

**PERSONALITY CHANGES IN SCIENTOLOGISTS:  
EFFECTS OF MEMBERSHIP**

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**ABSTRACT**

In an attempt to discover the effects of long-term membership of Scientology, 48 members were administered a series of personality measures, including the Adjective Check List, the Purpose in Life test, and the Barron Ego-Strength scale of the MMPI. Semantic differentials seeking responses on the respondent's situation prior to joining Scientology and demographic data were also administered. Results of correlations (partialled for age) between personality measures and time in the movement suggest that there was a significant increase in social ease and in effectiveness of goal-directed behaviour. Data also indicated that members were unlikely to have been unhappy or unstable prior to joining. These findings suggest that the negative aspects reported by some authors of membership in Scientology are not apparent in this sample, and that there may in fact be some benefits accrued to long-term members.

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The Church of Scientology holds an interesting position among the so called "new" religious movements, having developed in the late 1940's rather than coming into prominence in the early 1970's as have most other movements. Nevertheless, it has been classified as a "cult" by a number of authors (West & Singer, 1980; Schwartz & Kaslow, 1981) and it has been argued that members are likely to be psychologically devastated, economically exploited and to lose their ability to distinguish reality from imagination (Conway & Siegelman, 1979). On the other hand, Scientology claims to be able to raise an individual to higher levels of being through a technique known as "auditing", analogous to psychotherapy, which may enable transcendence of all traumas of the past, and at higher levels the ability to experience events in past lives or to externalise the mind into the bodies of other. (Brice & deCelle, 1978).

A recent major study of Scientology by Wallis (1977) describes it as offering a set of theories which explain the situation of the individual in this life and provide means of achieving relief from psychological and psychosomatic disabilities, and means for improvement of efficiency. Wallis goes on to note that as the belief system (Dianetics) developed from a lay psychotherapeutic system to a religious doctrine, it drew a great deal of hostility from the mental health professions which was subsequently reciprocated. In some states, Scientology was banned as being "evil; its techniques evil; its practice a serious threat to the community, medically, morally

and socially; and its adherents sadly deludes and often mentally ill" (Anderson, 1965).

Such claims and counter-claims are disturbing given that they are supported by little if any empirical evidence. Given the opposition of Scientology until recently to many mental health professionals, and vice versa, it has been difficult if not impossible to obtain co-operation in order to obtain such evidence. However, as Wallis has noted, there are signs that Scientology has in the last decade come to be recognised as a legitimate and valid religious collectivity. This change public attitude prompted the present study, which investigates the effects of membership of Scientology on personality.

### **Method**

This study investigated the effects of Scientology membership using correlations, partialled for age, between length of time in Scientology and scores on a number of measures of personality, including the Adjective Check List (ACL) (Gough & Heilbrun, 1980), the Barron Ego-strength scale of the MMPI (Es) (Barron, 1953), and the Purpose in Life Scale (PIL) (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964). A number of demographic and attitudinal variables, including nature of first contact with Scientology, time between contact and getting involved in training, religious background, other religions investigated, drug history, living arrangements, parents' reaction to Scientology, mental stability and happiness before and after joining, and relationship with parents and happiness of parent's marriage before joining the movement, were assessed on nine-point semantic differential scales.

Subjects were obtained by taking one hundred names at random from the records of the Church of Scientology in Melbourne, Australia from a list supplied which included some three hundred of those who had been members for three years or longer. Questionnaires with a covering letter were then sent direct to these individuals, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope for their return. Two were returned undeliverable, and 48 completed questionnaires were subsequently returned, a rate of 49%. The ACL, Es and PIL were scored by a research assistant blind to the source of the instruments, and coded for computer analysis.

Analysis consisted of the computation of mean, median, standard deviation and range for those scales which contained interval or ratio data, tabulation of ordinal data, and computation of partial correlations (partialled for age) for time in Scientology with the scales of the ACL, and with the Es and PIL. Partial correlations were also computed between time in Scientology and the semantic differential scales assessing attitudes.

