The representation of cults/new religious movements in the media

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Plagiarism Statement

In submitting this assignment, I agree to the terms of Massey University's plagiarism policy. I have acknowledged and referenced anybody else's ideas in this work that are not my own. I confirm this work is original and entirely my own.

Abstract

This project aimed to discover how cults were represented in the New Zealand media by comparing what was found in international media about cults. It analysed how Gloriavale Christian Community and Shincheonji 2019 news articles were written through themes, sources and language. The accuracy of cult stereotypes was challenged through interviewing people who were part of Gloriavale and Shincheonji. It concludes there were similar features throughout the personal stories. However, the stereotypes are often more simplified or exaggerated than what people have experienced.

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1. Introduction

This project looks into the media's coverage of cults/new religious movements. It starts with a long form piece of journalism informed by the research I undertook. This research was first about finding out how to define cult, which is a loaded term according to academics. Paul J. Olson (2006) said the term "new religious movements" was becoming more accepted than the term "cults" in academia. He stated "cults" had negative connotations and discouraged people to find out more about what religious groups are about. He also said the media tend to sensationalise and rely on cult stereotypes in their coverage which contributed to the negative general perception of new religious groups (Olson, 2006, pp. 97–98). The term "new religious movements" was a more neutral term referring to small religious groups with differing beliefs to traditional religions.

The research looked into the varying perceptions of new religious movements in society and found that was highly influenced by the media coverage. Douglas E. Cowan and Jeffrey K. Hadden (2004) said that most people will not meet these religious groups directly and so the media is the only way they get their information about them. The way the media represents these groups determines what they think about them and what decisions they made. They claimed the media used rumours and weak allegations in their evidence against new religious movement to reinforce their narrative (pp. 66–68). There was also research into how people perceive cults and new religious movements, why they perceive them in a generally negative way and how tertiary education can, for example, be a way to challenge people's assumptions about these groups. Media representation was also researched, including what was reported about new religious movements and how theory like new values determine what journalists report about.

Further research was made into how New Zealand media reported new religious movements. There was almost no research completed on the representation of these groups in New Zealand media. The project focused on two new religious movements with Christian values operating in New Zealand. There was a focus on recent news articles published in 2019. The literature research informed the analysis of these New Zealand articles. As found in the academic research, similarly the reportage of the New Zealand articles focused on negative stories of leavers and abuse allegations, particularly in Gloriavale. James A. Beckford (1983) said the media often draws upon the 'strange' elements of a cult group regarding the way they live, 'trickery' upon their deceptive recruitment tactics and 'misery' in terms of lacking a sensible place to live and eat. In response, there is emphasis on 'anger' for the scandals taking place and 'threat' to normalcy (p. 56). This project analyses the stereotypes and assumptions of new religious movements reported in the media, assumed by the general public and discovering what is accurate and what is not.

This project topic also had Ethics Committee approval before research began. Ethical considerations were made before interviewing my participants. The main consideration was the sensitive information they might share, involving physical or psychological abuse in a cult group. Sensitive information was treated with caution and only included in the longform piece if it had a purpose and not for sensationalism. There was some sensitive information one participant struggled to share so that was not included in the longform piece. Particular sensitivity arose from mention of family and friends of the participants still in the religious groups. Therefore, a decision was made to only name the participants and not anybody else mentioned for privacy reasons.

2. Long form journalism:

The people behind the cult stereotypes

For many, cults are synonymous with brainwashing, control and all-powerful leaders but when Hope Burmeister spoke to people who had left Gloriavale and Shincheonji in New Zealand she found the stereotypes do not hold up.

Connie's story

Connie Parkes (21) belongs to a Wellington church and is studying at Victoria University. In July 2019, she is invited by a friend to a Christian workshop at the university. Asking many questions at the workshop, she is followed up by one of the leaders who starts meeting with her and her friend regularly at cafes. This woman appears kind and wise and becomes a mentor figure in Connie's life.

They start to meet many times a week, always studying the Bible. Connie finds she is learning a lot and really enjoys the studies. Most of the time, the teachings are what she would have been taught in a church setting so she doesn't question it. Only occasionally is she taught something that doesn't quite sit right such as not all Christians will be saved and that lying is okay for the Glory of God. However, this is always subtle and this woman knows how to say it in a way that does sound right.

After a few weeks, Connie and her friend are invited to a more formal bible study three times a week. However, these studies are on Tuesday and Friday nights and Saturday afternoons. Connie already has church commitments that she will have to give up. She isn't sure if she is prepared to give these up to go. So, she takes some time to think about it when she goes overseas.

Although she really likes this woman, something doesn't feel quite right but she can't place what it is. When she comes back to serve at church, she prays that God will make it clear to her. It just so happens that one of her church leaders had met on the street and spoken to someone who had recently left Shincheonji. He was worried because he'd heard a girl named Connie from his church was still in the group. This leader speaks to Connie and asks her about this. It suddenly hits her at once. It is true. She is a part of a cult and she hadn't even known it.

Stereotype 1: You can easily spot a cult

There's a conception that cult members will be out wearing distinctive clothing or probably sitting around with candle sticks in a basement. A cult stands out, right?

But for Connie, her encounter with Korean group Shincheonji does not stand out as odd. "What I pictured a cult to be like is not my experience with it at all. It was very subtle the whole time". When Connie is invited to the first workshop, she describes it as a "pretty run-of-the-mill, Christian kind of workshop. Nothing out of the ordinary. They just talked about the Bible. Very introductory stuff; it wasn't like, whoa, I've never heard this before and no red flags". For her, it is just another Christian group where she is learning a lot of new things about the Bible. Most of what she is taught is consistent with what she believes as a Christian. She never imagined herself to be in a cult.

Shincheonji has been operating in many universities across New Zealand, such as Victoria University, where Connie first encountered members of the group. It is a Korean apocalyptic group that follow the teachings of Lee Man-hee. Dr Geoff Troughton, programme director of Religious Studies at Victoria University says the group tends to find "young people who are exploring questions, who are working out their identity, who are open to listening to stuff. You're working stuff out. That's mostly where these groups grow".

Many people think they'll know if they're talking to someone from a cult because they'll make themselves known. Say who they are. Wear a label. Something obvious. Natasha Polgase, who was also in the Shincheonji group says, "I remember even when people were talking about Shincheonji, the South Korean cult, I was thinking, I'm in a bible study with normal looking Aucklanders. It just felt way too normal". There seems to be an underlying belief that a cult would not look 'normal'.

Dr Troughton claims some groups do try to separate themselves from ordinary society by showing they are different, such as wearing a uniform or living differently. However, some groups do feel the pressure to blend in and act normal. "Shincheonji, they're trying to look normal but at the same time, trying to invite you into something that is quite different".

Natasha experiences confusion and anger when she is told by others what Shincheonji really is as she'd convinced herself it isn't anything out of the ordinary. She came to trust the people in the group. Connie also feels a lot of shame that she unknowingly joined the Shincheonji movement: "I think part of the embarrassment and shame at the other end is because of the stereotype and stigma around what a cult is of, it's so obvious, it's such a weird thing that only weirdos get sucked into that. So, it was embarrassing to then turn around and say, no I very nearly did and did to a point."

