

Leaving the Cooneyites: Analysis of the Leaving Process for Long-term Members of a Sect

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Persons who become members of sects through birthright may be unique. They are not joiners through choice and coercion does not play a part in their early participation. An examination of these persons as leavers permits the setting aside of the debate about voluntary and coercive recruitment as an influence in the process of leaving (Barker, 1984). In the second generation of a sect there will be some members who did not choose membership and they will not have been coerced into membership. Murray refers to them becoming members by default (1995:46). We prefer to think of them as persons who become members through the process of being socialised within and by the sect. In other words, from birth or a very young age they are social products of the sect. This research deals with seven former members of the Cooneyite sect whose backgrounds manifest this pattern of socialisation. They were raised in the sect from birth or an early age.

Besides the goal of learning about the leaving process for the Cooneyite sect, a religious group about which very little is known, the research was guided by two underlying questions: (1) Is the process of leaving sects the same for birthright members and those who become involved as young children as it is for those who join as young persons and adults? (2) Is the process of leaving sects basically similar to the process of leaving mainstream churches?

Most of the research evidence about leaving sects comes from studies of persons who joined as young persons or adults (Wright, 1987:57). For these persons, there is clear evidence about the significance of length of membership. The length of time in a sect is strongly related to the decision to stay or leave. Leavers often spend less than one year in the sect (Ungerleider and Wellisch, 1979:280) Only a little evidence is available about what sect leaving is like for birthright members and those who were involved from childhood. Research on the Shaker sect, for example, reveals that a second generation problem is experienced when large numbers of younger members leave the sect. Some of the second generation members will be those persons who grew up in the sect. They may have been brought in at a relatively young age by their parents or recruited from orphanages as the Shakers did. (The Shakers who practised celibacy had no true birthright members.) High proportions of these second generation members leave. In the case of the Shakers, the longer the young people had been in the community during their childhood, the more likely

they were to leave. Shaker socialisation of children did not result in high maintenance of membership during adulthood. In adulthood those children raised by the Shakers did not stay as long as those who joined as adults. Being Shaker children discouraged people from becoming committed long-term Shaker adults (Murray, 1995: 40, 43 and 46).

Much of the research about sect leaving has focused upon specific issues such as brainwashing, coercion and deprogramming (Bromley and Richardson, 1983). Although this research usually provides excellent evidence about these specific issues, it has tended to deflect consideration away from analysing the overall nature of the process of sect leaving. There is, however, some evidence about this process with respect to those who are adult joiners. Most are young persons with the average age of joiners being 20 years. Even more significant is the fact that membership is very temporary. The average length of membership is only two years. The main characteristics of the leaving process are: (1) role conflict between the follower role and the fraternal role when expectations of leaders exceed those of adherents; (2) emergent role passage where the leavers gradually and ambiguously discover and practise disengagement through resolving doubts and apprehensions with ad hoc arrangements; (3) crises of social disruption or isolation, interpersonal conflict, physical or emotional depletion, educational and career pulls, affectional pulls and legal or illegal removal; (4) disillusionment due to breakdown in members' insulation from the rest of the world, development of unofficial or unregulated dyadic relationships, the perceived lack of success in achieving goals and inconsistency between the behaviour of leaders and teachings of the sect; (5) tendency for longer-term members to be overt and declarative about leaving and for short term (less than one year) members to be covert; (6) structural changes or weaknesses of the sect, dramatic change in the sect and sect stagnation and decline (Wright, 1988: 146-156).

Research on leaving sects seldom considers whether the process of leaving conventional churches is similar or different. Research about religious apostasy and disaffiliation reveals that leaving mainstream churches is largely the result of individual status and lifestyle related factors (Bromley, 1988:11). Leaving is almost entirely a matter of individual commitment and preference. For Americans in the mid-1970s religious defection was highest among Catholics and lowest among the conservative Protestant denominations (Roof and Hadaway, 1977:409-410). In America, young, single, male adults (18 to 25), liberal in social values, oriented to an ethic of personal fulfilment, and with higher educational achievement and occupational status are more likely to be involved in religious defection. Also, those most likely to leave the church are most likely to have been more exposed to the cultural new morality and value changes of the 1960s and 1970s, especially about drug (marijuana) use and sex. The leavers' reasons for departure included objections to church teachings and members, growing up and setting aside family pressure to attend church, no longer seeing the church as relevant or helpful, and incompatibility

between one's lifestyle and church affiliation. Those who leave are more likely to have had more social contacts with friends outside their neighbourhoods, lived in cities rather than small towns or rural areas, and experienced unhappiness based on real problems and family disruption (divorce) as children (Hadaway and Roof, 1988:34-42).

