

Stress-induced hypomania in healthy participants

THE ALLOSTATIC “MANIC-DEFENCE HYPOTHESIS”

JOHN HUNTER

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SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR STEVEN COLLINGS

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“Rational therapeutic development in bipolar is hampered by a lack of pathophysiological model. However, there is a wealth of converging data on the role of dopamine in bipolar disorder”
(Berk, et al., 2007, p. 41).

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When prophecy fails

“It has been said that man is a rational animal. All my life I have been searching for evidence which could support this” – Bertrand Russell¹

In 1956 psychologists Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schachter described the behaviour of members of a flying saucer cult who believed that a flood was coming to destroy mankind, and that only their followers would be saved by the aliens (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956). Members publicly declared their beliefs, left their jobs and (in some cases) their spouses, sold their possessions and, when ridiculed by the public, drew together with even greater resolve. Undeterred by rational arguments, they gathered in their leader’s apartment on December 20th 1954, waiting to be taken up by the alien spaceship at midnight. These people, who were quite capable of rational thinking, committed their finances, their reputations, and the trust they had in their own judgment to this belief and, as they waited in that apartment, the psychological stakes were extraordinarily high.

Hours slowly passed, midnight came and went and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the aliens did not arrive. Festinger and his colleagues were intrigued not only by their unsubstantiated beliefs but, more particularly, in the response of most group members to the events of that night. Rather than acknowledging the facts, dispassionately reviewing their thinking, and conceding their mistake, many accepted the unlikely explanation offered by their leader: that the aliens had communicated with her and explained that their faith had allowed the earth to be spared. These members had a psychological incentive to avoid evidence which disconfirmed their beliefs. What would it say about them, and the things that they had done, if they had been wrong? Acknowledging their mistake would have caused psychological discomfort² and because few could endure the emotional consequences of objectivity, most remained in the group, and, to further reduce dissonance, attempted to recruit others.

It is precisely this emotional attachment to beliefs in the face of evidence which separates the closed-minded from the open-minded, and the imprisoned from the free. Yet, while it is tempting to ridicule the illogical and unsubstantiated beliefs of others, and to grow frustrated at their reluctance to revise these views in the face of evidence, we are often blind to our own cherished irrationalities. We like to think ourselves immune to such credulity and believe that our perspectives are reasonable, even though we may be oblivious to the array of clandestine factors which both shape our perceptions and make it uncomfortable to review them. When confronted with information that contests our most core beliefs, our identities may be threatened, and it is a bold minority who can look unemotionally at the facts, concede when they are mistaken, and move – enlightened – onwards.

¹ (Russell, 1950).

² Referred to as *cognitive dissonance* by Festinger (1957).

Abstract

This thesis analyses the structure, conditions, promises, and results of Large Group Awareness Trainings (LGATs)³, demonstrating that established environmental triggers for hypomania/mania are core features of the LGAT process, and that the majority of (ostensibly healthy) LGAT participants display symptoms that closely resemble hypomania/mania. Through an understanding of the biology of stress (the common element in identified environmental triggers for hypomania/mania), and with reference to the dopamine hypothesis of bipolar disorder, the 1911 manic-defence hypothesis is revisited, and an allostatic⁴, rather than solely psychoanalytic, mechanism by which the structured application of psychological stress leads to hypomania/mania is hypothesised.

Disclaimer

It is crucial when considering LGATs as a category to apply the label cautiously - while there are likenesses between trainings, there are also noticeable differences. It is evident that these groups have a similar source, and that they have multiplied through copies of the original trainings, and copies of those copies. While highly scripted (and thereby easy to emulate) there would, however, have been natural evolution, individual preferences of leaders, and deliberate revision of their processes over time. It is important to bear this in mind when contemplating a “typical” LGAT:

“Although psychologists have often classified LGATs as a generic group (cf. Finkelstein, Wenegrat, & Yalom, 1982) and although this classification does have considerable heuristic value, it must be kept in mind that each of these interventions is unique” (Fisher, et al., 1989, p. 747).

Having acknowledged these limitations, there are conspicuous similarities between many of these trainings, and there is utility in aggregating findings from organisations which have a similar origin, make similar promises, employ similar techniques, create similarly stressful environments, involve similar confrontational interactions, are structured in similar ways, utilise similar sales models, advocate similar philosophies, and – perhaps most significantly – elicit similar results. While the term “LGAT” is frequently used, and many organisations’ trainings are commonly described as such, some resist the categorisation, and a universally accepted definition of the term has not yet been established. Although a concise and comprehensive definition remains elusive, the similarities in origin, processes, and results between identified LGATs will be highlighted so that, at least for the purposes of this thesis, these trainings may reasonably be grouped and collectively assessed.

³ *Large Group Awareness Training* (LGAT) is the generic term for a type of “transformational”/ “breakthrough”/ “enlightenment” training that involves dozens to hundreds of participants at a time. These trainings are central to this research and they will be explained in detail in the course of this thesis.

