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“We are Committed to Our Success”:
NXIVM from an Anthropological Perspective

Bachelor Thesis

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Statement

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Prague, 24.06.2022

Erin Picardy

Abstract

This study focuses on NXIVM, an organization that existed from 1998 to 2018 and described itself as a human potential movement led by a philosophical leader. I understand NXIVM to be a new religious movement that also operated as a multilevel marketing company. I collected my data through unobtrusive methods and then analyzed through qualitative content analysis. The purposeful data sample consists of the published autobiographies of three former female members: Toni Natalie, Sarah Edmondson, and Catherine Oxenberg. Data was also contextualized by supplementary primary sources such as books, patents, and televised docuseries such as HBO's *The Vow* and Starz's *Seduced*. The research for this study centers on the *Five-Day*, an introductory course for *ESP (Executive Success Programs)*, the flagship company under the NXIVM corporate umbrella. This paper is an anthropological interpretation of the reflections of the selected three authors' experiences and understanding of NXIVM as an institution and specifically, the *Five-Day* as an initiation into the institution. Firstly, I show how my data concurs with Raine's (2021) understanding of NXIVM as primarily a reinventive institution with elements of a total institution. Secondly, I interpret the *Five-Day* as an initiation ritual - a specific "rite of passage." (van Gennep, 1909) This paper aims to apply Victor Turner's (1969) ritual theory concepts of 'liminality' and 'communitas' (as elaborated in the recent discourse on ritual theory (Hüsken-Neubert 2012, Eriksen 1995, Bowie 2006)) to the analysis of the *Five-Day*. Lastly, I argue that as a social institution NXIVM can be interpreted to have existed on a continuum from reinventive to total. (Goffman 1961, Scott 2010, Raine 2021) I also claim that NXIVM can additionally be interpreted as having existed on a continuum from 'liminal' to 'liminoid'. (Turner 1974, Spiegel 2011) Therefore, I present The NXIVM Continuum, an analytical model of interstitial continuums of reinventive to total and 'liminal' to 'liminoid' which represents the fluidity of the nxian members' experiences and involvement as described in the selected autobiographies.

Keywords

NXIVM, Ritual, NRM, Autobiography, Qualitative Content Analysis, Continuum, Total Institution, Reinventive Institution, Liminality, Communitas

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Abbreviations

CBI - Consumers' Buyline Incorporated

DOS - "Dominus Obsequious Sororium"

ECA – Ethnographic Content Analysis

EM - Exploration of Meaning

ESP - Executive Success Programs

EST - Erhard Seminar Trainings

ICSA - International Cultic Studies Association

IJCAM - International Journal of Coercion, Abuse, and Manipulation

MLM - Multilevel Marketing

NHN - National Health Network

NLP - Neuro-Linguistic Programming

NRM - New Religious Movement

QCA - Qualitative Content Analysis

RI - Reinventive Institution

SOP - Society of Protectors

TI - Total Institution

Introduction: “We are committed to our success!”

On day one of that seminar, they gave each of us a white sash, which they explained was a ‘student sash’ - a long piece of fabric they instructed us to wear around our necks so that it fell to mid-torso on both sides. They’d told us that the Stripe Path measured one’s ‘growth’ or ‘level of integration.’ I looked down at my sash. I didn’t like it; I thought the idea (and the fabric) was cheap and embarrassing, and I didn’t like that they were taking it upon themselves to measure us as people when they didn’t even know us. I didn’t appreciate being considered at the bottom of the ranks, nor did I like the ranking system. Meanwhile, David was having a meltdown, relating these ranks to the corrupt regime in the country he’d been born in, which he and his family had emigrated from when he was a preteen. Neither of us was fully on board with this. “Should we leave?” I asked him. He gave me a look that seemed to say, Sarah, we spent so much money to be here. (Edmondson 2019, p. 53)

...

Mark had been right: by day three, I’d started having some big shifts and wondered what I could accomplish if I just tried this. I started to get excited about the Stripe Path and what it could do for my self-esteem and my sense of accomplishment. As an actor, I’d never had a path to measure my progress. I’d been working hard with acting, where there was no linear path forward as there is with many careers. Sometimes I booked a voiceover job; other times, a movie. You take what you can get. NXIVM felt like I’d finally discovered something I could stick to. I could learn to help others like the coaches had helped me. (Edmondson 2019, p. 55)

...

I liken the experience of the Five-Day to the first time you take Bikram yoga. Put simply, it stinks... but as you get more familiar, you become used to the stench until you eventually don’t even notice it. Afterward, it was like taking off sweaty, smelly yoga clothes and stepping into the shower: feeling lighter, fresher, so much stronger and clearer. Getting into the process sucked, but by the end, the benefit was so good. (Edmondson 2019, p. 56)

In 2005, Sarah Edmondson was unsatisfied with her trajectory in life. In her 2019 autobiography, *Scarred: The True Story of How I Escaped NXIVM, the Cult That Bound My Life*, (see appendix A 2) she wrote that she felt stalled in her career and in her relationship. She was looking for a sign from the universe on what direction her life should take. At a film festival on a cruise, she met Mark Vicente, famed director of *What the Bleep Do We Know?!*, the top-grossing documentary film of the time. Vicente told her about his life-changing experience in an organization called NXIVM¹ which was led by the smartest man in the world, Keith Raniere.² Edmondson felt this was the sign she was looking for. She decided to sign up her and her partner, David, for the roughly \$2500³ introductory *Five-Day* intensive into *ESP (Executive Success Programs)*, NXIVM’s flagship company. About 10 years later, Edmondson would find herself being held down naked by her best friend and work colleagues on a table to become scarified in a *branding ceremony*⁴ as a formal initiation into a secret sorority of nxian⁵ elite called *DOS*⁶ where she was expected to say the phrase: “Master, please brand me, it would be an honor, an honor I want to wear for the rest of my life.” (*United States of America v. Raniere*, 2019, p. 2064)

¹ NXIVM is pronounced ‘nex-ee-um’.

² Raniere is pronounced ‘Ra-neer-ee’.

³ According to Edmondson (2019), they received a discounted rate which came to roughly \$2500 in Canadian dollars each. This was a considerable amount of money for them to pay at that time. (Edmondson 2019, p. 32)

⁴ The topic of *branding* in *DOS* will be discussed more in-depth in 2.1.4, 2.2.4.1.2, and 3.4.1. (see appendices A6, A7)

⁵ ‘Nxian’ is an emic term that is both a noun and an adjective. It can be a word used to describe a member of NXIVM or it can be used to describe something as relating to NXIVM. For example, a nxian engages in nxian practices. Another nxian term, is ‘espian’ which is used similarly but for the nxian company ESP which will be discussed further in later chapters.

⁶ *DOS* was an acronym for a fake latin term, *Dominus Obsequious Sororium*, which roughly translated to “master over the slave women”. (Berman 2021, p. 13)

The quotes at the beginning of this paper shows how at the start of her journey within the organization, Edmondson felt hesitant about NXIVM but due to the large amount of money spent on the program she decides to complete the *Five-Day*. The “shift” she experienced in day three of the *Five-Day* is when she began to see the organization in a positive light and when she decided to work her way up *the stripe path*.⁷ She became so successful within the organization that she was eventually recruited into the most elite and secretive organization in the entire institution, *DOS*, where she experienced ritual violence. (Bowie 2006) How could something so seemingly benign as executive success classes lead one to devout membership in a social institution that former members publicly call a ‘cult’? How does anyone find themselves in an organization such as NXIVM? As Mark Vicente explains in the HBO documentary on NXIVM, *The Vow*:

We’re not fucked-up, strange monsters that made bad choices our whole life. We didn’t join a cult. Nobody joins a cult. Nobody. They join a good thing and then they realize they were fucked.

(Mark Vicente in *The Vow*, 2021)

I wanted to learn more about this “good thing” from the perspective of people who experienced it. What was it about this organization that attracted so many people for so many years?

NXIVM ran for 20 years, from its inception in 1998 to its dissolution in 2018. As an organization, it described itself as primarily a human potential movement with thousands of members at centers in different countries (see appendix B 1). It was created by its philosophical leader, Keith Raniere (b. 1960) (see appendix A 1), and Nancy Salzman (b. 1954) (see appendix B 7), the company’s organizational leader. I found it interesting that NXIVM was structurally a multilevel marketing company at its core but also behaved like a new religious movement with a charismatic leader. It was secular and yet, all-consuming. It never claimed to be a religion. It made no supernatural claims, and yet, the former members describe practices that resembled worship. Instead of products, this company sold seminars on financial success and mental wellbeing. I wanted to know how so many people could devote their lives to such an organization and what their experiences had been like in their own words. In this paper, I sought to describe, understand, and interpret the individual experiences of Toni Natalie (see appendix A 4), Sarah Edmondson, and Catherine Oxenberg (see appendix A 3) as former members of NXIVM, an organization which they claim to have been a *cult*.⁸

Toni Natalie, Raniere’s former longtime girlfriend and business partner, explains in her 2019 autobiography, *The Program: Inside the Mind of Keith Raniere and the Rise and Fall of NXIVM*, that NXIVM was very concerned with being labeled a *cult*. The following quote from her book exemplifies how the organization counteracted these accusations:

“This is a label,” they explain, “that conveys no meaning but devalues the group. It is designed to keep people away from the group without saying what is wrong with it.” When this happens, they advise the student to respond, “What specifically makes the group a *cult*?” or “What do you mean by cult?” or “What do they do that’s wrong?” The key point to make, they suggest, is that according to the dictionary definition of the word, a cult must involve religious beliefs and rituals. ESP was not a religion, so how could it be a cult? (Natalie 2019, p. 97)

Raniere took great pains to brand NXIVM as a secular institution. In the training manual for coaches within the organization, he wrote the following:

Under no circumstance should any rule, ritual or method be construed to have any religious or mystical content. Each ritual has a practical worldly meaning and explanation. We live in a world of many religions. Independent of this, we the people of the earth need ways of interacting with each other that are based on mutually agreed ethics of respect. As such we fashion all aspects of ESP in a non-religious, non-mystical and practical manner. We do this so that we can all participate interdependently as part of the human team. (Raniere 2003, p. 62)

Although NXIVM was determined to be a secular institution, I view the organization to have operated very much like a spiritual organization or New Religious Movement (NRM). Raniere and Salzman were very careful about how NXIVM was described to the broader public. Their public image and marketing were vital

⁷ *The Stripe Path* is NXIVM’s social hierarchy which will be discussed in 2.2.1.

⁸ I understand *cult* to be an emic term. (see 1.1.1.)

to the organization. They were committed to the narrative that NXIVM was not a religious organization, and that Ranieri was not a spiritual leader. However, in this paper, I will argue that this appears to be contradictory to their practices. I understand NXIVM to be a New Religious Movement (NRM).

When I began my research in 2020, no academic research had been published about NXIVM; there was just what was published out in the mediascape in the form of news articles, podcasts, autobiographies, books, documentaries, and even a Lifetime made-for-tv movie. The NXIVM story has been unfolding throughout the time of my work on this paper. Since I began my study of NXIVM in 2020, many high-ranking nxians have been sentenced to prison for a broad range of offenses ranging from racketeering and fraud to the sexual abuse of both adults and minors. In the media, there have been autobiographies, documentaries, podcasts, and a book written by a VICE journalist, Sarah Berman. In the world of academia, there has been one monothematic academic journal issue and one media review relating to NXIVM.

Like millions around the world, when I first saw the headlines in 2017 of a “sex cult”¹¹ involving the rich and famous; I was intrigued. I’m a self-described “true crime buff”. While I regularly follow these kinds of stories, the NXIVM case always stood out to me. What drew me in was that when I pushed past the salacious headlines of *DOS*, I discovered that NXIVM had been a massive organization with thousands of members that aligned itself with the Human Potential Movement. I felt that there was so much more to this story than what was being portrayed on the surface level in the media. I knew that I wanted to research NXIVM from the perspective of socio-cultural anthropology, my chosen field of study. I wanted to focus on the rituals and other cultural practices. I did not want the focus of my study to be on *DOS* (the secret group within NXIVM that has become known in the media as “the sex cult”).

My interest in NXIVM became more and more about the individual journeys of former nxians and how they described their experience within the institution. Eventually, I narrowed my focus on the *Five-Day*, which I interpret to be an initiation ritual into the world of NXIVM. The autobiographies of Toni Natalie, Sarah Edmondson, and Catherine Oxenberg, three former female members, served as my primary source data. Using the experiences described by the authors, I interpret the *Five-Day* as an initiation ritual - a specific ‘rite of passage.’ (van Gennep, 1909) This paper aims to apply Victor Turner’s (1969) ritual theory concepts of ‘liminality,’ ‘liminoid,’ ‘continuum,’ and ‘communitas’ as elaborated in recent discourse on ritual theory (Hüsken-Neubert 2012, Bowie 2006, Spiegel 2011) to the my interpretation of the *Five-Day* as initiation ritual as described in the autobiographies. I will also build on Susan Raine’s (2021b) article on NXIVM by explaining my understanding that NXIVM showed varying degrees of characteristics of reinventive to total institutions.

The first chapter of this paper contains the theoretical framework, methodology, and research questions. In Chapter 2, NXIVM as an institution is explained. In that chapter, I will begin with the history of NXIVM, followed by the nxian ideology. In the same chapter, I will elaborate on Raine’s argument that NXIVM was a reinventive institution with a “shadow-like presence of a TI” (Raine 2021b, p. 79) following the work of Goffman (1957) and Scott (2011). Finally, in Chapter 3, the *Five-Day* will be examined and interpreted as an initiation ritual into the institution of NXIVM. In 3.5, I will present my interpretation of selected former NXIVM members’ experiences as described in the autobiographies with my schema, The NXIVM Continuum, which depicts NXIVM as existing on a cross-section of interstitial continuums: reinventive to total institution and ‘liminal’ to ‘liminoid.’ In my conclusion, I will summarize my argument that the *Five-Day* can be understood as a three-part initiation ritual into the world of NXIVM which I interpret to exist on intersecting sliding scales from reinventive to total institution as well as ‘liminal’ to ‘liminoid’.

¹¹ In the notes section of Berman’s (2021) book, there is a long list of news articles labeling *DOS/NXIVM* as a “sex cult” (Berman 2021, p. 293-305) (see appendix ! for headlines)

Chapter 1 – Theory, Method, and Questions

1.1. Theoretical Framework

1.1.1. The Current State of Research on NXIVM

As of May 2022, no significant academic research has been published about NXIVM from an anthropological context. However, in June 2021, the *International Journal of Coercion, Abuse, & Manipulation (IJCAM)*, associated with the International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA), published a special monothematic issue that focused on the comparison of NXIVM and Scientology. I consider the articles in this issue to be written primarily in sociological and psychological discourses. The IJCAM is a new journal that was established in 2021. In the introduction of the issue, they write that they are peer-reviewed and in official association with ICSA, an association of scholars, survivors, authors, and enthusiasts dedicated to cultic studies. I attended the ICSA online conference in 2021. I found the experience enlightening on the world of academic studies, literature, and support groups dedicated to the study of ‘cultic groups.’

In this paper, regardless of its frequent use in the IJCAM in reference to NXIVM, I understand the term ‘cult’ as an emic term by those who consider themselves former members. I understand the word ‘cult’ to be stigmatized. There is, to my knowledge, no clear definition of the term ‘cult’ in anthropological discourse and therefore, in order to avoid a lengthy debate on cultural relativism within this paper, I have chosen instead to refer to NXIVM as a social institution, an organization, a new religious movement, etc.

In 2021, there was also a media analysis titled *NXIVM and #MeToo*, written by religious scholar Susan J. Palmer for *Nova Religio*, a peer-reviewed journal of emergent religions published by the University of California Press. Palmer analyzes the two documentary television series, HBO’s *The Vow* and Starz’s *Seduced*, in the context of the #MeToo movement in the mediascape.

1.1.1.1. Monothematic Academic Journal Issue on NXIVM vs. Scientology

The articles in the IJCAM were beneficial to my research as they helped me define NXIVM in sociological terms and in comparison, to other groups labeled ‘cults’ such as Scientology. The most relevant article in the journal to my research is *Reinventing the Self: NXIVM’s Promises, Secrets, and Lies* by Susan Raine (2021b). In the next two chapters, I discuss her work at length on understanding NXIVM through sociological concepts of total and reinventive institutions. I also explain these original theoretical concepts by Goffman (1957) and Scott (2011).

The following articles in the journal were also helpful to me to provide added context: “Comparative Reflections on Scientology and NXIVM” by Stephen A. Kent (2021), “Narcissistic Sexual Predation: Keith Raniere’s Grooming Strategies in NXIVM” by Susan Raine (2021a), and “Scarred: The True Story of How I Escaped NXIVM the Cult That Bound My Life by (Sarah Edmondson)” (2021), a book review by Robin Boyle-Laisure.

Kent’s introduction expounds on his decades of research on Scientology as a sociologist and offers a point-by-point comparison of NXIVM and Scientology. In her first article, “Narcissistic Sexual Predations,” Raine dissects Raniere’s motivations behind many NXIVM practices. Lastly, Boyle-Laisure wrote a review of Edmondson’s autobiography, a central source of data for my research.

1.1.1.1.1. Total and Reinventive Institutions

In the following subchapter, I briefly explain why Raine (2021b) understands NXIVM to be a reinventive institution with elements of a total institution. I also give definitions of both institutions and a summary of the similarities and differences between the two. In Chapter 2, there is a more in-depth description of total and reinventive institutions with specific examples from NXIVM.

Raine understands NXIVM to be both a total and reinventive institution. In her abstract, she writes: In this article, I examine the multilevel cultic organization NXIVM, using Susie Scott’s (2011) reinventive institution thesis—an update of Erving Goffman’s (1961) work on total institutions. (...)

I employ Scott's model not only to situate NXIVM within this cultural milieu, but also to examine some of the specifics of its structure, the nature of interpersonal relationships, and the promises that the movement and its founder, Keith Raniere, made. (...) Moreover, I discuss those aspects of NXIVM that have more in common with total institutions than reinventive ones, demonstrating that, at least in this case, the two types of institution may operate within one organisation. (Raine 2021b, 60)

She maintains that NXIVM is more in line with reinventive institutions though at times, it appears to be more of a total institution.

In order to better understand Raine's argument, I studied Goffman's (1957) *The Characteristics of Total Institutions* and Scott's (2010) *Revisiting the Total Institution: Performative Regulation in the Reinventive Institution*. Erving Goffman (b. 1922) most famously wrote about the concept of total institutions (TIs) in the late 1950s and early 1960s after spending time undercover at a mental institution as one of the staff. He developed many criteria for characterizing a total institution in his lectures and writings afterward, such as his famous book, *Asylums* (1961).

Goffman (1957) understands total institutions to be places where the institution decides all aspects of life. These can be places such as prisons, boarding schools, or monasteries. He explains that TIs are commonly characterized by physical barriers such as high walls, isolated geographic locations, and barbed wire. (Goffman 1957, p. 313) However, that is not a mandatory characteristic. In the case of most TIs, members are kept against their will, but that is not necessarily true of all TIs. As Raine (2021b) comments:

Goffman's (1961) TIs feature coercion and pressure within a traditional top-down power structure: The institution foists new identities and experiences of selfhood on its inmates, most of whom are rendered powerless by institutional power mechanisms. In TIs, the institution controls the members, and they are aware of this process (whilst knowing also that private selves exist). (Raine 2021b, 63)

Through high control tactics enforced by an authoritarian power structure, total institutions impose new identities on its members who may or may not have voluntarily joined this institution. Goffman refers to this process as 'resocialization.' It is a multi-step process in which the previous self is systematically stripped away and replaced with the new identity created by the institution.

Scott (2010) defines reinventive institutions (RIs) as "places to which people retreat for periods of intense self-reflection, education, enrichment, and reform, but under their own volition, in pursuit of 'self-improvement'." (Scott 2010, p. 218) Scott (2010) argues that Goffman's (1961) concept of TIs should be updated to observe that some institutions resembling TIs are not entirely repressive and that there is an agency felt by some members. (p. 214)

Raine (2021b) addresses the transformative qualities RIs have on participants' sense of self. In her article, she quotes Scott's 2010 book *Total Institutions and Reinventive Identities*. She describes the structure of an RI as:

A material, discursive or symbolic structure in which voluntary members actively seek to cultivate a new social identity, role or status. This is interpreted positively as a process of reinvention, self-improvement or transformation. It is achieved not only through formal instruction in an institutional rhetoric, but also through the mechanisms of performative regulation in the interaction context of an inmate culture (Scott, 2010, p. 3; p. 30–31)

RIs can be physical or conceptual spaces that exist within certain discourses. One of the most defining characteristics of RIs versus TIs is that, typically members volunteer to join in order to transform their identity or sense of self purposely. Generally, RIs are seen in more of a positive light by the world at large, whereas TIs usually remove their members from greater society and are often seen as punitive measures.

Scott also notes that reinventive institutions (RIs) are also not as voluntaristic as they portray themselves to be and that there is, in fact, a "Foucauldian disciplinary power [that] operates through the process of performative regulation". (Scott 2010, p. 214) 'Performative regulation' is a concept that is a form of social control that operates as a "dramaturgical deployment through symbolic interaction". (Scott 2010, p. 221) The power structure of an RI is multidirectional and diffuse. It is managed through mutual surveillance, self-regulation, and performative symbolic social practices.

Scott uses Butler's (1990) notion of performativity and Goffman's theories to inform her understanding of dramaturgy and performativity. To quote Butler (1993), the understanding of performativity is not "the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather, as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains". (Butler 1993, p.

2) In the context of RIs, Scott explains:

Performative regulation can therefore be located at this conceptual juncture: the RI inmate is both an actor who performs and a subject position defined by the sum of these performances. S/he is both agentically performative and constrained by the discipline of interaction. (Scott 2010, p. 222)

Identity is the interpretation of results by the audience of a dynamic performance by the actor. The audience interprets the performative actions of the performer and validates their identity by orientating the performer.

Scott writes:

Authorship of the reinvented self is not the unique privilege of the subject, nor simply directed by the experts to whom they turn, but rather emerges from the interaction between the two. (Scott 2010, p. 213)

Creating a new sense of self is a dynamic and reciprocal process in which the performer and the audience actively craft an identity for the performer, i.e., 'actor' or 'inmate'.

Though Raine understands NXIVM as primarily a reinventive institution (RI), it also displays many qualities of a TI. Raine argues that NXIVM is an RI because of its multidirectional power diffusion, voluntary membership practices, and transformational qualities of the seminars. However, she notes that while it is predominantly an RI, some aspects of NXIVM often present themselves as a TI as well.

1.1.1.2. NXIVM and #MeToo

Sociologist of religion Susan J. Palmer (2021) in her media review, *NXIVM and #MeToo*, of the tv documentaries, *The Vow* and *Seduced* (both produced by major private U.S. cable news networks in 2020), provides an overview of the narratives of both series while placing it in context of the #MeToo movement which went viral at the beginning of 2017. Palmer also raises numerous questions about Raniere and NXIVM in the context of NRM (New Religious Movement) studies.

Palmer compares Raniere to many infamous figures labeled 'cult leaders' such as Rajneesh and David Berg. She also contemplates why Raniere was sentenced to life imprisonment when many comparable charismatic leaders were not. The current social climate set by #MeToo is most likely to have had an impact on the media interest in NXIVM and the outcome of the court case.

Palmer elucidates the novelty of the research on NXIVM as an NRM. She points out that *The Vow* aired in 2020 at the same time as the legal case against Raniere and his associates was unfolding. (Palmer 2021, p. 107) Season two of *The Vow* is set to air in 2022. The story of NXIVM is still being told from the perspective of former members.

1.1.2. The Study of New Religious Movements

I understand NXIVM to be a New Religious Movement (NRM). Defining NRMs has proven quite a challenge to the academics who study them. Religious scholar, J. Gordon Melton offers this explanation:

Attempts to locate any shared characteristics—beliefs, practices, or attributes—have failed. Thus it is suggested that what new religions share is a common deficiency that pushes them into contested space at the fringes of society. New religions are assigned their fringe status by the more established and dominant religious culture, and by various voices within the secular culture (government officials, watchdog groups, the media, etc.). New religious movements disagree significantly with the dominant accepted religious beliefs/practices in any given cultural setting and/or engage in one or more of a range of activities unacceptable to religious and/or secular authorities, such as violence, illegal behavior, high pressure proselytism, unconventional sexual contacts, or minority medical practices. (Melton 2004, p. 1)

NRMs vary in intensity, beliefs, and practices. For example, they can range from intensive westernized yoga practices to membership in a 'doomsday cult.' Some examples of NRMs are Scientology, Wicca, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the New Age Movement.

Due to the rise of individualism beginning roughly in the 1960s, NRMs became increasingly popular. There was dissatisfaction with the status quo and common institutions offered. In addition, economic and social difficulties led to discontent among the middle to upper classes of young people entering the workforce only to find that their expected life trajectory was not what they had anticipated. Self-transformational practices have since grown in popularity as millions worldwide seek out ways to improve their way of life both professionally and interpersonally. The urge to shed one's previous status and transform oneself can sometimes drive one to join groups that could be considered NRMs voluntarily.

The term 'cult' is widely used in reference to NRMs such as NXIVM by former members, academics, and the media. I understand the word 'cult' as an emic term used by former members and not an academic definition of any group. I view it as a loaded term that only appears to have negative connotations and could potentially be a source of bias when attempting objective analysis. Therefore, when using attributing 'cult' to NXIVM in this paper, I use it only as an emic term and not a classification on my part.

I have applied several concepts to my study of NXIVM as an NRM. In this paper, I will include the concept of spiritual capital as described in a paper published in 2007 by sociologist of religion Matthew Guest (1975) titled *In search of spiritual capital: the spiritual as a cultural resource*. I will also include the concepts of 'bricolage' and the quest for self-perfection in NRMs by socioanthropologist of religion Veronique Altglas (2008).

1.1.2.1. Spiritual Capital

Matthew Guest's 2007 article, *In Search of Spiritual Capital: the Spiritual as a Cultural Resource*, elaborates on NRMs and their use of 'spiritual capital'. 'Spiritual capital' is an elaboration on Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'cultural capital'. Guest (2007) explains the various forms of capital in his article as follows:

Bourdieu distinguishes between economic capital (material resources and wealth), social capital (significant relationships between individuals), symbolic capital (accumulated prestige or honour), and cultural capital. The latter features heavily in Bourdieu's work, particularly in discussions of the generation and maintenance of power in society. In its simple usage it refers to skills and knowledge, acquired through education, which can be used to acquire jobs, money and status. However, Bourdieu deploys 'cultural capital' in a more complex fashion, to capture the ways in which the very minutiae that make up the social identities of the social elite are recognised as indicative of value and currency, so that the dominant social classes are able to sustain their dominant status." (Guest 2007, p. 5)

Through the accumulation of spiritual capital by way of rituals and cultural objects, members of NXIVM move closer to *integration* or enlightenment. The negotiation of the use of spiritual capital creates a social reality and dictates the power structure of the institution.

Guest (2007) also explains how spirituality is linked to New Religious Movements or NRMs. He writes:

'Spirituality' has been invoked in this way to articulate dissatisfaction with mainstream religious traditions and to signal an attempt to move beyond their limitations. This is the rhetoric used within discussions of the 'New Age' movement, focussed on inner-transformation and the holistic, spiritual healing of the self. (...) Their 'spirituality' is shaped by an interactive process, set within a complex network of relationships. It draws on cultural resources which are deployed and negotiated, not merely absorbed. In sum, spirituality is not the preserve of autonomous individuals; it is subject to a broader social distribution of power. (Guest 2007, p. 1-2)

According to Guest (2007), any dissatisfaction felt in life outside of the institution is alleviated through the transformational qualities of the practices within the institution. The accumulation of cultural resources such as 'spiritual capital' is a way for members of spiritual organizations to negotiate their status and identity within the power distribution structure of the institution. Their 'spirituality' is reflected in their accumulated wealth of 'spiritual capital.' Those members with more 'spiritual capital' can reap the social benefits afforded to them within the institution as they barter their way up the hierarchy made up of dynamic social relationships.

NXIVM was a highly structured hierarchical society. Members (namely women) who could get close to Raniere were deemed more *integrated* and therefore were afforded more privileges within the

institution. It was also possible to be afforded more ‘spiritual capital’ within NXIVM if you happened to be famous (as was the case with Catherine Oxenberg) or were a high-earning recruiter for the organization, such as Sarah Edmondson. Both Oxenberg and Edmondson are former nxians and authors of autobiographies featured in this study.

Concerning NXIVM, I connect spiritual capital to cultural objects such as the sashes in the *stripe path*, which denoted rank in the social hierarchy. I also connect it to how practices such as *Exploration of Meanings (EMs)* helped accumulate the spiritual capital necessary for nxians’ quests to become more ‘integrated’ in their path to transform their sense of self. Both *the stripe path* and *EMs* will be discussed at length in Chapter 2.

1.1.2.2. ‘Bricolage’ and Self-Perfection

NXIVM as an organization strove to defy convention in many aspects by borrowing from many disciplines and shifting its branding constantly to reinvent itself in the most attractive light possible at the time. In Chapter 2, I employ Altglas’ concept of ‘bricolage’ when discussing the influences that were purported to be used by Raniere in his creation of NXIVM’s belief system, practices, and terminology.

Raniere could be considered a ‘bricoleur,’ i.e. someone who “collects objects that have already been used and re-assembles them in new combinations, granting them usages for which they were not initially intended.” (Altglas 2008, p. 466) According to Altglas, ‘bricolage’ is typically found in new religious movements or new age movements popular with middle to upper-class people where “à la carte” borrowing various cultures, practices, and ideas is commonplace. (Altglas 2008) For example, Raniere’s influences ranged from Ayn Rand to L. Ron Hubbard and incorporated practices from martial arts, neurolinguistic programming, and multilevel marketing companies such as Amway. He combined these techniques and claimed that his teachings were part of the Human Potential Movement.

It is a widespread modern phenomenon for people to engage in self-improvement practices to seek a transformation due to anxiety over one’s trajectory in life. This point is also addressed in Altglas’ 2008 article titled, *Indian gurus and the quest for self-perfection among the educated middle-classes*, which will also be included in this study. Essentially, Altglas argues that since the counterculture revolution of the 1960s, the rise of individualism and higher education rates amongst the middle classes led to disillusionment when their expectations of financial success and personal happiness did not coincide with their reality or opportunities in life. The response to this by some was a mass movement towards new religious movements, especially exoticized belief systems and performative ritualized practices like those found in westernized forms of yoga and Buddhism.