Natasha's story

At the beginning of 2019, Natasha Polgase (21) goes to a dinner at her church for new university students and meets and becomes friends with a girl who invites her and another friend to meet up with a

missionary woman at a café. This woman seems lovely and passionate. The only thing that strikes Natasha as strange is that rather than share her story, the woman is more interested in their stories.

Natasha starts meeting the woman, quickly opening up about her Christian faith and having bible studies together. Early on, this woman urges Natasha and her friends not to tell anyone about their meetings. She uses scriptures to show lying can be okay and they shouldn't teach what they are being taught if they don't have a good understanding of it. This makes sense to Natasha and she agrees to keep the meetings a secret.

After two weeks, they are invited to a formal bible study. Similar to Connie, Natasha also has church commitments and isn't sure if she is ready to sacrifice then. However, the woman kindly encourages her to do it for her personal faith journey as it will only be a short-term sacrifice for long-term benefits. In July 2019, she starts going to this bible study three times a week. It is a small group of mostly young, university-age females. Natasha is surprised at how organised the study is. Desks are laid out with a big whiteboard at the front of the room. They all receive welcome packs with an exercise book inside with their name on it. Natasha feels it is very inviting.

She starts to get to know people in the study, even kicking around a football in a park some days. She starts to trust them and feel part of a community. However, when her church starts to talk about a Shincheonji cult that sounds similar to what she is at, she becomes worried. At one bible study, the teacher comes up to her and asks if she is okay. She tells him about this cult she was hearing about and admits it sounds like this study. He listens and reassures her of her worries. The woman also meets up with her and reminds her to have faith and believe in what she is learning. Natasha feels much more at ease after this.

She hasn't told anyone about the study but her friend had told her boyfriend about it. A woman who had led their camps when they were teenagers finds out from him that Natasha and her friend are in the Shincheonji group. Natasha's friend finds out the truth and both she and the woman try to contact Natasha but she doesn't answer. She is angry because she's already made up her mind it isn't a cult. However, this woman persists and comes to meet with her whether she likes it or not.

When Natasha realises for herself that the teachings do not focus on Jesus, it changes things for her. She loves and cares about the people in this group so much but she knows she has to leave. The hardest thing for her is messaging the leaders thanking them for all their effort but telling them to not contact her again. They don't push or pressure her to come back. Instead, they never reply to her text just as she asks.

Stereotype 2: Cult leaders have hierarchical control over members

Religious cults are often led by a charismatic leader. They usually have a lot or complete say over how a movement operates. However, many people believe these leaders have full, almost aggressive control over their members.

When Natasha expresses her worries to one of the leaders the group is the Shincheonji cult she'd heard about, she finds she is comforted by his response. "He just listened and was very compassionate. I don't remember him forcing me to do anything and so I felt really good about it. Wow, would someone in a cult be that understanding?"

While some small religious groups may exercise hostile control, many try to slowly get people on board with their beliefs. Dr Troughton describes it as a gradual revelation into the hidden truth: "They need to work people into the truth. It's a kind of mystical revelation that most people won't be able to handle without some initiation".

For some groups, it's more about growing and teaching their members how to live obediently to the teachings of the leaders. Former Gloriavale member Conqueror Courage admits it is hard to form his own identity when he's lived his whole life the way he's been taught. "It's like a mould that they create and they teach you how to fit into the mould. Even now, when I've come out of the mould, it's still in there to just go back into that mould. It's really easy to do. I have to actually actively fight against just going back into that same mould that I was always taught to be in".

It's also about how an individual in a religious group feels when they don't obey the leader's teachings. They can start to form an instinctive inner scolding, even if they haven't been verbally told off. Another former Gloriavale member, Hannah Harrison, says "there's a way in which it's always you that's wrong. Every situation that something bad happens, it always comes back to you that's wrong".

In order to build a cohesive group or community, the leaders need to create a place that people want to come and feel supported. Troughton speaks of "a sense of meaning, a sense of identity, offering identity, a place to belong where people will know you, care about you, support you in your troubles. That's definitely a part of it. A purpose in life. These are all beautiful things that people need. I don't think it's a sign of weakness that people are attracted to this stuff".

In talking about the Shincheonji leader she knows, Connie says, "she was really nice but looking back, I can see a lot of things that she was saying that were really hidden manipulation like so not overt and making us feel like we need her".

Control is not always about telling someone that you have to follow them. Sometimes it's about making a person feel that they need them.

Hannah's story

Hannah Harrison (25) lives in Gloriavale Christian Community for the first 20 years of her life. She describes a protected childhood and says it was a beautiful place to live and lots to do outdoors. Throughout the 20 years of living there, life is always very structured. There is always something to do and she doesn't have a lot of free time. When she is at school, she is taught a lot of practical things, such as cooking and sewing. However, it is gender-based and she isn't allowed to do woodwork even though she really wants to. She also wants to do accounting when she grows up in but in this community, nobody gets to choose what they do when they're older.

When she is older, she is on a roster with other women doing cooking, cleaning and washing. She works long days and never gets breaks. Along with looking after her siblings as she is the oldest of 12, by the end of the day, Hannah is always tired. She is supposed to work for the good of the community and not for herself. She lives her life under the belief that as a woman, she isn't allowed to have an opinion. It is drilled into her all her life. When she is towing the washing line, she tries to do it a different way that she thinks would be faster. However, she is told off for being too independent.

She lives a long time believing what she is taught that the blessing comes in obedience. However, when a visitor from Timaru prays for them to serve God out of love and not out of duty, it is a completely new concept for Hannah and her family. She and her family start to question what they have always known. Hannah begins to realise that everything she does is out of duty because she is simply following the rules of the leaders. She grows tired of it and of trying to be someone she isn't.

Her parents ask this visitor, who they know well, to help their whole family escape. He does and they leave in 2015 on a Saturday night at 3am. Hannah has now worked in a curtain shop for almost four years and loves the freedom to be able to be paid, to have breaks and to share her ideas with her colleagues. It's refreshing for her to be able to even decide what clothes she wants to wear and how long she wants her hair to be. She is now able to freely express her opinions with anyone she meets.

Stereotype 3: Cult members are brainwashed

Perhaps one of the biggest misconceptions is the concept of brainwashing. The idea comes from the 1970s when cult leaders could control their members with a remote control, as if they had no individual thoughts anymore. But can any group take away your ability to think?

Despite being taught to not have an opinion in Gloriavale, Hannah Harrison often questions this internally: "They'll say, women are not supposed to have an opinion. You're not to have an opinion. You don't get to decide anything. You just need to be submissive and obedient. I always had trouble with that. I remember this one specific youth meeting and the leader of the young people was saying this and just sitting there thinking, yeah but I do have an opinion. I know I'm not supposed to but I do. What do you want me to do? It's not like my brain's just going to go away because you tell it to".

Even though some groups like Gloriavale want its members to only agree with the community teachings, many leavers experience a moment of wanting to think for themselves. "I just got over all the lies and over having to lie in the way I was living and pretend I was thinking a certain way and being a certain person just to make people happy", Hannah says.

Clearly, no matter what people are taught, they always have individual thoughts. Dr Nick Thompson, deputy head of staff and postgraduate for Humanities Theological and Religious Studies at Auckland University believes people can't get brainwashed by others, rather they brainwash themselves. "Any doubts you have, any worries you have about the moral actions of the group, you push them down inside you. You police yourself. You don't need so called brainwashing or mind control. People do that to themselves as the price of membership".