⁴ Allostasis is the combination of biological, psychological, and behavioural changes which allows an organism to cope with a stressor (Sapolsky, 2004; Wallenstein, 2003).

Thesis map

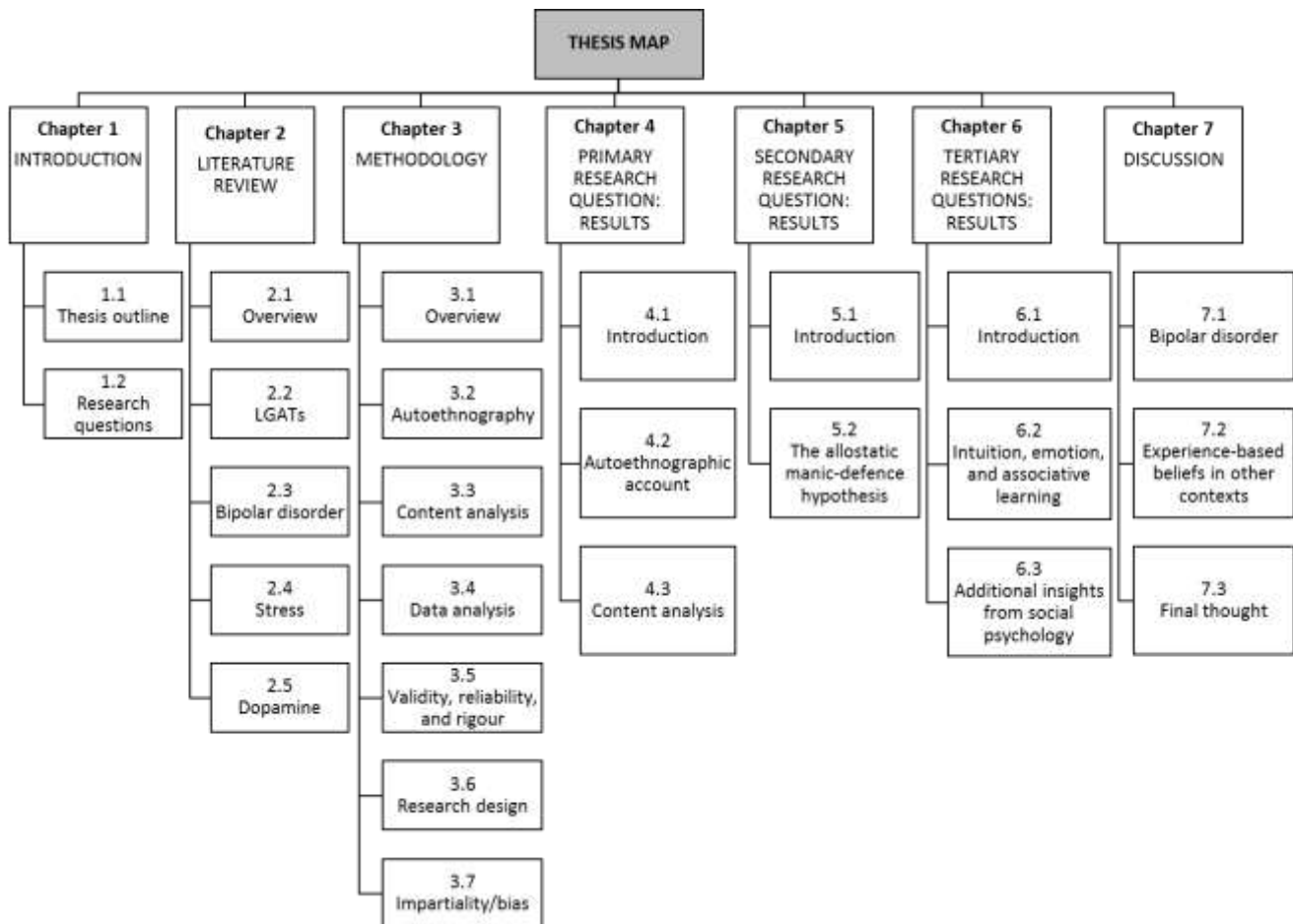


Figure 1: THESIS MAP

To ensure that the reader is always oriented, organisational charts will periodically be employed. As indicated in Figure 1, the current section is “Thesis Map”.