Before analysing the process of leaving for the seven former members of the Cooneyites, this group will be located in the sociological theory of sects and then the development and characteristics of this sect will be outlined. Theoretical conceptualisation as a sect is the common sociological way of analysing religious groups such as the Cooneyites. To relate this research directly and usefully to the literature which deals with sects, the Cooneyite religion is classified according to Wilson's conception and typology of sects. For Wilson, a sect is a group with a strong sense of self-identity which permits members to set themselves over all others through exclusive access to supernatural truths. A sect claims complete allegiance which transcends commitments to state, ethnic group or friendship network. The exclusivity of sects is accompanied by conceptions of the sect as an elite. A sect is a group with a high sense of integrity which is diffused among members. All members are expected at all times to manifest integrity and commitment through self control and conscientiousness (Wilson, 1970:26-27). At this general level, it is clear that the Cooneyite group constitutes a sect, but it is far less clear-cut about what type of sect it is most useful to analytically classify the Cooneyites. Treating the Cooneyites as a conversionist sect would seem to be the most useful. For the Cooneyites, salvation is to be achieved only through profound personal transformation. The process of conversion "must occur at a given time, as a known experience. Thereafter the individual may believe himself touched by God, inspired by the Spirit, redeemed by the Saviour" (Wilson, 1970:38). To a much lesser degree the Cooneyites can also be understood as a transformative sect and an utopian sect, but little would seem to be gained from analysing the Cooneyites as an introversionist, manipulationist, reformist or thaumaturgical sect (Wilson, 1970: 37-40).

Because of the precarious nature of the usage of the concept "sect", especially with respect to typological classification, and to facilitate fruitful comparison with other groups known as new religious movements (NRMs), the Cooneyite group also will be identified in terms of Beckford's framework (1985:76-89). In terms of internal relations, one of the two defining features in the framework, the modal Cooneyite position is that of devotee. In the devotee-type sect the members "devote themselves fully to the promotion of their movements' values, teachings, and material security. At the same time they reduce the significance in their lives of bonds to people who are not fellow-members" (Beckford, 1985:82). In the patterns of relationships between NRMs and wider society, the other defining feature in Beckford's framework, the Cooneyite group inserts itself into society through the refuge mode. Social contact with the outside world is under specified conditions, which for the Cooneyites involves primarily work and evangelisation. Other contacts are confined to a minimum.

Success is defined in terms of measuring up to internal ideals, and as Beckford points out, “the purity of the refuge must be constantly monitored. This is more important than an increase in numbers” (1985:86).

Now turning to the history of the Cooneyites, the sect was founded at the end of the nineteenth century, one of a number of religious groups that resulted from a pietistic revivalism which characterised, in particular, the final stages of the Industrial Revolution. Other Protestant-type sects to be formed at this time include the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints/Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists. The Cooneyite sect was founded by William Irvine, a Scotsman, about 1897 in Ireland where he was working as a lay preacher for the Faith Mission, an evangelistic arm of the Presbyterian religion. Irvine and his followers preached initially in the churches of other religions, but eventually Irvine denounced all churches and the ministers preaching therein. This public condemnation was based on Irvine’s interpretation of verses 8 to 10 of Matthew 10: “... freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat”. Irvine understood these verses to mean that a paid clergy and the use of church buildings were against the principles of Christ’s teaching, and that preachers had a duty to take Scriptural messages out to the people wherever they were. It was upon the literal meaning of these particular verses that Irvine established the form of ministry that characterises Cooneyism today (Parker, n.d.:2). He was soon joined by Edward Cooney and together their commitment, energy and zealotry helped establish the overseas missions in the United States, Europe, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. William McClung, a civil servant from Dublin, brought the religion to New Zealand in 1903.