Natasha sees herself as on a great spiritual journey in Shincheonji. "I had no alarm bells ringing. I felt like I was on a spiritual high, honestly. I was like, man, this is such a breakthrough in my life and relationship with God." She experiences a personal breakthrough and gets what she needs from the group. She does not feel controlled but believes she knows exactly what the group is as she assumes she'd never be the kind of person to end up in a cult: "I think I used to think that people in a cult were real stupid or just real narrow-minded which I didn't think I was". For some, there is doubt and confusion, even if Connie can't quite understand it for herself. "I remember leaving and praying and being like, I don't know if I misunderstood or if she's wrong or if I'm wrong but God, you're literally going to have to make it really clear to me because I don't know where I sit on that. I remember it did unsettle me. I just felt so unsure about what I actually believed, more in the terms of, have I had it wrong this whole time?".

People in cults experience a range of thoughts and emotions when facing the environment and its teachings. Dr Troughton: "All groups indoctrinate. They teach you things, you become part of an environment in which certain truths and certain ways of seeing the world you're being exposed to and drawn into. But where does that become brainwashing?"

Conqueror Courage learns to not speak his thoughts and only say what is required of him. "I kept my thoughts to myself. I think that was reasonably common, simply because if you had a wrong thought and you said it to someone, you could get in huge trouble so it's simply filtering your ideas and thoughts and only saying what was sanitised and couldn't be offensive and couldn't get you in trouble". It's not that he doesn't have different thoughts to what he is taught but simply becomes used to this daily process of sanitising those thoughts.

Conqueror's story

Conqueror Courage (26) lives in Gloriavale Christian Community for the first 25 years of his life. When he is young, he describes living in the community like living on a farm with his family and people that feel like family to him. When he is a teenager, he goes to school and also works in one of the businesses or on the farm outside of school hours. It is normal for him to get up at 4am or 5am and finish late at night.

When Conqueror finishes school, he works in building which he doesn't get to choose. Luckily, he enjoys building which he knows isn't the same for his work mates. He works long hours all his life. Although this is a heavy workload, he never sees this as a bad thing because it is all he ever knows.

He always knew the community was different since everyone wears the same clothing. He is taught to see himself as better than the rest of the world. The leaders preach that things like sunglasses, baseball hats and black cars are worldly and they should not wear or use these things. Conqueror thinks he and the community are special and because of this, it is okay to do things that are uncomfortable. He often says things he thinks are his own ideas but it is always repeating what he has been taught.

Conqueror is arranged to be married at 17. He doesn't know who he is marrying until he proposes to her. They marry and have four children together. He has a comfortable life working and looking after his family. However, he admits he never has deep relationships with any of his family members or work mates. For the first year of his marriage, he doesn't connect deeply with his wife. For a long time, he doesn't tell anyone his thoughts because any wrong thought can get him into trouble. He is encouraged to not have an opinion to clear the way for the will of God.

When he is 25, his views start to completely shift. The theological views of the community are that everyone should have the same views, saying and doing the exact same things. Conqueror starts to believe that agreeing for the sake of agreeing isn't right. He decides he doesn't have anything against the community and doesn't mind living there. However, he isn't going to be afraid to voice his thoughts anymore.

In 2019, months later, the leaders take him into a long meeting and decide he can't live in Gloriavale anymore. The next day, a leader comes to take him away but Conqueror says he doesn't want to leave his family but he has no choice.

Now on the outside, he is living with and cares full-time for three of his children. His wife and fourth child remain in the community. He and his sons enjoy the freedom of being outside and like to go on road trips and bush walks. His sons get excited about even going to the supermarket. It surprises him that he's been able to really get to know his sons like never before. Although it completely divided his family, Conqueror says leaving is the best decision he ever made.

Stereotype 4: Cults are completely bad

Cults, according to the stereotype are controlling, dangerous groups we should always be fearful of. While these groups can have some restrictive rules and unusual teachings, the experience for members is not always entirely bad.

As a child, Gloriavale was like a paradise to Conqueror Courage: "Honestly, living in Gloriavale growing up is an amazing experience. It's a beautiful place and there's a lot of beautiful people and at the same time some really atrocious things happen". As he grows up, the controlling nature of the community becomes more apparent.

Despite the negative stories about escaping cults, the full story is likely to have some good aspects. Dr Nick Thompson: "it's very rare that your experience of a community is going to be all bad. It might be bad enough to make you want to leave but it's very rare that memory will be completely bad. There will probably be some good things about it and when you come out of that community into the wider world, the wider world is also likely to be a mixed bag."

People join these groups for different reasons, an important one being part of a supportive community. Natasha Polgase says the people in Shincheonji is one of the main things that keep her going back. "Being in that group at the time was really good for my self-esteem because it was a supportive community and there was a lot of encouragement of giving credit for our commitment for showing up all the time. It felt kind of nice just being myself as part of the community or a little part of something really big and important."

But why do we only hear bad things about cults? Why do we automatically assume the worst? Troughton theorises that "a lot of the cult language is a distancing device. It's a way of saying religion is weird generally and is best avoided. A little religion's fine but don't let it affect your life. Just fit in. If you become too religious, then you end up like one of those cults or something".

He also says cult language, the stereotypes we speak out about cults, is generally an oversimplification, an overstatement and an overdramatisation to make the groups sound more dangerous.

Asked about views of Gloriavale from the outside, Conqueror Courage shares, "there's the ones who are really pro-Gloriavale and paint it as this shiny, idyllic paradise on earth and then there's the others that are all about the sexual predators and the abuse and all that. But I think what you've got to really realise is that Gloriavale is actually both those things.

It's the paradise with the abuse."

3. Literature Review

Religious cults have always fascinated people as they live completely differently to the rest of the world in lifestyle and values. The media has reported on these groups over the years both in New Zealand and internationally. However, the way these groups are reported in the media has a big impact on how they are perceived in society. This research aims to find out how religious cults are perceived by the public within academia and how that compares to their representation in the media.

Upon research, I discovered the term 'cult' is unfavourable among many academics who prefer the term 'new religious movements'. Charles Sarno and Helen Shoemaker (2016) said the term cult was replaced to avoid existing negative connotations: "Given the stigma now associated with the word cult, many social scientists eschew it for the more value-neutral term, new religious movement" (p 9). I acknowledge that the term 'cult' is more commonly known. However, given this preference, I will use the term 'new religious movements' over 'cult', unless the author specifically uses 'cult', for the remainder of the research.

Definition of a 'cult' or new religious movement

Eugene V. Gallagher (2008) said the term 'cult' is firmly placed in popular culture, such as entertainment and news. It was "used with a robust confidence that its meaning and accuracy are both self-evident and widely shared" (p 206). However, its meaning is not always clear and is usually filled with assumptions. Cults come under the logical assumptions that its members are 'not like us' and there are only small differences in each kind of cult because they are all the same. Gallagher (2008) claimed the term cult "is used to assert identity in order to propagate fear of the other and to increase the cohesiveness of specific moral communities" (pp 217–218).