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

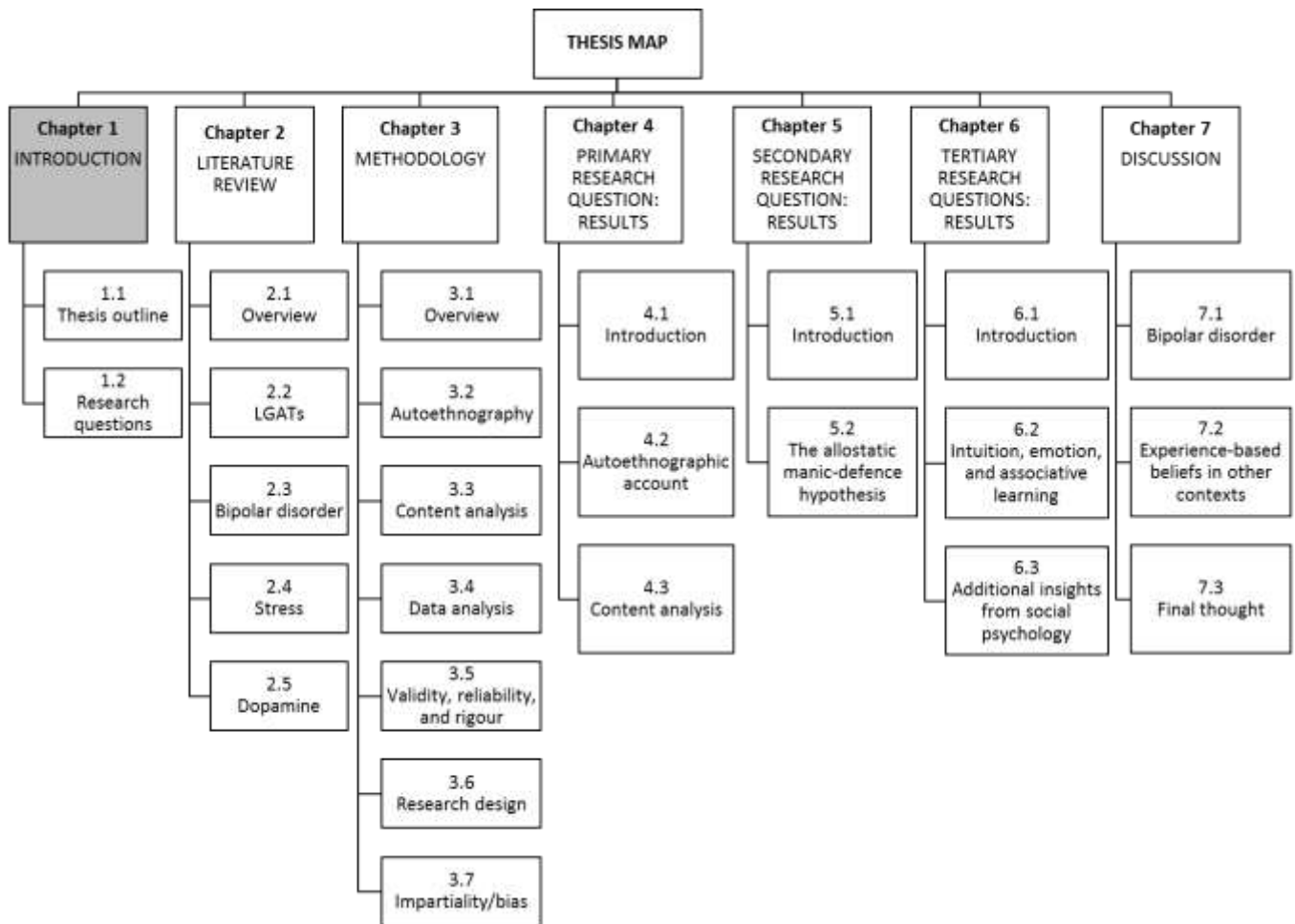


Figure 2: THESIS MAP_INTRODUCTION

As indicated in Figure 2, the following chapter is the introduction. The introduction is comprised of the thesis outline and the research questions.

1.1 Thesis outline

Bipolar disorder (or “manic depression”) is a psychological disorder that affects approximately 2.4% of the world’s adult population (The National Institute of Mental Health, 2011). It is an illness that not only impacts tens of millions of people directly, but which, if not correctly diagnosed and effectively managed, can cause significant distress for spouses, family members, friends, and others who interact with, and sometimes care for, these individuals. The World Health Organisation ranked bipolar disorder as the sixth leading cause of disability in high-income countries, and the eighth leading cause of disability in low and middle income countries for people under the age of sixty (World Health Organization, 2004) and, in evidence of the suffering experienced by those with the illness, it was found in one extensive epidemiological study that the suicide attempt rate of individuals with bipolar disorder is nearly twice that of those with unipolar depression (Chen & Dilsaver, 1996).

While a certain amount is known about the aetiology of the illness – there is consensus that genetic, biological, psychological, and environmental factors play a role – a great deal about these factors remains unclear (Miklowitz, 2011; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011). While stress has been identified as a key environmental trigger (Bostock, Kirkby, Garry, & Taylor, 2015; Koenders, et al., 2014), there are practical and ethical limitations to studying stress, and this restricts progress in understanding the disorder. Research which assesses the impact of stress on bipolar disorder tends to do so retrospectively, asking those already diagnosed whether a “major life event” preceded the onset of symptoms. These studies are, however, frequently limited by confounding variables, and/or the heterogeneity of stressors. Additionally, experimental research on stress is constrained by small sample sizes and the use of ethically sanctioned, but benign, stressors such as exercise, counting tasks, and public speaking (Sapolsky, 2004; Wallenstein, 2003). These experiments produce milder, and arguably – since hypomania/mania is likely the response to extreme stress – irrelevant, results:

“... if you give an organism a massive stressor, it will reliably have a strong stress-response. With more subtle stressors, we have more subtle stress-responses” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 162).