In the autobiographies of former members by Oxenberg, Edmondson, and Natalie, I found self-transformation and success to be common themes by all three women. As Oxenberg describes in her autobiography:

At fifty, I was a veteran of the self-help, self-improvement, self-realization genre. In an effort to overcome a tenacious, life-threatening eating disorder that I’d struggled with from age sixteen up until my midthirties, I tried every kooky idea out there that promised to heal my body, enlighten my mind, and, hopefully, save my life. In no particular order, I’d been rolfed, rebirthed, chelated, Deeksha-ed, magnetized, fêng shui-ed, baptized, ozoned, watsu-ed, and hypnotized. I’d meditated, chanted, 12-stepped, past-life-regressed, fasted, rehabbed, and sweated in lodges. I’d listened to Jungians, herbalists, angels, yogis, shamans, astrologers, Apache medicine men, Buddhist monks, Chopra, Robbins, Kabbalah, the maharishi who hung out with the Beatles, the constellations, and even my own dreams. I drank a Peruvian tea that makes you hallucinate and vomit; I ran across hot coals and floated in sensory deprivation tanks; I flung myself off a sixty-foot telephone pole in the middle of a winter blizzard in Oklahoma. I did everything I could to try freeing myself from the addictive clutches of a disorder that held me in its grip. Subsequently, self-help became a way of life. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 13-14)

By the time Oxenberg had made it to NXIVM, she had been seeking transformation in her life for some time. Edmondson and Natalie both write that when they met Raniere and began to follow his practices, they were seeking self-transformation. They all felt like they were not living up to their full potential in their

professional and personal lives. They were seeking out an ideology or a ritualistic practice that would help set them on the right path to success. This self-transformational journey led them to NXIVM.

1.1.3. Ritual Theory

My interpretation of the Five-Day as an initiation ritual is the main centerpiece of this paper. My understanding of the *Five-Day* is grounded in the anthropology of ritual, a subfield of sociocultural anthropology. I read relevant chapters of social anthropologist Thomas Hyland Eriksen's *Small Places, Large Issues*, a textbook on sociocultural anthropology for a broad overview of basic anthropological theory. (2001) To better understand ritual theory, I read anthropologist Fiona Bowie's chapter on ritual theory in her textbook, *The Anthropology of Religion* (2006), to understand the scope of the various anthropological theories of ritual.

Bowie offers several definitions of ritual; however, I found the following definition she used by sociologist Bobby Alexander (1997) to be the most useful to my studies:

Ritual defined in the most general and basic terms is a performance, planned or improvised, that effects a transition from everyday life to an alternative context within which the everyday is transformed. (Alexander, 1997, p. 139 in Bowie, 2006, p. 140)

I understand ritual and, more specifically, 'rites of passage' as a multifaceted, transformative, and performative practice that transitions a participant from one state to another. My view of performativity is shaped by Scott's (2011) interpretation of Butler's (1990) definition found in section 1.1.1.1.1. on total and reinventive institutions as well by performance theorist Richard Schechner.

Schechner relied heavily on anthropologist Victor Turner's theories (1969, 1974) and applied them to social drama and theatrical performances. Bowie explains that Schechner understood performances to entail a specific timetable, a non-productive value attached to objects, and, in many cases, a specific location in which to perform. (Bowie 2006, p. 145) He understood that the separation between ritual and theatre lay in the difference between efficacy and entertainment.

Schechner proposed that instead of the difference between the two being understood as a binary that they existed on a continuum or rather a sliding scale in which elements of both could be found in varying degrees. Social anthropologist Andrew D. Spiegel employs the concept of continuum in his article on 'liminal' and 'liminoid' spaces, building upon Turner's (1969, 1974) work. In this paper, I also use the concept of 'continuum' concerning my understanding of NXIVM's practices that present as characteristics of total and reinventive institutions as well as characteristics of 'liminal' and 'liminoid.'

To understand the concept of rites of passage, I studied Turner's (1969, 1974) concepts of ritual, 'liminality', 'liminoid', and 'communitas'. I will provide an in-depth summary of Turner's (1969, 1974) concepts in the following subchapter. To provide a more modern theoretical context on rites of passage, I consulted cultural anthropologist Ute Hüsken and religious scholar Neubert's introduction concerning initiation rites in their book *Negotiating Rites* (2011).

Indisputably, rituals have long been regarded as a part of tradition, typically religious. They are often performed in the same ways time and time again in a stable form that is preconceived to create harmonious survival of the tradition. However, as Ute Hüsken, a cultural anthropologist, and Frank Neubert, a religious scholar, point out as editors of *Negotiating Rites* (2011), rituals should not be viewed as stable entities but rather as ways for humans to interact with one another.

Boundaries between people, cultures, religions and other aspects of life can be negotiated through rituals. Negotiations are constantly communicated through various actions and expressions in life. Rituals are typically the result of negotiation over time and reflect how human beings of a similar or different culture interact with one another. In the introduction of their book, Hüsken & Neubert define negotiation as:

processes of interaction during which differing positions are debated and/or acted out - are ubiquitous in ritual contexts, either in relation to the ritual itself or in relation to the realm beyond any given ritual performance. (Hüsken & Neubert 2011, p. 1)

Ritual is one way humans distinguish themselves from one another and establish boundaries in many aspects of their lives, such as culture and religion.

It is through this deep participation and increased familiarity, one becomes an insider to a particular group. With deep participation, disagreements are bound to happen, and conflict can arise. How a specific culture discusses it and negotiates the changes in their practices creates the very fabric of the social reality in which they exist.

1.1.3.1. 'Rites of Passage'

There are many kinds of rituals, such as calendrical rituals that occur cyclically on an annual basis. Some modern-day examples would be birthdays or holidays such as Christmas and Ramadan. However, Turner was mainly concerned with a particular type of ritual known as 'rites of passage' (Van Gennep, 1909) which Bowie (2006) defines as the following:

Rites of passage (rites de passage) mark the transition from one stage of life, season, or event to another. Everyone participates in rites of passage, and all societies mark them in various ways. (Bowie 2006, p. 147)

Turner (1969, 1974) understood 'rites of passage' in terms of a passage from a structure (society) to anti-structure (ritual) and back to structure again once the process was complete. In Turner's *The Ritual Process*, he writes that according to ethnographer and folklorist Arnold Van Gennep (1909), rites of passage are trichotomic. First, the separation phase is considered the starting point of the process in which the subject of the ritual initiates a separation from society. In this stage, the ritual subject leaves their previous status in a social framework. This act can be undergone individually or as a part of a group.

I interpret NXIVM's introductory five-day course, the *Five-Day*, as a rite of passage using Turner's concepts. In my thesis, I will demonstrate my understanding that the *Five-Day* was intended as an initiation ritual into the culture and lifestyle of NXIVM and its belief system. I claim that the *Five-Day* follows the three-part rites of passage model and meets the criteria for several concepts such as 'liminality' and 'communitas'. (Van Gennep 1909, Turner 1969)

At the beginning of the *Five-Day*, the recruit or 'passenger' is in the separation phase. The first module, *Rules & Rituals*, introduces them to the practices of NXIVM and the institution's rules. It appears that over the next three days, the 'passenger' is commonly found to be in the liminal period in which they bond with the other participants and experience 'communitas', usually after undergoing an *Exploration of Meaning (EM)*, a line of hypnotic Socratic questioning rooted in neuro-linguistic programming. At this time, they are not yet full members of institutions but are going through a transformational process. By the time of graduation, the *Five-Day* aims to achieve 'aggregation,' i.e. to be a nxian who will spread the principles of NXIVM to the world.

On the first day of the *Five-Day*, I posit that the Rules & Ritual module is purposely taught at the beginning of the *Five-Day* as a first step in the 'separation' phase into the 'liminal' phase (Turner 1969) or 'mortification of the self' (Goffman 1961). Even Turner acknowledges the similarity of this transition to the liminal as reminiscent of the stripping phase referred to by Goffman (1961). Turner (1969) writes:

Erving Goffman (Asylums, 1962) discusses what he calls the "characteristics of total institutions." Among these he includes monasteries, and devotes a good deal of attention to "the stripping and leveling processes which...directly cut across the various social distinctions with which the recruits enter." He then quotes from St. Benedict's advice to the abbot: "Let him make no distinction of persons in the monastery. Let not one be loved more than another, unless he be found to excel in good works or in obedience. Let not one of noble birth be raised above him who was formerly a slave, unless some other reasonable cause intervene". (Turner 1969, p. 108)

In the example of the monastery, it is explained that everyone is accepted equally; however, preferential treatment is given to those who are exceptionally gifted or, rather, particularly obedient. I will illustrate in this paper that in the *Five-Day* and other nxian practices, those who engaged in the practices enthusiastically were given special encouragement to continue their nxian journey.

The second phase in an initiation ritual is the liminal period or intervening period. Liminal spaces or periods are considered to exist in anti-structure. Structure is understood to represent structured society outside of the liminal ritual period. Turner (1969) describes this part of the process as when "the characteristics of 'the passenger' are ambiguous and passes through a cultural realm that has few, or none of

the attributes of the past or coming state.” (Turner 1969, p. 94) Liminal entities are usually portrayed as possessing nothing with no social status or position in the social structure. They are expected to accept the new rules and not complain if they are to receive punishment if these new rules were to be broken. In the *Five-Day*, I understand this stage as the second, third, and fourth day of the five-day course.

This stage is where the participant in the rite experiences ‘communitas’, which is described as an intense bond forged by the shared trauma or heightened ecstatic emotions one feels when undergoing the shared experience when in the statusless limbo of the liminal period. ‘Communitas’ is more than a sense of community. Due to this intense experience, the ‘passengers’ create a bond and social reality amongst themselves, and this shared understanding is known as ‘communitas.’ I will discuss this concept more in subchapter 1.1.3.1.1.2. as well as chapters 2 and 3 where I discuss NXIVM as a social institution and the Five-Day as an initiation ritual.

The final stage in the rite is known as aggregation. To quote Turner, “They are in a relatively stable state” and have rights and obligations of a defined ‘structural’ type. (Turner 1969, 95) They are expected to behave in accordance with norms, customs, and ethics relative to their social position. In other words, the process is complete, and they have passed through the threshold and have been fully inducted into the new community. They are free to return into the ‘structured’ society i.e., everyday life; however, they are understood to be transformed by their experience and therefore behave in a changed manner, unlike their previous state before the completion of the ritual process. In Chapter 3, I will discuss my interpretation of the final day of the *Five-Day*, where there is a graduation ceremony that I suggest symbolizes the transition from the liminal anti-structure back to a structured society.

1.1.3.1.1. ‘Liminality’

The concept of ‘liminality’ is the most predominant subject of Turner’s (1969, 1974) work. Although the term is borrowed from Van Gennep’s (1909) ‘liminal’ meaning threshold, Turner (1969, 1974) expanded on this idea and interpreted it as the most critical aspect of the ritual process. Once a ‘passenger’ has been stripped of their sense of self linked to the outside structured world, they enter an in-between phase in which they are statusless within the anti-structure of the liminal space. Liminal activities or spaces are typically defined as serious, transformative, and often permanent.

While it is generally understood that there will be a return to structure within a ritual process, that is not always the case. The risk of permanently rejecting and never reentering society is seen as a necessary peril to shed the previous status of the individual in question to achieve a new social position they are seeking through the initiation ritual. (Eriksen 2001) As Bowie explains:

This stage of a rite of passage may be fleeting or extended indefinitely, as in the case of pilgrims or religious communities who seek to live permanently outside the normal structures of society. (Bowie 2006, p. 153)

Those who choose to live unconventional lives in liminal spaces such as convents and communes may perhaps exist indefinitely in anti-structure. Turner (1969) and others view that the personal freedom that exists outside the constrictions of structured society can allow for increased transformational growth and creativity.

I posit that those who chose to live, work, and socialize within NXIVM existed in a liminal space. They were constantly engaged in transformative practices by taking workshops, teaching workshops, and training to get to the next level in *the stripe path*. There was hardly any time left in the day to socialize or maintain a life outside NXIVM if one was to properly adhere to the practices and try to keep advancing in their progress towards *integration*. Therefore, if one were to commit to NXIVM, they would be in a perpetual state of transformation and self-discovery. It would be nearly impossible for anyone to exist in structured society outside of the institution effectively.

1.1.3.1.1.1. 'Liminoid'

While the concept of 'liminality' is often linked to the realm of seriousness and work, Turner (1974) developed another term, 'liminoid', that described liminal processes that inhabited the world of play. While 'liminoid' spaces and activities are still seen as transformative, they are often interpreted as substantially less serious and permanent. Schechner having worked closely with Turner spent most of his time developing his theories on the 'liminoid'. In Spiegel's (2011) article on South Africa's 2010 World Cup, *Categorical difference versus continuum: Rethinking Turner's liminal-liminoid distinction*, he provides a succinct summary and comparison of the two definitions as well as introduces the idea of placing these specific cultural events on a continuum of liminal to liminoid.

Turner (1974) offers many point-by-point differences in which the 'liminal' can be distinguished from the 'liminoid'. It is a complex and nuanced distinction. Essentially, he understood that the concept of 'liminal' is more in line with traditional or agrarian societies. In order to account for a more industrialized paradigm, he introduced the concept of 'liminoid.' In the crudest of explanations (and by no means exhaustive or descriptive), 'liminal' spaces can be attributed to 'work' and 'liminoid' to the realms of 'play.' As Turner puts it:

The liminoid is more like a commodity - indeed, often *is* a commodity, which one selects and pays for - than the liminal, which elicits loyalty and is bound up with one's membership or desired membership in some highly corporate group. One *works* at the liminal, one *plays with* the liminoid. (Turner 1974, p. 86)

I understand that 'liminoid' is seen as more voluntary, temporary, and leisure-based whereas 'liminal' is more mandatory, fixed, and centered on duty. Due to the protestant work ethic that dominated the western world, the demarcation between work and idle play became blurred. Turner (1974) defines this as 'industrial leisure.' Therefore, the line between 'liminal' and 'liminoid' in industrialized western postmodern society is often open to interpretation.

Spiegel (2011) summarizes Turner's (1974) distinctions between 'liminal' and 'liminoid' into five contrasts. The first contrast is that the anti-structure in a 'liminal' space is necessary to maintain the status quo of social structure outside of the ritual whereas, in 'liminoid' spaces, the anti-structure can potentially affect change post-ritual. Secondly, the 'liminal' is designed by the group to be contrary and provocative, whereas the 'liminoid' arises "ideosyncratically and interstitially" (Spiegel 2011, p. 13) and can produce real social change. Third, Spiegel explains, "Liminal periods/spaces occur cyclically and/or in connection with life-cycle processes and events; and what occurs during liminal periods and in such spaces is of collective concern to members of a socially solitary unit (a 'society')." (Spiegel 2011, p. 13) However, the 'liminoid' occurs more randomly and at the will of individuals within certain social groups. The next contrast is regarding the meanings behind the practices; they are shared by those who belong to the social group during the 'liminal' spaces/events/rituals. In the 'liminoid', the meanings are more individual and psychological.

While Turner mainly presented the 'liminal' and 'liminoid' as binary concepts, there appears to be the potential for negotiation. The two may exist simultaneously within the same space, ritual, group, or practice. I propose that NXIVM often tip-toed the line between 'liminal' and 'liminoid.' As Raine struggled to label it as total or reinventive as an institution definitively, I, too, am hesitant to view nxian rituals and practices as solely 'liminal' or 'liminoid.' I am more inclined to view it as on a continuum of 'liminal' to 'liminoid' existing both simultaneously in varying degrees and flexibility.

1.1.3.1.1.2. 'Communitas'

'Communitas' is complex to define since it is a multifaceted concept. It could simply be described as a dynamic term to describe an intense phenomenon of togetherness and belonging experienced by group members engaging in a similar activity. However, this is quite reductive and does not encompass the complex nature of the term. Turner (1974) offers the following rather winding definition:

I meant by it not a structural reversal, a mirror-imaging of "profane" workaday socioeconomic structure, or a fantasy-rejection of structural "necessities," but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying

a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group such as a family, lineage, clan, tribe, or nation, or of affiliation with some pervasive social category such as a class, caste, sex- or age-division. (Turner 1974, p. 75) ‘Communitas’ is to adopt the agreed-upon social roles provided by a particular group during the period of anti-structure. The lingering memory of this communitas has a lasting and binding effect upon those who engaged in the shared experience. The suspension of ordinary life and the intensity of the process profoundly impact those who experience it.

While the actor is transformed upon the feeling of ‘communitas’ and is now a member of the particular group, the sense of self is not entirely lost after one returns to structure. As Turner explains:

We thus encounter the paradox that the experience of communitas becomes the memory of communitas, with the result that communitas itself in striving to replicate itself historically develops a social structure, in which initially free and innovative relationships between individuals are converted into norm-governed relationships between social personae. I am aware that I am stating another paradox: that the more spontaneously "equal" people become, the more distinctively "themselves" they become; the more the same they become socially, the less they find themselves to be individually. Yet when this communitas or comitas is institutionalized, the new found idiosyncratic is legislated into yet another set of universalistic roles and statuses, whose incumbents must subordinate individuality to a rule. (Turner 1974, p. 78)

The ego is intact post-‘communitas,’ but the memory of it helps maintain the new social status they have achieved by completing whatever rite or ritual they had undergone. A new social structure can be born out of the behavior of those in ‘communitas’ and becomes institutionalized. This phenomenon is not just reserved for ancient and sacred rituals but also occurs in the modern world. It can readily occur anywhere. As Turner writes:

Thus, in the workshop, village, office, lecture-room, theater, almost anywhere, people can be subverted from their duties and rights into an atmosphere of communitas. (Turner 1974, p. 76)

The mundane or the profane can also be a place for ‘communitas’ to exist. We are all likely to have experienced this at one time or another in our lifetimes.

1.2. Research Problem

This paper is an anthropological interpretation of the reflections of the selected three authors’ experiences and understanding of NXIVM as an institution and specifically, the *Five-Day* as an initiation into the institution. I am interested in examining the dynamic processes of ritual performance within NXIVM as related to Victor Turner’s (1969) ritual theory concepts of ‘liminality’ and ‘communitas.’ I will show how the autobiographies’ descriptions of the *Five-Day* can be interpreted as a ‘rite de passage’ which consists of a three-part process of separation, liminality, and reaggregation. (Van Gennep 1909) I will relate how the concept of ‘communitas’ was experienced by Edmondson and Oxenberg during practices such as *Explorations of Meanings (EMs)* in the *Five-Day*. I will describe how the individual journeys of the authors throughout their time in NXIVM could be interpreted as ‘liminal’ and ‘liminoid’ depending on the intensity of the participation within the organization at any given time. I will also show how the description of NXIVM in the autobiographies describes the organization as a reinventive institution with a “shadow-like presence of a [total institution] TI.” (Raine 2021b, p. 79) I am also interested in how the nxian experience could be interpreted as existing on a continuum (Bowie 2006, Spiegel 2011) from liminal to liminoid as well as reinventive to total. In 3.5, I will present The NXIVM Continuum, my interpretation of these concepts as they relate to the experiences of the three authors in the selected autobiographies.

1.3. Methodology

My research design for this paper was qualitative in its approach. As I will explain fully in the following subchapters, I decided the best way to approach my research problem would be qualitative content analysis or ethnographic content analysis of a purposeful data sample obtained through unobtrusive methods. Since my data sample was a homogeneous selection of three autobiographies, my understanding was that qualitative document analysis would be the best approach. I did not think that quantitative methods would

help me with my chosen research problem which attempts to describe and understand reflections on dynamic personal experiences. It is also my understanding that since my data was collected from autobiographies which inherently have a narrative quality that qualitative methods were a better fit than quantitative ones when examining the complexities of someone's experience over the course of time within specific contexts. In this paper, I am primarily more concerned with nuanced reflections on specific experiences which I deem to be more in line with qualitative methods than hard facts on specific events which I consider to be better suited to quantitative methods.

1.3.1. Method of Data Collection and Construction of the sample

First, I will describe the method of my data collection and then the process of constructing my sample. Essentially, I was faced with several initial challenges when designing my research for this paper. It became apparent to me in the early stages of my study of NXIVM that I would not be able to pursue ethnographic fieldwork based on participant observation and interviews as is most common within anthropology today.

I came to this conclusion due to four reasons. Firstly, NXIVM as an institution no longer existed. I began my research in 2020 and NXIVM began its decline around the year 2017. Therefore, there were no physical centers to visit and there were no official nxian events to attend. Secondly, I am pursuing my studies in Prague, Czech Republic. The majority of nxian activities occurred in North America. While I am American and could visit the United States with no language barrier or visa restrictions, the cost of such visits and the complications of Covid-19 happening at the time of my research made this an implausible option. Thirdly, I didn't have access to the field i.e., I had no personal connection to NXIVM in any way. I had no informants or access to former members or even private nxian materials. Lastly, NXIVM was historically litigious as an organization. It was well-known that in 2003, they sued Rick Alan Ross, a well-known "cult expert", who assembled some researchers to attend nxian seminars and examine nxian materials. They subsequently published their findings on the website for Ross's Cult Education Institute. (Natalie 2019) Although Ranieri had been arrested by the time I began my research, he had not yet been convicted and his supporters were still working on his behalf. Moreover, no academic research on NXIVM had been published yet either. Therefore, there was no precedence set for me on how to navigate potential ethical and legal risks, which would have been far beyond the scope of an undergraduate thesis. For all of these reasons, it was clear to me from the outset of my research on NXIVM that I would have to rely on unobtrusive methods of collection of data from publicly accessible material.

The three autobiographies published by Natalie, Edmondson, and Oxenberg were the clear choice for my purposeful data sample. The data collected from the autobiographies was substantial and adequately covered the scope of my research problem. The data sample was homogenous since the three documents were all autobiographies published between 2018 and 2019. All three were narrated personal accounts of eyewitnesses who were similarly situated, i.e., all female, former NXIVM members who held a critical stance on the organization. All three of the authors had been informants to law enforcement and were instrumental in providing evidence in the trials against Ranieri and his associates. Now, I will discuss each of the autobiographies and their significance to my research.

The autobiographies cover the decades-long period from NXIVM's inception in the late 1990s up to Ranieri's imprisonment in 2019. I read these autobiographies in the form of ebooks on Amazon's Kindle program. However, I also listened to the audiobook versions of these texts as Natalie, Edmondson, and Oxenberg all narrated the audiobook versions of their autobiographies. I found it extremely helpful to hear the author's own voices read their own words since I was able to pick up on added dimensions such as stress, tone, and emotion that are not necessarily as easy to interpret when simply reading a text. All three of the authors appeared in *The Vow* and made public appearances such as interviews so I also became more familiar with how they looked and carried themselves physically which added yet another dimension in understanding their unique points of view through their experiences.

Toni Natalie's autobiography covers the precursor to NXIVM, Raniere's company, Consumers' Buyline, along with how Keith Raniere (NXIVM's philosophical leader) met Nancy Salzman (co-creator of NXIVM), who helped design many of the rituals and educational materials for the organization. Natalie also provides key insight into Raniere's motivations behind the creation of NXIVM as well as an insight into the early days of the institutions.

Sarah Edmondson provides insight into the workings of NXIVM and its rituals as a high-ranking member. She was one of their top earners and the head of the Vancouver branch. Legal text scholar Robin Boyle-Laisure writes in her literature review of Edmondson's autobiography:

Sarah's detailed descriptions of the trainings, V-Week, her later ascent in the organization, and, in turn, her recruitment and trainings of others, provide a realistic view of how one can be pulled into a scheme that on the surface looks positive. (Boyle-Laisure 2021, p. 99)

Edmondson's reflections on her institutional trajectory within NXIVM were crucial to my understanding of my research problem. While Natalie and Oxenberg provided invaluable context and information as well. Edmondson's personal experience and scope of the autobiography provided much of the key details that provide structure to my arguments.

Lastly, Catherine Oxenberg provides more of an outsider's perspective into the organization and documents along with the autobiographies, the fall of NXIVM, and the collapse of the community. She and her daughter, India Oxenberg, enrolled in NXIVM courses. While Catherine Oxenberg left the organization, India stayed behind and became one of the most high-ranking and devoted members of NXIVM. For years, Catherine battled to extract her daughter from what she believed to be a malicious 'cult'.

While India Oxenberg is a central figure in the NXIVM narrative, I chose not to include her 2020 audio memoir from Audible because it was only available in audio form and not in text. I felt that three autobiographies were sufficient and that transcribing an entire audiobook would not be productive. Also, her story was featured in her mother Catherine's autobiography and in her own words in the documentary, *Seduced*, which focused on India's perspective.

To provide a broader context, I used journalist Sarah Berman's book *Don't Call it a Cult: The Shocking Story of Keith Raniere and the Women of NXIVM* in my research as a secondary reference. This book was an excellent resource to understand the nxian narrative from all the separate sources in one comprehensive text. Documentaries such as HBO's *The Vow*, Showtime's *Seduced: Inside the NXIVM Cult*, and *The Lost Women of NXIVM* on Investigation Discovery provided a significant contextual and visual dimension to my research. I found them to be an invaluable resource as they allowed me to see and hear what was described in the autobiographies. Academic literature, news articles, photographs, court cases, and patents were also analyzed in addition to all the previously mentioned supplementary sources. (see appendices)

1.3.2. Method of Data Analysis

The primary method of analysis was qualitative document analysis, more specifically, qualitative content analysis, specifically ethnographic content analysis of personal documents i.e., autobiographies. My primary analytical technique was coding in which I engaged in data reduction and then applied a specific coding framework in my notes. I relied on the texts Bryman's (2012) *Social Research Methods* and Schreier's (2012) *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice* as a guide in my method of analysis. As I described, I used qualitative methods of document analysis and content analysis. It is my understanding that Document Analysis is the systematic interpretation of a selected data set of documents that have been verified for authenticity and are within the scope of the study. (Bryman 2012) In my case, these would be the three selected autobiographies. More specifically, I apply Ethnographic Content Analysis which is a qualitative method to the documents. Schreier defines Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) as:

a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material. It is done by classifying material as instances of the categories of a coding frame. (Schreier 2012, p. 1)

Essentially, QCA relies on analyzing qualitative material in a systematic way through a coding framework. This definition provides a basic explanation however, I find the term ethnographic content analysis (which

I understand to be a subset of QCA) to be closer to what I did in my research for this paper. Bryman quotes Altheide's (1996) definition of his theory of ethnographic content analysis (ECA) as:

ECA follows a recursive and reflexive movement between concept development–sampling–data, collection–data, coding–data, and analysis– interpretation. The aim is to be systematic and analytic but not rigid. (Anthropological conceptual) Categories and variables initially guide the study, but others are allowed and expected to emerge during the study, including an orientation to constant discovery and constant comparison of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances. (Altheide 1996 in Bryman 2012, p. 559)

My research for this paper was systematic in that I had a coding framework and was analytical in its approach, but it was reflexive and recursive in that I allowed my research problem and conclusions to take shape as I analyzed and interpreted the data. For example, I began this study with an interest in NXIVM and sociocultural anthropology. From there I began to narrow my focus on rituals within NXIVM. Eventually, I decided that the *Five-Day* was a substantive enough research focus and that I could apply Turner's theories of rituals. Then, after reading the IJCAM articles (which were released a year into my research), I adopted Raine's interpretation of NXIVM as a reinventive/total institution and it emerged as one of the three significant pillars of this paper. Lastly, the NXIVM Continuum which I present as my final step of analysis emerged quite late in my research as a result of my interpretation of the first two steps of understanding NXIVM as a social institution and the Five-Day as initiation ritual.

1.3.3. Limits of Research and Ethical Issues

There have been some limitations in my research both from the perspective of the data collection and analysis. Since I am using only what is in the public sphere (i.e. autobiographies, documentaries, etc.) and am not able to ask further questions of the authors, this has limited my ability to answer certain questions as I am unable to clarify facts beyond what is published. Also, since the focus of much of the media coverage on NXIVM is on *DOS*, there is less information on *ESP* and even less on the *Five-Day*.

As my data sample was designed to be homogeneous (i.e. female, former members who were critical of NXIVM), there are many voices not included in my research. For example, there is no male perspective in this paper. NXIVM was a large organization that had both male and female members in all levels of the organization. It should also be noted that there are still Ranieri supporters who were former members of NXIVM. (see 2.1.4.) There is a small group of women and men who have publicly stood by Ranieri, NXIVM and *DOS* despite a barrage of negative press and several convictions of former high-ranking nxians including Ranieri. These are just a few of the perspectives that were beyond the scope of my purposefully homogeneous constructed data set.

Apart from the limits of my data, there were numerous technological difficulties I experienced throughout the analysis. While analyzing the autobiographies, I used Kindle ebooks and the audiobooks narrated by the authors. From a technical standpoint, I have had to develop my own coding methods as I was unable to find any updated academic guides that allow the academic form of coding on ebooks, let alone ebooks on Kindle. However, Kindle's software allows four colored highlight options and the ability to add notes to each quote. These are then able to be exported as an HTML or PDF document. Unfortunately, there is a limitation to the amount of each book that can be highlighted and exported. However, since the "Five-Day" is not heavily featured throughout each autobiography, I did not surpass this limit.

Clearly, this is a less complex method of coding than a program such as Atlas.ti which was not a viable option given my selected data sample. For supplementary data sources such as patents and lawsuits, I have been using Adobe Acrobat, which has an OCR feature that converts PDF documents into searchable text that can be copied and pasted. There is also a wide range of colors for highlighting and a notes function which has been invaluable for coding.

As for my positionality, I am a white American female in my early thirties. I am also a self-described true crime enthusiast. This is, after all, how I found out about NXIVM in the first place. In many ways, I am not so different from the women in these autobiographies. As I read these books, I related to all of these women, however different our life circumstances may be.

It has been challenging to remain objective about the NXIVM practices as I read these women's harrowing accounts of control and kept abreast of the recent convictions of high-ranking NXIVM members. I also have spent so much time studying these women that it is sometimes difficult to remember that I have never met them, and all I have is their spoken and written word intended for the public at large. However, in my research, I have tried my best to target the data on ritual practices and focus less on the narratives of abuse experienced by these women, however compelling I may find them.

Overall, I find no ethical problems with the research I have conducted as I have used unobtrusive methods of data collection. I have also adhered to common ethics of publishing and citation. My biggest personal struggle with the writing of this paper dealt more with issues of relativism and intersubjectivity. In my research and in my writing, I aimed for methodological relativism. I did not take a morally relativist approach. Due to the narratives of abuse by the authors of the autobiographies, I was forced to reflect upon my own moral standards which triggered negative emotions in me. I took great care to challenge myself to refrain from inserting my own value judgments or approaching this from the perspective of another academic discipline such as criminology. It was essential that I focus on the "what" and "why" in the narratives of these women. I also had to keep in mind the intersubjectivity of this study. It was my task to communicate and clearly differentiate various perspectives: the emic ones, the expert ones, and my own.

Chapter 2 – NXIVM as a Social Institution

In this chapter, I will show how NXIVM is described as a social institution in the three selected autobiographies. In order to understand these accounts, I use the concepts of total and reinventive institutions. (Goffman, 1961; Scott, 2010; Raine, 2021b) At the height of its success, NXIVM was an international organization with thousands of members; however, the main headquarters were in Albany, New York. NXIVM began in 1998 and collapsed after Ranieri, and his associates were arrested in 2018. Perhaps, Susan Raine, in her 2021 article, *Reinventing the Self: NXIVM's Promises, Secrets, and Lies*, provides one of the most succinct descriptions of NXIVM. She writes:

NXIVM has variously been identified as a cult, a multilevel marketing (MLM) or pyramid scheme, a self-help group, and, more recently, as a criminal enterprise. Each of these labels is appropriate. (Raine 2021, p. 61)

Raine's quote exemplifies why the study of NXIVM as an institution and belief system is so complex. It is described as a *cult* by former members, but it does not neatly fall into the categories of other similar organizations by the people who study them. One central point of interest is that NXIVM was a secular institution and, most importantly, a capitalistic endeavor. This is why Raine also classifies it as an MLM or pyramid scheme.