Eileen Barker (2014) makes the point that new religious movements cannot be generalised as they all live completely differently based on their beliefs (p 241). However, there are some notable characteristics these groups can have. New religious movements tend to have both members born into the group and those who join later. New converts can have pre-existing ideas of society and so are more prone to quickly falling away. New religious movements tend to have a charismatic but unpredictable leader who does not have to follow anyone else's authority. They may even be considered a god so also have spiritual authority. New religious movements also clearly divide aspects of the world such as the physical and spiritual, what is good and evil and also separate themselves from the rest of society. Barker (2014) said because they clearly separate themselves but still have to exist in society, the rest of the world takes notice and also separates themselves from these groups (Barker, pp 214–242). This is a possible

explanation as to why these groups come under so much criticism and controversy, especially in comparison with more traditional religions.

Difference between a 'cult' and a sect

Stark and Bainbridge (1979) defined a sect as a group once part of a church that was unhappy with some of the churches' beliefs or practices and breaks away. This group slowly forms a new church sect with slightly different beliefs (p 132).

In contrast, new religious movements are usually innovative and form through "mutation or migration", creating a new group that does not usually become a large movement (Ibid p 126). While sects usually come from a Christian background, new religious movements are not always exclusively Christian. Stark and Bainbridge (1979) said "not all cults are religions, in the strict sense of the term, because not all represent systems of ultimate meaning". Some offer followers a taste of magic and some advantages. They further said "When a sect breaks away from a church, it takes with it the label "religious," but cults are not born with the religious label attached". They conclude that new religious movements are not entirely bound by the traditional church values but instead establish their own (p 127).

Most new religious movements cause a degree of tension in society due to their strong, unusual beliefs. Some can avoid the tension from society if they are quiet and do not become a complete religious movement, interfering with everyday life (Stark & Bainbridge, 1979, p 128). Stark and Bainbridge (1979) said "among cult movements, the more a cult mobilizes its membership, the greater the opposition it engenders". A cult movement is more likely to have opposition if they take their members away from ordinary society (p 128). This is usually when distressed family members begin to protest against these groups for the return of their loved one, causing public outcry.

The general perception of new religious movements

The public's perceptions of new religious movements are shown to be overwhelmingly negative. A study by Paul J. Olson (2006) asked 98 undergraduate students to give their opinions on scenarios involving Catholicism and another smaller religious group. Most had a negative view of the smaller group "brainwashing" people, whereas not of Catholicism. This shows big Christian groups have become normalised whereas people are more critical of new religious movements: 75 percent of participants had a negative view of new religious movements although 91.7 percent "were basing their perceptions on some form of media presentation." (Olson, 2006, p 99). Clearly the media have a huge role to play in shaping peoples' perspectives of new religious movements in society.

In 2003, 2,426 Nebraskans were surveyed to find out their overall views on religious groups and how much control the government should have over them. Participants were asked how comfortable they

would feel if their neighbour joined a cult, a new religious movement and a new Christian church. Most responded "very uncomfortable" with their neighbour joining a cult, "somewhat comfortable" with their neighbour joining a new religious movement and "very comfortable" with their neighbour joining a new Christian church (Olson, 2006, p 100). This concludes a general acceptance for larger religions such as Christianity but more suspicion towards 'cults'. However, when participants were asked how comfortable they would feel if their neighbour joined a new religious movement, the results indicated slightly more comfortability. Based on the findings, Olson (2006) claimed "Nebraskans have an overwhelmingly negative attitude towards cults, but do not hold such a negative view of NRMs even when they know nothing else about the group. Simply changing the terminology used to describe a religious group does, in fact, make a very large difference" (Ibid p 104). However, the term 'new religious movement' is not widely accepted and the research indicated a much higher comfortability with sects of Christianity than new religious movements.

Along with a general disdain for new religious movements, many of the elite in government and society "impose strict measures of social control on cults", enforcing laws to prevent these groups from recruiting new members, for example (Ibid p 98). James A. Beckford (1983) stated "Moreover, the weight of public opinion seems to be in favour of keeping religious matters largely in the sphere of the private and consequently outside the framework of law" (p 58). New religious groups are also usually criticised by the public for their subtle threats to families, rather than bigger problems such as alcoholism, drug use and criminality (Ibid p 60). This shows that the irrational fear of new religious movements may be stronger than the reality.

What new religious movements are really like

Coralie Buxant and Vassilis Saroglou (2007) said despite their representation in the media, studies show that "(a) people who join NRMs (small and marginal groups, which are often radical and socially contested as cult-like movements) are not mentally ill; and (b) belonging to NRMs is beneficial rather than detrimental to the mental health and well-being of members" (pp 17–18). Members of new religious movements tended to struggle in areas of stress and anxiety, drug abuse, relationships and reason for being before they joined. Once they joined, they found themselves feeling supported in these issues (Ibid p 18). This shows the reality of how dangerous these groups are is not commensurate to their representation in society. A study of members of new religious movements and non-members showed the religious members valued conformity, tradition and benevolence while non-members valued more self-direction and stimulation (p 26). Buxant and Saroglou (2007) also discovered religious members often used moral judgement for conventional rules. They tended to look and judge everyday situations rigidly based on their moral compass (p 27). While these members may be more obedient to

the strict morals of the religious group they are part of, there was no indication of mental illness or delusion. The members just had completely different values and views of the world than the non-members.

While it may be different for those who have left these groups, Dominiek Coates (2013) says studies are indicating that "NRM participation can be an experience that facilities significant growth and development" (p 793). Coates studied 23 participants who were formally in new religious groups and found they joined for direction in their life and to have a sense of community that they did not otherwise have (Ibid p 795). All participants spoke of "experiencing an intense "identity void" upon the loss of the NRM identity, followed by a period of intense uncertainty or "existential anxiety". Following this, they would seek to learn more about their emotions and beliefs through books and counselling (Ibid p 801). Scholars have found that the anxiety, fear and depression experienced by people after leaving new religious movements is not due to brainwashing but to a loss of identity. Coates says they can feel a strong loss because their identity was attached to a group (Ibid 802). However, he rejected the notion that former members have an obscured sense of self but that their experience in the group helps them form a more solid sense of self (p 805).

Children who grow up in religious groups experience a similar loss of identity when leaving a religious group. Jessica Pratezina (2019) says children who grow up in a new religious movement have a "cultural and spiritual identity" which comes from what they are told about their identity and place in the world (p 77). Third generation children are taught they are "set apart for spiritual purposes" and they are special and unlike other children in the world (Ibid p 78). These children consider themselves isolated from the rest of the world which is not always a negative but when they leave the group, they can experience loneliness and disconnection from community (Ibid p 79). Pratezina claimed these children fight loneliness by connecting with others who were also part of a new religious movement. Part of this is in learning what a new religious movement is and understanding their own experience better (Ibid p 79). Many children who leave these groups start the process of rediscovering who they are and finding a new cultural and spiritual identity unlike the one their parents gave them (Ibid p 80).

This research gives a new perspective on what members and former members of new religious movements are really like. They are not usually dangerous, brainwashed people but live with an identity confined to the beliefs of a religious group which helps them to consider decisions morally and form a stronger identity. This is not something most people have heard about and certainly not what is reported in the media.