Animal studies permit a greater degree of stress, but are limited in their applicability because animals are imperfect proxies for humans, because people often respond differently to the same stressors, and because it is difficult to reliably elicit human-relevant stress, such as guilt, shame, and humiliation, in animals:

“But a problem in extrapolating to humans is that experimental stressors used in animal studies are usually more awful than what we typically experience. Not only that, but we differ tremendously among ourselves as to what we experience as truly stressful...” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 161).

Three commonly identified environmental triggers of hypomania/mania are stress, sleep disruption (a form of stress), and goal-attainment (arguably synonymous with “stress removal”) (Bostock, et al., 2015; Koenders, et al., 2014). No study to date has taken millions of ostensibly healthy participants, exposed them to a high degree of “homogeneous” psychological stress and sleep disruption in a controlled environment, abruptly replaced the stress with affirmation (“goal-attainment”), and monitored the effects. The observation which prompted this research was that these three environmental triggers seemed to be conspicuously present in a form of “transformational training”, known generically as a Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT). Not only did these triggers appear present, but the symptoms of bipolar disorder (euphoria, expansiveness, optimism, energy, productivity, confidence, creativity, decisiveness, viewing the world more positively, impulsivity, and – less frequently – depression and psychosis) were later noted in, or reported by, LGAT graduates.

Because the triggers and symptoms of bipolar disorder seemed to be mirrored in the processes and results of LGATs, these trainings appeared to be a valuable subject for analysis. Since the LGAT environment is carefully controlled, and there is limited interaction with the outside world for the duration of the trainings, LGATs offer a degree of experimental control, where stressors are formidable and relatively homogeneous, and confounding variables are restricted to a greater extent than occurs in retrospective studies. In contrast to conventional experimental studies on stress, which typically only have a few dozen participants taken from a narrow section of society, it is estimated that at least 4 million people in 22 countries have taken part in LGATs since 1971. This allows the findings of this research to be generalised with a greater degree of confidence. While it is not possible to formally diagnose hypomanic/manic symptoms in past LGAT graduates, a case will be made that LGATs incorporate bipolar triggers in their “technology” and that the promised, observed, and described thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of graduates closely resemble hypomania/mania.

There are further features of LGATs which make them uniquely relevant to bipolar disorder. If, as has been argued by some theorists, hypomania/mania occurs in response to threats to self-esteem (Bentall, 2003), and if “not all stressors produce the exact same stress-reponse” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 35), then the stress most relevant to bipolar disorder is that which makes an individual feel guilty, inferior, ashamed, and uncertain. LGATs arguably generate a greater level of stress than would occur under conventional research conditions, this stress – while punctuated with periods of relaxation – is longer-lasting than occurs under experimental conditions, and the nature of the stress (while somewhat generic) is more likely to elicit guilt, inadequacy, and diminished self-esteem than occurs in typical stress research. Also significant is the structure of the stress application: LGATs apply stress for a period of days before abruptly removing it and replacing it with affirmation (Mathison, 1993; Singer, 2003). It will be argued that this structure is significant in triggering a hypomanic/manic state.

While the primary goal of this thesis is to assess the legitimacy of the hypothesis that LGATs contain bipolar triggers and cause bipolar symptoms, the secondary goal is to offer a plausible explanation for this observation. The *manic-defence hypothesis*, first put forward by psychoanalyst Karl Abraham in 1911, submits that mania is an adaptive response to feelings of inadequacy – that grandiose thoughts are employed by manic depressives (people with bipolar disorder) to counter a sense of low self-esteem, and that during mania these grandiose thoughts spiral out of control (Bentall, 2003). Building on an updated understanding of the stress response, homeostasis/allostasis, dopamine, the association between stress and dopamine, and the dopamine hypothesis of bipolar disorder, a biological mechanism behind the manic-defence hypothesis will be outlined and explored. Based upon the structure, content, and results of LGATs, it will be contended that, through days of stress-inducing exercises, sleep disruption, and a sudden removal of stress, LGATs elicit a temporary elevation of dopamine transmission, which remains elevated in most participants for a period of a few days to a few weeks. This transient dopamine excess potentially explains the hypomanic/manic symptoms experienced by most participants, which are marketed by LGATs as “transformations”.