### **Sample**

The sample consisted of 24 men and 24 women, with a mean age of 40.2 years, SD 15.1, median 35.8: range of ages was 16 to 72, with time in Scientology being a mean of 14.6 years, SD 8.0, and range 2.5 to 30.0. Thirty-four of the samples were married, seven single and seven separated, divorced or widowed. Most common occupations were office and sales workers (29.2%), proprietors and managers, and skilled workers (18.8% each), and professionals and housewives (10.4%). Parental

occupation was for 86.4% skilled workers or above, with 45.4% having parents who were office and sales workers or proprietors and managers. Modal education was completion of secondary schooling (68.1%), with the remainder having had some tertiary education or being graduates.

### Results

Data indicated that most respondents (68.8%) had made contact with scientology via friends or relatives, 25% via advertisements or publications, and 3 were born into it. None had been contacted on the street. Most (82.2%) had got "on lines" (become members) and commenced auditing within a year, 33.3% within a month. Church of upbringing was Church of England (29.2%), Uniting Church (33.3%), and Roman Catholic (14.6%), with between one and four individuals indicating they were brought up as Scientologists, Jewish, Mohammedan, Salvation Army and Dutch Reformed Church members, or with no religion. Mean number of religions investigated before Scientology was 1.9, SD 2.4: a large minority (41.7%) indicated they had not investigated any religion prior to joining. The majority had been born in Australia (72.9%), roughly equivalent to the figures for the general population (79.4% in 1981). Drug history was uncommon in the majority, with 60.4% having none, 8.3% soft drugs only, and 31.3% hard drugs or an extensive drug history.

Table 1

Partial Correlations of Personality and Attitude Scales  
with Time in Scientology

ACL: Favourable Items	.33
*	
Self-confidence	.25
Unfavourable Items	-.27
Personal Adjustment	.20
Communality	.20
Ideal Self	.22
Achievement	

	.18
Creative Personality	.19
Dominance	.13
Military Leadership	.51
**	
Endurance	.47
**	
Masculine Attributes	.09
Order	.41
**	
Feminine Attributes	.33
*	
Intraception	.34
*	
Critical Parent	.05
Nurturance	.39
**	
Nurturing Parent	.44
*	
Affiliation	.29
*	
Adult	.15

Heterosexuality	.10
Free Child	-.25
Exhibition	-.02
Adapted Child	.06
Autonomy	-.07
A-1	.03
Aggression	-.20
A-2	-.09
Change	-.05
A-3	.29
* Succorance	-.29
* A-4	.40
** Abasement	.03

Deference	.20
Barron Es Scale	.15
Counseling Readiness	.09
Self Control	-.14
Purpose in Life Scale	.13

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

Prior to joining Scientology, the modal occupation had been skilled workers (25%), with office and sales workers and students (20% each) following. These occupations are similar to those occupations reported for parents, and for present occupation.

On the nine-point semantic differential scales, it appeared that respondents had a generally good reaction to being Scientologists from their family and parents (mean 2.9, SD 1.9: 1 = accept), had not come from particularly religious families (mean 4.5, SD 2.3: 1 = not at all religious), nor were religious as children (mean 4.5, SD 2.3: 1 = not at all religious). Respondents also reported that they were not particularly unhappy before joining Scientology (mean 4.5, SD 2.3: 1 = not at all happy) not mentally unstable (mean 5.6, Sd 2.5: 1 - not at all mentally stable). The same type of normal curve response was obtained for the happiness of the parents' marriage (mean 4.5, SD 2.2: 1 = very happy), for happiness in adolescence (mean 4.3, SD 2.2: 1 = very happy), for relationship with parents in the six months prior to joining Scientology (mean 3.3, SD 2.2: 1 = very good) and for meaningfulness in life in the six months prior to joining Scientology (mean 4.8, Sd 2.4: 1 = a lot). In all of the semantic differentials, actual response range was from 1 to 9, indicating that the full spectrum of responses had been covered. Correlations (unpartialled) between the

semantic differential scales and time in the movement were all nonsignificant ( $P < .05$ ) with the exception of drug history ( $r = -.67$ ), indicating that the longer in the movement, the less severe drug history prior to entry. Score on the Es scale, produced a mean of  $50.6 \pm 3.5$ , on the PIL  $126.0 \pm 7.8$ . On all the scales of the ACL, the scores of the respondents fell within  $\pm 1$  SD of the normative sample (mean number items checked,  $86.4 \pm 43.1$ , Md 82.0).