Representation of new religious movements in the media

The way journalists intend to report on new religious movements appears to be different to what is found in the media. Harvey Hill, John Hickman and Joel McLendon (2001) quoted Judith Buddenbaum that reporters' "most important consideration in handling the religion beat was an even-handed, non-judgmental and fair approach to stories." (p 25). However, strong negative language was frequently used in new religious movement stories. Hill et al, said when emotive language was used in the media when discussing information or facts that were supposed to be neutral, it could influence the reader to see the facts in a positive or negative way (Ibid p 25). The following studies showed journalists often used strong, emotive language when reporting on new religious movements.

Hill et al (2001) analysed news articles over a six-month period from January 1, 1999 to June 30, 1999 that mentioned religious groups. They found that despite much criticism from religious leaders of the media bias, "overt anti-religious sentiments are rare" (pp 26–31). However, it was the strong, negative descriptive words when describing new religious movements that showed an underlying bias. They discovered individuals in the groups were described in a more neutral way as a 'member' than the groups themselves as 'cults' (Ibid p 33). They also found most reporters would use the words "faith" and "belief" for more traditional, accepted religions but would not for new religious movements (Ibid p 26). They suggested that reporters tended to accept government, police and other 'weak evidence' on new religious groups as they are unpopular and on the edge of society (Ibid p 34). The media tended to only report on new religious movements when something unusual occurred or groups went against cultural norms. This firmly placed these groups under the typical stereotypes of cults (Ibid p 34). Hill et al, said that negative representation of new religious groups in the movement had even encouraged some groups to react with violence (Ibid p 35). This suggests the media can not only reinforce stereotypes and beliefs but also influence people's actions.

Barend van Driel and James T. Richardson (1988) analysed news articles from November 1973 and April 1984 about sects and cults. In most cases, the idea of cults in the media most commonly reflected popular belief or negative perceptions. Reporters did not have a clear understanding of the differences between sects and cults; most often attributed characteristics of sects to cults (p 176). These definitions of cults commonly came from anti-cult experts; the characteristics were members being brainwashed, having no freedom and seeing ordinary society as evil, along with compelling but controlling leadership (Ibid p 177). Van Driel and Richardson also discovered there was a gradual preference for the word cult in the media. While most reporters used the word sect, over time, the word cult was more commonly used (pp 177–178). However, the word cult would push negative attributes onto all new religious groups. This generalisation can damage these groups' reputations, even if they are harmless. They further said

“by adopting the concept "cult" as a descriptive category, NRMs were, willingly or not, condemned to occupy a position in the same category of groups that includes the People's Temple, the Manson Family, and other marginal movements which evoke public fear and horror” (Ibid p 181).

Academics have expressed concern that only generalised and exaggerated information about these groups was being shared. Bernard Doherty (2014) said 65 percent of Australian respondents to a survey of social attitudes said they got their news from television (p 41). A factor in why the information about these groups was not adequate was the journalist’s “religious illiteracy”, or their lack of personal and background knowledge of new religious groups (Ibid p 46). Doherty also claimed religious reporting was less of a priority or interest for reporters and so stories produced were of considerably lower quality than other subject area. He said reporters tended to only give a platform for former members of new religious groups, concerned parents and cult experts and there was a lack of reportage of fair analysis into the groups themselves (Ibid p 47). Doherty said the media did not usually do follow ups to stories about new religious movements about the resolution of an allegation, for example. He claimed the media can either shape a new religious movement story into a conspiracy theory or simply reflected what the people wanted. It can be concluded that there was a gap in the reporting of specific groups and their individual values and practices which would have given the public a better understanding of new religious movements.

New religious movements and news values

The choices journalists make about how to report a story about a new religious group are usually determined by specific news values. Douglas E. Cowan and Jeffrey K. Hadden (2004) say the media have a lens on the world and determines what readers see and do not see (p 65). The four news values for new religious movements proposed were

“1. Event negativity
2. Resonance of the event with target news consumers
3. Rarity of the event in the experience of target news consumers
4. Conceptual clarity or simplicity with which the event may be portrayed”

(Ibid, p 60).

These four values come from a set of news values that journalists use to determine whether a story is newsworthy or not. The first is that negative news stories about new religious movements tend to be more newsworthy as people are likely to read if it is exciting and has conflict in it (Ibid p 71). The second is that readers need to have an understanding within their cultural setting to connect with the story they are reading. This is why journalists report on stories about new religious movements in their own setting

rather than elsewhere (Ibid p 72). The third is that stories about new religious movements are considered newsworthy only when they are outside the "normal" and the "expected"". This piques the interest of a reader because it is different to what they experience day-to-day (Cowan & Hadden, 2004, p 74). The fourth is that these stories must also be simple and relatively easy to understand and implicitly reflect who the good and bad people are (p 76). These values seem to clash with how many academics think journalists should be reporting.

One journalist responded to the criticism, explaining how journalism filters events to form a narrative. Firstly, Mark Silk (1997) responded to Richardson and van Diel's statement about journalists being unable to remain neutral by stating "facts and trends do not just sit around awaiting neutral dissemination to the public at large. Day in and day out, they engage in the business of shaping the information at their disposal (good, bad or indifferent) into culturally significant narratives" (p 137). He claimed the main things about religion covered in American media are "good works, tolerance, hypocrisy, false prophecy, inclusion, supernatural belief, and declension" (Ibid p 138). These were not all negative but rather interesting enough to write a story about. Silk makes the point that if no kind of abuse has occurred then there is no story. Otherwise, they are just a peaceful group of law-abiding citizens. He also claimed he did once write an in-depth 'inclusion' story about a group of scientologists, despite academic belief that it is never reported. While academics are theoretical, journalists are practical. Silk said Richardson and van Diel did not explain *how* to write a more positive, inclusive story on a new religious movement and urged them to give journalists advice on what to write about instead. He said journalists did reflect the public and what was concerning them and it was important to inform people if something dangerous was going on within a religious group. If nothing dangerous is going on, there was no story (p 141). It is clear that journalists appear to be attracted to the story of a dangerous 'cult' group because it is interesting enough to publish.

New religious movements as a moral panic

The media can often hype stories to the point where there is widespread 'moral panic'. Joseph Laycock (2013) cited sociologist Stanley Cohen's definition of a moral panic: "A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to, the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible."" (p 81).

The moral panic about new religious groups began in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This scare led people to believe members were "misguided, mentally unwell or evil, and both were viewed by some as

threats to the moral fabric of society and to family life" according to Jenny Reichert & James T. Richardson (2012, p 48). Reichert and Richardson said moral panic was easily spread through the news media and affected how people viewed new religious movements. Moral panic arose from the media claiming threatening activity happened more frequently than it actually did, creating fear and a cry for action (Ibid p 50). They claimed negative perceptions of cults in the media can even sway jurors to perceive a case about new religious movements through their own stereotypes (Ibid p 51). This shows again the strong influence the media have on the public, especially in relation to new religious movements as people are already suspicious of them.

Moral panic often starts from an alarming news article. Then forms a community agreement that there is a threat and something needs to be done about it. Benjamin Dorman (2005) quoted Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda (1994) in his article that moral panic is "when significant numbers of people are subject to intense feelings of concern over a threat, which a sober assessment of the evidence would suggest is either nonexistent or is not likely to cause much concrete harm" (p 84). He said the main criteria for moral panic are concerns from multiple groups, hostility at the religious group causing trouble, consensus of the apparent threat, disproportionality from the perceived fear to the actual threat and volatility (Ibid. 84–85).