An associated tertiary goal is to explore the implications of a manufactured “spontaneous” experience on persuasion and belief-formation. If it is possible to reliably trigger powerful affective states (feelings of love, joy, forgiveness, confidence, creativity, energy, decisiveness, and “transformation”) in *almost all* individuals at strategic times, the implications for persuasion, and belief-formation are significant. The impact of emotion on rationality, as explicated by cognitive scientist Antonio Damasio (2006), will be considered, while psychologists Petty and Cacioppo (1986) reveal the impact of “affective cues” on persuasion. Based on the work of social psychologists such as Kahneman, Tversky, and others, it will be shown that, when rational processes are minimised, intuitive processes take precedence and that, in this context, a powerful emotional experience may become a compelling, but illegitimate, substitute for critical thinking and evidence. In addressing the primary research question it will be demonstrated that LGATs are able to reliably trigger immensely pleasurable affective states in participants (and thus control the “experience”). It follows that (exhausted) participants may form a positive association with LGAT principles that they been given neither the time nor the space to critically consider:

“By overassociating positive emotions with people, objects, or places, too often and indiscriminately, we may feel more positive and relaxed about many situations than we should...”
(Damasio, 2006, p. 162).

It will be contended that LGATs emphasise intuition (“natural knowing”), denigrate critical thinking, and create conditions which make critical thinking difficult. In this environment, most participants are primed to form experience-based (intuitive) beliefs and, when an experience is then generated, participants are more likely to accept arguments and obligations that they may otherwise reject.

Since their inception LGATs have been accused of using deceptive and indirect methods of persuasion and control (CESNUR, n.d.; Singer, 2003) and so, in addition to considering the impact of an “experience” on persuasion, the use of thought reform (“brainwashing”⁵) in LGATs will be assessed. While this is not a primary goal of this thesis, the conditions of thought reform provide a useful framework through which to examine the way that LGATs generate stress, disrupt normal sleeping patterns, and create a sense of goal-attainment in participants. Because participants are explicitly told that no thought reform processes (or, in fact, any other forms of manipulation) are used (Fowler, 1999; Schreiber, 1999), it is relevant to informed consent that clarity is provided on this issue.

Additional findings from social psychology, as outlined by psychologists Cialdini (2007), Gilovich and Ross (2016), Kahneman (2012), and others will also be used to explain how the structure, exercises, and rules of LGATs incorporate powerful, yet hidden, levers of influence⁶. Many of the processes employed by LGATs – such as the insistence on applause at strategic points and the elevation of the authority status of the trainer – may appear inconsequential to participants, but it will be contended that they restrict critical thinking, distort interpretation, shape self-perception, prime desired behaviour, minimise autonomy, and ultimately increase the likelihood that participants will recruit others and take further courses with the organisations. The ethics of these tactics will not be comprehensively addressed, but it will be shown that, in spite of their insistence to the contrary, LGATs make use of numerous well-established processes of persuasion.

Considering the impact of an affective experience on persuasion, assessing the degree to which LGATs employ thought reform, and providing insights into the use of other clandestine influence techniques adds necessary context, and provides insight into the adoption, by many intelligent participants, of specious/extreme beliefs and perspectives which appear immune to rational argument⁷. These elements, however, form only a tertiary component of this thesis. The primary goal is to outline a potentially useful observation about hypomania/mania as an exaggerated defence against psychological threats, and the secondary goal is to theorise a biological explanation for this observation. It is hoped that this research will stimulate further interest, inspire further research, and ultimately lead to a greater understanding of, and more informed treatments for, bipolar disorder.

⁵ “Brainwashing” is a non-scientific term often used to refer to unethical indoctrination processes. The more clearly defined academic terms are “thought reform” (Lifton, 1961), and “coercive persuasion” (Schein, 1961).

⁶ These hidden levers of influence are what Lifton (1961) referred to as “Mystical Manipulation”.

⁷ The idea – proposed by many LGATs and frequently accepted by graduates – that no beliefs are, in fact, advocated is just one example of a belief which is irreconcilable with the evidence.

1.2 Research questions

The goals of this thesis translate into primary, secondary, and tertiary research questions:

1.2.1 Primary research question

- Will most healthy individuals exposed to a structured process of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment (as occurs in LGATs) experience transient hypomanic/manic symptoms?

1.2.2 Secondary research question

- Is there a plausible biological explanation for a structured process of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment triggering transient hypomanic/manic symptoms in healthy individuals?

1.2.3 Tertiary research questions

- What are the implications of an ability to manufacture a powerful emotional (hypomanic) experience – at a strategic point in time – on intuition, associative learning, and persuasion?
- What does social psychology reveal about the conditions and processes employed by LGATs?