The claims purported by the group were more or less grounded in reality. For example, instead of promising an individual's spiritual immortality as Scientology does, NXIVM claimed to help you achieve financial success and emotional happiness through a science-based *tech* (the nxian term for coursework designed to release oneself from all fears and mental limitations).

NXIVM relied heavily on self-help practices belonging to the Human Potential Movement, which became popular in the countercultures of the 1960s and is still popular today. The majority of NXIVM practices were borrowed from other long-standing institutions such as martial arts, NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), as well as other similar organizations such as EST (Erhard Seminars Trainings) and Scientology.

NXIVM's belief system and practices could be classified as 'bricolage' and Ranieri as a 'bricoleur'. In Altglas' 2014 article on 'bricolage' in *Culture and Religion*, she explains that this is quite a common occurrence in eastern-influenced subcultures and new religious movements popular with western participants, such as Siddha Yoga and Kabbalah. Simply put, 'bricolage' is defined by Altglas as the eclectic assemblage of various cultural elements to create something new. As Raine's quote clarifies: NXIVM cannot be defined as one thing. It was never designed to be so.

2.1. History of NXIVM

2.1.1. The Smartest Man in the World

By the time NXIVM was launched, Keith Raniere had spent many years creating a mythology around the story of his life and the level of his intelligence. He claimed that in his childhood, he was an “East coast judo champion by age eleven; he learned high school math in a day at age twelve; he taught himself three years of college mathematics by age thirteen.” (Berman 2021, p. 26) Among other things, he claimed to be “a self-taught, concert-level pianist.” (Raine 2021a, p. 65)

He is purported to have cheated on a take-home IQ test monitored by the honor system known as the Mega Test by employing a team of women close to him to complete it. Based on the results of this test, The Mega Society awarded him a “cartoonishly high IQ score of 240.” (Berman 2021, p. 23) He used this score to gain a mention in the 1989 Australian edition of *The Guinness Book of World Records*. He then claimed that he was “one of the top three problem-solvers in the world.” (Berman 2021, p. 26)

In 1988, the Times Union, an Albany newspaper, published a glowing article about Raniere, which featured bombastic claims about his intelligence and further cemented the mythology Raniere had crafted about his image as a gifted, one-of-a-kind, savant. In reality, Raniere possessed an average or below-average ability in most of his claimed endeavors, and according to his peers and acquaintances, he rather had a penchant for bullying. (Berman 2021, p. 28) At 29, he used the claims that he was “the smartest man in the world” as the foundation to garner credibility to create his future company, *CBI*. (Natalie 2019, p. 26)

Raniere’s creation of his own impressive origin story is quite common among other charismatic leaders. As sociologist Stephen A. Kent remarks in his article on the many comparisons between NXIVM and Scientology and Keith Raniere and L. Ron Hubbard (the creator of Scientology). He writes:

Characteristics that the two founders shared— fabricated backgrounds, grandiosity, lack of empathy as demonstrated in human rights violations, entitlements around confining the uncooperative or troublesome, interfering with women’s reproductive rights—simply may reflect attitudes and behaviors that grow out of a shared personality disorder. (Kent 2021, p. 20)

Kent claims that these men act similarly due to a shared personality disorder that I understand could easily be attributed to many other leaders of similar organizations. There are some similarities between the two men; however, there are also many differences as far as the organization they created and how they went about creating their organizations. In sociologist Susan Raine’s 2021 article, *Narcissistic Sexual Predation: Keith Raniere’s Grooming Strategies in NXIVM*, she argues that Raniere is most likely a narcissist who engaged in sexual predation. Kent also argues that both men displayed malignant narcissistic tendencies.

Even though Raniere was adamant that NXIVM was not a religious organization, it was often remarked upon by the former members that they felt that he was portrayed like other religious icons such as Jesus or Buddha. For example, Oxenberg wrote that in the framed photos of Raniere at the ESP headquarters, he looked like Jesus. Natalie wrote that others thought of Raniere as “Vanguard, the lone member of the human race who was *fully integrated*¹². He was a twenty-first-century Buddha.” (Natalie 2019, p. 142) Edmondson also wrote how others perceived Raniere and his beliefs:

Ever since that first phone call with Mark on day one of my Five-Day, he encouraged all of us to ignore everything unfavorable that we’d ever heard or read about Keith Raniere. After all, Jesus, Buddha, and all other thought leaders met with resistance, he and the leaders explained, because most people in the world wanted things to stay status quo. Why else would human progress be necessary? They taught us a theory that came from the nineteenth-century German philosopher Schopenhauer: “All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self evident.” Keith and the senior level coaches believed that one day the teachings in ESP would be accepted by the general public as a way of life. It was exciting to consider being part of this movement in the world, so far ahead of the curve. (Edmondson 2019, p. 46)

Raniere portrayed himself as a humble follower of his own philosophy who was so enlightened that he felt no need to practice *satiative*¹³ activities such as sex and sleep. He insisted on kissing everyone in NXIVM

¹² The nxian term for enlightenment is *integration*.

¹³ *Satiative* is a nxian term for what was deemed to be unnecessarily indulgent or gluttonous practices.

(male or female) on the lips in greeting which in American culture is unusual and rather intimate. He was never a legal owner of NXIVM and officially received no salary. He rarely raised his voice in public and maintained a calm public image. All of these things made his followers believe that he followed his own rules and had gone through the same process that they were going through which added credibility to the rituals and practices, as well as the sacrifices they were making to follow his doctrine.

In nxian literature and culture, he is often likened to other spiritual leaders. Comparisons to the Buddha were welcomed. Anthropologist Victor Turner writes the following about the Buddha in *The Ritual Process* (1969):

In the Buddha we have a classic case of a "structurally" well endowed religious founder who underwent initiation into *communitas* through stripping and equalizing and putting on the behavior of weakness and poverty. (Turner 1969, p. 197)

It can be noted that there are striking similarities to how Turner describes the Buddha and how nxians viewed Raniere. This is unlikely to be by accident as Raniere's public image was carefully crafted first by his associates and later by a PR team. (Edmondson 2019, p. 86; Oxenberg 2019, p. 133) Raniere would eventually publicly meet the Dalai Lama, which was considered a massive win by the organization.

Sociologist of religion Susan J. Palmer (2021) also discusses Raniere in comparison to other similar leaders in her article on NXIVM. She explains that Raniere is somewhat of a wild card in uncharted territory for the study of charismatic leaders of NRMs. She writes:

The question often asked is, why did so many intelligent, highly-educated, privileged, beautiful, and (mostly) mature women (unlike Epstein's underage victims) surrender to Raniere, with his false promises and cruel depredations? But is Vanguard so very different from other prophet founders of new religions who have been accused of exploiting women for their own self-gratification, using them to enhance their charismatic display (such as Rajneesh and Rael), coaching them in acts of self-abasement (such as Love Israel and David Brandt Berg), or featuring feminine nudity in their rituals (such as Anton LaVey)? Their treatment of women has been explained as a product of the 1960s sexual liberation movement, as spiritual applications of free love and love-ins of the counterculture. Thus, for scholars of alternative religions in America, the level of public outrage towards Keith Raniere might appear surprising, considering that many other male charismatic leaders have imposed similar ordeals on their female followers without suffering consequences. (Palmer 2021, p. 110)

It is an interesting question for our current times. Raniere was sentenced in 2021 to 120 years in prison for his crimes which will be explained in more detail in subsection 2.1.1.5. The difference in the treatment of Raniere as opposed to other similar leaders who often faced no legal ramifications may very well be the added context of the #MeToo movement, which has furthered the cause of shedding light on the abuse of women more than any other time in recent memory. Palmer also notes in the article that it is also the deception, degradation, and cruelty with which Raniere operated that constitutes a large portion of the outrage. (Palmer 2021, p. 110)

2.1.2. The Birth of NXIVM

In 1990, Raniere and four friends created the precursor to NXIVM, *Consumers' Buyline Incorporated (CBI)*. (Natalie 2019, p. 14) Raniere briefly worked at Amway, a successful multilevel marketing company operating at the national level, and used it as a model for the company. *Consumers' Buyline Inc. (CBI)* was a multi-level marketing company and pyramid scheme that claimed to allow people to buy products at a cheaper rate. Toni Natalie, one of the authors of the autobiographies, met Raniere in 1991 and soon began selling for *CBI* with her husband. She describes her work with her husband, Rusty, at *CBI* as:

Rusty and I had always been a good sales team, but when the product was CBI, we were next-level. We moved those memberships with the fervor of Jehovah's Witnesses, but instead of salvation, we were offering steep discounts on everything from microwave ovens to groceries—stuff that was valuable in this lifetime. (Natalie 2019, p. 17)

After becoming one of *CBI*'s top sellers, she subsequently left her husband and became Raniere's girlfriend during this period.

In 1996, when *CBI* failed due to fraud allegations after being accused of being a pyramid scheme by the New York Attorney general, Natalie started *NHN (National Health Network)* with Raniere. This company provided nutritional health food supplements. It was an initially successful company run almost entirely by Natalie. Through *NHN*, Natalie would meet Nancy Salzman and introduce her to Raniere.

Salzman was referred to Natalie for a consultation to resolve issues with constipation by using *NHN* dietary supplements. The two women formed a bond after the products recommended to her seemingly worked. Natalie then underwent NLP sessions with Salzman concerning her relationship with Raniere. Natalie eventually introduced Salzman to Raniere.

He and Salzman became close and decided to work together. It was likely at this time that Raniere and Salzman developed a secret sexual relationship in addition to their professional one. Raniere would be the indisputable philosophical leader in their new business venture, and Salzman would handle all administrative and curricular tasks. They took inspiration from the success of Tony Robbins, a public speaker who used NLP practices and also happened to be operating in the upstate New York region as well.

In 1998, Raniere and Salzman, with the input of Natalie and other women in Raniere's orbit, launched *NXIVM*. The company offered seminars in executive success known as *ESP (Executive Success Programs)*. Natalie explains the business model in her autobiography:

Like *CBI*, *ESP* would be a multilevel marketing company, with students and coaches instead of members and affiliates. Instead of selling steep discounts on various consumer goods, the product was human potential coursework. Students would recruit others to take the courses, which would be followed up by still more courses, until the subject was either broke or full-on enlightened. (Natalie 2019, p. 91)

Natalie and journalist Sarah Berman in her book about *NXIVM*, *Don't Call It a Cult*, make the case that *NXIVM* was modeled after *CBI* in many ways. The business model, which was essentially a fraudulent pyramid scheme, operated almost precisely the same except that the goods sold would not be physical but mental and, to some extent, even spiritual. Raniere wanted to cash in on the Human Potential Movement resurgence at the time and decided to rebrand and use Salzman's training in NLP to create the curriculum.

Raniere would be known to their followers as *Vanguard* and Salzman as *Prefect*. According to Natalie (2019), *Vanguard* was the name on a pinball machine at *CBI*. (p. 52) *Prefect* hails from Roman times and means a high-ranking military official. The word *NXIVM* is Roman in origin and comes from the term "nexum." Journalist Susan Berman explains in her book that:

The *NXIVM* name has many layered meanings, from "next millennium" to "place of learning" to the more hidden meaning that allegedly references the Roman concept of debt bondage. (Berman 2021, p. 6)

This would be a rather unironic nod to the nature of a pyramid scheme in which more and more people invest money into the operation with the promise of making money as long as they maintain high-levels of recruitment beneath them in the overall structure.

The inspiration and influences of *NXIVM* are numerous and wide-ranging. In true 'bricoleur' fashion (Altglass 2014), Raniere cobbled together the ideas and practices of different organizations such as Amway¹⁴, Scientology¹⁵, and EST¹⁶ as well as literature such as Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*¹⁷ and Isaac Asimov's *Second Foundation*¹⁸. Other influences include Martial Arts¹⁹ and Neurolinguistic Programming²⁰.

¹⁴ Berman 2021, p. 35

¹⁵ Kent 2021, p. 3

¹⁶ Berman 2021, p. 44

¹⁷ Natalie 2019, p. 94

¹⁸ Berman 2021, p. 28

¹⁹ Raine 2021b, p. 69

²⁰ Berman 2021, p. 35

2.1.3. The Rise of NXIVM

At its height, NXIVM had thousands of members and training centers all over the world with a large Spanish-speaking base in Mexico. (Berman 2021, p. 5) It is estimated that over 16,000 people took NXIVM courses worldwide. (Raine 2021b, p. 60) High-profile people became members such as actress Allison Mack (from the tv series, *Smallville*), Emiliano Salinas (the son of the former president of Mexico), as well as Clare and Sara Bronfman (the billionaire heiresses to the Seagram fortune). Mack became one of Raniere's most devoted followers. Salinas was responsible for launching the Mexico chapter of NXIVM, which became immensely popular and recruited thousands to the organization. The Bronfman sisters took on a significant role in NXIVM by essentially bankrolling the entire NXIVM operation during their membership.

Arguably one of the most impressive feats of NXIVM was the successful negotiation by the Bronfmans to arrange a visit by the Dalai Lama in 2006 to meet Raniere as a fellow spiritual leader. Here Raniere is pictured with the Dalai Lama placing the white sash over his head as is done when a NXIVM member is given a new rank. Clare Bronfman is featured in the bottom photo to the right.

Over time, there were many official companies and organizations under the NXIVM umbrella that shared the same values and philosophy. These offshoot companies will be discussed in a later subsection. Many people were so taken with the *tech* i.e., the coursework and the practices of NXIVM created by Raniere and Salzman, that they wanted to live and work exclusively within the NXIVM community. However, like most pyramid schemes, it was rare for anyone to make money in the organization unless they made it to a high-ranking position which at that point would have put someone deeply into debt unless they were already quite wealthy.

2.1.4. The Fall of NXIVM

In 2017, Edmondson's story was featured in a front-page New York Times article published right at the height of the "Me Too" movement alleging that Raniere had blackmailed her and other nxian women into an alleged 'sex cult' named *DOS* where they were *branded*²¹ with his initials. The women in *DOS* were told that they were joining a secret sorority of powerful women much like the Freemasons but with the goal of female empowerment. The structure was pyramidal with hierarchical branches of *masters* and *slaves*. Most women were unaware that Raniere was at the top of the pyramid and was using *DOS* to control, coerce, and abuse women sexually. It is now a common hypothesis that Raniere had the idea of something similar to *DOS* in mind when he first created NXIVM. (Raine 2021b, p. 69; Oxenberg, 2019, p. 192; Edmondson, 2019, p. 25).

At the time that whistleblowers such as Edmondson were coming forward, previous accusations against Raniere of crimes such as fraud and pedophilia dating back to the 1980s were also resurfacing and further contributed to the dissolution of the organization. Frank Parlato, a disgruntled former employee, had been keeping a blog on NXIVM allegations and developments for some years. He is often cited in the documentaries and some IJCAM journal articles. NXIVM had been labeled a *cult* in the past by the media, namely a front-page 2003 Forbes article (see appendix D 4) commissioned by Edgar Bronfman, father to Clare and Sara, but never at this scale and with so much evidence. Before this time, any high-ranking members from NXIVM or former girlfriends of Raniere who left were harassed and sued. However, after the New York Times article was published, many NXIVM members began to rethink their involvement in the organization and began to leave.

Raniere was on the run from law enforcement in 2018 when he was finally arrested in Mexico and subsequently extradited and imprisoned while awaiting trial. In 2018, Oxenberg published her autobiography that primarily details her attempts to extract her daughter India from the organization, who shortly left after Raniere's arrest. In 2019, *The Lost Women of NXIVM*, a TV documentary film featuring Parlato and former

²¹ I understand *branded* to be an emic term. The *branding* was done with a cauterizing pen. From the description in the autobiographies and the images of the scar (see appendix A 6, A 7) I understand it to be more similar to the act of ritual scarification.

members, premiered on the Discovery channel that alleged Ranieri was intentionally responsible for the deaths of several women, and featured damning audio and video recordings of Ranieri. Some of these claims were also mentioned in Natalie's autobiography. These serious allegations have never been brought to court.

In 2019, Natalie published her tell-all autobiography about the abuse, stalking, harassment, and litigations she suffered at the hands of Ranieri and his supporters during and after their relationship. Edmondson, in the same month and year as Natalie, Edmondson published her detailed account of her many years in NXIVM and her experience in *DOS*. Later, a class-action lawsuit was filed by Sarah Edmondson, Catherine Oxenberg, and others against Keith Ranieri and Nancy Salzman.

Ranieri was convicted in 2019 and sentenced in 2020 to 120 years in prison after pleading guilty to a range of crimes. According to Raine (2021):

Ranieri was convicted of the following offences: "racketeering and racketeering conspiracy; sex trafficking, attempted sex trafficking and sex trafficking conspiracy; forced labor conspiracy and wire fraud conspiracy". These convictions speak to several criminal acts including fraud, extortion, identity theft, computer hacking, sexual exploitation of a minor, and both the production and the possession of child pornography. (Raine 2021b, p. 61)

He was also ordered to pay a \$1.75 billion fine. (Berman 2021, p. 287) Allison Mack was also sentenced in 2021 to 3 years in prison. (Ly & Moghe 2021) Salzman was sentenced to 42 months in prison and was ordered to pay a \$150,000 fine. (Moghe 2021) Clare Bronfman was sentenced to 81 months. (Hong 2021) Other members in Ranieri's inner circle were also tried and given jail time. This case is now being used as a precedent in other court cases of a similar nature.

As of 2022, there are still some former members acting as Ranieri and NXIVM defenders (most prominently *Battlestar Galactica* actress Nicki Clyne) who have waged campaigns known as *The Forgotten Ones/We Are As You*²² and *The Dossier Project*²³ that proclaim Ranieri's innocence and claim to want to set the record straight on NXIVM and *DOS*. However, the general consensus amongst most former members, journalists, researchers, law enforcement, and court rulings proclaim NXIVM to have been a fraudulent, criminal, and ultimately, cultish institution.

2.2. The Operating System

ESP (Executive Success Programs) offered a series of intensives based on the *Rational Inquiry Method (RIM)*. Ranieri describes it as a "belief system." (Ranieri 2003, p. 7) Another nxian term for how one thinks, or their belief system is *The Operating System*. The practices and coursework that one undergoes in a nxian training are known as the *tech*. Nxian terminology is often given a technological or scientific-sounding element to reinforce that these practices were high-tech and scientifically proven effective. Some of the takeaways from the Rational Inquiry operating systems are that there are no *victims*,²⁴ living *ethically* is paramount,²⁵ and humans are "meaning-making machines"²⁶ that can control how they deal with their emotions and understanding of the world.

These beliefs were paired with Salzman's training in neuro-linguistic programming, otherwise known as a form of hypnosis, led to one of the hallmark practices of NXIVM being born: the *EM (Exploration of Meaning)*. Through *EMs*, students would work through *disintegrations* or negative emotional associations in order to attempt to become fully *integrated* or "to be in complete control of your emotions and not be unduly swayed by past traumas and misperceptions." (Berman 2021, p. 120)

According to Natalie's autobiography, the only person who was ever fully integrated was Ranieri while other women who were high-ranking in NXIVM had come quite close. *Integration* can also be interchanged with enlightened. To quote Natalie:

²² Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WeAreAsYou/>, Instagram: <https://bit.ly/3LOkDK3>, Twitter: <https://bit.ly/3wO8rFp>

²³ <https://www.thedossierproject.com/>

²⁴ Raine 2021b, p. 68

²⁵ Ranieri 2003, p. 30

²⁶ Oxenberg 2019, p. 32

NXIVM has a strict hierarchy with Raniere (aka Vanguard) at the top...The higher in the hierarchy, the closer an Espian is to integration, akin to being enlightened, perfect: Thoughts flow together flawlessly, Maria says, “like a plate without any cracks.” Salzman is close to integration, she says, and Raniere is completely integrated. (Natalie 2019, p. 193)

Integration could be interpreted as a spiritual good in that it could be quantified in nxian terms. Different members, depending on rank, were interpreted to have differing levels of integration. The accumulation of *integrations* could be exchanged as spiritual capital (Guest, 2007) to achieve a higher standing within the community and more respect from its leader. The way in which *integrations* were measured was through *The Stripe Path* which was the visual representation of the nxian hierarchy through colored sashes representative of rank.

As was mentioned earlier, *EMs* were seen as one of the most effective ways to remove the disintegrations that prevent one from becoming enlightened. *EMs* can be likened to Scientology’s similar practice known as ‘auditing’, which has the participant work through trauma in this life or a past life. (Kent 2021, p. 6) However, outsiders often consider it to be used as a system of discovering sensitive information about the participant, which can be later used against them as mental manipulation.

Another significant practice in nxian ideology is being *at-cause*. Being *at-cause* is essentially the understanding that you are the cause of whatever is happening to you since nxians use a practice called *state control*, which is when one artificially controls whatever emotional state they are in and can transition from one emotional extreme to the other. (Edmondson 2019, p. 54-55) In the nxian philosophy, there are no victims, and therefore, anything that happens to you, whether good or bad, was caused by you one way or another.

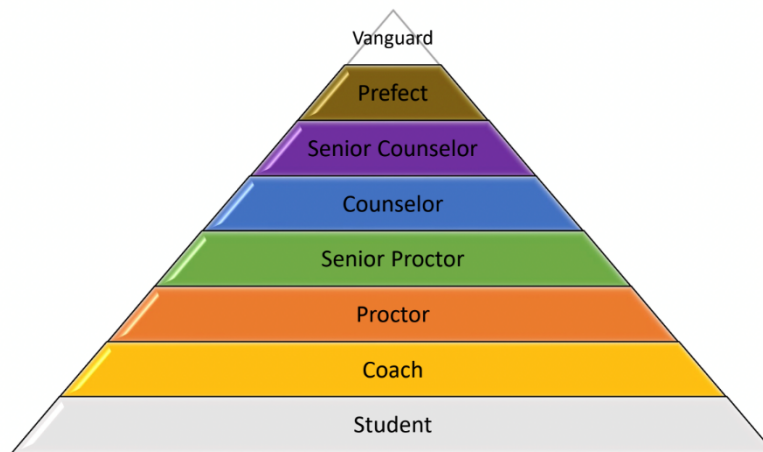
2.2.1. *The Stripe Path*

The Stripe Path was a clear, visual way to denote rank in NXIVM. Certain privileges and responsibilities came with each rank. Since the overall structure of NXIVM was pyramidal in nature, it was increasingly more difficult to make your way to the top. It required lots of time and money, as well as a personal commitment to Raniere as he was the one who ultimately decided who was promoted.

The following description by Raine gives a clear and concise overview of how the *Stripe Path* worked:

The Stripe Path expressed NXIVM’s structure and hierarchy. Wearing a coloured sash around their necks was mandatory for ESP members, with each sash colour denoting one’s level on the Stripe Path. Participants had to earn four white stripes on their sashes prior to being promoted to the next colour and level. To achieve stripes and advance through the sash levels, coaches evaluated ESP members on proficiency in courses taken, the number of people a member recruited, and the number of integrations a person achieved. (Raine 2021b, p. 69)

The Stripe Path is modeled after the colored belt system denoting rank in martial arts. Below is a pyramidal diagram of the ranks of NXIVM and their assigned color scarf worn by members of their rank:



1 Diagram of *The Stripe Path's* Colored Sash Hierarchy

Everyone starts on their first day of *ESP* at the *Five-Day* with a white *Student* sash. Ranieri pointedly wore a white scarf to outwardly communicate that he was forever learning and just a humble student. At the top of the hierarchy is the only gold sash which is worn by Nancy Salzman, known as *Prefect*. Edmondson had reached Senior Proctor and was awarded a green sash for her efforts. According to Edmondson, only one unnamed person ever achieved the blue Counselor sash. The purple Senior Counselor sashes were reserved for members like Barb Jeske and Pam Cafritz, who were longtime secret lovers of Ranieri and devoted followers.

Edmondson explains that there were three criteria to advance to the next level in *The Stripe Path*. The first is “your skill level with the “tech” (how many courses you’d taken).” (Edmondson 2019, p. 37) The *Five-Day* is just one of several beginning entry-level courses in *ESP*. There are numerous courses and programs of varying lengths that follow, such as the *Eleven-Day*, *Sixteen-Day*, *Ethos*, or membership in another NXIVM company such as *JNESS*. The second requirement to advance to the next level is how many people you have enrolled and recruited to join *ESP* or another NXIVM organization. The third and final criteria is “how many ‘integrations’ you’d experienced, thanks to your dedication to working out old, unsuccessful emotional patterns from your past.” (Edmondson 2019, p. 37)

The Stripe Path is a clear hierarchy that comes with certain perks that are financial and social. When someone is awarded the next rank and given a new sash, there is a ceremony, and the following words are recited. For example, if you were to be promoted to the rank of *coach*, someone of a higher rank would place the sash around your neck and then recite: “Welcome to the rank of coach with all of the rights, responsibilities, and privileges that it entails.” (Edmondson 2019, p. 88)

I feel that it is significant that the words “rights,” “responsibilities” and “privileges” are used. Rights indicate that by achieving a certain level, they are now inherently owed certain things, presumably such as respect and certain freedoms. By responsibilities, this would imply that there would be an increase in the workload one would take on from that point forward. Finally, privileges are similar to rights but are conditional. A privilege can be taken away in light of bad behavior or failure of expectations.

The Stripe Path appears to have been used as a tool of manipulation in many ways. By dangling the possibility of achieving the next rank, people were encouraged to put more time and money into the organization. On the flip side, there were moments when people were pressured into doing things they were uncomfortable with because of their rank. In Edmondson’s autobiography, there is a particular quote that exemplifies this.

During the secret branding ceremony for *DOS*, Edmondson is visibly uncomfortable and is looking for a way out of going through with receiving the brand. In the book, she relays her internal dialogue at this moment and how her rank in NXIVM affects her decision-making:

Sarah, you're just looking for the back door. What they've taught us is right: breaking commitments is what women do. This is what makes you weak. You are strong! You can do this. And I remind myself of what this means within NXIVM. You're the only green sash here besides Lauren, I remind myself. I'm one of the highest ranking in the whole company. (Edmondson 2019, p. 19)

Being one of the highest-ranking members in the room, let alone in the entire organization, further compelled Edmondson to go through with the branding ceremony regardless of not wanting to participate.

Edmondson also explains in her autobiography what she refers to as the “closed-loop system of logic” (Edmondson 2019, p. 99) where the lower-level individual is considered less integrated and, therefore, the one who needs to change. She writes:

In NXIVM, the tacit belief was that the lower-level individual was most likely the one causing the problem or having the issue. (...) The senior levels did it to me and I did it to others (...) In other words, no complaint from a lower-level individual was valid because the response was always, “What are you making it mean?” or “I think you are vested” - the NXIVM word meaning reactive or in need of circumstances being different - “and should probably get an EM before we talk further about that.” (Edmondson 2019, p. 99-100)

As we can see from the above quote and all the previous examples, the social hierarchy dictated how people acted and reacted in their daily lives within NXIVM. Being unable to question your superiors is a hallmark of total and reinventive institutions and will be further discussed in the following subchapter.

The Stripe Path helped to visualize the hierarchy and to maintain separation among the ranks. Several performative practices illustrate the rank of an individual simply by their behavior. The nxian handshake is a perfect example of this. The social status of the two engaged in the handshake determines how the handshake will be performed as well as the placement of the hands. Edmondson explains that even seating at NXIVM events was decided by *The Stripe Path*. She writes,

In the Five-Day, we learned that the senior-level coaches, like the green sashes and the two purples, always sat in the front of any audience, closest to Keith if he was in attendance. The lower-level students, like us white sashes, were relegated to the back. (Edmondson 2019, p. 62)

The Stripe Path was the primary marker of success and was a tangible way of seeing one’s progress. It served an administrative function as well as a visual one in order to set people apart and denote rank. The scarves themselves became a cultural object that visually represented the amount of spiritual capital one had accumulated within the organization. The more spiritual capital they possessed within the social hierarchy, the more *integrated* they were.

The most *integrated* person was Raniere; therefore, the closer you were to him, the more spiritual capital (Guest 2007) you were presumed to have. As Raine remarks in her article, the *stripe path* also bred a feeling of exclusivity and shaped how they saw themselves and others within the organization. It was also a way to gain spiritual capital by being near those with higher levels of *integration*. This fed into the idea of exclusivity surrounding those higher up the *stripe path*.

2.2.2. Twelve-Point Mission Statement

The *Twelve-point Mission Statement* (see Appendix C 3) is recited at the beginning of every course. An experienced nxian would know the entire twelve points by heart. Oxenberg (2019) describes her first experience with the *Twelve-point Mission Statement*:

After all the bowing was done, our next step was to recite in unison the mission statement written out in big block letters on a giant poster board at the front of the room. It was to be regurgitated daily until we knew it by heart. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 22)

The recitation is one of the most repeated performative practices within NXIVM, as it is a verbal recitation in unison at the beginning of every event or training. I obtained the complete *twelve-point mission statement* from published evidence in the NXIVM trial. It is about one page worth of text. This is quite a long text to have memorized and repeat at the start of every day one is in a seminar. If one were a fully committed nxian,

they would be spending the majority of their time in seminars, and therefore, they would be repeating this almost daily.

The *mission statement* serves to reinforce the ideology of the organization and increases the feeling of ‘communitas’ in its members. Numerous themes appear time and time again in NXIVM that are featured in the mission statement. I identify the three most important themes as Success, The Interdependent Self, and Tribute. I will analyze these three themes based on select quotations from the mission statement.

2.2.2.1. Success

Success is the main word in the title *Executive Success Programs*. The words “success” or “successful” appear 15 times in the mission statement. In the first point of the mission statement, *success* is defined as “an internal state of clear, honest knowledge of what I am, my value in the world, and my responsibility for the way I react to all things.” (Raniere 1998) *Success* in espian terms is defined as an achieved state of being that dictates your understanding of yourself and your value and responsibility to others. It also is intended to shape how you interpret your social reality.

In NXIVM, it is believed that a *successful* person behaves *rationally* and *ethically*. They believe that *ethical* people must control the world for the sake of humanity. In order to do so, they must control the wealth. In the 11th point, it states:

It is essential for the survival of humankind for these things to be controlled by successful, ethical people. I pledge to ethically control as much of the money, wealth and resources of the world as possible within my success plan. (Raniere 1998)

The use of the word survival implies urgency in the course of action. There is a pledge by the person reciting this to take financial control over whatever is possible to help save the planet. Therefore, in NXIVM, the aggressive pursuit of success in terms of power and money is no longer seen as a selfish act but a selfless one.

As was explained in the work of anthropologist Veronique Altglas (2008), one of the most common driving factors in engagement in NRMs is a longing for personal success or a perceived failure on the part of the social system. Those who join NRMs are often educated and belong to the middle or upper classes. It is believed that they tend to be seeking a missing element in their life due to the disappointment they feel in their trajectory towards success, be it financial or social. It is hypothesized that due to the rise in individualism and education, more and more people tend to expect a certain level of success upon completion of typical milestones such as finishing college; however, a growing number of people feel as though they did not receive the perks in life they feel they were owed based on their life choices and hard work. I propose that the theories by Altglas (2008) explain why success is such a central theme not only in the *Five-Day* but also in nxian culture.

