearing’s eligibility for parole, this document stated that he:

abused [his] social standing and position of authority by sexually molesting young girls in a church society … [and found that] [s]hould [he] be able to get [himself] into a place of power and authority, he [would] manipulate potential victims into compliance and ensure secrecy around [his] behavior. ... [In addition, the psychologist found Shearing to be] highly manipulative, even during the interview process. She found that [his] insight was shallow and self-serving ... describing [his] presentation as

within the context of the bounded choice model, which allows for a limited decision-making ability within a certain worldview. For further discussion, see note 159.
remarkably selfish, egocentric and narcissistic. [The psychologist] concluded that [he] was an entrenched sex offender, who was both dangerous and predatory. (NPB, 2003:3)

The Board’s conclusion is a telling testament encapsulating Shearing’s violent legacy and the power of his abusive charm, but it does not establish — with certainty — qualities that necessarily indicate sexually abusive NRMs. Not all authoritarian or charismatically-led NRMs necessarily have violent undercurrents, but equally, not all violent (or sexually violent) NRMs require a catalytic event to set in motion systemic abuse. What the Board’s conclusion does acknowledge and underscore, however, is that given the same set of circumstances, there is a high probability that Shearing would re-engage in his abusive pattern of behavior, using theological justifications, charismatic authority, increased monitoring, and his power within the movement to exploit his members’ adulation.

So what can we ultimately learn from Ivon Shearing and the Kabalarian Philosophy? Certainly, the analysis of Shearing’s behavior contributes to an understanding of charismatic leaders, their power within the organizations they lead, and the sense of entitlement that drives these authoritarian leaders, but the Kabalarians provide little in the way of establishing a predictive model indicating situations where sexual violence exists: Shearing and his members gave outsiders no reason to suspect the violence that permeated the private lives of many of the female members. This is an important point to underscore because there seems to be a pervading hope that such sexually abusive situations can be prevented. Essentially, the Kabalarian Philosophy’s case emphasized that the abused women needed to assert themselves against their leader’s domination and control before they could realize that his behavior towards them was inappropriate and sexually — rather than spiritually — based. Perhaps the most interesting aspect to Shearing’s criminal conviction, therefore, is the disintegration of Shearing’s control and the monitoring system that Shearing had expressly created to avoid his behavior ever being criticized.
When examining the court transcripts, the dissolution of Shearing’s control appears as a thread that eventually unraveled his authority in the authoritarian group, and also undermined the spiritual credibility of his teachings. When one looks at any of the material discussing the Kabalarian Philosophy, there is a complete absence of material that mentions Ivon Shearing in any capacity. All of the material available online deals exclusively with Alfred Parker, and any direct acknowledgment of Shearing’s twenty-five-year tenure as leader of the movement has been carefully omitted. Stemming from one member’s inability to continue to live a lie (Witness #4, R. v. Shearing, 1997:318), Shearing’s downfall was the result of him not being able to convincingly maintain influence over the devotee’s belief that the relationship between them was special and needed to be kept secret from other members. Only after the emotional strain the one devotee experienced became overwhelming did she speak of her abusive relationship with Shearing to another member, and even then, with great reluctance since she thought that by breaking the secret, she was damning both the other member and the whole Kabalarian movement. The disenchantment the woman felt, however, unknowingly was echoed by numerous other women in the Kabalarian Philosophy. Shearing’s ability to convince his victims that their relationship was unique and needed to be protected from the jealousy and misinterpretation of others, seems to have been the cornerstone of his abusive behavior. When this cornerstone crumbled, so too did his capacity to quell his victims’ desire to discuss their experiences within the Philosophy with other members, leading to his disintegration of power.

As the Kabalarian women demonstrated by their initial reluctance to draw the authorities into the situation, however, asserting themselves against their powerful charismatic leader was a difficult endeavor. Although it remains uncertain whether Shearing’s sexual violence would ever have become public knowledge had a single Kabalarian woman decided that their leader’s actions needed to be dealt with by the police rather than within the organization itself, Shearing’s control over the Kabalarian Philosophy had begun to collapse. Had the
woman not brought her story to the police’s attention, the possibility exists that Shearing might have continued on as the spiritual leader of the Kabalarians indefinitely. A reasonable theory to suggest here is that discontent from within the membership of such a socially isolating group may be the only way of ousting an abusive and manipulative leader. In Shearing’s case, the Kabalarian members realized the hypocrisy in their leader’s teachings and behavior. The devotees made the difficult acknowledgement that Shearing’s spirituality was entrenched in the pedestrian ideal of self-gratification — a realization that ultimately led to his downfall and exposure as a man who was far less divine than members had ever believed he was. The incongruity between the Kabalarian Philosophy’s peaceful public image and Ivon Shearing’s criminal behavior serves to highlight the need to continue researching the complex dynamics found in New Religious Movements, especially those where evidence of sexual abuse is proven.
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