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

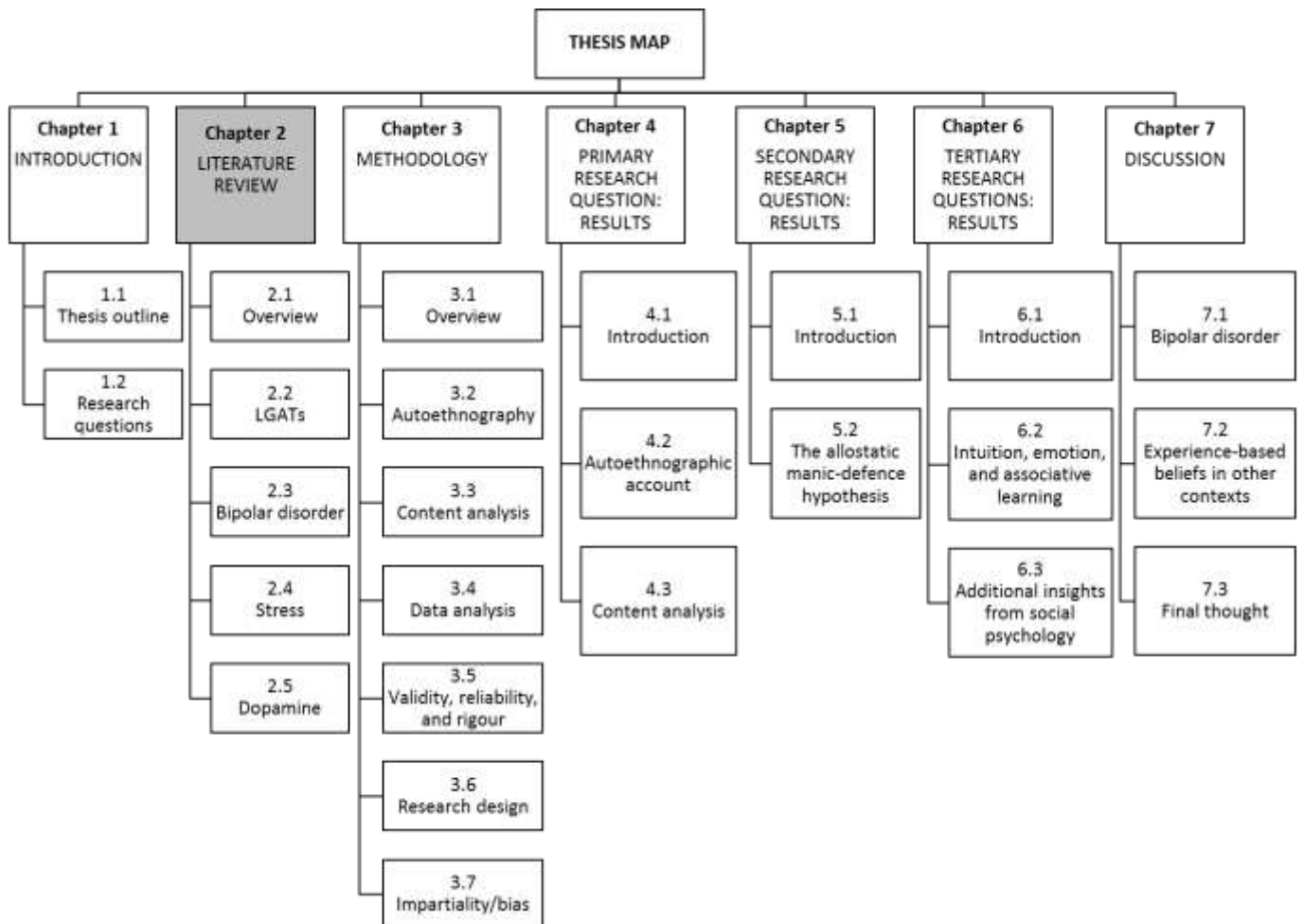


Figure 3: THESIS MAP_LITERATURE REVIEW

As indicated in Figure 3, the following chapter is the literature review, which is made up of an overview, followed by sections on LGATs, bipolar disorder, stress, and dopamine.

2.1 Overview

This research aims to demonstrate that established environmental triggers for bipolar disorder elicit hypomanic/manic symptoms in the majority of healthy individuals. Given the recognised prevalence of bipolar disorder is approximately 2.4% (The National Institute of Mental Health, 2011), this is a bold assertion and, while it is not being argued that LGAT participants generally develop lifelong psychological disorders, it is proposed that most participants enter into a transient hypomania-like state. In order for these assertions to be credible, it is important that related subjects are highlighted and explained - the literature review provides a grounding in topics which contextualise the major observations and arguments of this thesis.