The exaggerated threat comes from the media's general caution of new religious movements. When a sample of journalists were asked what they thought of new religious movements, none of the groups listed were perceived as "very favorable" and only a few journalists perceived some of the groups "somewhat favourably" (Richardson & van Driel, 1997, p 123). While Richardson and van Driel suggested journalists may be favourable towards anti-cult organisations, a survey by Shupe and Bromley (1980) showed "many journalists appear to be suspicious of both the new religions *and* their opponents" (p 126). This shows it may not be just new religious movements reporters are suspicious of but many aspects of society. Journalists feel that responsibility to criticise and correct moral society. However, Richardson and van Driel noticed a pattern of ignorance and judgement from the reporters. Some journalists refused to answer questions or give their opinion which troubled the academics' faith in the press to report fairly on all religious groups (Ibid p 129). Richardson and Barend van Driel claimed the news media were not neutral and actively constructed information and events (Ibid p 117). They said the media promoted a "so-called structure of balance" and stuck to the status quo on many social issues. Journalists were described as "moral entrepreneurs" of "social control" (Ibid p 177). Therefore, it made sense that reporters wanted to warn the public of any moral threats to society even when there was none.

How the representation of new religious movements could be shifted

We are still left with the issue of a misrepresentation of religious groups that struggle to be heard. As a result, some new religious movements have been attempting to reshape that representation through the use of their own public relations. Donald A. Westbrook (2018) said scientologists produce their own promotion media for "self-communication, apologetics, dissemination, and proselytization" (p 382). He said they wanted to "*legitimate* themselves" in spite of what had already been produced about them in the media (Ibid p 382). Westbrook said that if more religious groups were to be active promoting themselves on the internet and other places, it would give an insight or a "face" to the church (Ibid p 383). The internet has become a powerful tool for groups such as scientology. There is so much information and diverse opinions on the web. Because of this, the internet is perhaps the last place that would sway people towards the "evil "cult"" representation (Ibid p 384). David Miscavige, at the opening of Scientology Media Productions in 2016 said: "Because as the saying goes, if you don't write your own story, someone else will. So, yes, we're now going to be writing our story like no other religion in history" (Ibid p 387).

Another way new religious movements can start being re-represented is through teaching. Many people have assumptions about these groups and it can help to explore the reasoning behind that. Benjamin E. Zeller (2015) said that as a teacher of new religious movements, the main challenges included "confronting students' assumptions, presuppositions, and stereotypes about the subject matter, and even questions about the merit of studying the topic at all" (p 121). The best way for students to learn about new religious movements was to unlearn what they already assumed and to reteach them detached from their own stereotypes (Ibid p 122). A lot of what people believed about new religious movements was from rumours and stereotypes and not facts. Just the word 'cult' could bring with it negative feelings and fears. Zeller said "students recognise how language shapes the ways in which groups are treated by society and how categories like 'cult' and 'religion' are culturally conditioned" (Ibid p 125). The way he would reteach his students was by active learning whereby students were challenged about their assumptions for themselves and were forced to reconsider the "loaded categories of religion and cult" (Ibid p 127). Zeller said getting his students to teach the class about a new religious group enabled them to learn and understand deeper than they otherwise would (Ibid p 129). Shifting the representation of new religious movements begins with people being well informed and enabling every group to have a fair critique.

Case study of Gloriavale and Shincheonji

For my case study, I wanted to research different new religious movements that had recent media coverage in New Zealand. I chose Gloriavale and Shincheonji because they are different in how they operate and in how much media coverage they have received.

Gloriavale is a small religious community of over 500 people in the South Island of New Zealand. Everything the members do come from their unwavering beliefs of what they are taught of scripture. It is only when people are put in a place that challenges what they always understood of their community that they question the ultimate truth they are taught (David Crawley, 2016, p 41). One former member, Joy, who left and returned for a brief time said, "Walking out from there is walking away from God's church… I didn't want to lose my salvation." She believes all that she has ever known and held truth with would be gone if she left the community (Ibid p 42).

Shincheonji is a larger global movement that has started to recruit in New Zealand. It is part of the "second generational movement" of Korean new religious movements that are the most active in contemporary Korea (David Kim & Won-il Bang, 2019, p 5). These new groups pushed the limits and taught more about the spiritual world and the big social problems such as globalisation that traditional Christians may not have considered (Ibid p 5). The movement grew from 60,000 members in 2008 to 180,000 in 2017 and has spread to 24 nations. (p 6)

While I found plenty of research from overseas, almost no research has been done on the representation of new religious movements in the media in New Zealand. The only New Zealand-based article I found was "I believe the truth is here: Musings on the Gloriavale community" (Crawley, 2016). However, this was only a short theological article and analysed the spiritual and psychological aspects of Gloriavale. Because there has been no research done about new religious movements in New Zealand, I have analysed Gloriavale and Shincheonji news articles from 2019 to see how much coverage each group received and how they were represented. This is discussed in the content analysis section.

I also noticed a lack of journalistic understanding and response. I specifically noticed this in Richardson and van Driel's (1997) survey of journalist's opinions of new religious movements. They sent out 437 surveys but received only 87 responses. An editor even responded saying he refused to give his opinion as it could impact the way he reports (pp 121–122). This was not a large enough study to legitimately reflect the opinions of journalists. Furthermore, these academics did not understand that most journalists choose not to have opinions on issues in society. They are urged not to express their political and religious views in news stories. This angle was only discussed by one journalist, Mark Silk (1997), responding to the criticisms of journalistic coverage of new religious movements. He said that while no

journalist could be completely impartial, some journalists even choose not to vote so as not to impact their reporting (p 140). This was a different perspective that was needed in the wider discussion but it is only one in the vast pool of academics. It is also an older article and fresh perspective on the issue from a journalist is needed. In my journalism project, I aimed to offer that impartial, fair reportage of new religious movements by interviewing multiple former members from Gloriavale and Shincheonji and letting them freely share their story.

Conclusion

The representation of new religious movements in the news media is by no means a simple issue. In order to understand why these groups are represented negatively in the media, there needed to be a wider discussion on the general views of new religious movements. The definition of a 'cult' that is more commonly known and used is not even simply defined as it carries with it many assumptions and stereotypes. Although it is difficult to generalise new religious movements, there are some common characteristics. However, these characteristics are too general and bring forth negative connotations. This is shown in that the general perception of new religious movements was negative comparatively to Christian sects. A common misconception was that people in these cults had been brainwashed. In reality, members and former members of new religious movements had a greater awareness of their identity and morals. Most participants surveyed for their opinion said their main source of information for new religious movements came from the media. However, the media were found to generalise and exaggerate these stories which caused a lack of understanding of these groups in the public. The journalism perspective in this issue was lacking in research as reporters have a criterion in what they produce. This was established through news values determining what is interesting enough to report. Journalists have a different role to play in society than academics so what is needed is a better understanding of journalism practices and how a representation shift of new religious movements can be practically undertaken in the news media.