2.1.2.2. The Interdependent Self

Even though it is called a *mission statement*, it reads more like a pledge. A mission statement is typically understood to explain a company’s overall vision; however, the *twelve-point mission statement* is intended to be read in unison by the group. Therefore, it is interesting and, I find, quite telling that even though it is recited in a group, the statement is written mainly in first person. The word “I” is used 35 times in the 12 points.

In every point, there is an emphasis on one’s understanding of themselves and their responsibility to other nxians as well as to the world. Everyone must act on an individual level but also understand that their actions affect everyone else. For example, the third point reads: “I understand each of us must raise ourselves—and thereby raise all others—as all others raise us. This is interdependence.” (Raniere 1998) It clearly states that interdependence is a central nxian theme.

I find this unusual for a self-help class as I understand that the emphasis would typically be placed on the self and not on a group dynamic. In point 9, it states: “The actualization of human potential by anyone is a tribute to all team humankind.” (Raniere 1998) This last quote makes more sense in a Human Potential

scenario; however, it still appears that the role of the mission statement, especially in the *Five-Day*, is to initiate one into NXIVM by introducing a sense of responsibility and dependence upon this particular group of elite people.

Raine (2021a) writes that to nxians Raniere “had become central to their sense of selfhood and identity, their perceptions of self-worth and value, and their sense of purpose and meaning.” (Raine 2021a, p. 57) I understand the recitation of the *twelve-point mission statement* to be an integral practice of NXIVM as it reinforces the nxian ideological paradigm and eventually has a transformational effect on the participant reciting it by continually strengthening their understanding of themselves as an interdependent self.

2.1.2.3. Tribute

We left on the final day in the manner Nancy had instructed us, paying tribute to NXIVM’s founder, Keith, by bowing while saying, “Thank you, Vanguard.” I felt self-conscious doing this, but we’d bowed and said these words after each time we recited the mission statement and at the close of each day in the training. At this point, it had come to feel less strange. (Edmondson 2019, p. 42-43)

In the mission statement, *tribute* is defined as “a form of payment and honor. It is giving credit where credit is due.” (Raniere 2003, p. 190) *Paying tribute* is performed in many ways in NXIVM. For example, as is explained in the quote above from Edmondson’s autobiography, it was expected to say “Thank you, Vanguard” after receiving instruction or reciting the mission statement.

Other forms of *tribute* include bowing and the hanging framed photos of *Vanguard* and *Prefect* in NXIVM buildings. In the patent, the practice of framed photos of Raniere and Salzman is explained: “As in hospitals, corporations and martial arts dojos, pictures of the founders are displayed to show respect and to give tribute.” (Raniere 2003, p. 61) Oxenberg describes her impression of the ESP headquarters in upstate New York:

The only décor I remember was the framed headshots of Vanguard and Prefect on the wall, displayed prominently like religious icons - side by side, as if they were Jesus and Mary: Keith with his long hippie hair and Nancy with her neck wrapped in her beloved gold sash. Both of them smiled for the camera as though they were posing for cheesy prom shots. I was mesmerized by how awful these portraits were. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 36)

Oxenberg was uncomfortable with this nxian practice. It felt to her that Raniere and Salzman wished to be worshiped like a “religious icon.” This practice is in contrast to Raniere’s rationalization of likening this practice to those of “hospitals, corporations and martial arts dojos” as a form of “respect.” (Raniere 2003) It only adds to the argument that Raniere purposely fashioned himself after religious icons like Jesus and the Buddha.

Tribute is also linked to morality and ethical conduct in the mission statement. For example, there is an emphasis on earning one’s success. Due to the interdependence of the institution, one’s success is connected to everyone else within the organization. Therefore, tribute must be paid to those around you and the leader who created the *tech*. If one does not give proper credit for one’s success or claims someone else’s ideas as their own, it is considered theft which is unethical. This was also a way of maintaining secrecy regarding nxian practices. In total institutions, unquestioning respect towards the authority system is essential to keep the social hierarchy intact. Failure to comply with the rules and regulations often resulted in punishments.

2.2.3. Exploration of Meaning (EM)

I'd led him through our process known as EM (exploration of meaning), and I observed quietly while he suddenly recalled a memory from deep in his past. His gaze, which had initially seemed so worn and exhausted, widened into instant enlightenment. I allowed him a minute to realize that the event he was remembering had led to years of a behavior pattern that had been unhealthy for him. I broke the silence by asking, "What do you make it mean?" This was a routine benchmark for every EM. I was trained to facilitate shifts like this one every day...but for him? In that moment, we both knew that his life had just changed. (Edmondson 2019, p. 19-20)

In the quote above, Edmondson relays an experience she had administering an *Exploration of Meaning (EM)* to whom she describes as a famous rock star in her autobiography. (Edmondson 2019, p. 20) In this quote, we can see the transformational process an *EM* can trigger in an individual. Edmondson commonly refers to these transformations as "shifts". In Chapter 3, I argue that the experience of the *EM* fosters 'communitas' and occurs in the 'liminal' period of the ritual process of the *Five-Day*.

An *EM* as defined by Edmondson is "an exercise we did to examine a stimulus that had long triggered a negative emotional reaction in us, in what they called a stimulus/response pattern." (Edmondson 2019, p. 20-21) Oxenberg describes it as:

an umbrella term for a socratic line of questioning that's more experiential than the modules. It's a one on one process done with a coach that is meant to unhook the emotional charge around painful memories in one's life and dismantle phobias. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 23)

As both women explain, it is a one-on-one experience between the individual and someone of a higher rank in which the higher-ranking member questions the lower ranking one in order to shift their perception to be more in line with nxian philosophy and thinking strategies. It is usually performed in an intensive in front of the entire group. The individual receiving the *EM* is asked a series of questions based on their responses to the previous question as they explore negative emotional reactions to specific painful memories in their past or any bad habits that they wish to be rid of. *EMs* are often performed in public at a seminar regardless of the oftentimes intimate and personal information being shared. *EMs* are a major practice within *NXIVM* and supposedly have the most power to affect an individual perceptual shift. It is rooted in Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP), which is essentially a form of hypnosis.

An *EM* is usually performed in a group setting such as at an intensive however, it can at times be done in private. (see appendix B 15) Although the private sessions were often used as a form of negotiation to quell disagreements or disobedience. (Edmondson 2019, p. 133) While *EMs* are most effective in a setting such as an intensive, they also appeared to be effective for *NXIVM* members in private once they had already achieved 'communitas' within the institution. Edmondson recalls having to undergo *EMs* whenever she disagreed with a higher-ranking member's organizational decision or even suggesting a lower-level member receive an *EM* from her in order to change their mind, this leads me to understand that an *EM* could also be a tool of negotiation, conflict resolution, and punishment depending on the intent of the practitioner.

Salzman was a certified practitioner of NLP; however, Raniere had been using elements of it on various people for years. For example, Natalie explains that the first time she met him at CBI, he asked her if she wished to quit smoking. When she replied yes, he brought her into an office alone. She felt as if they had only been speaking for fifteen minutes, but after emerging from the office to leave, she was told she had been in there for hours. She also claims that the process seemed to have worked; she writes in her autobiography that she still has never smoked a cigarette since that day. (Natalie 2019, p. 23-26)

EMs are very similar to the practice of 'auditing' within Scientology. Sociologist Stephen Kent in his article, *Comparative Reflections on Scientology and NXIVM*, defines auditing as: "people identifying traumatic incidents (even supposedly in past lives) that reputedly cause blockages (engrams) that hinder people's optimal performance." (Kent 2021, p. 9) In both *EMs* and auditing, individuals recount their traumas in hopes of becoming more successful.

Raniere publicly criticized Scientology but appeared to borrow many nxian practices from the organization. (Natalie 2019, p. 91) In Kent's article, former high-ranking nxian Mark Vicente is quoted to have said:

I actually heard him talk negatively about Scientology. He would say that the auditing process actually dissociates people, which I thought was very funny, because in essence, a lot of the processes that were used in NXIVM did exactly that. They dissociated people from different things that they were reacting to. But no, he never spoke about how he got ideas from there. Now, there are people that [sic] knew him that said that he had actually studied Scientology extensively. But I'd certainly never seen any L. Ron Hubbard books, and mostly what he said about Scientology was that it was not as effective as what he was doing in NXIVM and wasn't very good for people. That was his basic story. (Vicente in Abramovitch, 2020 [capitalization in original]; also, Remini and Rinder, 2020, @ 54:20 in Kent 2021, p. 6)

It appears that those who were close to Raniere were aware of his tendency to borrow elements from Scientology when crafting nxian principles and practices. However, it was important to Raniere to distance himself from Scientology and L. Ron Hubbard in order to avoid any negative associations.

2.2.4. Recruitment

Many former students described this never-ending treadmill dynamic. Whatever insecurity or problem you identified in the class, the long-term solution was always more coursework. And the way to afford more coursework was to sell more classes. This is a familiar dilemma to anyone who has tried to succeed in multi-level marketing; for the vast majority of NXIVM students, the economic rewards never materialized. (Berman 2021, p. 121)

Recruitment is an essential aspect of NXIVM. Firstly, due to how the organization was constructed, recruitment was essential to keep it alive. Without a continuous stream of new members, the pyramidal structure would collapse. This processual structure is the basis of all MLMs and pyramid schemes. Members must continually sign up new members to earn a regular income living exclusively within the organization.

In the autobiographies, recruitment is a common theme. It was a significant component of the reward structure offered by the institution. Both Edmondson and Oxenberg discuss a moment at the end of the *Five-Day* in which they were celebrated for having recruited others. Their reward was extra stripes on their sashes which made them feel special and celebrated.

Turner (1974) describes how the feeling of *communitas* can drive people to recruit them to their way of thinking. He writes:

Communitas tends to be inclusive (some might call it "generous"), social structure tends to be exclusive, even snobbish, relishing the distinction between we/ they or in-group/ out-group, higher/lower, betters/mentals. This drive to inclusivity makes for proselytization. One wants to make the Others, We. (Turner 1974, p. 82)

The Stripe Path created an institutional structure within the 'liminal' anti-structure space of NXIVM, therefore, creating a negotiation of inclusivity and exclusivity where the feeling of 'communitas' allowed one to feel included, but the institutionalized nature of the hierarchy pushed them to strive for a higher rank.

Edmondson was a prominent recruiter for NXIVM and became a full-time devoted member not long after her first few intensives. She was able to make an income working for NXIVM and quickly worked her way up the *stripe path* due to her ability to recruit. In her autobiography, she explains:

Now I'd become one of the star salespeople within NXIVM. With my thousands of hours of coursework I knew the material inside and out, and I could find the gem in every course that would draw people to enroll. Between my own direct enrollees and all the people they'd recruited, my team and I enrolled hundreds of people. I'd reached the highest closing rate in the whole company. (Edmondson 2019, p. 98)

Edmondson's high levels of recruitment made her a "star" within NXIVM. She was well-respected and afforded many privileges within the company. She was also able to operate with a bit more autonomy than some other high-level members because she recruited so many people to the organization and ran a successful branch in Vancouver.

2.2.4.1. Organizations Under the NXIVM Umbrella

Over time, there were many official business companies and organizations under the NXIVM umbrella that shared the same values and philosophy. From daycares and yoga schools to science foundations and humanitarian funds, it is “estimated that NXIVM had launched close to one hundred offshoot companies, many of them drawing funds up a pyramid-like hierarchy.” (Berman 2021, p.5) A hallmark aspect of an MLM is constant expansion. Without constant expansion, there is no way to keep money flowing, as the way people (especially those at the top) make money is through recruitment. The MLM company or pyramid scheme stagnates without recruits and eventually falls apart. This appears to be a way to attract a wider audience of new members and possibly the driving force behind creating so many offshoot companies.

Constant expansion was also a way for Raniere to diversify his financial portfolio as he learned from his experience with *CBI* to never have his name as the owner of any of the companies or properties as a way to be not liable for any legal implications. While he did not legally own anything connected to NXIVM, he was undoubtedly the philosophical leader and the only voice that truly mattered in the multi-million-dollar organization with thousands of international members.

Some of the most successful and well-known branches of NXIVM were, of course, *ESP* but also organizations such as *JNESS* and *SOP*, which claimed to be seminars on gender-based issues concerning modern men and women. While there were hundreds of public nxian companies, the secret sorority known as *DOS* continues to dominate NXIVM’s legacy due to the compelling allegations of abuse by former members which led to Raniere’s conviction in 2021.

2.2.4.1.1. *JNESS & SOP*

After Oxenberg had completed the Five-Day, she was asked by Salzman to host a small *JNESS* seminar at her home which was billed as a women’s empowerment workshop. Oxenberg’s mother and daughter, India, (who would go on to devote herself fully to the organization) were in attendance for the seminar. *Jness* was created by Raniere in 2006 with the claim that it would help one self-actualize their full potential as a woman as well as help them in their heterosexual interpersonal relationships. However, Edmondson and Oxenberg both reflect that it was latent with misogynistic rhetoric which wildly contrasted feminist message it was advertised to impart. Below, Oxenberg quotes Nancy Salzman’s lecture at the *Jness* seminar held in her home:

Men don’t experience intimacy. Imagine the difference between sticking your finger in someone’s mouth and them sticking their finger into your mouth. The first one is not an intimate experience, the second one is. That is what sex is like for a man. (...) Men are designed to be polygamous, and women must learn to tolerate this behavior. Men are more loyal than women. When men cheat, they go back to their wives. When women cheat, they tend to transfer affection and leave their primary relationship. (...) Men abide by an honor code, and women do not. This code gets passed down, like a legacy, from father to son. Women, on the other hand, are whimsical, entitled, spoiled, overemotional, childish, self-serving, weak-willed, indulgent, lack discipline, have trouble keeping their word, and are bereft of any such code. (Salzman in Oxenberg 2019, p. 43)

In her autobiography, Oxenberg relays her shock and disappointed at Nancy Salzman words as she found it to be completely contrary to what she anticipated to be a pro-feminist get-together. In her autobiography she described her reaction to Salzman’s lecture about women and men:

My gut lurched in protest and anger. (...) When Nancy divulged proudly to the class that it was Vanguard himself who had benevolently and brilliantly devised the entire *Jness* program to guide women, bells went off inside me like a fire alarm. This is ridiculous! A program about female empowerment devised by a man? (...) I was livid, and wanted desperately to raise my hand, raise hell, and call for anarchy in my own living room, like I’d done the first day back in Venice²⁷. But as hostess, propriety ruled. (...) I needed a comrade in arms and searched around the room for my

²⁷ Oxenberg is referring here to the *Five-Day* she had recently attended in Venice Beach, California.

mother's face. On it I saw the same expression of disgust that I was trying to hide on mine. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 43-44)

She explains that she found it ridiculous that the *Jness* curriculum was written by Raniere, a man. Even though she felt angered and offended by Salzman's words she did nothing to object since she had spent so much money on the future classes she had signed up for. She felt that it would be a waste not to participate in the rest of the classes. She also was not willing to face the embarrassment of challenging guests in her own home. Even if this meant the disapproval of her mother and ignoring her gut feeling that this was not something that was in line with her beliefs. Her daughter, India, appeared unphased by the messaging of the seminar so Oxenberg decided to continue with the classes but to be aware of any other "warning signs". (Oxenberg 2019, p. 47)

After the immense success of *Jness*, the *Society of Protectors (SOP)* was launched in 2010. *SOP* was for men and *Jness* was for women. They both followed the same recruitment and pay structure as all other nxian courses. The trainings were given in the form of seminars and intensives. After the sustained success of both *Jness* and *SOP*, Raniere decided to bring the two groups together for a special series of seminars that he would lead. Edmondson in the following quote explains that eventually *SOP Complete* was created which was crafted as a way for women to go through the male experience. She writes:

SOP Complete was like a boot camp so that women could experience what it's like to be raised as a boy in our society—expected to be strong, forbidden to cry, considered weak if they showed emotion. We were told it would help us to understand the men in our lives. Keith would be teaching these original co-ed courses himself, which didn't happen often. (Edmondson 2019, p. 139)

It was not common for Raniere to teach lectures at this stage in NXIVM however, the topics of gender relations greatly interested Raniere. Since *SOP* was taught by Raniere in person, it was a way for male members to acquire spiritual capital by being in his presence. Edmondson reflects on Raniere's philosophy that was taught in *Jness* and *SOP*:

SOP was a traditional way of viewing relationships, where men were the hunter-gatherers who protected women and women were the domestic damsels in distress who needed them. The curricula for *Jness* and *SOP* taught that in our society, men and women had separate roles and capabilities. Men were meant to be our heroes and protectors, and they had the wiring to spread their seed, which justified that sexual appetite. This set the foundation for Keith to rationalize his behaviors: men were wired for non-monogamy, while women were genetically dispositioned to stay with one man. Ultimately, Keith wanted to teach us that a woman's role is to obey a man. (Edmondson 2019, p. 141)

Edmondson in the above quote describes how traditional roles of men and women were repackaged as progressive empowerment. She suggests that Raniere's ulterior motives for the curricula was so he could impose his dominance on female members in NXIVM so that he could create *DOS*. Like many of the other nxian companies, *SOP* served as a training for some of the practices.

From some recorded footage of some of the lectures, it would appear that female submission was not the only goal of Raniere in *Jness* and *SOP*. There are several video recordings of Raniere making extremely controversial and disturbing statements regarding rape and sexual molestation of children. In an early NXIVM training session in the late 90s at which Natalie was present, she was horrified to realize that the details of her own childhood abuse told in confidence to Raniere and Salzman were twisted into a philosophical discussion of whether the rape of a child could ever be a good thing. She quotes Raniere as saying in the seminar:

If a mother in an African tribe performs fellatio on a baby, is she a bad mother because she is molesting him? Or is she a good mother because she has soothed her child? (Raniere in Natalie 2019, p. 99)

This statement would be inflammatory enough and could easily be attributed solely to the views of Raniere and not of NXIVM core values. However, Natalie, in her autobiography, transcribed Salzman making a similar argument years later in a NXIVM seminar:

If you look at sexual abuse, there are different ways to determine if it's abuse. One of them is the age of consent...In some states in the United States the age of consent is 17, in some parts of the world the age of consent is 12...so what's abuse in one area is not abuse in another. But what is sexual abuse really? Is the person a child, or is the person adult-like? Does the person have a certain type of understanding or cognition of morality to make such a choice? In other words, when you are talking to a 12-year-old, does the 12-year-old understand the choice she is actually making? That determines whether it is abuse or not. Because that choice has effects potentially on her physically, but also

effects in society later. (.,.) It's...more society abusing them than the adult, because they didn't know it was bad, but society tells them it's bad before they're bad. (...) So was it the adult or was it society? Because in some societies in the past, like in Rome, standards were completely different. But we are not in Rome. (Salzman in Natalie 2019, p. 100-101)

This quote from Nancy Salzman clearly aligns herself with Raniere's personal belief that sexual activity with a minor is not a problem of ethics or morality but in fact an unjust law created by society. This was not an open discussion on cultural relativism but a way to justify Raniere's molestation of underage girls which he had faced allegations of for years and was eventually convicted. I also find it significant that Salzman uses Ancient Rome in her argument as so many nxian elements are borrowed from ancient rome i.e. 'nexum', slavery bondage, 'prefect', etc.

2.2.4.1.2. *DOS*

Most of the media's focus on NXIVM is on a secretive and exclusive group within the institution called *DOS (Dominus Obsequious Sororium)* "a fake Latin phrase roughly translating to "master over the slave women." (Berman 2021, p. 14)). Membership in *DOS* was highly clandestine and selective. Only the most devout Nxians were invited to join. Sarah Edmondson was a member of *DOS* and writes about it at length in her autobiography. It is also a central feature of Sarah Berman's book, *Don't Call It a Cult*. Catherine Oxenberg's daughter, India, was also a member of *DOS*. While Natalie was never in *DOS* she writes about it in detail throughout her autobiography in a second-hand capacity. It is also important to mention that *DOS* is the main feature in the two docuseries, *The Vow* on HBO, and *Seduced* on Starz

Since Raniere had designed *DOS* to be a way for him to pressure women to sleep with him, he selected only attractive, thin young women to be recruited with the eventual intent of them becoming Raniere's sexual *slaves*. Raniere purposely used the women he was in secret high-control sexual relationships with such as Alison Mack and Lauren Salzman to recruit the women, run the group's meetings and ceremonies as well as to pass along the *collateral* to him unbeknownst to the women it belonged to. Toni Natalie explains the secrecy surrounding *DOS* in her autobiography:

DOS was a secret society within the larger secret society of NXIVM proper. A number of prominent Nxians were not recruited into, and were likely not aware of the existence of, DOS until the story broke in the papers. Nancy Salzman was not asked to join and knew nothing about it. (Natalie 2019, p. 242)

DOS was a very small secret organization. It was so secret, in fact, that even the second-in-command and co-creator Nancy Salzman did not know it existed. Both Nancy and her daughter were engaged in a sexual relationship with Raniere however, Nancy Salzman was not involved in *DOS* but her daughter, Lauren Salzman was.

Women were not allowed to know what *DOS* was or who was in it before they provided *collateral*²⁸ which could be anything from nude photos to taped staged confessions. The fear of the release of these damning materials is what forced women to join let alone from leaving *DOS* or becoming a whistleblower. These materials were never actually released to the public but the fact that they existed was enough to keep women from turning on *DOS*. However, many women also stayed in *DOS* because they were lied to about who was at the top of the pyramid and what the actual goal of the organization was. They thought that they were joining something akin to a feminist version of the Freemasons. *DOS* was billed to the women who joined as female empowerment. It would capitalize on the "feminist" coursework in JNESS but also create

²⁸ *Collateral* as a nxian practice is discussed at length in 2.3.2. Not only was it a wider common practice within NXIVM, but it was also particularly prevalent in SOP where the men were required to perform *readiness drills* in which they could be texted at any time day or night and were required to respond within seconds. If they did not respond within the allotted time, they could pay upwards of \$1500. (Berman 2021, Edmondson 2019) In *DOS*, women were required to perform even more intensive *readiness drills* even while driving as well as constant check-ins in which they asked for permission to eat and sleep. If they were expecting to lose signal on their phone due to an elevator or driving through a tunnel, they were required to text "dark" and "undark" once they had regained signal. Failure to reply within the allotted time could result in their *collateral* being leaked publicly. (Edmondson 2019)

strong bonds among strong women. They felt as though men had been helping boys' clubs and now it was time for women to network in secret in order to get ahead in their chosen field.

The women of *DOS* (once their *sisters* in their group were revealed to one another) had likely known each other for years, having worked closely together at NXIVM. In Edmondson's case, her recruiter and 'master' was Lauren Salzman who she considered to be her best friend and was the maid of honor at her wedding. Therefore, the idea of making a lifetime vow to someone she trusted as a ceremonial gesture in the pursuit of unlocking her full potential seemed like a great opportunity for self-growth.

As the media has widely reported, many of the women who joined *DOS* were eventually branded with a cauterizing pen in a ceremonial way. Edmondson describes how the ceremony was described to her:

I flew to Albany for what Lauren had called an "initiation ceremony" that she'd be leading. . . Lauren said that by the end of the initiation ritual, my life would be changed. (Edmondson 2019, p. 184)

Edmondson speaks openly about her discomfort, confusion, shame and fear surrounding the event. She makes it clear that this is not something that she would have done of her own accord had she not been pressured and lied to.

She explained that when she agreed to go through with it, the mark she was to receive at the ceremony was described to her as a small tattoo:

Lauren said we'd all be receiving an identical tattoo the size of a dime—that we'd all share. I've never wanted a tattoo. (...) This tattoo represents my commitment to this mission, our mission, which is not a passing phase, but a lifetime commitment. (...) Lauren has guaranteed that nothing could equip us with more strength than being initiated into this sisterhood. From what she says, this will be true empowerment. (Edmondson 2019, p. 10-11)

Edmondson agreed to the "tattoo" since it would be a way to have a shared experience with her new sisterhood to which she had made a lifelong commitment. Edmondson explains how the social pressures, the nxian belief system and the threat of the release of her collateral all compounded into the reasons why she underwent a humiliating and physically painful procedure she did not want. She writes:

I lay on that exam table with a professional licensed physician standing over me. Did I want to go through with it? No, not at all . . . but my collateral had a lot of power. Inside that room as we took turns lying on the table, there was never a moment when I didn't feel self-conscious about being unclothed. I bared all of myself for this organization in both the literal and the figurative sense. The feeling in the room was not one of unconditional acceptance or female empowerment. (Edmondson 2019, p. 185)

In the above quote, Edmondson describes how this experience was very far away from her expectations of "female empowerment". She felt misled by the true intentions of this group and was only going along with what was happening out of fear.

Edmondson describes the process of the *branding* in her autobiography. First she describes witnessing another woman, Gabriella, undergo the procedure. Edmondson wrote that they disinfected the area before the procedure and all the women were naked except for surgical masks which they wore to prevent infection. Edmondson and some other women held Gabriella down for approximately 45 minutes as the physician seared her skin with the cauterizing pen with the symbol that was later revealed to be Ranieri and Alison Mack's initials combined. Edmondson wrote the following description of Gabriella's *branding*:

When the iron first makes contact to her skin, Gabriella's whole body flips and tweaks, as if she's being electrocuted. She screams out in pain. Above her surgical mask, the woman holding her other foot meets my eyes, a distinct transaction between us: What in the actual fuck?! I can't pull my attention away from Gabriella's pain. It's a horror movie now. I realize that they've given us the masks because the instrument Danielle is using, an electric surgical device with a live tip, is actually burning Gabriella's flesh. The smell of scorched skin filters through the mask, into my nose, to my stomach. I close my eyes and position my nose tightly against the skin of my shoulder. (Edmondson 2019, p. 20-21)

Lauren Salzman (Nancy Salzman's daughter and Edmondson's best friend who recruited her into *DOS* and is the one leading the *branding ceremony*) tells Edmondson that she has to not show any weakness in order to motivate the other women to endure the painful procedure. Edmondson recalls feeling conflicted and wanting to leave. She repeatedly writes in the autobiography that she did not want to go through with the

experience. When she underwent the procedure, she recalls disassociating and using *state control* (a nxian tactic for controlling one's emotions) in order to make it through the ordeal.

The following morning, Edmondson was still affected by her experience. She felt pressured by Lauren Salzman to keep her physical brand scar a secret from her husband. In the following quote, Edmondson reflects on how NXIVM as an institution had transformed her:

The next morning, I was still haunted. NXIVM had become a deeper part of me—now, in the physical sense—than I had ever wanted. I knew that if I tried to voice any of this, they'd say I had no character, no honor, that I was a complainer, a parasite throwing a tantrum. They'd say that my behavior was exactly the reason that a group like DOS needed to exist, because women who get uncomfortable and indulge their discomfort are weak. "Go as long as you can without letting Nippy see this," Lauren said, gesturing to my mark. "You have to make sure he doesn't form a link between this and Albany." I couldn't let Nippy find out. Over the past twelve years, the organization had disassembled my understanding of strength versus weakness. My dad had taught me that courage is not the absence of fear, but action despite fear. I'd been raised to voice the truth, to do the hard thing, to stand against what seemed to be wrong. But in NXIVM, through years of coaching, reinforcement of some behaviors and punishment for others, the senior levels had trained me to believe that staying silent was right. (Edmondson 2019, p. 186)

She describes how the teachings of NXIVM had gone against the principles she was raised with. She felt as though her fundamental understanding of basic principles such as strength and weakness, and good and bad had shifted in the favor of the institution. As was described at length in 2.2., in the nxian belief system, there are no ultimate victims and nxians are encouraged to be *at cause*. This means that there is no such thing as victimhood. You cannot be the victim of a crime or be manipulated as you are in complete control of your own reality.

At the same time, the flow of information was tightly controlled within the institution. For example, the women of *DOS* (except for the top tier of masters/slaves such as Alison Mack and Lauren Salzman) did not know that Raniere was at the top of this hierarchy. They understood it to be an entirely female institution separate from Raniere. It took Edmondson some time to realize that the brand she had received was in fact a combination of Raniere and Alison Mack's initials. After she and her husband, Nippy, became aware of Raniere's involvement in *DOS*, they left NXIVM (including their Vancouver center) and launched a public whistleblowing campaign.

2.3 NXIVM as a Reinventive Institution

In the following subchapter, I will build upon Raine's (2021b) argument that NXIVM is a reinventive institution that always had a "shadow-like presence of a TI." (Raine 2021b, p. 79) I will provide examples from the selected autobiographies of how NXIVM reflects the criteria laid out in the writings of Goffman (1961), Scott (2011), and Raine (2021b). From the perspective of Natalie, Edmondson, and Oxenberg, NXIVM was a "greedy institution" (Scott, 2010; Coser, 1974) that was extremely exclusive and demanding. Through the resocialization processes these women cast away their previous selves and acquired new identities that were more in line with the institution. They all explain that there was a clear distinction in the level of commitment from those who relocated to live near the nxian headquarters in *Albany* and those who were members of their local nxian chapter.

The Clifton Park/Knox Woods area of Albany in upstate New York was considered the headquarters for NXIVM as it was where the main office was and where Raniere lived with his most devoted followers. I understand *Albany* to be an emic term referring to the location many nxians lived in as well as a reference to nxian administrative and leadership who were located there as well. Oxenberg describes *Albany* as "cult command central". (Oxenberg 2019, p. 172) Many nxians lived and worked in *Albany*.

Edmondson (2019) explains that over the years, she and her husband, Nippy, debated whether to move to *Albany* or not. In her book, she describes the pros and cons she discussed with her husband regarding whether they should move:

If we moved to Albany, he said, we could have a built-in community of friends and colleagues in NXIVM to help us out with baby-sitting while also being within a few hours of the city to go on

auditions, line up work, and visit his parents when they were at their apartment in Manhattan. (Edmondson 2019, p. 121)

She lists community, child care, and proximity to work, family, and friends as pull factors to moving to *Albany*. However, there were also many reasons why she and her husband, Nippy, never made the move. She writes that she feared losing her autonomy since she already ran her own center in Vancouver, her home. (Edmondson 2019, p. 97)

Edmondson also described that she witnessed many people go to *Albany* for a temporary assignment only to move there permanently. (Edmondson 2019, p. 120) She writes about the pressure she felt from *Albany* to move there, especially after becoming a mother:

But it was as though the upper ranks could sense that motherhood was threatening to pull me away. I started to feel more pressure from Albany for us to move there because they still wanted me to help lead the development of the Ultima curricula. I didn't want to be anywhere near it. By this point I had seen enough people move to Albany and drop off the face of the earth. All of the actors, like Nicki and Allison, who had moved there to "deepen their craft" had stopped auditioning altogether. I had also witnessed people giving up their lives for vague work exchanges that seemed like bottomless pits. (Edmondson 2018, p. 120)

She uses quite strong language such as "drop off the face of the earth," "giving up their lives," and "bottomless pits." It is my understanding that Edmondson was quite resistant to moving to *Albany* as she felt that it would seriously stifle her career and limit her autonomy. I find it significant that she was able to defy pressures from the higher-ups such as Salzman. I understand this to be because she was such a strong recruiter and high-earner within the company. She expresses that she faced resentment from *Albany* as a result as she was able to retain a lot of her freedom while still enjoying the organization's perks, unlike most of the other high-ranking female members.