The sect itself rejects any form of name because it preaches that it is the one true church following Christ’s teaching and as he had no name for his ministry while on earth, likewise it does not need a name. However, the sect emphasises that other churches need names to distinguish themselves from it. Outsiders recognise the sect by a variety of names. These include: No Name, Cooneyites, Two-by-Twos, Go-Preachers, Christian Conventions, The United Christian Conventions of Australasia and New Zealand. Those in the sect refer to their religion as “The Truth” or “The Way” when talking among themselves.

Cooneyite membership carries a strict code of discipline to which all are subject. This includes a number of rules, conditions and traditions which members understand from childhood or are initiated into on entry to the group. Rules have been made based on the literal meaning of Bible passages and these rules attempt largely to exclude certain elements of ‘worldliness’. A number of these affect women only and others proscribe behaviour that is common place for most people:

- women to have long hair, worn up on the head
- no jewellery
- no earrings

- no make-up
- no trousers (applies to women only)
- no white weddings
- no playing sport
- no television
- no movies
- no remarriage for members
- attendance at all meetings (usually three per week) unless sick - a message must be conveyed expressing the reason for non-attendance
- attendance at the annual convention
- celibacy, poverty and obedience by all workers

Turning now to the seven leavers from the Cooneyites, four were born into the sect. One was under five and two others were seven when their parents joined. Childhood participation involved attending home fellowship meetings, public gospel meetings and annual conventions with their parents. Day by day and week by week the traditions and rules of the sect were learned and internalised. Between 16 and 18 each 'professed' and became a full sect member. Profession is marked by full immersion baptism. From that point on each one was expected to completely and unquestioningly accept all the teachings of the sect and to practise them unreservedly.

Perhaps even prior to profession, some ambivalence about participation may have been developing as the memories about the meetings are largely negative for these seven leavers: gospel meetings night and day; boring meetings; rules; being reminded of no TV, haircuts [for females], makeup or jeans; never being allowed to express feelings; not much learning. The exclusivism is also recalled in negative terms: isolation from the world; always being different from other people; not being allowed to do things with school friends; not playing sports. Participation was not, however, entirely unpleasant for these leavers. There were happy times together at pot luck teas and picnics. Annual conventions were a time for meeting friends. There was a sense of being in a 'select club'. Besides finding satisfaction through interpersonal relations, the leavers also acknowledge that the sect provided them with a relationship with God which all still strongly value, kept them away from trouble and provided them with security.

For nearly all of these leavers serious questioning of the sect's teachings was triggered by the discovery of the sect's origins which could be traced to the beginning of the century. Six of them had discovered that their sect had deliberately deceived in order to conceal the historical truths of the sect. The workers preach that "The Way" goes back to biblical days and that the workers who go out in twos are simply carrying on the traditions of Christ's disciples who went out in pairs to carry the message of God. This analogy has come to validate the historical basis preached by the workers and completely overlooks the role of Irvine and Cooney in the establishment of the sect. "I was told that the preachers were the only true servants of God and we should obey them even if they were wrong!" "We were told nobody

else followed Jesus, we were the only ones, I found out this was not true when I talked to an outsider, Christian lady.”

The decision makers in the Cooneyites seem to think that it is important to conceal how the sect was established one hundred years ago, for whatever reason. This deception is carried out by the workers in New Zealand, and has been incorporated into the ideology of the sect. One reason for the false teachings may be to continue the cover-up that has been ongoing within the sect since its founders breached accepted codes of ethics and behaviours and started preaching religious beliefs counter to the sect's original ideology. Inheritors of the leadership must have seen a need to distance themselves from the human weaknesses and excesses that characterised the lives of its early founders, Irvine and Cooney, and which could threaten the continuation of the sect. Hence, it may be said that the false teachings concerning the sect's establishment were initially an attempt to rescue the sect from possible foundering and at the same time confirm its ideological basis, thereby retaining its adherents staunch in their beliefs. Once the faith had outlasted these earlier problems, the perpetuation of its myths of origin has continued. It is a treadmill that no one to date has had the courage to disestablish, and over time has been successfully incorporated into the sect's dogma and ideological base.

Precipitating factors have played a significant part in the leaving process. One person talked about her marriage difficulties at a certain point in her life while she was an active participant in the sect. She perceived a lack of concern for her and her situation, and sadness at the non-availability of counselling within the sect's structure. When faced with this personal crisis which was not alleviated, the respondent then began to question the sect's beliefs and what she had been told for many years.