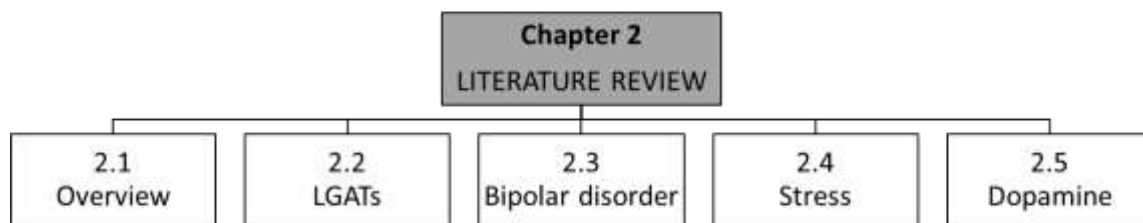


Figure 4: Outline of literature review

As indicated in Figure 4, the first major topic covered in the literature review is LGATs. Evidence will be provided in chapter 4 (Primary Research Question: Results) that LGATs cause psychological distress, disrupt normal sleeping patterns, create a sense of goal-attainment, and result in hypomanic/manic symptoms, but before these organisations can be assessed, an understanding of what an LGAT is must be established. The literature review, therefore, considers early research on these trainings, the origin of the term “large group awareness training”, and other commonalities between these groups. It also outlines the history of these trainings, the influential figures in the industry, the general training environment, common philosophies espoused, the basic claims of the trainings, their popularity and prevalence, their litigious nature, the relationship between LGAT processes and psychotherapy, evidence of their efficacy, and evidence of harmful effects.

In order to argue that LGATs involve environmental triggers for bipolar disorder, and elicit hypomanic/manic symptoms, it is also necessary to establish what bipolar triggers are, and to engender a familiarity with bipolar symptoms that extends beyond the DSM-5⁸. While diagnostic criteria exist for hypomania/mania, these states are sometimes difficult, even for professionals, to identify (Miklowitz,

⁸ The DSM-5 is the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, a classification and diagnostic tool produced by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), published on the 18th of May, 2013.

2011). This is particularly true when “diagnosis” does not involve a dialogue between mental health professionals and clients, and so an intimacy with the experience of hypomania/mania is vital. A depiction of the symptoms will, therefore, start with the DSM-5, various textbooks, and specialist books, but will be expanded to include the reflections of artists, poets, composers, and novelists who are believed, or confirmed, to have had the illness. This will be further supplemented by a description of my first manic episode (2.3.6 Autoethnographic account of bipolar triggers and symptoms), to facilitate an understanding of the way that bipolar triggers may naturally occur, the numerous ways that hypomania/mania manifests itself, what hypomania/mania may look like to an observer, how it distorts perception and behaviour, and what it feels like to the person experiencing it.

Because of the central roles of stress, sleep disruption (a form of stress), and goal-attainment (“stress removal”), the nature and biology of stress will be considered in some detail. Core to this understanding is the concept of allostasis – the fluctuating state of equilibrium towards which the body continually strives, and the range of biological, psychological, and behavioural changes which facilitate this attempt at dynamic equilibrium (Sapolsky, 2004). The relationship between the mind and the body, explored and articulated through the field of neuroendocrinology, provides a link between psychological stress and various neurological changes, and a possible biological mechanism by which psychological allostasis may be maintained in the face of acute emotional stress.

Following closely from this topic, it will be argued that the neurotransmitter dopamine (DA) plays a key role in the allostatic response to acute psychological stress. Dopamine has long been associated with hypomania and mania (Asok, et al., 2017; Berk, et al., 2007; Cousins, Butts, & Young, 2009) and, because dopamine in the “pleasure pathway” is associated with motivation, confidence, and the anticipation of pleasure, it is the ideal remedy to feelings of uncertainty, inadequacy, pessimism, guilt, and fear. In short, it is a useful antidote to acute psychological stress. Dopamine will, therefore, be covered broadly, after which the association between dopamine and bipolar disorder will be reviewed and, finally, existing evidence on the relationship between the identified environmental triggers for hypomania/mania and transient dopamine elevation will be outlined.

As indicated in the title, this research pays homage to a concept, first described in 1911 by psychoanalyst, Karl Abraham, referred to as the *manic-defence hypothesis*. While lacking the neuropsychological insight which exists today, Abraham noted that mania appeared to be a defence against feelings of inadequacy, attributing the manic elevation of mood to grandiose thoughts conjured in defence of an individual’s struggling self-worth (Bentall, 2003). Acknowledging the insight of this hypothesis, the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* emphasises a biological, rather than psychoanalytical, mechanism by which the brain defends the self-esteem of a psychologically threatened person. While individual psychology undoubtedly plays a role in the experience of stress,

and while – as argued by Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck – there is a dynamic interaction between thoughts and mood (Corker, et al., 2013), it will be contended that structured psychological stress can cause a biological elevation in mood. Whilst the relationship between the two is iterative rather than linear, it will be contended that an elevation in mood results in grandiose thoughts and not, as Abraham suggested, the other way around.

In summary, the literature review will provide an overview of LGATs, elucidate the environmental triggers and symptoms of hypomania/mania, demonstrate that stress is the common factor in the triggers, establish that humans have evolved to maintain balance when physically or psychologically stressed, and present evidence that a transient elevation in mesolimbic dopamine might be one way that a person copes when psychologically stressed. With a grounding in these topics, the primary, secondary, and tertiary research questions can be addressed.