2.3.1. What is a Total Institution?

In order to understand reinventive institutions it is important to first understand total institutions. Scott, in her 2010 article, *Revisiting the Total Institution: Performative Regulation in the Reinventive Institution*, succinctly summarizes the four defining points of a TI created by Goffman as follows:

The four key features of a TI were: (a) the unfolding of the daily round in the same place and under the same authority; (b) batch living, or being treated as part of an anonymous mass; (c) the rigid timetabling and scheduling of activities; and (d) an institutional goal of resocialization. (Scott 2010, p. 215)

According to Goffman's mid-20th-century interpretation, modern life was divided into three spheres (sleep, play, and work) that did not overlap and were the basis of how we spend most of our time as humans. He explains:

A basic social arrangement in modern society is that we tend to sleep, play, and work in different places, in each case with a different set of coparticipants, under a different authority, and without an over-all rational plan. The central feature of total institutions can be described as a breakdown of the kinds of barriers ordinarily separating these three spheres of life. (Goffman 1961, p. 314)

Essentially, he explains that in TIs, all necessary aspects of one's life needed to survive and keep busy were taken care of by the institution. The authority of the institution planned out the daily routines, which included work and diversion. The authority also provided food and shelter. Goffman adds that TIs also:

do not look for cultural victory. They effectively create and sustain a particular kind of tension between the home world and the institutional world and use this persistent tension as strategic leverage in the management [of people.] (Goffman 1961, p. 317)

In order to achieve the desired resocialization by the institution, the authority system must take great care in the initial resocialization period to strip away the previous ties to the outside world. This can be likened to the separation period leading into the liminal period in Turner's ritual theory. The passenger has been stripped from their previous life and is now between their old life and their new one.

Upon entering the institution, "the *stripping processes* through which *mortification of the self* occurs are fairly standard in our total institutions." (Goffman 1961, p. 317) This is done by removing pre-

institutional items and severing outside attachments such as family, occupation, and educational lines. This is also achieved through limiting lines of communication to the outside world.

Another aspect of TIs that Goffman discusses is: “Expressive signs of respect for the staff are coercively and continuously demanded.” (Goffman 1961, p. 318) In NXIVM, the act of *paying tribute* could be interpreted as this. *Tribute* is also one of the first things instilled in the very first module of the *Five-Day*. Goffman also writes that the mortification process is often most severe during the first few days of the entrance as part of the initiation process. For example, the reminder of the initiates' low status is repeatedly enforced upon the new participants in this ‘rite de passage’ (Van Gennep, 1909). This would explain why the first module, *Rules & Rituals*, that teaches nxian practices in the *Five-Day* is on the very first day.

Overall, NXIVM does not neatly fit into the category of a TI for the following reasons. The locations where members slept, played, and worked were varied and not centralized. While it could be argued that those who lived and worked in Albany were in a quasi-total institution, I do not find it strong enough to argue that it fits the description laid out by Goffman (1961). For example, in the *Five-Day*, students would work during the day in a rented space or a private home and then retreat in the evenings to rest either at their homes, hotel, or as a guest at a NXIVM member’s home. At V-Week, everyone would stay at the same resort, and everything would take place in one location; however, that occurred once a year and lasted only a week. Also, high-ranking members would often be traveling to attend seminars and give trainings; therefore, it is difficult to argue that NXIVM was a classic total institution. Lastly, another reason why NXIVM does not fit into the class TI mold is the emphasis on individuality instead of “being treated as part of an anonymous mass.” (Scott 2010, p. 215)

2.3.2. The System of Privileges & Punishments

During the initial mortification process, the initiate is informed of the ‘privilege system’ in an attempt to enhance the ‘stripping process’ of the self. First, they are informed of the ‘house rules’ which are defined as “a relatively explicit and formal set of prescriptions and proscriptions which lay out the main requirements of inmate conduct.” (Goffman 1961, p. 320) As previously mentioned, the *Five-Day* uses *Rules & Rituals* as its very first module on the first day of the intensive. This is to clearly explain how to conduct oneself within the organization from the very start in order to give the new recruit as much time as possible to familiarize themselves and adjust to the new expectant behaviors.

Next, a set of rewards or privileges are clearly defined in exchange for obedience to the staff in both mind and action. The attainment of these privileges has a tendency to consume the mind of the ‘inmate’. According to Goffman:

The building of a world around these minor privileges is perhaps the most important feature of inmate culture and yet is something that cannot easily be appreciated by an outsider, even one who has lived through the experience himself. (Goffman 1961, p. 321)

These “minor privileges” become incredibly important to those within the total institution. In the world of NXIVM, these minor privileges could be understood as having an *integration*, receiving extra stripes on your sash, being invited to play volleyball with Ranieri, or even receiving an EM from a high-ranking member such as Nancy Salzman.

The third element of the privilege system is ‘punishments’ which are designed to be the consequence of breaking the rules and are designed to be more severe than one would encounter in the outside world. Edmondson explains in detail the different forms of punishments that were designed by the authority system within NXIVM.

She describes three different forms of punishments that were often self-administered whenever the individual felt that they had transgressed nxian principles. The first one she describes are *breach forms* which she explains were:

a one-page sheet that read like a Catholic confession, complete with self-criticism, requests for forgiveness, and the acknowledgment that one’s most problematic “life issue pattern” had gotten in the way of advancement in the program and in life. (Edmondson 2019, p. 135)

She adds that these were especially difficult for ESP members as they left them feeling isolated and shameful as if they had let down themselves, the organization, and sometimes, even the world.

The second punishment was known as a *penance*. She remarks that it is not so unlike the same usage as those in the Catholic church's version of the term. If one were to fail to complete a step or a goal, one would undergo an activity or practice. She explains:

For example, if I wanted to get into better physical shape but for any reason did not follow through with my commitment to go to the gym, my penance might be to take cold showers every day for a week or sleep on the floor instead of in my bed. (Edmondson 2019, p. 135)

As stated earlier, Goffman (1961) explains that in a TI, the punishments are often more severe than what one would experience in the outside world. To an outsider, this might appear to be an unusually heavy price to pay for something as small as not going to the gym.

The final punishment Edmondson describes is known as *collateral*. The term *collateral* was discussed at length in the previous subsection on *DOS*. It appears that *collateral* was a common practice in all organizations within NXIVM and one all potential *DOS* initiates would be familiar with. In the more commonly used form, *collateral* was something that needed to be given in the event of a failure that would cause so much pain that it would propel you to keep your word and stay committed to whatever goal you set for yourself. The example that Edmondson gives is that if someone were trying to read a book and if they failed to hit their achieved word count then they would need to give someone \$1000. It couldn't be something minor as it had to cause real regret if the *collateral* were to be given or lost.

Goffman (1961) also describes that there are three distinct elements that are basic to total institutions when it comes to the characteristic authority system that governs them. First, the staff is allowed to discipline any member of the inmate class. Secondly, these corrective behaviors can be extended to many things such as the inmate's dress, manners, and behaviors. In the social hierarchy of NXIVM, any higher-level sash could discipline a lower-level sash and request them to do an EM if they felt as though they had transgressed the institution in any way.

The final feature Goffman (1961) mentions is that failure to behave appropriately in one sphere such as work will be taken out on another sphere such as sleep. A perfect example of this is mentioned by Oxenberg in her autobiography as well as in *The Vow*. Oxenberg noticed that while staying with Mark Vicente and his wife, Bonnie Piesse. She remembered that Bonnie was sleeping on the floor next to the bed as *penance* for failing in a task set out by NXIVM. However, to Vicente and Piesse, at the time, it appeared to be an appropriate measure which they happily complied. However, to Oxenberg, this struck her as odd and quite punitively restrictive to their way of life. There is a particularly poignant scene in *The Vow* where Vicente breaks down in anger and frustration when Oxenberg and Piesse are laughing at the absurdity of Piesse sleeping on the floor. However, Vicente does not find this moment funny and is still very much angry at NXIVM for the negative impact it had on his life.

2.3.3. 'Inmates' versus 'Staff'

Goffman, in his 1961 article, also discusses the power dynamic between 'inmates' and 'staff' where the staff is allowed to interact with the outside world and the inmates are confined to the institution. It is my understanding that due to the pyramidal organization of the institution, members of NXIVM simultaneously fulfill both roles of inmate and staff.

There was truly only one leader in NXIVM: Raniere. However, he had many people below him who held high-ranking power positions and served primarily to perform administrative tasks. Because the ultimate goal of *the operating system* was to achieve *integration*, it was necessary for everyone other than Raniere to attend endless seminars and training sessions. As Raine explains:

Although Raniere was the primary authority, the multiple levels of achievement along the Stripe Path, along with members' ability to become coaches themselves (i.e., coaches in training all the way up to senior coach), likely increased the perception of control and empowerment they garnered and offered them the sense that they contributed to and influenced the process of growth for themselves and for others. (Raine 2021b, p. 70)

Since Raniere was the one determining one's level of integration and rise up *the stripe path*, this was a subjectively shifting and perpetually unattainable goal. All of the *coaches* and *proctors* were responsible for educating the ranks below them but also responsible for their own growth and understanding of the practices. This also contributed to the negotiation of the practices and rituals within NXIVM.

I understand that this power struggle was a major pull factor within the organization as it never provided a way to graduate or exit the program since it was essentially impossible to achieve full *integration*. I also posit that this emotional insecurity and confusion over clearly defined roles of authority and submission is another important factor to consider. Throughout the autobiographies and documentaries, various interpersonal conflicts within NXIVM over the years became apparent, especially among those jockeying for Raniere's attention such as his numerous secret girlfriends.

It's also important to note that *EMs* served an important function within NXIVM as a way to resolve conflict. As everyone operates *at-cause* and there are no *victims*, if one is experiencing emotional distress or interpersonal conflict then it is they themselves who are at fault and not the other person regardless of what was said or done to them. The only way to resolve these issues was to receive *EMs* until the mentality surrounding the conflict was changed and the emotional reaction dissipated.

2.3.4. 'Fraternalization', Familiarization, and 'Communitas'

Undergoing an initiation ritual to enter into a total institution is a process. It requires what Goffman calls 'fraternalization'. The participant also needs to familiarize themselves with the practices of the group. During this sometimes lengthy process, I suggest that the participant would experience what Turner refers to as 'communitas'. The 'fraternalization process' appears to be quite similar to 'communitas' and is defined by Goffman as:

the process through which socially distant persons find themselves developing mutual support and common 'counter-mores' in opposition to a system that has forced them into intimacy and into a single, equalitarian community of fate. (Goffman 1961, p. 324)

It is also explained that the certain prejudices and stereotypes that a new recruit may hold of the people inside the institution before entering tend to fade as one familiarizes themselves with the same experiences and grows to share the same paradigm.

Goffman writes that there are different ways in which people react to their initiation into the total institution. The first is 'situational withdrawal' in which a person only reacts to the things happening immediately around them and is rather detached from their surroundings. They only minimally participate in what is required of them and shut down emotionally. One example of 'situational withdrawal' could be that of Natalie's experience:

I watched, stunned, as the other participants, Pam and Karen and Kristin and a dozen or so others, cheerfully revealed all to Prefect and Vanguard—the keepers of the secrets. (Natalie 2019, p. 100)

Her participation in NXIVM occurred towards the end of her relationship with Raniere and she was becoming increasingly more dissatisfied with the relationship which she claims were due to the more frequent abuse. She attended the lectures and completed the coursework but did not do so enthusiastically and wrote about how horrified she was internally as she attended the seminars.

The second reaction is the 'rebellious line' in which the inmate refuses to participate in a meaningful way and openly mocks the institution. Oxenberg writes about how shocked she was at her own disrespectful behavior in the seminars. She writes about the way she comported herself during the first two days of the seminar:

I snapped. Like an allergy, I had a violent reaction to the structural rules and rituals these people were presenting, and, from the back row, I became the rebellious, obstreperous teenager I had never been. I refused to call Nancy Prefect. (Callum and I came up with our own nickname for her early on: Gold Sash.) I refused to bow to anybody, I refused to learn or do the silly handshake and clap, I refused to say the mission statement (I mouthed the words and, under my breath, said "Blah, blah, blah, blahhhhh"), and I refused to wear the white Level-One sash I'd been given. Just the thought of putting it around my neck made me choke. I kept leaning back and letting it casually slip off my neck and slither down the back of my chair until it reached the floor in a heap. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 25)

Eventually, Oxenberg did start to participate and signed up for more classes but in the beginning, she was quite rebellious. What I find significant is that she makes it clear that her behavior was quite out of the ordinary for her. She explains that it was the specific situation she was placed in that brought out this kind of behavior in her.

The third example of inmate reactions to a total institution environment given by Goffman is known as ‘colonization’ where the:

sampling of the outside world provided by the establishment is taken by the inmate as the whole, and a stable, relatively contented existence is built up out of the maximum satisfactions procurable within the institution. (Goffman 1961, p. 325)

I understand this to mean that the elements of the outside world that are offered by the institution are happily received by the inmate and they are relatively content with their life within the organization since they feel their needs are met. They are able to mine what they want out of the total institution while remaining satisfied with the benefits they retain from the outside world as well.

In my opinion, this could be closest to Edmondson’s reaction to the organization. She was able to have a relatively normal life within the institution by marrying, having children, and never moving to Albany all the while reaping the benefits of the organization. She was also one of the few people to make a living in the organization by following the rules. However, she mainly attributes this to never moving to Albany and maintaining her own training center in Vancouver.

Lastly, there is ‘conversion’ in which the inmate commits fully to the lifestyle and rules within the institution and attempts to become a “model inmate”. (Goffman 1961, p. 326) This is different from the colonized inmate as they attempt to keep as much freedom as possible and create their own happy existence within the confines of the institution. The converted inmate will attempt to become staff and shows an immense amount of “institutional enthusiasm”. (Goffman 1961, p. 326) I would suggest that a prime example of this within NXIVM would be Alison Mack who immediately took to the teachings of ESP and quickly rose to the top ranks. She completely left her old life behind as a famous actress and devoted herself entirely to Raniere.

While Goffman notes that these are four common alignments people can take within an institution the majority of them would ‘play it cool’ in employing an:

opportunistic combination of secondary adjustments, conversion, colonization and loyalty to the inmate group, so that in the particular circumstances the inmate will have a maximum chance of eventually getting out physically and psychologically undamaged. (Goffman 1961, p. 327)

It is my understanding that the majority of people who attended the *Five-Day* course or any of the other introductory NXIVM courses fall into this category for many reasons. Some did not feel as though the teachings would provide them value, some could not afford them (or at least were not willing to go into debt for them) and others did not want to devote their lives to the committed values and lifestyle. Lastly, others may have felt too much unease by the process. It is important to remember when looking at NXIVM that thousands of people took the courses but only a small percentage of those participants chose to remain within the organization and work their way up *the stripe path*.

2.3.5. What is a ‘Reinventive Institution’?

Susie Scott (2010) created her reinventive institution theory after realizing that there was a new emergent type of institution that was appearing in response to the needs of the modern world. Scott defines a reinventive institution (RI) as:

one to which members voluntarily commit themselves, willingly discarding their former identities to pursue transformative regimes of self-improvement and identity reinvention: they range from therapeutic clinics to spiritual retreats, academic hothouses, secret societies and virtual communities.

(Scott 2010, p. 1)

She believes that this type of institution wasn’t adequately covered in Goffman’s TI theory. However, I would argue that this may be due to the popularity of these types of institutions following the 1960s. She critiques Goffman’s *Asylums* (1961) by noting key discrepancies in the thoroughness of the analysis. Scott argues that Goffman did not conduct thorough interviews during his research and spent time in only one

mental hospital, therefore his experience was not necessarily indicative of all institutions. Also, as was previously mentioned the nature of TIs has changed since Goffman's research in the late 1950s.

These are some of the reasons why Scott suggests a new type of TI for the modern world known as reinventive institutions that are enforced through a more voluntary form of social control known as performative regulation. She claims that while a total institution is often designed in a more involuntary rehabilitative manner, a reinventive institution is voluntary as well as "both reinvented, in its structural form, and reinventing, in its effect on members' identities." (Scott 2010, p. 218)

2.3.6. The Rise of Individualism

Reinventive institutions can be seen as a result of the Human Potential Movement that grew to prominence in the 1960s. NXIVM claims to be a Human Potential organization. According to anthropologist Veronique Altglas (2008), the emergence of self-help and eastern spiritual movements promoting enhancement and entrepreneurial success is directly linked to the increased liberalization and individualization of the 1960s. She writes:

White middle-class adolescents and young adults had benefited from the prosperous economic conditions and the democratisation of education of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and Western Europe. But this educated class expanded beyond the needs of the economic system, and became to a certain extent ill-adjusted. Thus the counter-cultural quest for new lifestyles and values and the exploration of alternative religions have been interpreted as the rejection of a society unable to satisfy expectations of upward social mobility and recognition of this educated middle-class. (Altglas 2008, p. 7)

Due to the growing dissatisfaction of the educated middle-class with their lack of upward mobility they felt they deserved after playing by life's rules, many people sought out alternative methods in order to achieve the success they felt was due to them.

This demographic of white, educated, middle to upper-class individuals seeking enhancement of the self and financial success were the majority of new recruits to NXIVM. It even attracted the rich and famous who seemingly had enviable lifestyles, wealth, and success. As Scott (2010) notes:

Far from being a stigmatizing sign of abnormality, it has become quite popular, even trendy, to define oneself as having a crisis or breakdown and check oneself in for treatment. (Scott 2010, p. 218)

These trendsetters were high-value recruits for NXIVM and were often targeted at introductory seminars such as the *Five-Day* and given preferential treatment. For example, Nancy Salzman flew in to conduct *EMs* at Oxenberg's *Five-Day* which was noted by all to be a rare occurrence and believed to be strategically done in an attempt to ingratiate Oxenberg into the organization.

2.3.7. Performative Regulation

Sociologist Susan Raine (2021b) cites Scott's concept of *performative regulation* as a central feature of RIs. There are three components of *performative regulation* and Raine's research shows that NXIVM engages in all three. The first component of *performative regulation* is defined as:

[T]he idea that individual members of the RI are both controlled and controlling to the extent that they are subject to institutional control mechanisms, but their membership is voluntary, and they contribute to shaping the environment to which they chose to belong. (Raine 2021b, p. 64)

It is important to state that NXIVM membership began voluntarily and was a paid endeavor. While the group often used manipulative tactics in order to encourage recruits to sign up, ultimately the choice was theirs whether they were to pay the money and take the course. There was nothing legally or physically forcing anyone to continue to take the courses; however, the social pressures and promises made by the organization helped propel students further up *The Stripe Path*.

Another aspect of the above quote by Raine is that by completing the courses and becoming a *coach* themselves they felt as if they had a hand in shaping the organization. It gave them a feeling of control in shaping the environment and how it was presented and how the material was taught to new recruits. It should also be mentioned that a central concept of the NXIVM belief system is that there are no "ultimate victims" and that when you are *at-cause* you are in control of your feelings and how you are treated by others.

(Edmondson 2019, p. 103) In other words, you chose to sign up for NXIVM and its culture, and therefore, anything that happens to you within the organization was because of your actions.

The second component of *performative regulation* is defined as a need for “mutual member surveillance” in order to ensure that the others are behaving in line. (Raine 2021b, p. 64) Due to the insular nature of the NXIVM community and the ultimate control Raniere had over the organization, there was a culture of surveillance. It was up to Raniere to decide who would rise up *The Stripe Path* and therefore, he would determine who was worthy of honors despite how many courses one took or how much money they paid. Scott explains how power operates in this kind of cultural environment:

Power operates horizontally as well as vertically, as members monitor each other's conduct, sanction deviance and evaluate their own progress in relative terms. The disciplinary gaze is not merely transmitted but reticulated: dispersed and refracted through an agentic network. The rituals of peer group interaction are central to this process, and can be as important as the formal instruction they receive in motivating people to commit to an RI instead of going it alone. (Scott 2010, p. 221)

Since Raniere could not be present at all times to know how people were performing he relied on his inner circle or “harem”²⁹ of loyal advisors to inform him of how people were performing. This would not be possible without a culture of surveillance.

The culture of a ‘surveillance society’ within an RI institution such as NXIVM also makes it difficult for one to leave. Berman (2021) explains in her book:

NXIVM had been carrying out intense surveillance schemes for years, something that wasn’t widely known until the Ross lawsuit put much of it on the record between 2007 and 2009. (Berman 2021, p. 171)

This relates back to my earlier points in the TI subchapter in the Inmates versus Staff section. Due to NXIVM members negotiating between both authoritative and submissive roles within the organization, the delegation of power was exerted both vertically and horizontally. It was also a feature previously mentioned about TIs that authority figures were able to discipline any lower ranking individual at one’s own agency. I argue that this also contributed to the creation of a surveillance society within NXIVM.

The third and final aspect of *performative regulation* is defined as a negotiation between the institution and its members. One example of this is the sheer number of offshoot companies that made up NXIVM as well as the different branches operating worldwide. These companies were often created at the request of its various members who had a skill or an interest that they wanted to pursue. The branches were also started by various members who had taken the courses abroad and decided to bring it to their hometown as was the case with Sarah Edmondson who opened with Mark Vicente a branch in her home city of Vancouver.

2.3.8. NXIVM as a ‘Greedy Institution’

All three authors of the selected autobiographies, describe how their experience with NXIVM caused them to shed their previous selves and undergo resocialization by the institution. Over time the institution required more and more of their time until it became their sole focus. In the case of Natalie, once her relationship to Raniere began her life was different. She changed her career and her relationship with her family and friends. Every aspect of her life was controlled by Raniere.

For Edmondson, she also found herself consumed by the institution. She began to focus less on her career and devoted most of her time to recruitment, working her way up *the stripe path* and opening up her own successful center. She met and married another nxian. Even their wedding was dominated by nxianisms (for example, their wedding vows were written by Raniere) which made their families feel uneasy. The wedding was scheduled around training sessions and they were unable to take a honeymoon since they were so busy working for the institution.

²⁹ Raniere was in clandestine polyamorous sexual relationships with the majority of his close female advisors. They are often referred to as his harem in the autobiographies and documentaries. (Natalie 2019, p. 128; Edmondson 2019, p. 18; Oxenberg 2019, p. 65)

Oxenberg witnessed her daughter, India, become more and more involved in the institution until she was no longer in contact with her after she moved to *Albany*. Oxenberg then spent several years completely devoted to extracting her daughter from the institution by exposing NXIVM to the media, and attempting to engage federal law enforcement in taking them down through arrests and prosecution.

RI participants often don't see themselves as coerced into receiving treatment but rather as informed consumers receiving a paid service for voluntary resocialization. It is generally understood to be a benign and benevolent institution promising to repair and enhance the damaged self. However, Scott explains RIs could also be defined as 'greedy institutions' after Coser's (1974) definition, i.e. these institutions require much if not all of the member's time. They are exclusive and demanding absolute commitment.

While RIs differ from TIs in that there is no physical confinement, the mental symbolic boundaries between outsiders and insiders can be understood to be just as potent. Scott explains that this is done through the following:

Anticipating positive effects of liberation, empowerment and self-actualization, they embrace the institution's rules, venerate its staff as inspirational gurus, and willingly comply with its timetabled activities, believing that it is in their best interests to do so. Whereas Goffman's asylum patients experienced a mortifying loss of self through institutionalization, RI clients willingly discard their old selves in the hope of finding something better. (Scott 2010, p. 219)

It is the promise of a transformation and betterment of the self that creates willing members of the reinventive institution. Members of NXIVM were encouraged to continue taking more and more courses as they were repeatedly told by the higher ranking members that they were not fully *integrated*. It was also communicated that it was necessary to work up the stripe path in order to attain the knowledge to better achieve their goals.

Interdependence is a major theme in the *Twelve-point Mission Statement* and throughout the nxian belief system. This interdependence on one another tends to breed conformity. Instead of becoming more individualized as a person and more successful in their career, the unfortunate side effect of continued membership in the RI is often the opposite effect. As Scott explains:

Ironically, far from embarking on an individualistic journey of self-discovery, consumers are provided with 'McSelves' - generic new identities, not so very different from the standard hospital issue of the Goffmanesque asylum. The end result - a new self - is the same in each case, but rather than being imposed on the mortified remains of a prior identity, the RI gingerbread figure elects to fit itself into a pre-existing mould. (Scott 2010, p. 219)

This is clearly an undesirable result for someone who was wishing to achieve individual success and further their own career. It is an ironic effect that by seeking to strengthen their individualism they become more and more like the other people around them through increased commitment to the institution. As was discussed in 1.1.3.1.1.2. Turner (1974) also described a similar phenomenon post-communitas in which the participant in the initiation ritual understands their individuality to strengthen but the opposite can occur as they take on the similar attributes of those within the institution.

Oxenberg witnessed this from afar as it happened to her daughter, India, after she committed to NXIVM. They both attended the *Five-Day* together but only India decided to devote herself to the institution. India at the time had dropped out of school and was trying to launch a small business. She was somewhat shy in comparison to her mother and was seeking her purpose. After attending numerous nxian training sessions she decided to become a coach and years later would move to *Albany*. India eventually would become one of the first members in *DOS* and became part of Ranieri's inner circle. Oxenberg describes the change she saw in her daughter as:

Instead of trying to find her individuality, India was in the process of losing it. Everything that was strikingly unique about her was about to be erased as she transferred her loyalty from one family to another. That first thin wedge, slyly slipped between us on day one of ESP, had now formed a chasm. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 61)

As was described in the quote by Oxenberg (2019) about her daughter becoming less and less like her former self as she transferred from one family to another, the reinventive process voluntarily sought out by members of RIs unfortunately tend to experience the opposite effect in that they often become 'mcselves' instead of

individuals. Keeping up with the new demands of the institution can also be an exhausting process mentally however, due to the pressures of the institution it is more challenging to leave. As Edmondson writes:

The EMs and the homework were taking up so much of my time, and by now I was so hyperaware of my reaction patterns that sometimes the practice felt more like a flogging than a tool for informing or empowering myself. Coming up on the two-year mark of working toward my orange sash, I sometimes longed for the days when I'd just walked through life reacting to things without itemizing every time I did. Still, I was focused on my goal. I had put in so much time and I wasn't going to quit. (Edmondson 2019, p. 92-93)

Even if the member realizes the negative results of their new life and status within the institution, once they have invested so much time, money and effort of going through the resocialization process and the member has experienced 'communitas' it becomes increasingly more difficult for them to leave.

In subchapter 2.3 NXIVM as a Social Institution, I have attempted to answer my research question of how NXIVM was described as a social institution in the selected autobiographies. It is my understanding that the data found in the autobiographies concerning NXIVM as an institution concurs with Raine's (2021b) argument that NXIVM was a reinventive institution with "a shadow-like presence of a TI". (Raine 2021b, p. 79) In order to understand RIs we must first understand TIs, therefore I provided a summary of characteristics found in TIs and provided correlating examples from the selected autobiographies. Next, I explained the characteristics of an RI and likewise gave examples from the perspectives of namely Edmondson and Oxenberg.

The selected autobiographies show how all three women voluntarily joined the institution in hopes of self-improvement and personal success. They then shed their previous identity and understanding of themselves through the institution's resocialization process. Due to the institution's performative regulation, system of privileges and punishments, and 'communitas', the women felt increasingly more committed to the institution and found it more and more difficult to leave regardless of a lack of physical barrier preventing them from doing so. Their original quest to strengthen their individual self in the RI was pushed back in favour of the absolute commitment to the RI and resulted in opposite. Therefore, I conclude that the personal reflections in the selected autobiographies provide rather typical examples of the paradoxical effect of the RIs: NXIVM promoted reinvention of the self and strengthening individuality but instead could be interpreted as a 'greedy institution' that created uniform 'McSelves', or rather 'nxianselves'.

In the next chapter, based on the examples of the selected insiders' reflections of the so-called Five-Day, I will show how NXIVM as a reinventive institution developed its own rituals, namely its initiation ritual, in order to provide a personally transformative experience while legitimizing the NXIVM ideology, social hierarchy and norms, establish 'communitas' of the transformed leading to 'nxianselves' and socially reproduce itself.

Chapter 3 – Five-Day as an Initiation Ritual

3.1. Overview

I interpret the *Five-Day* as a 'rite of passage', an initiation ritual into the world of NXIVM. I understand that it was the hope of Raniere and Salzman that after someone completed this course they would have a changed mindset and reinvented identity in line with nxian paradigms. They would then return to the outside world on the 'mission' to recruit others to their way of thinking. While the *Five-Day* may not have always been successful in its attempt to recruit new members, it did appear to have varying degrees of transformative effects on the majority of people who committed to completing the course.

In this chapter, I apply anthropologist Victor Turner's (1969) adaptation of Arnold Van Gennep's (1909) work as a guide to interpret the *ESP Five-Day* as a 'rite of passage' into NXIVM as a community. Turner explains this process as:

The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both. During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual subject

(the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), Liminality and Communitas the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-a-vis others of a clearly defined and "structural" type; he is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions. (Turner 1969, p. 94-95)

As is explained in the quote above, there are three phases in the process: 'separation', 'liminality', and 'aggregation'. There is also the experience known as 'communitas'. In the following subchapters, I will provide evidence found in the autobiographies of Edmondson and Oxenberg to assign certain practices to the stages and experiences written about by Turner and Goffman.

3.1.1. *ESP*

The *Five-Day* intensive was an introductory course into *Executive Success Programs (ESP)* which was the original and by far the most successful company within the NXIVM corporation. It began in 1998 and offered seminars in what they described as human potential coursework. As Edmondson explains, *ESP* was designed to be "experiential" as well as a "process that was supposed to create perceptual shifts". (Edmondson 2019, p. 69) In 2002, *ESP* would expand to become NXIVM which connected the various other self-help companies Raniere had created. Raine explains the progression of courses that were offered at the time of the height of *ESP's* success:

The 5-day intensive had 23 modules, while the 16-day had approximately 52 (which, when completed, meant that the member had finished Level One of the curricula). Members then moved to Level 2 courses, 23 prior to enrolling in Jness Weekends, and then completing ten 8-day Jness Tracks training courses (primarily for women), Society of Protectors weekends (for men), and SOP Complete for men and women. Raniere continued to roll out further courses as he expanded *ESP's* repertoire. (Raine 2021b, 68-9)

All of NXIVM's companies were somewhat intertwined as is evident from the above quote. While the *Five-Day* appeared to be the most popular way to be introduced to the espian curriculum as well as the nxian community, it was not the only way. For example, one could enter NXIVM through a one-day introductory session, a weekend intensive, a 16-day intensive, or even *Jness*.

My decision to focus on the *Five-Day* as a specific rite of passage was shaped by the patterns I recognized in the autobiographies and the documentaries. Both Edmondson and Oxenberg describe the *Five-Day* in detail in their writing. It is also described quite vividly in the documentaries with video footage and illustrated animations.