The former members were asked about the level of support they had found in the form of discussion and counselling which they could avail themselves of to help them through this period of questioning. All of them claimed that there had been none available to them within the sect. “None whatever. I hardly dared talk about my doubts to my sister, let alone anyone else.” “No - asked the workers to pray with us (husband and I) and they said, ‘No, we are not Pentecostals’. Also when I questioned some of our teachings, I was told I was blind for questioning.”

The fact that there was no assistance available to any of these people is surprising. It would seem wise to counsel doubters out of their fears and questions and, in doing so, hope to retain their loyalty and membership. As no respondent found this to be an option exercised by any of the sect's leadership, it must be assumed that doubts and questions were not to be accommodated and were possibly perceived to be a threat within the sect. Since there was obviously no room for doubt, once entertained, the leadership used the weapon of silence and mistrust to usher doubters out of the sect. It can be concluded that dubiety and membership were viewed as mutually exclusive.

It is worthwhile to pursue the above discussion and locate it within a time frame, in terms of the length of membership of these leavers. Four were birthright

members of the sect and of the other three, one had become involved as a pre-schooler and two as seven year olds. All had left the sect as adults, so their membership had not been fleeting, but rather, extending over twenty, thirty or even forty years. Given this time span within any group or organisation, the means of leaving can be viewed as even more surprising. In this particular sect where numbers of members must be of relevance, (probably around 4000 in New Zealand) it is difficult to understand why counselling was not available when needed by people who had been so active in the life of the sect over such long periods of time. It can only be assumed that there are serious fears held by the leadership when questions arise that may challenge long-held beliefs and traditions. So serious, in fact, that it is presumed to be more strategic to allow doubters to leave rather than attempt counselling, news of which may infiltrate the whole sect and, at worse, cause a mass exodus of members as a sectarian off-shoot. For this to be the case, the sect's leadership must know of the deceit and deliberate cover-up to which the general membership is exposed. There must be a realisation that should it be uncovered the viability and very existence of the sect may be threatened.

Numerous other precipitating factors were part of the leaving process: realisation and acceptance that "The Way" was not a pathway of truth, but deceptive in its teachings (3 persons); a revelation that the sect was controlled by man and not by God (1); dishonesty and tactics of workers (1); questions not answered (2); lack of kindness and compassion of workers (1); reading relevant literature (1); encouragement from outsiders to seek alternative religious fulfilment (2); lack of results from continual, year-long gospel meetings (1); fear of being excommunicated (1); being ostracised and isolated within the sect (1) and feeling desperate (1).

There are some common threads running through the above factors, revolving around knowledge of false teachings and the lack of genuine, Christian concern that typified workers' responses to the dilemmas and questions of members. Former members had been left with negative feelings once they had voiced their disquiet to others. It seems that once such feelings had been acknowledged and spoken about with workers, the workers' common response was a psychological and emotional severing of these members' ties with the sect. The members appeared to be cast adrift from the group they had been part of, for decades in most cases. The only resolution to the individual's problem was to choose not to attend meetings or conventions and become outsiders, part of that mass of people that the sect had preached "were beyond salvation". This alternative would have been fearful in the extreme not only because of being catapulted into the sea of the "great unwashed", but because it required the severing of ties with family, friends and the whole support network that had been built up over several decades. The sect was their life, their social network, and the means of salvation, so leaving was not a decision to be entertained lightly. Once the decision had been made, it was highly probable that there would be no turning back, no re-entry into the fold of Cooneyites because the trust and loyalty which are vital to the well-being and functioning of sectarian groups,

could no longer be taken for granted.

The Cooneyite sect is an organisation whose adherents' prime motivation in their gatherings is religious fellowship. In this respect, the sect is no different from hundreds of other groups whose membership meet and mingle for such purpose. But in many respects that is where this sect's similarities end with the more mainstream, orthodox religions. Its organisational structure is distinctive, perhaps unique, in that it is not accountable to its membership as a whole, either religiously or financially. Membership at all stages and ages is dependent on absolute and wholehearted acceptance of sect rules, but none of this appears in writing. The hymn book is the only sect material available in published form. Traditions, beliefs and practices seem to have remained in their original form, largely unchanged over a century of existence. This can be put down to the fact that all aspects of religious practice and sect organisation are beyond public scrutiny. Except for gospel meetings, the sect has no public profile. Internally nothing is allowed to be challenged. Dissent and non-conformity are not tolerated. Continued challenge results in exclusion. "One preacher had the reputation of having kicked more people out of fellowship than he had brought into it." Conformity and obedience was stressed. "One young worker had said that if a worker were to request something to be done - even if it happened to be something wrong, 'Do it and God will honour you for having obeyed one of his servants, one of the homeless preachers'."