4. Discussion

The literature review showed the representation of new religious movements in overseas media was mostly negative. Although reporters aimed to be fair in their reportage of these groups, academic research revealed an underlying bias in what was reported, the sources used and the language used. However, there was a lack of New Zealand research into new religious movements in the media. I chose to analyse all Gloriavale and Shincheonji news articles from 2019 to find out the main themes and what sources and language was used. There were 29 Gloriavale and only two Shincheonji articles so I will focus mainly on Gloriavale and briefly on Shincheonji. I will discuss the ways in which the news media represents and constructs stories about these religious groups to the public.

Framing Theory

In order to understand why news articles are written in a certain manner, it is important to mention framing theory. Media framing theory is the idea that an article is constructed in a certain way to convey a particular message; the way in which a reporter organises the information, chooses what information to include and how it is worded is how it can be framed. Olasunkanmi Arowolo (2017) said "Frames can be defined as organising ideas or themes, ways of linking together stories historically, building up a narrative over time and across political space" (p. 3). This shows that the media do not just conceptualise pre-conceived ideas independently but also feed into what is already being reported on.

David Tewksbury & Dietram A. Scheufele, (2009) said news framing involves reporters arranging "arguments, information, symbols, metaphors, and images" in a particular way to push their ideas across (p. 19). They argue it can be possible for a reporter to bring in additional facts or statistics to reinforce their message. However, a strong frame would not need as much reinforcement as it relies on pre-existing beliefs and values. In some cases, a single word is able to change a reader's perspective on the issue in the article (pp 19–20). The way information is arranged creates a logical flow and causes the reader to resonate with the underlying message.

Agenda-setting, an aspect of framing theory, considers how often an issue is reported in the news and how accessible it is for the public. This, in turn, causes people to believe the issue is important. Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) said a construct that is both applicable and accessible are the most successful; applicable, meaning how relevant and popular it is in society. In fact, "alternative news values affected how audiences prioritised competing values relative to an issue" (Ibid p 21). They also emphasised if the frame was more applicable, a more powerful frame could be created.

The Gloriavale Articles

There were 29 articles about Gloriavale in 2019 in the New Zealand media. There were often double-up articles republished in other news sites. In order to make the analysis fair, an article published twice was only used once in the research. Most of the news articles were published on Stuff, but also NZ Herald and Radio New Zealand. There were also audio interviews with Gloriavale leavers on Radio New Zealand which were not included as the research focused on written news articles. What follows is an analysis of the main themes, the sources included and quoted and language used in the 2019 news articles.

Main Themes of Gloriavale

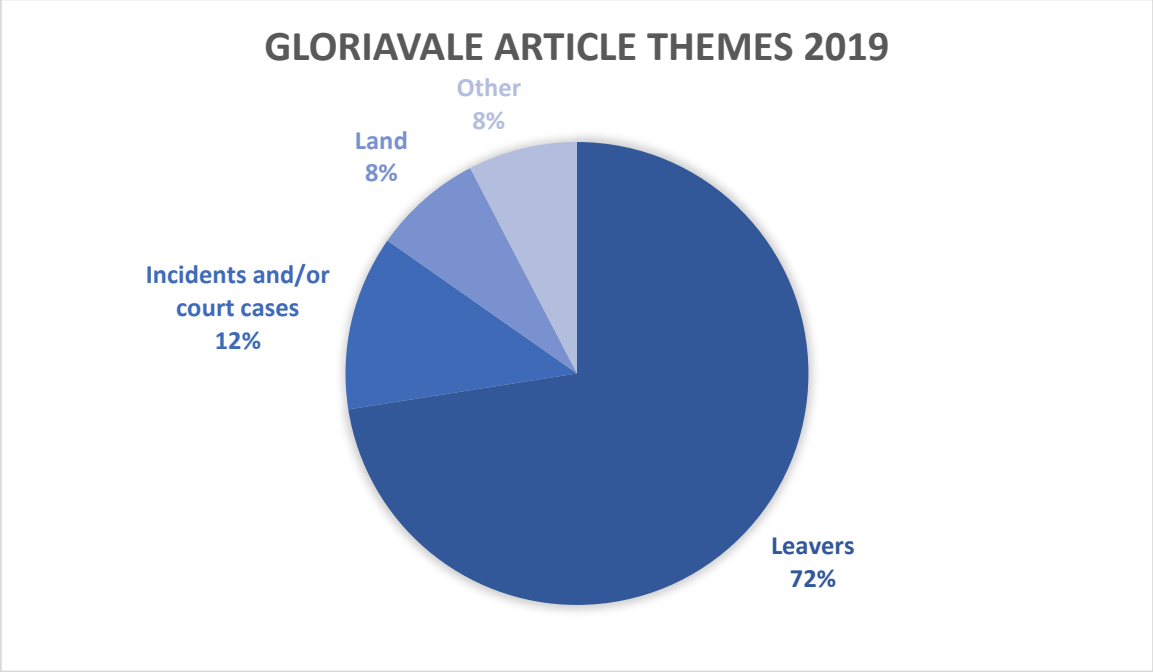

Figure one. Pie graph of main themes from Gloriavale articles in 2019.

As shown in **figure one**, most of the Gloriavale news articles from 2019 were about leavers of the community. Nineteen of 29 articles centred around leavers while seven centred around incidents and or court cases involving abuse; two focused on the community land and two mentioned Gloriavale as a top story of the year and in a larger story about 'cult' groups.

Since many of the stories were either about Gloriavale leavers or court cases about abuse, it quite often seemed like the same story was being told. The basic premise for leavers was that a family left Gloriavale, told their story of leaving and resettling in the 'outside world' and a woman named Liz Gregory from the Gloriavale Trust was usually quoted emphasising the same message of how hard it is for leavers to adjust to a new life and how the trust would support them.

The other basic premise for an incident was someone from Gloriavale had been abused, followed by a list of other abuses concerning members of the community and mention of the former leader, Hopeful Christian, was usually accompanied with the phrase "a convicted sex offender" (Bayer, 2019, para. 10). This implied a pattern of incidents and or abuse within the religious community.

The same story appeared to be being told over and over again. The main reason seems to be in framing Gloriavale as the 'baddies' while those on the outside were the 'goodies'. By reporting leavers' tragic stories and reports of incidents and abuse, it enables a reinforcement of the typical negative stereotypes of new religious movements. The other two main contributing factors were the sources reporters spoke to and the way the stories were being framed by the language used.

Sources in Gloriavale articles

Sources used were primarily Gloriavale leavers: 24 leavers were quoted in 10 different articles. Some leavers were quoted many times in separate articles while some were quoted only once. A few chose to be known only as a 'former member' or only by their surname such as 'Mr Ben-Canaan' (Pointon, 2019, para. 2). However, the vast majority were quoted by their full name. Many had changed their name from their former Gloriavale name to a new name. For example, Zoe Max was formerly known as Worthy Love in the community (Comer, 2019, para. 5). These leavers were generally very vocal and critical of the community in the media because of their difficult experiences in leaving Gloriavale.