3.1.2. *Five-Day* Structure

As the name suggests, this introductory-level course lasts for five days; however, it is my understanding that the schedules and content taught in the seminars could differ. Natalie attended numerous introductory courses in Albany, New York in the first year of NXIVM in 1998. Edmondson's first *ESP* course she attended was a *Five-Day* in 2005 in Vancouver, Canada. Oxenberg attended the *Five-Day* in 2011 in Venice Beach, California after attending a previous one-day introductory session. Edmondson wrote that the *Five-Day* lasted 13 hours per day. (Edmondson 2019, p. 40) Oxenberg wrote that her particular course lasted from eight in the morning until ten at night with a break for lunch but no break for dinner. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 21)

There are 21 basic modules listed in the Rational Inquiry Methods patent filed by Raniere in 2000. (See Appendix C 7) They are listed as:

1. Rules & Rituals & Scripting
2. Communication/And Being At Cause
3. Honesty Disclosure
4. Rapport & Excited State
5. Persistency & Motivation
6. Intensity & Power State

7. Work Value
8. Self-Esteem
9. Good Bad
10. Parasite/Producer Concepts
11. Parasite/Producer Strategies
12. Parasite/Producer Practice
13. Crime & Punishment
14. Shifter
15. Tribute
16. Money
17. Mission
18. Personal Value Inventory
19. Goal Setting
20. Time & Lists
21. What Is

According to Raine, there are 23 modules in the Five-Day. However, it is impossible to ascertain from just the texts if all of these modules are featured in the *Five-Day* as the patent does not specify and only some of the modules such as *Rules & Rituals*, *Scripting*, *Honesty*, and *Parasite/Producer Concept* are mentioned in the autobiographies. In the Starz documentary, *Seduced*, the *Five-Day* is depicted through animation (see Appendix B 19) and the modules are assigned to specific days:

Day 1:

- Rules and Rituals
- Communication & Being At Cause
- Rapport
- To Be or Not To Be

Day 2:

- Good and Bad
- Honesty and Disclosure
- Pride and Prejudice
- Persistence

Day 3:

- Parasite/Producer pt. 1
- Parasite/Producer pt. 2
- Shifter
- Work Value

Day 4:

- The Fall
- Nature of Emotions
- Exploration of Meaning

Day 5:

- Building an Excited State
- Civilization
- Tribute
- The Mission

Although the structure of the *Five-Day* remains the same, with a formalized procedure (Videos of Nancy Salzman were played for each module. The coaches or proctors would lecture from a script and then break the group up into teams to do exercises), it is difficult to discern the exact modules taught at the *Five-Days* that Oxenberg and Edmondson attended, let alone all of the *Five-Days* ever conducted. Through my research, I have collected the following data reflecting the structure and content of the *Five-Days*.

It is not explicitly written in the autobiographies which modules occurred on each day. However, certain modules are mentioned in the autobiographies as well as the documentaries. These two sources of information do not always corroborate one another. For example, Edmondson in her autobiography speaks about the *self-esteem* module on Day 3. In the patent, it is listed as the 8th module. It should be noted that this differs from the *Five-Day* schedule laid out in the *Seduced* documentary series.

It is challenging to tell for certain how each *Five-Day* was set up in the case of the authors featured in this study. It is possible they differed for Oxenberg and Edmondson especially since they were taken years apart. It is likely that the *Five-Day* evolved over time as a negotiation in response to the feedback of participants. NXIVM was ultimately a business and recruitment was an inherent part of its business plan, therefore, it is not unreasonable to propose that courses were perhaps adapted to meet the needs of prospective recruits as well as their leaders over time.

Another possible reason why the *Five-Day* experiences differed for Oxenberg and Edmondson could be due to the significant amount of time passed between the release of the patents, the autobiographies, and documentaries. The patents were filed in 1999 and 2007. The autobiographies were published in 2018 and 2019. The documentaries premiered in 2020. Negotiation is a common feature in rituals. The needs of the participants and the organizers do not always align perfectly and therefore the resulting ritual is often negotiated over time. Therefore, it is possible that the Five-Days evolved over time or perhaps were tailor-made for specific groups based on geographic location and demographic.

3.1.3. Location & Setting

Both Edmondson and Oxenberg describe the location and setting of their *Five-Day*. They are both actresses however, their level of fame, geographic location, socioeconomic status as well as the year in which they attended the conference appear to influence the quality of the venue and presentation. Oxenberg was likely a high-value recruit due to her fame and links to royalty. Edmondson had some success in her acting career but was by no means a recognizable face or name at the time of her enrollment. The experiences of these women had both differences and similarities.

Edmondson writes that her *Five-Day* was held in “a dingy conference room inside a Holiday Inn Express in Burnaby, British Columbia, twenty minutes east of Vancouver.” (Edmondson 2019, p. 43) She adds that the room was set up with a television and DVD player and “a semicircle of beat-up chairs with nine other attendees and a continental breakfast from Bread Garden—Canada’s version of Panera.” (Edmondson 2019, p. 34) Both Holiday Inn Express and Panera are widely considered budget options in North America. Edmondson’s use of the words “dingy” and “beat-up” tell the reader that she considered the venue to be somewhat run-down and uninviting.

Oxenberg had a different impression of her *Five-Day*. In her autobiography, she sets the scene of the venue from the outside in a more exciting and energizing light. She writes:

We made our way along the Venice Beach boardwalk early one morning in May 2011—past the maze of street performers, mystics, artists, funky shops, and bikinied girls on roller skates—until we reached our destination: a modern-looking duplex a block from the ocean.” (Oxenberg 2019, p. 14)

Oxenberg is a famous actress most notably remembered for her character on the show *Dynasty*. Many other famous people such as Rosario Dawson attended the same *Five-Day* as her. Oxenberg goes on to describe the atmosphere inside:

The scene that unfolded inside was just as bizarre as the madcap mystics and circus performers on the boardwalk. The loftlike living room was set up like a minimalistic lecture room, with a few couches and rows of folding chairs and not much else. It was as if the ESP troupe had slipped into town the night before and transformed someone’s home into a pop-up self-help venue. Standing at the front of the room, an army of barefoot ESP coaches greeted us. They wore green, orange, and yellow sashes around their necks, and they grinned from ear to ear. And when I say they grinned, I mean grinned. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 19)

Oxenberg’s description is in stark contrast to Edmondson’s experience. Edmondson’s initial impression was quite underwhelming and impersonal. Oxenberg’s experience was more inviting and high-end since it was held in someone’s living room in an affluent neighborhood in Los Angeles instead of a conference room in a suburb of Vancouver. Edmondson’s experience appeared to be quite low energy whereas Oxenberg describes her experience as more frenzied and overwhelmingly friendly.

In both Edmondson and Oxenberg’s experience, they watched videos of Nancy Salzman throughout the entire *Five-Day* however, Salzman was there in-person at the event for Oxenberg. Natalie did not offer

a description of her *Five-Day* location other than that it was held in Albany, New York. She was in attendance for the “pilot program” of ESP and therefore present for the launch of the organization.

3.2. Day 1: Separation

The first day of the course is known as the *Rules & Rituals* module. This was the introduction to nxian performative practices. It is explicitly written in the patent filed by Raniere that contains the training materials for some of the modules in the *Five-Day* that *the session space* in which the seminars are held is “any room or complex that can be closed off from the public to provide privacy and meet the standards of ESP.” (Raniere 1998, p. 62) I understand the act of entering into the *session space* for the allotted time of the *Five-Day* to signify a separation from the outside world which is the first step in the three-part model of initiation rites.

There were certain practices that nxians did at the beginning and the end of each session. There were also rules for how to enter or leave a space or how to address your superiors. For example, Raniere explains in one of his patents for *Rational Inquiry Method*:

Bowing is a show of respect and students bow when entering and leaving a session space. At the beginning and end of a session, the highest rank officially calls the group together with the ESP handclap. The class stands, repeats the ESP handclap in unison, and bows to the person leading the session. The leading person then returns the bow. The ESP twelve point mission statement is recited before the start of each ESP session. (Raniere 2003, p. 18)

In the above quote, there are several espian and nxian practices introduced. The first mentioned is bowing. This practice is a sign of *paying tribute*.

The bowing was adapted from martial arts in which a practitioner will bow before entering a dojo thought to be a sacred space. Martial arts bows are typically just forward bends with hands at the side. (see appendix B 8) However, the nxian bow appears to sometimes have a hand movement that is most likely influenced by westernized eastern spiritual practices such as yoga and meditation. When bowing, some nxians place their palms together with their fingers pointing upwards reminiscent of the Hindu ‘namaskar’. (see appendix B 9, B 10)

Bowing occurred at the beginning of the training session after the *ESP handclap*. Oxenberg describes the occurrence of the *handclap* as:

At the beginning of each day, coaches instructed everyone to huddle together and repeat in unison their mantra: “We are committed to our success!” This was accompanied by a synchronized hand clap. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 21)

The *ESP handclap* is one of several practices of collective synchronization. A synchronized handclap is a somewhat commonplace practice in American culture to conclude a ‘huddle’ in which a group will gather in a close circle in a sport, classrooms or work setting to discuss, negotiate or just to bring the group together for any reason. It is likely that NXIVM borrowed this practice from that. Raniere writes the following about the purpose of the huddle and the collective recitation of the phrase:

The purpose of this is to create an interaction on a level that is closer than normal, more like a team. It is an informal and what some people would call a “warm fuzzy” human interaction. By having this type of direct, imperfect, close, face to face, eye to eye interaction, we believe people will see each other not as objects but as people. (Raniere 2003)

I understand that from what Raniere describes as a “warm fuzzy” feeling, this close interaction is meant to bring about the feeling of ‘communitas’ which will be further discussed in 3.3.

Other examples of collective synchronization are the recitation of the slogan “We are committed to our success!” as well as the recitation in unison of the *Twelve-point Mission Statement*. I find the recitation of the slogan to be significant since it features the themes of commitment and success. Reciting it together implies that through interdependence and commitment to a common goal (that of the institution) will breed success not just for the individual but for all involved. The *Twelve-point Mission Statement* mentioned in the quote from the patent and described in depth in the previous chapter is a major component of nxian ideology and reiterates the themes present in the slogan. Since it is recited at the beginning of every training session, I consider it to be a central performative practice of the institution.

Another performative practice was the *ESP handshake* or *nxian handshake*. The nxian handshake was practiced regularly by all members of NXIVM and reinforced the social hierarchy. The way that the handshake was performed exhibited to one another and anyone else watching the rank and superiority of the two involved in the practice. (see appendix B 11) Edmondson describes her first experience learning about the handshake as:

On video Nancy introduced the NXIVM handshake, where instead of two hands meeting on the same lateral plane, the person who was higher on the Stripe Path positioned their palm on top of the palm of the lower-level student whose hand they were shaking.” (Edmondson 2019, p. 35)

Natalie, Edmondson, and Oxenberg all remark that they found this whole procedure to be “silly” (Natalie 2019, p. 93) and “hokey” (Oxenberg 2019, p. 23) but both assert that it was the first step in establishing a hierarchy.

These performative practices such as the bowing, the handshake and the recitation of the *mission statement* are specific to life in NXIVM. By performing these actions repeatedly, the nxian practices are normalized. Natalie writes:

[The] new student was inferior to the proctor, who was inferior to Prefect, who was inferior to Vanguard. From the first fifteen minutes of day one, Keith subtly communicated that he was the Master, and everyone else, his dutiful submissive. The utmost priority, in a maiden ESP session, was to normalize unusual behavior. (Natalie 2019, p. 92-93)

As all three women in their autobiographies pointed out, they understand these acts were the first thing taught as an act of power and subjugation to it was a way to immerse oneself into the institution. The choice could have been made to teach these at the end or the middle of the course as a way to offer an alternative lifestyle, but these practices were enforced from the very first moments instead.

Once she looked back on her experience, Edmondson came to the realization that the *Five-Day* served a functional purpose for coaches to discover recruits who were more amenable to the nxian lifestyle than others. She writes:

In retrospect, I can see the coaches in the Five-Day were trying to weed out the followers who weren’t going to be their sheep. (Edmondson 2019, p. 42)

Putting the *Rules & Rituals* module as the very first thing helped the coaches to see who was responsive to these types of practices and who was more hesitant. Though most people featured in the documentaries and the authors of the autobiographies, by their accounts, were uncomfortable with these practices at first, they gradually familiarized themselves with it and grew to accept it typically by day three.

I argue that Day 1 is when the separation period occurs. The new recruits have been separated from the outside world and stripped of outside norms. As Oxenberg reflects:

This kind of extreme exclusiveness was the first wedge a group like this placed between you and your life outside the group. It was the first stage of imprinting upon you that loyalty to ESP overrode anything else in your life. And that, I would learn, was the beginning of being inducted into a cult. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 21)

The *Five-Day* always occurs at a specific location in person. Participants are not allowed to come and go as they please since they are expected to participate fully in all of the exercises from morning until the evening. Since they are removed from life outside the intensive and only engaging in nxian practices, the participants are beginning the process of shedding their former self in hopes of a transformative experience by the institution. On the first day, the participants have not yet experienced a transformation or ‘*communitas*’ but they have committed to completing this *Five-Day* program by paying over two thousand dollars and taking time off from work. (Edmondson 2019; Oxenberg 2019) By committing their time and money, they have agreed to the transformational process and acceptance of the paradigms and practices begins the stripping and resocialization process voluntarily. At this stage, they are not quite members of NXIVM, but they do not feel free to leave either. They are in limbo.

3.3. Days 2-4: Liminal Phase

After the first day of the *Five-Day*, Edmondson and her partner were sceptical of NXIVM and its claims. They did some research that night after they got home and discovered the Forbes article accusing

the organization of being a cult. She called Mark Vicente who had inspired her to enroll in NXIVM. He convinced her to stay until day three as he assured her that she would feel differently after that day. Edmondson wrote in her autobiography: “Mark had been right: by day three, I’d started having some big shifts and wondered what I could accomplish if I just tried this.” (Edmondson 2019, p. 55) Something changed in the mindset of Edmondson and she began to see the organization in a positive light. Oxenberg also experienced a major shift after day three. She wrote in her autobiography:

Somewhere around day three, I wrote in my journal: “Hated the process. At the same time, couldn’t wait to get there.” (Oxenberg 2019, p. 29)

For Oxenberg and Edmondson, it was the experience of the *Exploration of Meaning (EM)* that changed their perceptions of the organization. They both felt that they were able to break free of traumas that were holding them back. For Edmondson, her *EM* during the *Five-Day* was focused on issues in her relationship with David that she subconsciously linked to unresolved emotions surrounding her parent’s divorce. In Oxenberg’s case, she was able to let go of her fear of auditioning by confronting her feelings over sexual harassment and abuse she suffered in her past. Like Edmondson after her *EM* experience, Oxenberg went from seeing NXIVM in a negative light to a positive one.

As was discussed at length in subchapter 2.2.3., an *EM* is a one-on-one experience most often performed in front of a group in which a higher-ranking member leads the lower-ranking member in a line of Socratic questioning intent on breaking traumatic emotional ties from their past in hopes of freeing them of the *disintegration* that is troubling them. Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) is the method used in *EMs* which is often thought of as a form of hypnosis, in which the way someone speaks and the words that they use allows the recipient of the process to fall into the rhythm of the speaker and to have their mind transformed. In this altered state of consciousness, people generally shared very intimate or personal things. Recipients of the *EM* were encouraged to relive various traumas they have experienced in their lives publicly in front of the entire group. Since everyone is expected to go through the same process in front of everyone else, *communitas* is most likely formed amongst everyone in the room who had fully committed to the experience whether as a practitioner, recipient, or an audience member. This practice is performative and is seemingly most effective when performed in the classroom setting.

Berman (2021) while writing her book underwent an *EM* with Edmondson and her husband, Nippy. She explained that it seemed extremely difficult to achieve an *integration* without the group experience that a training intensive setting provides.

Part of what made an integration so appealing was the honest, self-assured dispositions of the people in class who said they’d had them. NXIVM’s higher ranks, who often participated in these breakout sessions, never made excuses or blamed others for their problems. Ames and Edmondson did their best to recreate the atmosphere of an intensive, but without the group dynamic, I didn’t, in the end, have any kind of “aha” moment. (Berman 2021, p. 121)

Berman’s conclusion that there needed to be an “atmosphere of an intensive” in order to have an “aha moment” leads me to suggest that ‘*communitas*’ was achieved in the *Five-Day* for those who were willing to participate fully. (p. 121) *Integrations* were the incremental shifts in perception that allowed deep participation and created the atmosphere of a collective but intimate bond.

Edmondson describes that over her time in the institution she became addicted to the feeling of *integrations* she experienced in the *EMs*:

By now, the explorations of meaning—*EMs*—had become addictive, like my own version of “chasing the dragon.” It was thrilling to make those discoveries about old reactionary patterns that hadn’t been working for me, and the integrations had begun to give me a high. (Edmondson 2019, p. 60)

The exhilaration of being guided to having these perceptual shifts and watching others go through the same experience (as described in 2.2.3.) was a major pull factor for Edmondson into the institution. It was one of the practices in NXIVM that led her to becoming a full-time nxian. The fact that *EMs* were also usually a communal performative experience was attractive to Edmondson and Oxenberg. Oxenberg reflected on her shared experience with the others in the group as:

All week, we in the class would bravely bare our souls and reveal our flaws and imperfections to one another—our version of emotional boot camp. Like soldiers in the trenches, we formed very special, intimate bonds. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 35)

Both women felt as if they had created a special connection to those they had met in the intensives since they had shared their most traumatic experiences with one another. The rhythmicity of the EM due to the NLP i.e. hypnotic methods used seem to have placed the receiver of the EM in an altered state of consciousness. This altered state performed in front of other participants created a vulnerable and intense atmosphere in the room. The participants' experience of altered state of consciousness shared with others with the same experience in the course created the feeling of intimate bonds and trust between them as equals which I understand to be 'communitas'. (Turner 1969).

For Edmondson, the feeling of 'communitas' she experienced in the intensives were strong enough for her to repeatedly seek out the feeling of *integrations* so that she would eventually live endlessly in a liminal anti-structure environment, i.e. she lived and worked entirely within the institution. Instead of returning back to structure after the intensive ended (like Catherine Oxenberg would do) Edmondson gave up her career and the outside world in order to remain within this state of anti-structure. This concept of nxians wanting to remain in anti-structure will be further discussed in 3.4 and 3.4.1.

The phenomenon of 'communitas' is a hallmark occurrence in liminal anti-structural events and spaces. I suggest that Edmondson and Oxenberg experienced 'communitas' during the EMs. I propose that EMs could be interpreted as a feeling of communion as is described by Turner (1969, 1974). Since students had been sharing intimate details of themselves and their feelings throughout the course up until the time came to perform the EM, it was easier to divulge their greatest fears or personal shortcomings publicly to the group. They felt bonded by their intimacy, vulnerability and the experience of an altered state of consciousness during the EM

In this subchapter, I show how the period of time that occurs from day 2 to 4 could be defined as a 'liminal' phase. I suggest that the *Five-Day* was predominantly 'liminoid' with elements of 'liminal' as well. In subchapters 1.1.3.1.1. and 1.1.3.1.1.1. concerning the concepts of 'Liminality' and 'Liminoid' I discuss how due to the 'industrial leisure' phenomenon (Turner 1974) the realms of work and play are blurred. I understand NXIVM to be a near perfect example of this. The *Five-Day* fulfils some of the major components of a 'liminoid' event as it is a commodity that is acquired voluntarily however, it is also somewhat 'liminal' in that it is intended as an initiation ritual into an exclusive group that requires loyalty and membership.

'Liminal' experiences and events are generally more tied to life-cycle rituals whereas 'liminoid' events are more at the will of the organizers and participants. In this respect, the *Five-Day* is rather 'liminoid' It is my understanding that a recruit at the time of the *Five-Day* on their journey through NXIVM will have a primarily 'liminoid' experience however, the level of seriousness and intensity in which one pursues nxian teachings post-initiation determines how 'liminal' their experience becomes. I understand NXIVM to have existed on a continuum from 'liminal' to 'liminoid' and the *Five-Day* serves as an initiation ritual into this world.

Post-initiation the *Five-Day* served as a jumping off point in which the member negotiates how 'liminal' or 'liminoid' their experience will be. For example, a casual member with a few stripes on their white sash who participates in a few intensives and perhaps attends one V-Week celebration (the 10-day summer camp for adults at a YMCA resort in upstate New York to celebrate Ranieri's birthday) will most likely have a predominantly 'liminoid' experience with the option of engaging in more 'liminal' activities. However, if one were to perhaps attend multiple intensives and fly out to attend an all-night volleyball session to meet Ranieri all the while advancing their way up The Stripe Path by quitting their job to move to *Albany* and becoming a full-time nxian, their experience would be substantially more 'liminal'.

In the next subchapter 3.4, I will interpret the final day in the *Five-Day* as the third step in the three-part initiation ritual process. In 3.4.1., I will provide examples of how Natalie, Edmondson, and Oxenberg reflected upon their experience within NXIVM post-initiation up to their eventual break from the institution.

In subchapter 3.5, I will further explain my interpretation of NXIVM on a continuum from ‘liminal’ to ‘liminoid’ in much greater detail.

3.4. Day 5: Aggregation

The coaches lined up in front of the room, with Prefect center stage. Then, one by one, we went up and bowed our heads (even though I'd vowed not to), and Nancy ceremoniously placed newfangled sashes around our necks. Our old ones [sashes] had been taken away temporarily and transformed to reflect our progress. Callum and India now had one stripe added to the bottom of their sashes, to symbolize that they'd finished the first five classes. Mine had three red stripes across the bottom - the most you could be awarded. Me? The highest honors? Callum and I were dumbfounded, and then one of the coaches explained: "You've been awarded the honor of Best Recruiter in the class because you signed up more recruits than anyone else!" Callum and I looked at each other again and went into hysterics. After my dramatic protest on the first day refusing to ever, ever recruit for them, I'd gone ahead and beat everybody at it. Earlier that day, I'd signed up my husband and his two kids from his first marriage, Grace, thirteen, and Cappy, sixteen, to take the five classes we'd just completed - that's how I'd become a three-striped family recruiter! (Oxenberg 2019, p. 33-34)

Both Oxenberg and Edmondson were named *Best Recruiter* at the end of their *Five-Day*. Neither of them had anticipated being the most celebrated participant by the end of the experience since both of them had been resistant to the teachings and harbored many doubts. However, because of the perceptual shifts they experienced in the EMs, they decided to commit to the teachings and sign up for more classes. They even wanted their loved ones to participate as well. After the *Five-Day* was complete, both women reported in their autobiographies that they felt transformed by the practices. Edmondson felt this more strongly than Oxenberg but they both signed up for more courses and enrolled others in the program.

I find it noteworthy that there was an actual ceremony to signify the end of the *Five-Day*. From the description in Oxenberg's quote, there is a procession, and the highest-ranking members present would give everyone their newly transformed scarves with new stripes so that they can visualize their progress. Special attention and rewards were given to members who recruited the most into the organization regardless of if they had demonstrated obstinance at times. Edmondson describes her experience in the quote below:

At the end of that first *Five-Day*, the seminar leaders said they were “promoting” each of us to one-stripe white, which means we each received one red stripe on our white sash because we'd completed the first training. But when they came to me, I found I was the only one in the class to receive two stripes because Suzanne had told our facilitators that I had enrolled David. Because of that, they said they would put him “under” me in the enrollment structure. I felt like they saw something special in me. I kind of liked this path of earning; the satisfaction of having a clear goal and, if I'm being real, the most stripes of anyone in the room. (Edmondson 2019, p. 42)

I find the last two sentences to be rather significant as it indicates a change in her social status within the institution. Edmondson says that she felt that they recognized something special within her. She also enjoyed being the most accomplished person in the room. Goffman (1961) wrote in his work on total institutions that the attainment of rewards within the institution tends to consume the mind of the inmate. It often makes little sense to outsiders how strong the want for these rewards can be.

Edmondson also writes that she liked the path of earning and that she received satisfaction from such clear-cut goals. The confidence with which nxians spoke of their beliefs and the way they managed to commit to the rigid structures of the seminars, inspired Edmondson, and hundreds of others to become devout members of the organization. NXIVM, like many similar organizations, claimed to provide answers to life's questions as well as a definite identity for its members. Edmondson writes about how she felt after the *Five-Day* was complete:

After we left the Holiday Inn, I walked around feeling I had been given a book of secrets. I was living more consciously, with more awareness and authority in my actions and decisions. Even though my parents had raised me with the belief that I was in charge of my own destiny, the tools I'd learned in that *Five-Day* helped me to embody more license and assertiveness in my own life. I found that I could even stop taking sleeping pills - a crutch I'd relied on regularly for years. I was seeing people and the world

in a whole new light, and I wanted my loved ones to feel how I felt, and for us to engage in dialogues about this material. (Edmondson 2019, p. 43-44)

Edmondson felt completely transformed and liberated after her first experience with NXIVM. She felt that she had been given an exclusive key to knowledge which provided her with more confidence.

Edmondson was able to momentarily leave the structure of her previous life and become energized by the collective ecstatic experience she had after her *Five-Day*. This feeling that she describes is very similar to what Turner wrote: "...in rites de passage, men are released from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of *communitas*." (Turner 1969, p. 129) Edmondson left her structured world for the *Five-Day* where she experienced a profound perceptual shift which she shared in solidarity with the other participants in the seminar. Upon returning to the outside world, she brought her renewed outlook and excitement about her future and social status. She then sought to recreate this feeling of community with others by recruiting her friends and colleagues to the institution. She writes that she wanted her loved ones to share in this ecstatic feeling as well.

Though Edmondson felt changed as she traversed the outside structured society, this newfound social status within the institution and the spiritual capital accumulated post-initiation was not a viable social currency within structured society outside of the institution. In other words, achieving the status of *best recruiter* and earning an extra stripe on your white student sash means very little outside of NXIVM. I understand this to be an example of what I discussed in 2.3.3. about how 'minor privileges' within an institution mean a great deal on the inside but are quite difficult to explain on the outside. (Goffman 1961) The importance placed on these privileges can drive one to seek out the liminal anti-structure in perpetuity. The addictive feeling (discussed in 3.3.) of the *integrations* and 'communitas' were also contributing factors in wanting to remain within the anti-structure of the institution as opposed to the structured outside world.

As was described in 1.1.3.1., the final step in the three-part process of an initiation ritual is 'reaggregation' in which the participant leaves the anti-structure of the liminal phase and re-enters structured society as a transformed individual. They are then expected to act in accordance with their new social status within the structure of the outside world. I interpret the graduation ceremony at the end of the *Five-Day* to signify the participants' official re-entry back to the structured outside world. The *Five-Day* participants now have the status of a low-ranking member of NXIVM in possession of a *striped, white sash*. At this time in their nxian journey, they have a low amount of 'spiritual capital', but they have undergone the initiation process and have been accepted into the institution. Now, they are expected to practice the teachings they learned and to have an *upgraded operating system* in line with the nxian paradigm. There is now an incentive to recruit more members as there are many privileges afforded to those who recruit such as discounted rates on further intensives as well as special recognition and of course, more capital to barter their way up *the stripe path* in hopes of a higher rank.

3.4.1. The Nxian Journey as Described in the Selected Autobiographies

After participating in the *Five-Day*, Natalie, Oxenberg, and Edmondson all described very different journeys in NXIVM. Natalie was a member of NXIVM from the start of *ESP* in 1998 until she ended her romantic relationship to Raniere and left the organization in 1999. Edmondson joined in 2005 and left in 2017 after her initiation into *DOS*. Oxenberg joined NXIVM with her daughter, India, in 2011. Oxenberg stopped attending sessions in the spring of 2013. India remained a high-ranking nxian in Raniere's inner circle until after his arrest in Mexico 2018.

As was touched on in chapter 2.1.2., Natalie was in a romantic relationship with Raniere from 1991 to 1999. Around 1994, Natalie attempted to break up with Raniere, but he tracked her down at an ashram and convinced her to come back to the relationship where he promised major changes to their relationship such as going public, spending less time with his female 'friends' and moving away from the Knox Woods subdivision in Albany so they could become a proper family and raise her son. She felt that she could not say no as "resistance was futile." (Natalie 2019, p. 79) For a time the relationship was better while they ran their businesses together

(CBI, NHN, etc. described in 2.1.2.). Natalie reflects that she felt more and more unhappy and unsafe in the relationship. She writes that he began to abuse her, and they began to grow apart:

Although Keith and I nominally lived in the same house, we were spending less and less time together. He continued to be prone to violent outbursts, and to rape me when I did not consent to have sex with him, but mercifully, these episodes occurred with less frequency. (Natalie 2019, p. 106)

Natalie sought out Nancy Salzman to help with her relationship issues, but Salzman ended up working with Raniere instead and launched *ESP*. Natalie describes how Salzman and Raniere used Natalie's personal stories of childhood sexual abuse and used it in their seminars to justify rape and molestation as was described in 2.2.4.1.1.

Eventually, Natalie was able to leave both Raniere and *ESP* in 1999 but she describes that this was just the start of her harassment from Raniere, his followers, and his legal team. After months of "gaslighting" letters (Appendix (C 2)) sent by Raniere and women close to Raniere (Natalie's former friends), break-ins at her home, having her mail stolen, harassment at work, Natalie was then engaged in legal battles with Raniere and NXIVM that went on for years. (Natalie 2019)

Natalie explains that Raniere also spoke about her in NXIVM seminars as the "ultimate luciferian" in which he likens her to a devil-like person who displays *parasitic* tendencies:

Later, after I left Keith, I learned that one of the modules was directly based on my leaving him. The "Fall" module presents Lucifer in the guise of a beautiful woman who has rejected the teachings of Vanguard. Lucifer is "prideful" and not "steadfast," and she fails her "test." The training materials included passages from *Paradise Lost* mirroring ones that Keith had sent in his last meaningful letter to me, which highlighted "false independence," "tribute," "pride," "self-esteem," and "theft." The Fallen Angel "commits to evil for protection" and this "destroys the soul!!!" He thought so highly of his "technology" that he filed a US trade patent application for his tactic of "Rehabilitating a Luciferian." In the "Fall" module, Vanguard teaches that Toni Natalie is the first suppressive and the ultimate Luciferian. All *ESP* students knew me by name. When I first spoke to the actress Sarah Edmondson, a longtime Nxian, after she left the group, she said, "I can't believe I'm actually talking to you." "Why?" "Because I was taught that you were the devil." (Natalie 2019, p. 101-102)

As is shown in 3.1.2., *The Fall* module is featured in India's docuseries *Seduced* as one of the modules taught in the *Five-Day*. It is featured on Day 4.

Natalie continued to face harassment and fought NXIVM in legal battles for nearly two decades. In the autobiography, she describes the last time she saw Raniere after his many attempts to win her over with letters failed and he went to her workplace to confront her:

"The next time I see you," he told me ominously, "you will be dead or in jail." He was half right. I would not lay eyes on Keith Raniere again until his arraignment on Friday, April 13, 2018—but it would be Keith, and not me, who was in custody. (Natalie 2019, p. 114)

Natalie eventually went public with her story and was one of the many women to speak out against Raniere, Salzman and NXIVM as an institution. Out of the three autobiographical authors featured in this paper, Natalie's experiences centred mostly on Raniere and his personal life and less on life as a nxian. However, I find her story to be crucial to understanding the *Five-Day* and NXIVM as an institution since she was one of the founding members of *ESP* and was responsible for introducing Raniere to Salzman. She was also the basis of the concept of the *luciferian* which is a term so crucial to the nxian lexicon that Raniere even filed a patent on his methods of rehabilitating one (see appendix C 5) and used it as the foundation of a common module taught in the *Five-Day* known as *The Fall* (see appendix B 19).