Members know and understand the code of silence which pervades the sect and which demeanours, actions or indiscretions invite it. After a time in the sect, members realise doubts and questions are never acknowledged or debated. Such behaviour is not permissible, at least not by the members. When members no longer believe the rhetoric, accept beliefs or traditions, or cannot accept the leaders' biddings, the only alternative is to leave the sect.

There are no physical constraints to leaving, no public haranguing or abuse; there is simply an umbrella of silence that descends and envelops the leaders, workers and the membership as a whole. This is the experience of these former members. What constitutes the experience of workers who may also raise doubts is unknown. Presumably, they meet the same fate, leave and disappear within the community at large. Decisions made in this regard by the paramount leaders, are not revealed to the membership. No hint of scandal or dissension in the ranks is referred to; human transgressions or predisposition for sin would seem to be non-existent within this sect. The decision to leave then, is a personal one and because former members have done just that, they have unwittingly ensured the perpetuation of the sect and its organisation. Because the sect does not use specific, church buildings for fellowship meetings, but instead, meets in the homes of individual members on Sunday mornings it is easy for members to be excluded from the sect should workers deem it desirable or necessary. If a member's continued existence in the group is no longer possible and should the person not choose to walk away from the sect, then they can be excluded by the ritual of excommunication. The effect of this is that an

excommunicated member is simply no longer able to visit the appointed home on Sunday mornings for communion. This particular service is central to the sect's pattern of worship, and non-attendance at it robs the individual member of the most important, meaningful rite of their religion. Hence, exclusion from it, brings exclusion from the sect.

Leaving the Cooneyites involved leaving behind relatives and friends. Leaving was treated by family and friends in a similar fashion, in that it signalled, generally, the end to the relationship with those still in the sect. Some sect members expressed sadness and regret at a friend or family member turning their back on salvation. But for these former members the outcome of leaving was the avoidance of contact or complete rejection by group members. "They rejected me." "Most of them considered I had lost my salvation." "Most friends cut us off and regarded us as enemies of 'The Truth'." "We had gone out and lost our salvation." Attempts to dissuade members from leaving were limited. "None of them came to talk things over. The only contact we had was the deacon who came with another member to get assurance that we had really made up our minds to leave." "An aunty did come and visit me to tell me to think of my children. I told her that I was thinking of my children."

The leavers did a number of different things to end their participation in the sect. One announced to fellowship hosts that association with meetings was about to cease, two verbally informed workers in the district of the intention to leave, two wrote letters of resignation and two simply failed to turn up at meetings.

Once the sect workers became aware that these former members had "problems", their responses varied from apparent lack of concern to rebuking the member. One member found that the workers handled the situation by literally "running away!!" from it. Two others were ignored or avoided by the workers. In another case, the workers visited and chastised the member. Another member was informed that she had been led astray by false Christian writing. It is apparent that there was no form of open discussion entered into by workers and the members in religious turmoil, just negative reactions which implied that the members had forfeited their right to continued communion with other sect members.

Feelings at the time of leaving ranged from the traumatic to the normal. For some it was a very emotional experience: "Very distressed, confused. Like going through a divorce"; "I was greatly distressed as I still thought 'The Way' was right"; "Devastating - like a zombie. I didn't have any person to turn to outside. I was desperate. I just wanted to curl up and die"; "I suffered greatly at times". It is clear that at the time of leaving and the disassociation which followed was a terrible time for some leavers. Their lifelong process of socialisation came to an abrupt halt, and at least one found herself in an alien community without the means for social rebuilding and networking. However, several people were able to cope better and saw their state of mind as "good" or "stable". As one leaver indicated, "I wasn't upset as I had no great opinion of the workers as a group".