## Discussion

In discussing these data, it must be recognised that potential bias may arise from a response rate of about half. While this is common in questionnaire research, it is uncertain how it may effect results. In the present study, it may be that the antipathy felt by many Scientologists to the discipline of psychiatry may have had some bearing: systematic bias of data is unlikely if this is the case.

These data do not support many of the popular conceptions of Scientology as being a negative influence on personality development. Nor do they support the view that entrants into Scientology are unusual with regard to their previous history. The majority of members came from middle class backgrounds, from households which were not particularly religious, and tended not to be particularly religious themselves. Their lives prior to joining Scientology did not appear to be particularly unhappy or unstable, nor did they appear to be seeking meaning in life through other religions. Of particular interest is the fact that most investigated none or only one other religion, and the majority had no drug history. These data do suggest that most joined Scientology out of interest (the majority heard of it from others, rather than being approached): in sum, they reinforce the impression that investigation and membership were not motivated by instability, unhappiness or coercion. Membership appears to embrace the middle class, small business background, and most were employed when they got involved in the Church.

Data on the ACL Scales was used to investigate the effects on personality of time in the movement, given that a heterogeneous range of times in the movement was obtained. Results, partialled to control for age (Table 1) are interesting in that they do consistently suggest that there are benefits from membership of Scientology. Those who had been in the movement longer had a more favourable view of themselves, and on the need scales had increased their need for Endurance (sense of duty and conscientious work), Order (objective and rational), Intraception (possessing foresight, logic and insight), Nurturance (co-operation and sympathy), Affiliation (liking for people and social comfort) and a decrease in Succorance (high scorers demonstrate inadequacy in coping with stress and crises). The greatest increase over time in the movement was in the Military Leadership scale (orientation toward duty and obligations). Significant were also apparent on the Nurturing Parent scale of the group of Transactional Analysis scales (preference for continuity and old values), and the Feminine Attributes scale (sympathetic manner and positive reactions from others). The Origence-Intellectance scales also produced two significant correlations: A-3 (unpretentious and uncomplicated) and A-4 (analytic and self-disciplined). These results all point toward the conclusion that increasing time in Scientology gives rise to greater social ease and an increase in goal-directed,

organised behaviour, controlling for changes with age. This latter point suggests that increasing time in the movement is an effective training for increasing conscientiousness and industriousness and in pursuing objectives in a fairly single-minded way.

None of the ACL scale means were more than one standard deviation from the mean of the norms, suggesting that the respondents were well within the normal range as a group. Similarly, while it has previously been argued that membership of "cults" such as the Church of Scientology leads to ego disintegration, the scores on the Es scale were well within the normal range reported by Barron (1953). However, it must be noted that the Es scale was developed to predict response to psychotherapy, and it may be that if Scientology functions in a psychotherapeutic manner, those who do well stay longer. Results on the PIL scale indicate that Scientologists scored considerably higher than members of conventional religious denominations (Meler & Edwards, 1974) or committed Christians (Soderstrom & Wright, 1977) (both groups having mean scores in the range 107 to 116).

In summary, the disastrous consequences and ego disintegration reported by some authors for membership of the Church of Scientology cannot be demonstrated in this sample. In fact, quite the opposite result was found, with statistically significant improvement in social ease and in goal-directed behaviour being demonstrated. This tends to support the claim noted by Wallis (1977) that Scientology is a means for improvement of efficiency. The argument that profiles might have been "faked good" is not supported by the normal range of scores on each scale, and by the fact that if "faking good" had occurred, the results of the correlations of time in the movement, partialled for age, would have been in all probability non-significant as a result of lack of differentiation of profiles across time in the movement. Additionally, the communality score (a check for unreliable or randomly completed profiles) was within the normal range.

Nevertheless, some cautions are also in order with regard to these data. The sample is small, and consists of individuals who have been members of Scientology for a number of years: as a consequence, it is not possible to generalise to new entrants or those who do not continue in the movement. Results are in all probability a function of identification with the movement and the meaning in the life of the individual provided by it and might be expected to occur in other more conventional religious groups as well. However, despite these qualifications, the view expressed by some authors of membership of the Church of Scientology leading to personality disintegration and mental illness cannot be verified by the present study: if any conclusion is to be drawn it may be in the opposite direction. While this study reports on the personality of Scientologists using conventional psychometric indices of personality for the first time, further research replicating these findings is clearly necessary, given that there are no previous data on this group.

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