Edmondson's story has been discussed at length in this paper especially in chapters 2 and 3. Edmondson had devoted her life and career to NXIVM by achieving the status of senior proctor (one of the highest levels one could reasonably achieve within the institution). She had even met her husband, Nippy, in NXIVM. They intended to raise their children with nxian values and were actively debating to move to *Albany* as a family. Edmondson reflects in her autobiography that it was only the aftermath of her "branding ceremony" in *DOS* (see 2.2.4.1.2.) that signalled a negative shift in how she perceived NXIVM. She recalls a particular moment of engaging with Raniere after she had been unknowingly *branded* with a scar in the shape of his initials and reflects on the disillusionment she felt in that moment:

I stepped into Nancy’s kitchen to get caffeinated. There, I bumped into Keith, where he told me to just make sure I was in a good state. “The main thing is that you’re enthusiastic,” he said, adding something that I’ll never forget: “your job is to create the illusion of hope.” An illusion of hope? It hit me. To Keith, I was the actress who’d used NXIVM to go from the basement suite to a beautiful home. I had put in years of hard work, but to him, NXIVM wasn’t a place for us to self-actualize; it was a strategy to gain money and power from other people. The illusion of hope. It was a fool’s errand, all of it. The Stripe Path. The Mission. It was all phony. (Edmondson 2019, p. 141)

Only after the extremely liminal experience of ritual scarification, an actual case of ritual violence (Bowie 2006), she understood NXIVM to be “a fool’s errand”. She had felt that she was on a “mission” and had come to find that it was all “phony”. It was around this time she began to become sceptical of the institution and confided in her husband about *DOS*. Once Nippy learned about the brand with Raniere’s initials he immediately wanted to cut ties with the organization.

In her autobiography, Edmondson recalls an exchange (which the audio recording of is also featured in *The Vow*) between Nippy and Lauren Salzman who recruited Edmondson into *DOS* and acted as her master:

Meanwhile, as my son and I had journeyed from Albany to Toronto, Nippy arrived in Albany for the NXIVM coaches’ summit. When my husband reached the parking lot of Apropos, the restaurant-turned-NXIVM clubhouse where the summit was being held, he tracked down Lauren Salzman, who was talking with one of Nippy’s longtime SOP mentors, Jim. My husband surveyed the scene to make sure there was a crowd nearby—and then he yelled: “YOU BRANDED MY FUCKING WIFE!” Lauren tried to calm him down and use her ESP rapport skills to enter a conversation, but Nippy wasn’t having any of it. He warned Lauren she was participating in illegal activities and announced his resignation from all the companies. This was Nippy’s “mic drop.” He was the only person ever to publicly confront Lauren or anyone in the upper ranks about *DOS*. (Edmondson 2019, p. 207)

From then on Edmondson and Nippy have been fiercely opposed to NXIVM and were instrumental in the legal proceedings against Raniere and his associates. They continue to publicly share their story in documentaries, television appearances, and their own podcast, *A Little Bit Culty*³⁰. They are also associated with the #igotout³¹ movement which works to help people leave groups that they refer to as cults.

Oxenberg’s story differs from Natalie and Edmondson in that she had very little interaction with Raniere and the institution. Although she attended intensives and seminars for a few years, she refused to become a *coach* and to work her way up *the stripe path*. Oxenberg was sceptical of the organization from her first encounter, but she saw it as a way to connect with her daughter, India, who was becoming increasingly more involved with NXIVM and its members. Oxenberg continued to sign her and her family up for nxian courses. She recalls feeling that despite many “warning signs” such as the JNESS meeting at her home described in 2.2.4.1.1. and the increasing distance she felt from her daughter, she took the courses and tried to gain something from them. The following quote is a reflection on a conversation she had with India around that time:

If you really want my opinion, India”—which she didn’t—“I think this program should be used as a tool, not a lifestyle. Becoming a coach means it will consume your life.” India was quiet. She clearly felt very close and anchored to the group members after having shared so much with them. I felt that way about the people I’d met, moduled with, and EM-ed with, too. But for India, those feelings went deeper. She loved the sense of community she’d found with Espians and had even been socializing with the coaches, attending regular Humanities Events—Keith’s term for group hikes and potluck dinners. (He not only made up words but was also a walking malapropist.) I suppose the insinuation was that when Espians hung out, they were evolving humanity somehow through their very convergence. My daughter was hardly ever home. Her schedule was jam-packed with Espian classes and events. “They’re like an extended family,” she said to me around that time. It was also around that time that I began to notice something ever-so-slightly odd about India’s behavior. When we spent time together, she was with me, but . . . she wasn’t. We’d go for walks on the beach, and the whole time, she’d be on her phone, three feet ahead of me. I couldn’t keep up

³⁰ www.alittlebitculty.com

³¹ www.igotout.org

with her, and it felt like she was leaving me behind. As she grew closer to this false family, she began distancing herself from us. (Oxenberg 2019, p. 63)

In this quote, she describes how consuming the institution was for her daughter even before she became a coach and began officially worked her way up *the stripe path*. She describes how many events there were to participate in and that India was too busy and distracted to spend quality time with her family.

It would be later this year in 2013, that Oxenberg would attend a session in Mexico City that left her with a very negative opinion towards NXIVM. She felt that the instructors were antagonistic and aggressive towards her since she felt the need to challenge some of the ideas being taught in the seminar. After this point, her relationship with NXIVM soured and she only had negative personal experiences with them from this point since she refused to participate in the way that the institution demanded.

Oxenbergs describes how for years, she felt that her daughter was in danger at NXIVM but was unable to receive any help from anyone in extracting her from the organization. She recalls watching India become malnourished, erratic, distant, and secretive which was unlike her. As was described in 2.1.4., She eventually joined forces with other nxian defectors to contribute to the legal case against Raniere and associates. In the meantime, India was recruited as a *DOS slave* under Alison Mack and was *branded* (scarified) in a different ceremony than Edmondson. India had been in a sexual relationship with Raniere for some time and was devoted to *DOS* even after she witnessed his arrest in Mexico in 2018. Eventually, she decided to leave the institution and was able to avoid any legal ramifications by cooperating with law enforcement. India is now an outspoken critic of NXIVM alongside her mother and continues to speak out against the abuse she alleges during her time at NXIVM through interviews, her own audio memoir, *Still Learning*, and her documentary series on NXIVM, *Seduced*.

It is my understanding from the selected autobiographies, that namely Oxenberg and Edmondson experienced the *Five-Day* as an initiation ritual into NXIVM. I would suggest that the experience was not the same for Natalie as she attended the very first intensives and was already involved with Raniere and Salzman. She even had a hand in crafting the material for the seminars. However, for Oxenberg and Edmondson they both took the *Five-Day* intensive, recruited others into the organization, and continued to take courses. For Oxenberg, I would argue that her experience was much more ‘liminoid’ as she had no interest in pursuing the stripe path. As she progressed through the coursework, the institution demanded more and more from her as far as transformation and obedience, but she resisted and entered into conflict with the organization. For her daughter, India, it was a more ‘liminal’ experience from the start as she immediately took to the material and seriously pursued the nxian teachings and lifestyle, which ultimately led to her becoming a victim of ritual violence (Bowie 2006). For Edmondson, I understand her to have been seeking a more ‘liminoid’ experience from the *Five-Day* but as she began to pursue a career within the institution it became more transformative and ‘liminal’. I understand *DOS*, which Edmondson and India Oxenberg were members of, to be the most total institution within NXIVM providing the most ‘liminal’ experiences .

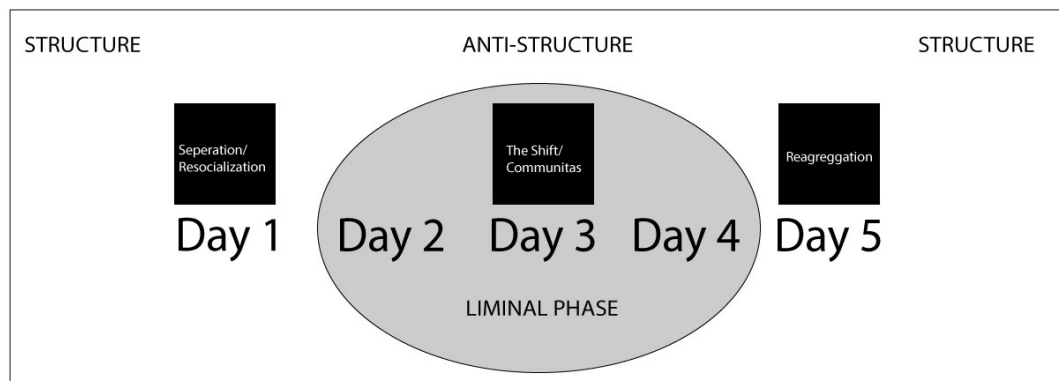
For Edmondson and India Oxenberg, they sought to perpetuate the ‘liminal’ phase and remain in anti-structure when it came to the realms of work and play. As is described in 3.3., they wished to extend the feeling of the intensives like the *Five-Day* for as long as possible by living and working within the institution. Eventually, their whole social structure was replaced by the nxian community. For Catherine Oxenberg, she would return to structure after each intensive only to re-enter the liminal space each time she took an intensive. However, this appeared to conflict with the authority system of the organization who seemed to demand more from their participants which is in line with ‘greedy institutions’. Oxenberg recalls that she was in regular negotiation and conflict with NXIVM over the approach and teachings which eventually left her feeling alienated and unwanted within the institution.

In 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, I have presented my interpretation of the *Five-Day* as initiation ritual using Turner’s (1969, 1974) concepts relating to ‘rites of passage’ as a three-part ritual. On the first day of the *Five-Day*, I understand the *Rules & Ritual* module to serve as the point of separation from the outside structured world to the anti-structural ‘liminal phase’ which I understand to occur formally from days 2 to 4. On the last day

of the intensive, reaggregation occurs with the formal graduation ceremony which symbolizes the release of the participants from the anti-structure of the intensive back to the structured outside world where they are expected to behave in accordance with their new social status as new nxians. In the following subchapter, I will present my interpretation of NXIVM’s existence on the continuums of ‘liminal’ to ‘liminoid’ and reinventive to total institution but also where my understanding of the *Five-Day* as it fits into this interpretation as well.

3.5 Interpretation: The NXIVM Continuum

I understand *ESP’s Five-Day* to be a three-part initiation ritual into NXIVM, a reinventive institution with totalistic undertones. I interpret Day 1 of the *Five-Day* to be when the separation phase (Turner 1969) with the eventual goal of resocialization (Goffman 1957, 1961) occurs. Over the span of three days from the second to the fourth day, I suggest that the actors enter a liminal phase in which anti-structure occurs. This is when participants experience a perceptual shift and/or ‘communitas’ usually on Day 3 as was the case for Edmondson and Oxenberg. On Day 5, the participants graduate from the program and therefore leave the anti-structure and reaggregate back to normal structured society. In the graphic (Figure 2) below, I have illustrated my understanding of the breakdown of the three parts of the rite of passage as it pertains to the *Five-Day*.

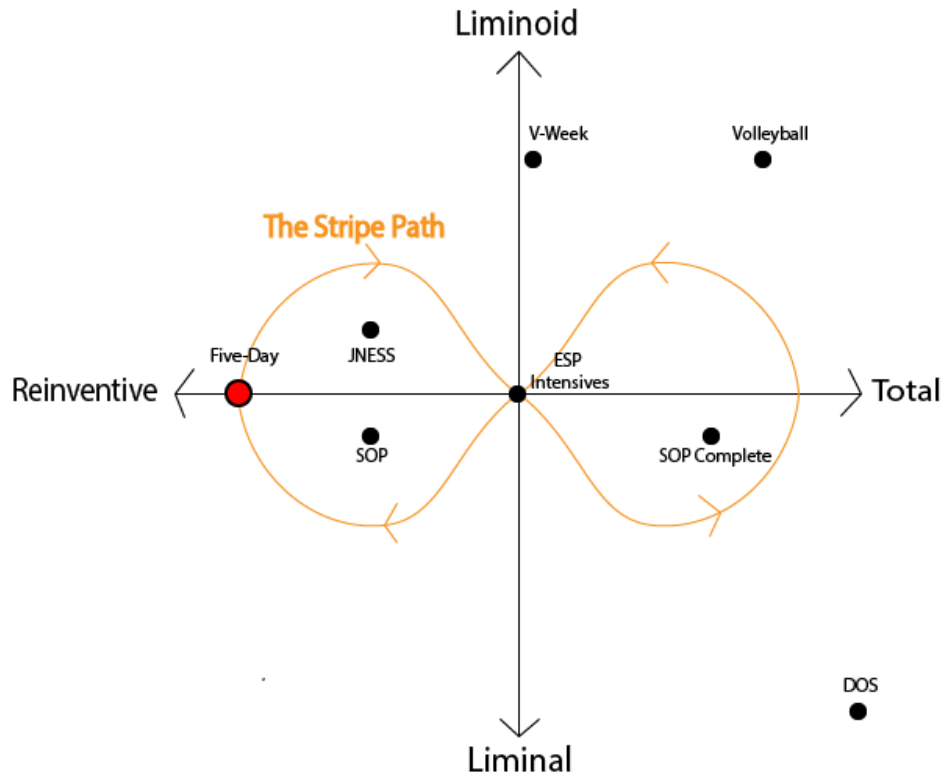


2 - Visual Representation of Interpretation of *Five-Day* as a three-part initiation ritual

I agree with Raine’s (2021b) argument that NXIVM demonstrates itself to be primarily a reinventive institution with elements of a total institution. She writes that it shares more commonality with a reinventive institution but at times it appears to be both simultaneously according to the TI framework pioneered by Erving Goffman (1961) and later adapted by Susie Scott (2010) in her creation of the study of RIs. This is important to my research as it helps to place NXIVM within certain established sociological paradigms.

The negotiation occurring between these two definitions adds to the common theme throughout my study of NXIVM that it rarely fits neatly into one category due to the ‘bricolage’ (Altglass 2008) nature of its design as well as the ‘industrial leisure’ phenomenon in which the lines are blurred between the realms of work and play (Turner 1974). I would therefore argue that NXIVM’s characteristics shift between reinventive to total institution is best understood to exist on a continuum. I would further argue that it could be simultaneously placed on another continuum of characteristics indicative of ‘liminal’ to ‘liminoid’.

I propose the best way to impart my understanding would be to visualize it in a scheme in which reinventive to total would be placed on the x-axis and the liminal to liminoid would be placed on the y-axis. I understand that if one were to follow *the stripe path* and become a committed nxian, they would enter a loop-like system in which they would seamlessly weave in and out of reinventive to total and liminal to liminoid spaces and practices. To visualize my understanding of this interpretation, I have created a schema. (See Figure 3)



3 - The NXIVM Continuum

In the schema, *The Stripe Path* is depicted as a yellow infinity loop. I have chosen a loop to symbolize *the stripe path* to describe the cyclical nature of the hierarchy. The loop-like symbol I have presented is not intended to reflect a literal, rigid, upward trajectory through the hierarchy of the institution but a representative, fluid, negotiated journey of a nxian experience. In 2.3.3. I describe my understanding of the fluid nxian power structure where members simultaneously fulfil the roles of ‘inmate’ and ‘staff’ in which the pyramidal organization requires one to be both subservient to higher ranks but also an authority to lower ranks. The eventual goal of *integration* was seemingly impossible since the demands for advancing to the next level shifted frequently in an attempt to drum up more business and incentivize recruitment since an MLM business structure can only function with continuous recruitment. Once someone was able to advance to the next status, they were then able to enjoy newfound privileges but were then expected to immediately begin striving for the next status by attending more courses and recruiting more people.

Various organizations and events in addition to the *Five-Day* that I understand to be significant to the nxian experience I have placed on various parts of the schema. For example, I have placed *DOS* all the way at the bottom right to indicate that I interpret it to be the most extreme total and liminal organization to come out of NXIVM. I have placed *Volleyball*³² at the upper right corner of the graph as I interpret it to be a liminoïd experience however intended to be a hallmark of the total institution i.e. it provides no reinventive qualities but only reinforces the authority of Ranieri. This is in contrast to *V-Week*³³ which I have placed leaning only slightly to the total side but firmly in the liminoïd.

³² *Volleyball* was a nxian activity that occurred in *Albany*. Ranieri would stay up all night and would expect his followers to stay up with him. One of the ways a nxian would be able to meet Ranieri (as he rarely attended intensives in-person) would be to attend a late-night volleyball session in which members would play with Ranieri. In the brief moments between play as well as before and after, members would try to find moments to speak with Ranieri and to seek out his advice as well as try to get in his good graces.

³³ The 10-day celebration at an upstate New York YMCA resort to celebrate Ranieri’s birthday in which hundreds of members would engage in summer camp type activities such as sports and courses. It would culminate in talent shows and performances to *pay tribute* to *Vanguard* face-to-face.

In the case of *SOP* and *SOP Complete*, I understand *SOP* (nxian fraternity) to be more liminal than its counterpart *JNESS* (a female empowerment group). However, once *SOP Complete* was launched, (the program designed for women to understand the male experience), the female participants were subjected to harsh physical and mental harassment. Moving on to the *ESP Intensives*, I have decided to place them in the center of the graph. This is to illustrate that there was a more individual freedom and a public-facing aspect to these courses. They were open to the public and members could choose to continue up *the stripe path* or not. However, the most central piece of my schema is the placement of the *Five-Day* as this is the focus of my paper.

I have placed the *Five-Day* as more reinventive but equally liminal and liminoid. I understand the *Five-Day* to be fully intended to be introductory and to provide classic, tried-and-true self-help techniques. Most of the exercises undergone in the *Five-Day* (except for the *Rules & Rituals module* and *EMs* which were discussed in 3.2 and 3.3) are similar to that of any self-help group course, group therapy, or coaching session. For this reason, I have interpreted it to be more reinventive and as a potential steppingstone into the total if one were to commit fully to NXIVM. There are some aspects that I propose could be more ‘liminal’ or ‘liminoid’ depending on the intention of the actor. I also suggest that it is dependent upon the degree of ‘communitas’ one feels during their experience that can determine how strongly they are incentivized to commit to the institution post-initiation. I have purposely placed the *Five-Day* on *the stripe path* to illustrate it as a potential stepping-off point before embarking on a journey into the world of NXIVM and the winding road that former committed members such as Edmondson faced.

Conclusion

In summary, I attempted an anthropological interpretation of the selected three authors’ descriptions and reflections of NXIVM and the Five-Day as written about in their autobiographies. My primary sources of data were based on unobtrusive method of data collection, specifically on document analysis. I analyzed the autobiographies of three former female NXIVM members: Toni Natalie, Sarah Edmondson, and Catherine Oxenberg. Toni Natalie’s autobiography covers her eight years as Raniere’s girlfriend and the birth of NXIVM. Her autobiography provided contextual information about Raniere’s character, his intentions behind the creation of the company, as well as a historical overview of the events of NXIVM. Sarah Edmondson’s autobiography gave first-hand accounts of what her experience was like from the beginning of her nxian journey and her rise up *the stripe path*. Edmondson became not only one of the most successful recruiters but one of the most high-ranking members in the organization. She was also a member of *DOS* where she was *branded* (scarified) in a secret ritual ceremony. Finally, Catherine Oxenberg’s autobiography details her experience in the *Five-Day* and other introductory nxian courses as well as her long battle to extract her daughter from the organization. All three women have been vocal critics of NXIVM in the media. They also cooperated with authorities to prosecute Raniere which resulted in his conviction and a 120-year sentence. In this sense, my data sample was limited, as it only provided the perspective of former female members who became critics of the organization. In the chapter on methodology, I explain the reasons for my methodological choices and especially for the construction of such a sample.

In this paper, I asked how the selected three authors describe and understand NXIVM as a social institution as well as how they describe and understand the Five-Day course, which served as an initiation ritual to this institution. Firstly, I showed how my data confirmed the results of latest sociological research on NXIVM, specifically Raine’s interpretation of this organization as a reinventive institution with a “shadow-like presence of a TI [total institution].” (Raine 2021b, p. 79)

Secondly, I offered a new perspective on my data: I showed how the *Five-Day* course could be interpreted as a ‘rite de passage’ which consists of a three-part process of separation, liminality, and reaggregation. (Van Gennep 1909) I further analyzed the dynamic processes of the described ritual performances within NXIVM as related to Victor Turner’s (1969) ritual theory concepts of ‘liminality’ and ‘communitas.’ I explained my understanding how the ‘communitas’ was experienced by Edmondson and

Oxenbergs during practices such as *Explorations of Meanings (EMs)* in the *Five-Day*. I described how the individual experiences (leading to different institutional trajectories) of the authors throughout their time in NXIVM could be interpreted as 'liminal' and/or 'liminoid' depending on the intensity of their participation and their status within the organization at any given time. I was inspired by Schechner (Bowie 2006) and Spiegel (2011) to view this theoretical framework as on a continuum.

Thirdly, based on my data I combined these two interpretative frameworks. However, I proposed that the categories reinventive and total as well as liminal and liminoid could be viewed as on a continuum and therefore, I suggested a more fluid and dynamic picture. In 3.5, I presented The NXIVM Continuum which placed these two interpretative frameworks (reinventive/total and liminal/liminoid) into one analytical model. Now that I have introduced the three steps I have taken in my process of analysis for this paper, I will now elaborate on these three steps in detail.

Now, I will discuss my first step in my process: analyzing the previously established research on NXIVM. In order to contextualize my data and to strengthen my interpretations, I incorporated another previous research on NXIVM i.e. the IJCAM monothematic issue (2021) on NXIVM versus Scientology and Palmer's (2021) media review on the docuseries, HBO's *The Vow* and STARZ's *Seduced*. Of the academic literature, I primarily attempted to build upon the above-mentioned research of sociologist Susan Raine (2021b) on NXIVM as a social institution. To better understand her argument, I studied the theories of Goffman (1961) and Scott (2010) concerning total institutions and reinventive institutions respectively. In order to show how NXIVM displays characteristics of a reinventive institution, I used specific examples from the autobiographies to elaborate on these arguments by Raine (2021b).

In 2.3., I explain my understanding from the descriptions in the three selected autobiographies that NXIVM predominantly displayed characteristics of reinventive institutions. For example, the three kinds of 'performative regulation' (Scott 2010) are found in NXIVM i.e. voluntary control mechanisms, mutual member surveillance, and negotiation between members and the institution. Scott (2010) writes that RIs are typically 'greedy institutions' (Coser 1974) that require all or most of one's time. Through voluntary resocialization, members are often transformed into 'mcselves' (Scott 2010) - an ironic side effect that transforms members into generic identical identities as opposed to more successful versions of themselves. This was also the case in NXIVM. Members came to NXIVM seeking self-transformation but often were forced into a pre-existing mold of the perfect nxian - becoming 'nxianselves'.

In this paper, I also discussed how the experiences described by the authors of the three selected autobiographies at times led me to understand certain elements of NXIVM as characteristic of a total institution. For example, I liken Goffman's (1961) 'mortification of the self' to Van Gennep's (1909) 'rite de passage' as interpreted by Turner. I argue that the *Five-Day* as an initiation ritual 'resocializes' (Goffman 1961) the individual and strips them of their previous paradigms and possessions much like total institutions. Other elements of NXIVM that could categorize it as a total institution are the strict privilege and authority systems such as *penances*, *collateral*, and *the stripe path*.

Concerning the second step of my analytical process, I then sought to apply an anthropological interpretation to NXIVM by using established anthropological theoretical frameworks. In this study, my main objective was to link NXIVM's *ESP Five-Day* to Turner's ritual process theory through the experiences of the three authors as written in their autobiographies. In my interpretation, I attributed the first day of the *Five-Day* to the 'separation' periods. I proposed that in the 'liminal phase' that lasted from days 2 to 4, the shared experience of individual perceptual shifts through public performative *EMs* created a sense of 'communitas' amongst participants at the *Five-Day*. Finally, I argue that the graduation ceremony marks the period of 'reaggregation'.

Since NXIVM was a modern institution that also wavered between reinventive to total, the concept of 'industrial leisure' blurred the line between work and play. (Turner 1974) For example, the journey of Edmondson appeared to have begun as voluntary reinventive liminoid experiences in which they were able to return to structured society; however, the more involved she became in the reinventive institution it

appeared that she was pulled into more liminal practices and experiences that exerted such control over her mind, body, and finances, that it rather resembled practices of a total institution. The same appeared to have occurred in the case of Oxenberg's daughter, India, who took the same *Five-Day* as her mother but ended up committing herself full-time to the organization and joined *DOS* alongside Edmondson (however due to the secret nature of the organization both women were unaware of each other's involvement at the time).

In 3.4, I argued that the level of 'communitas' experienced was linked to the intensity of the involvement in the institution as can be seen in comparison with Edmondson and Oxenberg who I understand to have both experienced 'communitas' in the *Five-Day*. For example, Edmondson chose to remain in anti-structure perpetually therefore combining her individual realms of work and play by devoting them both to this institution. Her social and financial needs became fulfilled solely by the institution. Oxenberg during her entire time in NXIVM never fully committed to the institution by refusing to work her way up *the stripe path* and would re-enter structured society after each of her nxian intensives. It is therefore my understanding that the intensity of 'communitas' felt by Oxenberg was seemingly far less to that of Edmondson or even her daughter, India, who socialized with other nxians in her free time even before becoming a coach and working her way up *the stripe path*.

Lastly, the third and final step of my analytical process for this paper was creating my own analytical model based on my anthropological interpretation of the data. In 3.5, I presented The NXIVM Continuum: my interpretation of these concepts by Turner (1967, 1974), Goffman (1961), Scott (2010), and Raine (2021b) as they relate to the experiences of the three authors in the selected autobiographies. Although my data confirmed agreed with Raine's (2021b) argument that NXIVM is a reinventive institution with elements of a total institution, I proposed that it could be viewed as on a continuum (Bowie 2006, Spiegel 2011) which emphasizes a more dynamic and fluid interpretation. In my proposal of The NXIVM Continuum, I argued that the more involved one would become in NXIVM and the closer they became to Ranieri, the more total the institution would become for the individual. I also explained my understanding of how the nxian experience could be interpreted as existing on a continuum (Bowie 2006, Spiegel 2011) from liminal to liminoid as well as reinventive to total. As I explained in the subchapter on The NXIVM Continuum schema, *the stripe path* weaved in and out of these distinctions and was a voluntary individual institutional trajectory of personal transformation and belonging to the nxian community.

As of writing this paper in 2022, NXIVM has officially broken into mainstream pop culture. It has been featured in several news articles, televised news programs, an A&E series on cults, podcasts, YouTube videos, internet memes, etc. A Lifetime made-for-tv movie was made about it. Sarah Edmondson and her husband Anthony 'Nippy' Ames started a podcast (of which I am a frequent listener) called *A Little Bit Culty* where they interview experts and former members of what they consider to be *cults*. In February 2021, NXIVM was featured in a Saturday Night Live musical comedy sketch titled "[Murder Show](#)"[1] which described namely women's obsession with watching 'true crime' tv shows as a form of stress relief and comfort during their free time alone. In the sketch, heartthrob Nick Jonas dresses up as Keith Ranieri in his infamous volleyball outfit and comically dances around while singing about famous *cult shows* such as *The Vow*, *Seduced*, *Heaven's Gate*, and *The Family*. While I was happy to see NXIVM awareness being brought to the heights of Saturday Night Live-level fame, I was a bit dismayed to see it reduced to merely being labeled a 'sex cult' as most of the media has done and continues to do to this day.

It is my hope that this paper will bring a nuanced awareness of NXIVM's practices as a window into why so many people were devoted to such a high-(social) control environment that left a large number of them vulnerable to the traumatic experiences they claim to have had while members of the institution. It is my understanding that the majority of people came to NXIVM in search of a more successful version of themselves and the longer they spent in the institution they became less and less like the person they were when they entered the institution. The unbalanced focus on the exclusive, secret organization within NXIVM does not explain why the majority of people joined this vast and long-lasting organization. This is why I chose to largely ignore this aspect of NXIVM in my paper.

While NRMs and organizations former members describe as ‘cults’ are often studied from a sociological and psychological perspective, it is my belief that academia could benefit from more research on these types of organizations from a sociocultural anthropological perspective. So far there has been no peer-reviewed academic research published on NXIVM that was written by anthropologists using anthropological approaches. It is my sincere hope that more anthropologists will take a scholarly interest in the research of NXIVM to better understand contemporary social reality.