Once on the outside, four of the seven leavers immediately began to have

positive experiences and reported enjoying their new found freedom and opportunities: “Expressing the real me. Wearing make-up, earrings, and pants”; “No more hair in a bun”. However, three former members saw this period in their lives as fraught with difficulty. One person found it hard to break the habit of not trusting anybody, a learned behaviour promoted by workers. Such distrust and suspicion had been built into the ideology of the Cooneyites and passed from generation to generation of members. The second of these people described himself as a wreck for months, not able to cope with life beyond the sect. The third found depression and confusion the outcomes of leaving.

Two of the leavers talked about seeking out an alternative church at this time. One saw this objective as rather difficult while the other was overwhelmed by the welcome received in other churches. Reactions in the broader community to the leavers were positive: feelings that the person had become a bit more “normal”, support, admiration and rejoicing. One former member was unable to comment about this because this person had no outside contacts of significance at the time of leaving.

All seven leavers have made contact with other former members for different reasons. These included: curiosity, counselling opportunities with those who would understand, to expose the truth and history of the religion, to have a laugh, or for help to readjust with new forms of Christianity. Not only is there informal contact, but there has been at least one conference which a number of former members attended. This, in itself, is a strong support structure and affirmation of the need to develop and enhance relationships with those who understand and have had similar experiences.

In summary, with one exception, the main reason given for leaving the Cooneyites was the workers’ deception surrounding the sect’s origins. To challenge or question workers about matters of faith and teachings was perceived as threatening behaviour and this was unacceptable. Signs of agitation, uncertainty or suspicion were smothered in silence. Doubt suggested lack of faith, and without faith there was no place in the sect. This finding suggests that the process of leaving is similar in at least one respect for those who have their primary socialisation in the sect and those who join as adults. Disillusionment is a key development in the leaving process in both cases. However, when the process of leaving as a whole is considered, the question of whether it is different in other important respects for those socialised in the sect from an early age and adult joiners warrants further research. The research needs to focus upon whether the crises and disillusionment need to be more intense and persistent for sect-primary socialised leavers than for adult-joiner leavers.

The process of leaving the Cooneyite sect has some similarities with as well as differences from the process of leaving mainline churches. The main similarity is that dissatisfaction with teachings in both cases play a significant part in the leaving process. In the 1960s and early 1970s many Americans left mainline churches because the church teachings were not compatible with the values and norms of the

counterculture of that period especially with respect to drug use and sexual relations. Similarly each of the Cooneyite leavers feels that the main reason for leaving was the finding out that the sect had different origins and an early history that was quite different from what they had been taught by the workers.

The major difference also centres on teachings. Many sects, including the Cooneyites, claim that salvation can only be achieved through sect participation. Mainline churches seldom hold this position. Hence, if the teaching of the sect is believed, leaving involves a heavy price. In contrast, few leavers from mainline churches would have any worries about eternal damnation being part of the process.

Another difference is the general approach taken by the two types of religious groups about leaving and leavers. Most sects are extremely concerned about losing members and take strong and direct measures to dissuade potential leavers. In this regard, the Cooneyites are not nearly as zealous in this matter as most sects. The Cooneyites do not seem to devote much attention to members who develop reservations about their religion. Efforts to help doubters overcome their concerns and persuasive activities to get them to stay are limited. This makes the Cooneyites quite different from many other sects who often use very intense socialisation procedures with members who express disquiet and start to consider leaving. In sharp contrast, the Cooneyites largely leave such members to resolve their own ambivalences and are very quick to cut these people from fellowship. On the other hand, even compared to the Cooneyites, the mainline churches have a relatively open and tolerant approach to potential leavers. Up to a certain point, sect members come under a lot of pressure to stay whereas mainline church members can drift away with hardly anyone taking much notice.

Thus, it is concluded that future research about sects and the leaving process focus upon the nature of the sect and length of time it has existed. Typologies of sects need to be refined and elaborated. Analysing the Cooneyites as conversionist-type sect needs reconsideration. The Cooneyites handle doubters differently from most conversionist sects. The period of existence of the sect also needs to be carefully considered. Much of the evidence about the leaving process relates to sects that have had a relatively short period of existence such as the Unification Church and the Children of God sect. A group such as the Cooneyites which has a hundred year existence and still maintains its sectarian features could well involve a leaving process which is qualitatively different from recently formed sects. A fruitful avenue of research could be to look at sects such as the Cooneyites which have two or more generations of existence and compare leavers who had their primary socialisation in the sect with those leavers who were adult joiners.

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