The primary source for most leaver articles was the general manager of the Gloriavale Leavers' Support Trust, Liz Gregory. She was quoted in 11 articles and the only source in six articles. Gregory was the one who set up the leavers trust after personally getting to know and housing leavers in her area; it was also mentioned she belongs to a church. She was often quoted asking the public for financial support and said the trust aimed to support leavers as Gloriavale shared everything equally and did not offer that kind of support (Comer, 2019, para. 17). Because of this, many leavers left with next to nothing. However, one leaver, James Harrison, claimed many leavers do get money from the Gloriavale leaders but many are afraid to ask for fear of being persuaded to stay (Batham, 2019, para. 7). Gregory also said the trust wanted to show leavers the world was not as evil as they had been taught as resettling was often difficult. Gregory often had big claims but, especially when she was the only source, there was rarely an opposition to assert or challenge this.

Gloriavale was asked to comment for six articles but consistently declined an interview. There was only one instance where a Gloriavale spokesperson made any kind of response: "A spokesperson from Gloriavale declined to be interviewed but said members of the community are free to come and go as

they please. When asked why so many people choose to leave under the cover of darkness, the spokesperson said it was probably out of shame" (Batham, 2019, para. 31–32).

There was an obvious gap of reportage from the Gloriavale community. However, there was clearly a prolonged attempt to reach out to the group but which proved unsuccessful. In that case, for practical reasons, it made sense as to why there was no response included in the articles.

Language used/implications for Gloriavale

Figure two. Word Cloud of key words used in 2019 Gloriavale news articles.

As shown by **figure two**, regardless of the news platform, common words were used in the articles. These were loaded, strong words that were often used freely and without explanation. The most common word was flee, fleeing or fled, used on 22 separate occasions. It was often used in place of the word 'leave'. For example, this was the first line of an article on *Stuff*: "Former Gloriavale members James Harrison, his wife and twelve children fled the secluded West Coast religious community with little more than $40 and a sewing machine between them" ("Starting a new life", 2019, para. 1). The introduction implies the family had to get away quickly so did not have time to take much with them. The word 'flee' has stronger emotional connotations than 'leave', 'flee' meaning to get away from a place

of danger. The second most commonly used word was 'control', 'controlling' or 'controlled' used 11 times. Again, this has strong connotations about being forced to follow rules or leadership, indicating a bias and criticism towards the community of enforcing rules members do not want to follow. In one article about a court case of child sexual abuse, the reporter freely used the word 'control' to describe what the former members experienced: "According to him and others who know her, his wife is under constant pressure from the leadership to abandon him – a common form of punishment and control by cult leaders to make renegades repent and return" (Richter, 2019, para. 17). The word 'control' was not put in quotation marks and was not explained. The reader is left to accept that based on one example used, Gloriavale is generally controlling.

Other common words used were 'reclusive' or 'secluded' to describe Gloriavale as separated from ordinary society, secluded used 11 times and reclusive six times. 'Freedom' was also used 10 times; 'dream' was used seven times, especially in reference to leaving the group and pursuing goals outside of the community. 'Excommunicated' and 'kicked out' were each used four times. Other words or phrases used more than once were 'controversial', 'escaping', 'isolated', 'strict', 'shame', 'power', 'fearful', rules, 'cut off' and 'thrown out'.

These were all words used by the reporter and not in quotes from sources. Some of the stronger and more unusual words used were 'disillusioned' and 'harrowed'. This shows that reporters were not afraid to use negative emotive language in the context of a religious group. However, one difference I noticed was the academic research in my literature review noted the word 'cult' was used frequently. However, it was only in one article in 2019. Gloriavale was more commonly referred to as a 'religious community'.

The Shincheonji articles

Although there were only two Shincheonji articles published on Stuff, they were the most balanced of all the articles I read. By balanced, I mean fair and including a range of perspectives including someone who was a former member of the new religious movement, pastors, a spokesperson from Victoria University and a religious academic. The reporter even tried to approach Shincheonji; the former member gave an address and the journalist went and knocked on the door and asked for a comment. However, the person who answered the door denied knowing anything about the group (Livingston, 2019, para. 36).

While the two articles were mainly focused on warning people in a negative way, the academic pointed out that people can choose to join any group but the problem with Shincheonji was they were not being honest about their beliefs: "Everybody has the perfect right to believe and follow what they want, but it is a reasonable expectation that groups will be upfront so people are able to make a rational decision when joining" (Livingston, 2019, para. 41). The reporter was critical of the group based on the primarily

negative stance his sources took. However, the difference I noticed is that he explored *why* this group was receiving backlash. Livingston explained why they were deceptive, for example, because Shincheonji recruited people without outright saying what they believed. This justified explanation was lacking in the Gloriavale articles that tended to make assumptions instead.

Conclusion

My research showed the representation of new religious movements in the New Zealand media was similarly negative as was found in the academic research. It was true that most reportage was about former members as that made up more than two thirds of the articles. The reporters did use many anti-cult groups and experts, such as Liz Gregory from the Gloriavale Trust. The main difference was that New Zealand articles on Gloriavale tended not to use the word 'cult' but instead used a more neutral term such as 'religious community'. However, the revealing assumptions about new religious movements came through the language used, which was also what the academic research found. There were some strong, negative words that were not explained and had negative connotations, such as 'flee' which was used 22 times. It was clear there was a narrative being framed of Gloriavale as the 'baddies', controlling and abusing people. In contrast, the articles about Shincheonji were balanced and gave a fair explanation of the religious group, rather than drawing assumptions.

5. Conclusion

This project has explored the way new religious movements are reported on and often misrepresented in the New Zealand media. The literature review informed an understanding of how the perceptions of these groups shape and influence their existence. It showed that the generally negative coverage of new religious movements has caused a public disdain for these groups. However, the public stereotypes of members of new religious movements were not always accurate. Although most people assumed cults to be negative and brainwashing members, most members joined at a hard time in their life and found a better sense of identity and community being in the group. This is just one of the instances where the cult stereotypes did not quite line up according to academic research.

In the discussion, practical research into Gloriavale Christian Community and Shincheonji 2019 news articles showed the academic research to be accurate. As most academics said, journalists tended to report on Gloriavale leaver stories and abuse allegations. The strong language, including the loaded word 'fled', was used frequently. Although the word 'cult' was not used often, other negative words showed the representation of these groups to be mostly negative. However, the two Shincheonji articles were more balanced and interviewed a wider range of people, including a spokesperson from Victoria University and an academic. This showed a less completely negative perception, rather an analysis into why this group operated the way it did. It was important to see how new religious movements could be analysed more fairly if the reporter chose to interview widely and deeply analyse.

The long-form piece of journalism was informed by the research undertaken. It focused on addressing these stereotypes reported in the media and assumed by the public. Interviewing people who had left Gloriavale and Shincheonji on their full story showed the stereotypes were not black and white. Most interviewees had a story with good and bad aspects to it and often commented on how their experience was different to what they expected of a cult group. Speaking to academics from Victoria University and Auckland University also showed some stereotypes were accurate but some were not. For example, these groups commonly indoctrinate; however, it is not brainwashing as we assume it to be. The academics stated that members are more likely to 'brainwash' or convince themselves to submit to the teachings. Therefore, the piece became about personal stories and how those stories disprove or complicate the common stereotypes. The personal stories were more real and important than the assumptions and became the focus of the piece. The news media could write more interesting, complex stories about new religious movements if they remove their own biases and assumptions and are prepared to change the typical narrative as it stands.

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7. Interviews

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