[1] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4RdcE6H4Gs>

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Timeline

- 1990 – *CBI* is founded
- 1991 – Toni Natalie meets Keith Raniere
- 1996 – *CBI* is shut down
- 1997 – *NHN* is founded
- 1998 – *ESP* is founded
- 1999 – Natalie leaves Raniere
- 2002 – *NXIVM* is founded
- 2002 – Bronfman sisters join *NXIVM*
- 2003 – Raniere files patent on *Rational Inquiry Method*
- 2003 – Forbes article published about Raniere as a ‘cult leader’
- 2005 – Sarah Edmondson joins *NXIVM*
- 2006 – *JNESS* is founded
- 2009 – Dalai Lama visits Raniere
- 2010 – *SOP* is founded
- 2011 – Catherine Oxenberg and daughter, India, join *NXIVM*
- 2012 – Union Times article accusing Raniere of pedophilia
- 2015 – *DOS* is created
- 2017 – New York Times article published exposing *DOS*
- 2018 – Raniere and associates arrested in Mexico
- 2018 – Catherine Oxenberg publishes her autobiography
- 2019 – *The Lost Women of NXIVM* documentary premieres
- 2019 – Edmondson and Natalie publish their autobiographies
- 2020 – *The Vow* and *Seduced* premiere
- 2020 – Raniere sentenced to 120 years in jail
- 2021 – Sarah Berman publishes book
- 2021 – Alison Mack, Nancy Salzman, and Bronfman sentenced to jail time
- 2021 – IJCAM publishes *NXIVM/Scientology* issue
- 2021 – India Oxenberg publishes audio memoir on Audible
- 2021 – Susan J. Palmer publishes media analysis

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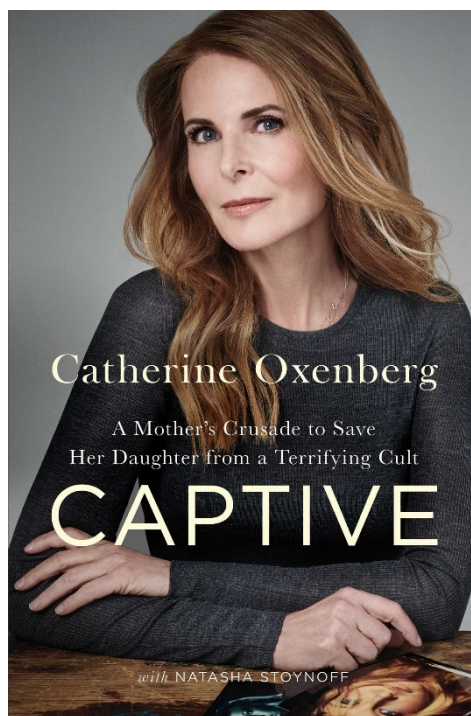


Photo A 3 Unknown (n.d.) [Catherine Oxenberg featured on the cover of her 2018 edition of her autobiography] [Book cover] <https://www.amazon.com/Captive-Mothers-Crusade-Daughter-Terrifying/dp/1982100656>

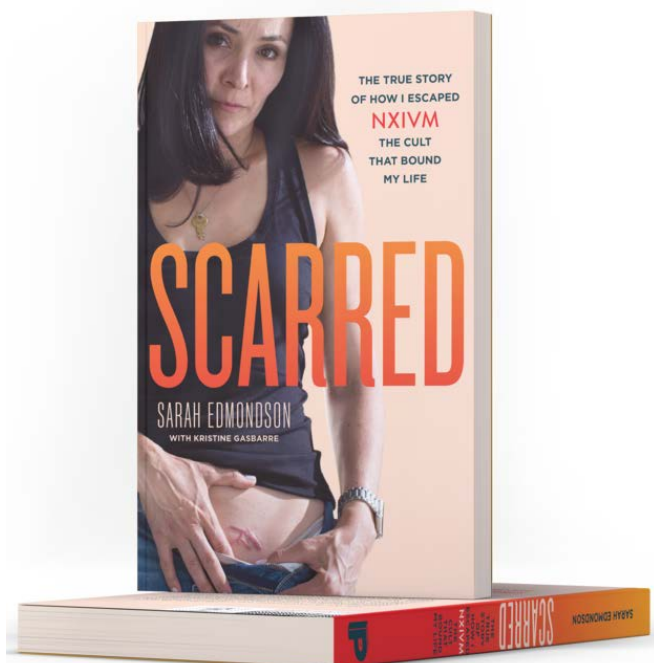


Photo A 2 Unknown (n.d.) [Sarah Edmondson on the cover of her autobiography] [Photograph] <https://www.sarahedmondson.com/book>



Photo A 4 Mann, Charlene (2020) [Toni Natalie poses with a copy of her autobiography which features Raniere on the cover] [Photograph] Rochester Woman Online. <http://www.rochesterwomanonline.com/index.php/2020/02/01/toni-natalie-cult-survivor-whistleblower-author>



Photo A 5 Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia (2017) [Catherine Oxenberg & India Oxenberg on vacation. India is preoccupied with NXIVM/DOS business on her phone.] [Photograph] *Captive: A Mother's Crusade to Save Her Daughter from a Terrifying Cult.*



Photo A 6 Fremson, R. (2017) [Edmondson shows her scar from the branding ceremony] [Photograph] *The New York Times.* <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/17/nyregion/nxivm-women-branded-albany.html>



Photo A 7 FBI (n.d.) ["Photos from the FBI show the branding on one victim, with Mr Raniere's initials, KR, superimposed in white" as evidence shown in trial against Raniere] [Photograph] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-48699099>

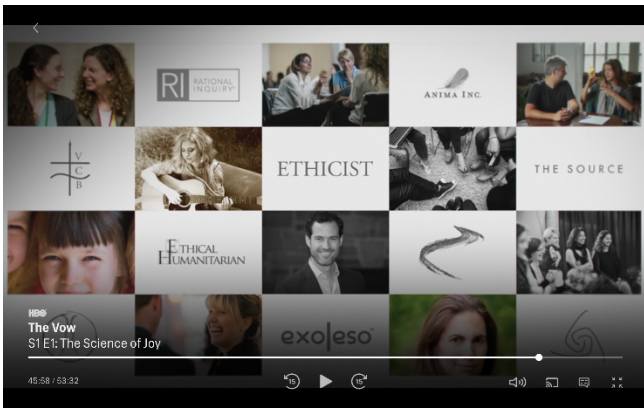
Appendix B – Screenshots



Screenshot B 1 (2021) [Graphic representing NXIVM centers globally] The Vow. HBO.



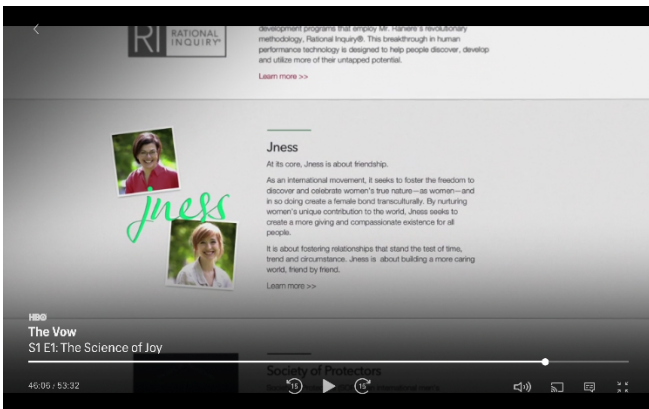
Screenshot B 4 (2021) [Society of Protectors (SOP) Logo] The Vow. HBO.



Screenshot B 2 (2021) [Recreation of NXIVM website displaying nxian companies] The Vow. HBO.



Screenshot B 5 (2021) [Artist rendering of animated depiction of the espian huddle and handclap at the start of a session] Seduced. STARZ.



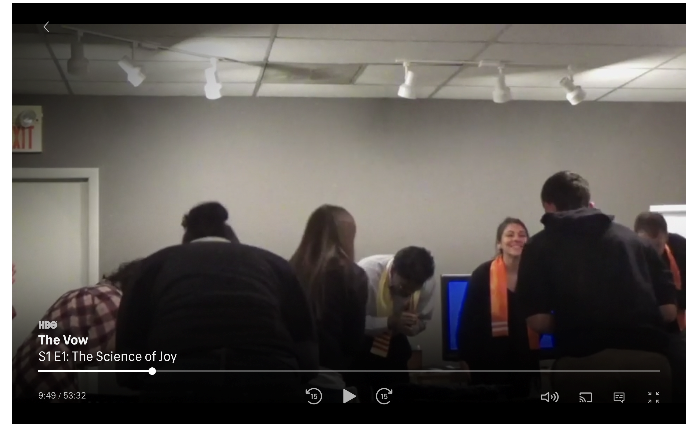
Screenshot B 3 (2021) [JNESS on recreation of NXIVM website] The Vow. HBO.



Screenshot B 6 (2021) [Artistic rendering of animated depiction of Catherine & India Oxenberg's Five-Day] Seduced. Starz.



Screenshot B 7 (2021) [ESP Seminar Video featuring Nancy Salzman speak which were played at most ESP seminars including the *Five-Day*] The Vow. HBO.



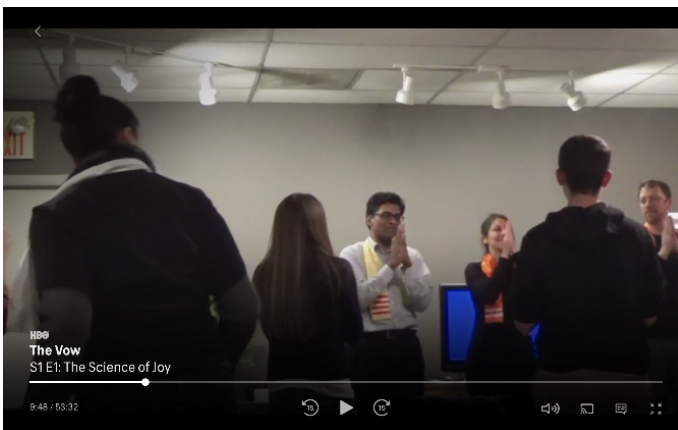
Screenshot B 10 (2021) [ESP instructor leads a huddle in a bow with palms touching akin to 'namaskar'] The Vow. HBO.



Screenshot B 8 (2021) [ESP instructor demonstrates bowing] The Vow. HBO.



Screenshot B 11 (2021) [Edmondson demonstrates the nxian handshake] The Vow. HBO.



Screenshot B 9 (2021) [ESP instructor leads a huddle in a bow with palms touching akin to 'namaskar'] The Vow. HBO.



Screenshot B 12 (2021) [ESP instructor (Proctor) demonstrates the nxian handshake and gives out white student sashes] The Vow. HBO.



Screenshot B 13 (2021) [NXians wearing sashes in audience at a NXIVM event] The Vow. HBO.



Screenshot B 16 (2021) [Ranieri and Salzman meeting the Dalai Lama for the first time.] The Vow. HBO.



Screenshot B 14 (2021) [An ESP intensive] The Vow. HBO.



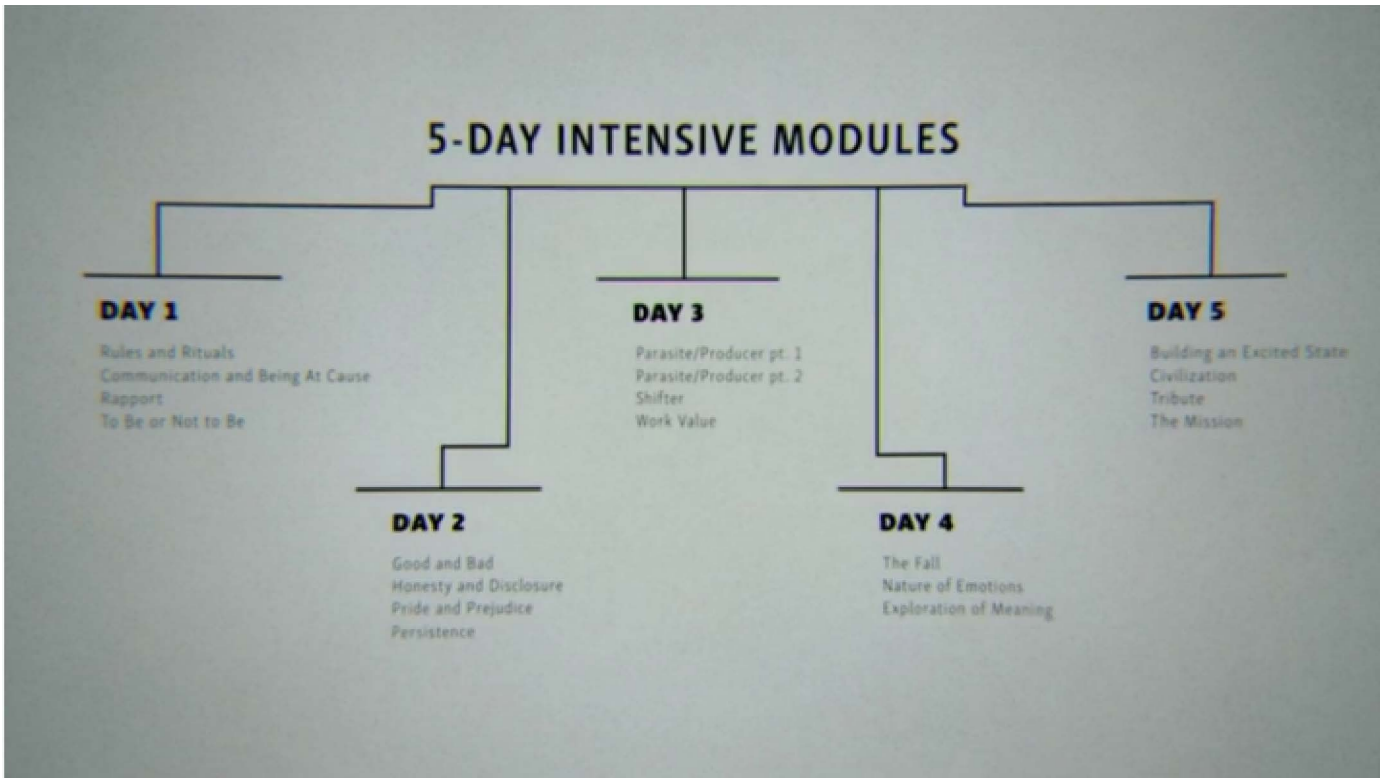
Screenshot B 17 (2021) [The Dalai Lama giving Ranieri a tibetan sash in a ceremonial way similar to a nxian sash ceremony] The Vow. HBO.



Screenshot B 15 (2021) [Nancy Salzman administering an EM] The Vow. HBO.

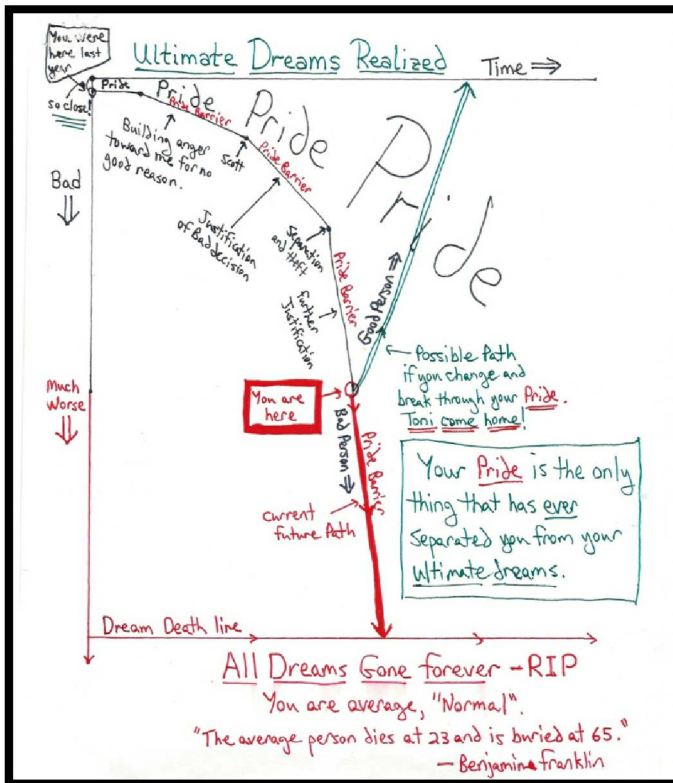


Screenshot B 18 (2021) [The Dalai Lama and Ranieri shaking hands] The Vow. HBO.



Screenshot B 19 (2021) [Graphic of 5-Day Intensive Module Schedule] Seduced. Starz.

Appendix C - Documents



Document C 1 [One of the threatening letters Raniere sent to Natalie after they broke up] The Program.



Document C 2 Raniere, K. (2003) [Drawing of sash for patent]

Twelve-point Mission Statement

By Keith Ranieri

Success is an internal state of clear, honest knowledge of what I am, my value in the world, and my responsibility for the way I react to all things.

There are no ultimate victims; therefore, I will not choose to be a victim.

I am committed to be successful. I understand each of us must raise ourselves—and thereby raise all others—as all others raise us. This is interdependence.

Success in my own right is my earned success. True success cannot be stolen, copied or received by happenstance. I will not masquerade as successful by these methods or any other. I will earn my success.

Tribute is a form of payment and honor. It is giving credit where credit is due. I will use tribute to uphold others beyond my petty likes and dislikes. As a result, I will define my self and my true contribution to humankind.

Successful people do not steal and they have no desire or need to steal. I will not steal anything. I will always earn what I need and desire. Copying without permission or tribute is not the highest form of flattery; it is theft. Theft is also taking or receiving something without fully earning it; it is always at the expense, no matter how small, of others.

Inner honesty and integrity are the highest human values and the foundation of the human psychology. All other values arise from them. I will never trade my integrity or inner honesty for any other value. It is never worth it.

The methods and information I learn in ESP are for my use only. I will not speak of them or in any way give others knowledge of them outside ESP. Part of the condition of being accepted into ESP is to keep all its information confidential. If I violate this, I am breaking a promise and breaching my contract, but more importantly, I am compromising my inner honesty and integrity.

True success is never at the expense of others. As a successful individual, I will never envy another's success. I will rejoice because I realize the success of others raises me up just a little bit more because I am also part of the human team. The actualization of human potential by anyone is a tribute to all team humankind. If others are successful, I will protect their success against those who envy them. I pledge to purge myself of all parasite and envy-based habits, and replace them with the habits of effort and interdependence.

I will unreservedly accept the success I have earned. I will accept no more and no less; this is accepting with integrity. I will give unreservedly to those who have earned it; this is giving with integrity. I will accept with integrity as easily as I give with integrity. To not accept what I am worth, or what I have earned, is to devalue myself and thereby all others.

People control the money, wealth and resources of the world. It is essential for the survival of humankind for these things to be controlled by successful, ethical people. I pledge to ethically control as much of the money, wealth and resources of the world as possible within my success plan. I will always support the ethical control of these things.

A world of successful people will be a better world indeed; a world devoid of hunger, theft, dishonesty, envy and insecurity. People will no longer try to destroy each other, steal from each other, down each other or rejoice at another's demise. Success, ethics and integrity are co-inspirational. I pledge to share and enroll people in ESP and its mission for myself, and to help make the world a better place to live.

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(12) **Patent Application Publication**
Raniere

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(43) **Pub. Date: Oct. 24, 2013**

(54) **DETERMINATION OF WHETHER A LUCIFERIAN CAN BE REHABILITATED**

(52) **U.S. CL**
CPC *A61B 5/165* (2013.01)
USPC **600/558; 600/300; 600/559**

(71) Applicant: **FIRST PRINCIPLES, INC.**, ALBANY, NY (US)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

(72) Inventor: **Keith A. Raniere**, Clifton Park, NY (US)

An aspect of the present invention is a method for determining whether a Luciferian can be rehabilitated. The method includes stimulating the Luciferian with a first stimulus and recording a first physiological response by the Luciferian to said first stimulus. The method includes determining, from the first physiological response, a first polarity of the Luciferian's response to the first stimulus. The method includes stimulating the Luciferian with a second stimulus and recording a second physiological response by the Luciferian to said second stimulus. Further, the method includes determining, from the second physiological response, a second polarity of the Luciferian's response to the second stimulus. The method includes comparing the first polarity to the second polarity to determine whether the second polarity has a greater value than the first polarity; and determining, from said comparing of first polarity and second polarity, whether the Luciferian can be rehabilitated.

(21) Appl. No.: 13/839,361

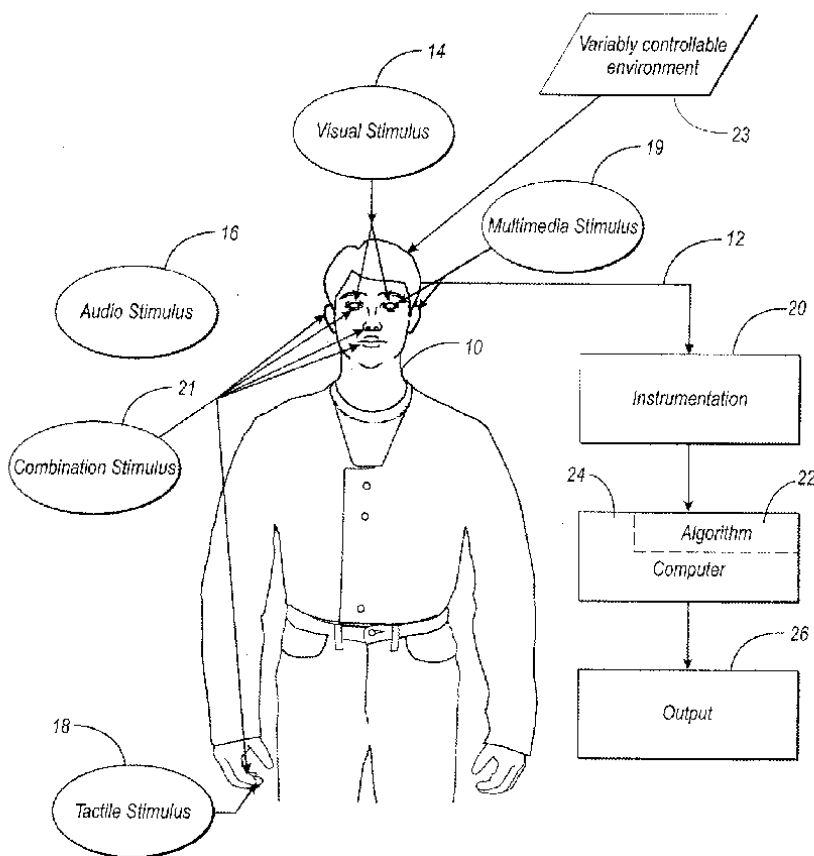
(22) Filed: **Mar. 15, 2013**

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 12/272,941, filed on Nov. 18, 2008. Continuation of application No. 11/931,524, filed on Oct. 31, 2007, now abandoned.

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**
A61B 5/16 (2006.01)



Coaches notes:

Handshaking exercise:

Coach demonstrates the 2 types of handshakes, students practices each point.

1. **Basic Handshake** utilizing 4 points:

- a. Coach shows how to meet **crux to crux**. Make sure that the student experiences the feeling of the crux. Student practices.
- b. Coach demonstrates the shake, **cocking the wrist slightly downward** with a firm forward motion. Student practices.
- c. Utilizing the **middle and ring finger grasp** coach demonstrates gaining control of the handshake, Student practices.
- d. Coach demonstrates the difference in dominance by **stepping into the handshake** first with the right foot and then the left foot. Student notes the difference. Student practices.

2. **ESP Handshake:** Utilizing 3 positions coach demonstrates the ESP handshake with all students using twohands. The placement of the left hand is demonstrated 3 ways:

- a. Coach places his or her **left hand on top** of the student's right hand demonstrating the respect for a higher-ranking student.
- b. Coach shakes the student's hand in a **vertical fashion**, demonstrating equal rank.
- c. Coach places his or her **left hand below** the student's right hand demonstrating positioning for a student of a lower rank.

3. **Personal handshake competition:**

Person A and Person B attempt to shake hands attaining the superior position. Each tries to gain the superior position. Coach determines who wins if students cannot. Best 3 out of 5 wins!

Watch Segment II of video:

Here Coach reviews rules and rituals explaining each to students and following the exercises. Be sure to show enthusiasm by accessing your excited state. This will help you to hold student's interest. Remember this is the student's first module, it is your task to make this a pleasant experience.

Rules and Rituals

Exercise:

Coaches have students think of as many organizations as they can that require their members to wear some sort of garment to meetings or uniform to for work.

* Some examples: all types of martial arts, girl scouts and boy scouts, most sports teams have designated uniforms, all branches the military, police, fire departments, mechanics usually wear uniforms, wait staff in most restaurants wear some sort of uniform, many businesses require standard uniform dress, etc.)

1. Just like in martial arts where a student's rank is signified by the color of his or her belt here in ESP we wear **Sashes or Scarves** – Each student shall wear an official ESP neck sash or scarf. The scarves come in different colors signifying measurable achievement and contribution to the ESP mission. Scarves may also have a Platinum edge at every level except white. The edge signifies the student has met additional rank requirements in a

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Figure 3
Listing of Basic Modules

<i>Module Number</i>	<i>Module Name</i>
1.	Rules & Rituals & Scripting
2.	Communication/And Being At Cause
3.	Honesty Disclosure
4.	Rapport & Excited State
5.	Persistency & Motivation
6.	Intensity & Power State
7.	Work Value
8.	Self - Esteem
9.	Good Bad
10.	Parasite/Producer Concepts
11.	Parasite/Producer Strategies
12.	Parasite/Producer Practice
13.	Crime & Punishment
14.	Shifter
15.	Tribute
16.	Money
17.	Mission
18.	Personal Value Inventory
19.	Goal Setting
20.	Time & Lists
21.	What Is

007060"2445960

Copy provided by USPTO from the PACR Image Database on 03/25/2002

Appendix D – Media Depictions



Media D 1 & 1 (2021) [Nick Jonas on Saturday Night Live as Keith Raniere dressed for volleyball] Saturday Night Live. NBC. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4RdcE6H4Gs>



Media D 3 (2021) [Raniere on the cover of Forbes magazine] Forbes.



Media D 2 (2019) [Newspaper headlines during Raniere trial] The Daily Mail. <https://bit.ly/3befEpK>

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

Today, plenty of sunshine, warmer
afternoon, high 72. Tonight, mainly
clear, sun-softened skies, low 55. To-
morrow, sunshine and a few clouds,
high 72. Weather map, Page C8

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HUGE BLOW DEALT TO HEART OF ISIS AS CAPITAL FALLS

U.S. ALLIES CELEBRATE

Militants Preparing for a New Phase After the Loss of Raqqa

By ANNE BARNARD
and HWANDA SAAD

BEIRUT, Lebanon — American-backed forces said on Tuesday that they had seized the northern Syrian city of Raqqa from the Islamic State, a major blow to the militant group, which had long used the city as the de facto capital of its self-declared caliphate.

Celebrations erupted in Raqqa, where residents had lived under the repressive rule of militants who beheaded people for offenses as minor as smoking. Fighters could be seen cheering and firing celebratory gunfire in the streets, according to residents reached by phone and text message.

The United States Central Command stopped short of declaring victory, saying that "more than 90 percent of Raqqa is in S.D.C. control," a reference to the Syrian Democratic Forces, an American-backed militia group made up of Syrian Kurds and Arabs.

Col. Ryan S. Dillon, a spokesman for the United States military in Baghdad, said Tuesday that Raqqa was on the verge of being liberated, but that there were still pockets of the city controlled by the Islamic State. Syrian Democratic Forces officers, however, were emphatic in phone interviews and public statements that they had finally wrested control of the city from the militants after a monthlong campaign.

"The military operation is over," said Talal Saleh, a commander reached by phone at the group's headquarters in Hama.

Said, a spokesman for the Syrian Democratic Forces, Manazhaq Bakh, said suicide bombers might still be hiding in the city. In a video teleconference with Pentagon reporters, Colonel Dillon also said that Islamic State fighters had booby-trapped the city with unexploded explosive devices and unexploded ordnance that officials say could take years to remove.

Whether final or not, the seemingly inevitable defeat in Raqqa of the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, carries heavy symbolic weight. At its height in 2014, the group controlled Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, as well as Raqqa and large stretches of land on both sides of the border. And it had grand aspirations to increase its territory and cement its rule.

The Islamic State leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who once spent time in a prison run by occupying American troops in Iraq, claimed to be the successor to the caliph, the Islamic emperor who shaped the region in past centuries. He persuaded tens of thousands of Muslims from around the world,

Continued on Page A4



Syrian Democratic Forces comrades and family members at the graveside of a man who was killed fighting in Raqqa this month.

Party Gathers, In Affirmation Of Xi's Might

By CHRIS BUCKLEY

BEIJING — When Xi Jinping strode out in the Great Hall of the People five years ago as China's new leader, his tight smile barely hid the atmosphere of smoldering crisis.

The Communist Party elite had been battered by infighting and scandals involving power grabs, bribery and even murder. Military commanders and state security chiefs — the guardians of one-party rule — had grown grossly corrupt. Critics openly accused Mr. Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, of dithering as popular unrest spread.

On Wednesday, Mr. Xi opened another Communist Party congress, this time in the nation's most powerful leader in decades, all but certain to receive a second five-year term. And after spending his first term tightening control on society he is expected to enshrine his authoritarian vision for revitalizing the party — and perhaps position himself as indispensable to its survival.

"Corruptly, crudely and dishonestly and abroad are undergoing deep and complicated changes," Mr. Xi said some 2,300 party delegates and other dignitaries assembled in the Great Hall. "Our country is in an important period of strategic opportunity in its development," he said in a calm, steady voice. "The outlook is extremely bright; the challenges are also extremely grim."

With his two most recent predecessors as Chinese leader, Mr. Hu and 91-year-old Jiang Zemin, in attendance, Mr. Xi told his audience that under his Chinese socialism

Continued on Page A3

Branding Ritual Scarred Women in Secret Circle

By BARRY MEER

ALBANY — Last March, five women gathered in a home near here to enter a secret sisterhood they were told was created to empower women.

To gain admission, they were required to give their roaster — or "maestro," as she was called — naked photographs or other compromising material and were warned that such "collateral" might be publicly released if the group's existence was disclosed.

The women, in their 30s and 40s, belonged to a self-help organization called Ndvim, which is based in Albany and has chapters across the country, Canada and Mexico.

Sarah Edmondson, one of the participants, said she had been told she would get a small tattoo as part of the initiation. But she was not prepared for what came next.

Each woman was told to undress and lie on a massage table, while three others restrained her legs and shoulders. According to one of them, their "maestro," a top Ndvim official named Lauren Salzman, instructed them to say: "Maestro, please brand me, it would be an honor."

A female doctor proceeded to use a cauterizing device to sear a two-inch-square symbol below each woman's hip, a procedure that took 20 to 30 minutes. For hours, muffled screams and the smell of burning tissue filled the room.

"I wept the whole time," Mr. Edmondson recalled. "I dissociated out of my body."

Since the late 1980s, an estimated 20,000 people have enrolled in courses offered by Ndvim (pronounced Neve-um), which it says are designed to bring about greater self-fulfillment by eliminating

Disturbing Complaints Suggest Dark Side to a Self-Help Group

psychological and emotional barriers. Most participants take stress workshops, like the group's "Executive Success Programs," and renounce their lives. But other people have become drawn more deeply into Ndvim, giving up careers, friends and families to become followers of its leader, Keith

Haziere, who is known within the group as "Vanguard."

Both Ndvim and Mr. Haziere, 57, have long attracted controversy. Former members have depicted him as a man who manipulated his adherents, had sex with them and urged women to follow near-starvation diets to achieve the type of physique he found appealing.

Now, as talk about the secret sisterhood and branding has circulated within Ndvim, scores of members are leaving. Interviews with a dozen of them portray a

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A disillusioned Sarah Edmondson left Ndvim, a self-help organization, after being branded during an initiation ceremony.

DEAL BY SENATORS SEEKS TO RESTORE HEALTH SUBSIDIES

TRUMP SUPPORTS PLAN

Bid to Stabilize Markets — 2 Years of Aid for Poorer Patients

By THOMAS KAPLAN
and ROBERT FEAR

WASHINGTON — Two leading senators, hoping to stabilize a teetering health insurance market under the Affordable Care Act, reached a bipartisan deal on Tuesday to fend critical subsidies to insurers that President Trump moved just days ago to cut off.

At the White House, virtually as the deal was being announced, Mr. Trump voiced support for it while insisting that he would try again to repeal President Barack Obama's signature health law.

The plan by the senators, Lamar Alexander, Republican of Tennessee, and Paty Murray, Democrat of Washington, would fund the subsidies for two years, a step that would provide at least short-term certainty to insurers. The subsidies, known as cost-sharing reduction payments, reimburse insurance companies for lowering deductibles, co-payments and other out-of-pocket costs for low-income customers.

Without them, insurance companies said, premiums for many people buying plans under the Affordable Care Act would jump, and with profits squeezed, some of the companies would probably leave the market.

"In my view, this agreement avoids chaos," Mr. Alexander said, "and I don't know a Democrat or a Republican who benefits from chaos."

Mr. Trump appeared to back the deal, even as he berated insurance companies, declared the Affordable Care Act "virtually dead" and promised the demise of the health law in due time.

"It'll get us over this intermediate hump," the president said at a Rose Garden news conference, describing it as "a short-term solution so that we don't have this very dangerous little period."

Passage of the deal negotiated by Mr. Alexander and Mrs. Murray is still far from assured. If approved, it could provide a reprieve for the Affordable Care Act that would prevent 300 million Americans from increasing as much as they might have otherwise. But consumers in many states will still face double-digit rate increases, and in many countries, health plans will be available from only one insurance company.

Moreover, Mr. Trump and other Republicans are still intent on repealing much of the Affordable Care Act, and an executive order

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Travel Ban Is Blocked

A federal judge suspended most of President Trump's latest immigration order, a day before it was to take effect. Page A26.