2.2 Large Group Awareness Trainings

Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT) is the generic description of a type of group training that was popularised in San Francisco in the early 1970s, and which have subsequently been conducted in at least 21 countries on 6 continents. They typically take place over four to five days and involve long hours, extreme philosophical perspectives, structured exercises, and emotionally charged/confrontational (stressful) interactions between the trainer and participants (Singer, 2003). A standard LGAT involves an introductory evening, three to five days of intensive training (original LGATs split this core element over two weekends, while contemporary courses tend to run over consecutive days), and a graduation-type evening, which serves as the introductory evening for family, friends, and colleagues of graduates. Sessions are conducted by a head trainer, supported by a number of assistants (often unpaid graduates of the training), and there may be a few dozen to a few hundred participants. The claimed result is a powerful, *and lasting*, change to participants' subjective experience of themselves and the world around them (a "breakthrough" or "transformation"):

"In general, LGATs espouse the idea that people are capable of changing their lives, not so much by modifying their external circumstances, but by changing the way they interpret them" (Klar, et al., 1990, p. 99).

Finkelstein, Wenegrat, and Yalom (1982, p. 518), Brewer (1975), and Rhinehart (2010, p. 27), similarly describe the stated purpose of the first major LGAT ("est") as:

"... to transform your ability to experience living, so that the situations you have been trying to change or have been putting up with clear up just in the process of life itself."

While it is estimated that hundreds of these trainings exist around the world (Langone, 1998), four will be focused on for the purposes of this thesis. The first three – the est training ("est" or Erhard Seminars Training), the Lifespring Basic Training ("Lifespring"), and the Forum – are no longer in existence, but were highly influential, while the Landmark Forum ("the Forum"⁹) exists today and is based to a large degree on est and the Forum. Because it is both current and the most prevalent, "Landmark" will receive much focus. In addition, the LGAT that I experienced¹⁰ will be commented on. As it is not a major LGAT, it does not offer the sample size afforded by est, Lifespring, the Forum, and Landmark. However, as it does not claim affiliation with these trainings, yet employs many processes that are identical to those used by the major LGATs, it reveals the scripted nature of these courses, and the way that former participants and trainers have spread these trainings around the globe.

⁹ "Pre-1991 "the Forum" refers to "the Forum", while from 1991 onwards it refers to "the Landmark Forum".

¹⁰ I will use the names "New Beginnings" and "Reflections" when referring to the training I took part in, and the advanced version of this training. These are not the real names of these trainings.

2.2.1 Paucity of published research on LGATs

A review of LGAT literature by Stanford University's Finkelstein, et al. (1982) notes that, despite significant public interest, extensive coverage by the media, and the generation of "much curiosity and private speculation within the psychotherapeutic professions" (p. 515), LGATs had not been given much attention in the professional literature by 1982; and that, in spite of the fact that nearly 450,000 people participated in some form of these trainings in the first decade they were in existence, LGATs had been largely ignored by social scientists:

"Little research has been reported and much of it is of poor quality" (p. 517).

Formal, methodologically robust studies on LGATs remain scarce in contemporary research which, given the ubiquity of these organisations, the extraordinarily positive effects claimed by these groups, and the accusations of manipulation and harm by critics, appears counterintuitive. LGATs make promises as grandiose as creating "breakthroughs" and "transformations"; they produce private research and testimonials claiming astonishing satisfaction levels - claiming that they repair relationships, elicit confidence, enhance energy and productivity, stimulate creativity, improve communication, and elevate responsibility. If found effective – and safe – under controlled conditions, not only would formal research have the potential to add powerful, new approaches to psychological therapies, but it would lend legitimacy (and add revenue) to this frequently ignored, and often denigrated, industry.

Finkelstein, et al. (1982) suggest that for a long time LGATs did not conduct formal research for a number of practical and philosophical reasons. From a practical perspective, the trainings include elements from a variety of disciplines which "fall outside the boundaries of academic disciplines which would normally perform this research (Bartley, 1978)" (p. 517). They argue that social scientists may distance themselves from LGATs, in fear of being seen to "endorse the commercial, nonprofessional use of potentially powerful tools for personal growth" (p. 517). Additionally, they argue that LGATs place significant emphasis on subjective experience and antipositivistic assumptions and, because of this, "objective research is not highly valued" (p. 517). Finally, it is argued that LGATs are likely to be more concerned with convincing potential customers than the academic community of their efficacy, as they "use an economic rather than scientific yardstick" (p. 517).

Because formal research is limited, and because LGATs often do not acknowledge being related to one another, defining a typical LGAT is challenging. Finkelstein, et al. (1982) identified the three most prominent LGATs at the time of their article as "est" (Erhard Seminars Training), Lifespring, and Actualizations. These organisations no longer exist, but information does exist on the structure, processes, and results of est and Lifespring, though publicly available information on Actualizations

remains scarce. The Landmark Forum, currently offered by Landmark Worldwide¹¹, is a close descendent of est and the Forum, and is of particular interest because its international presence provides a large, diverse sample from which to make generalisable observations. Although no peer-reviewed research describes the processes and environment of the Landmark Forum, a considerable number of journalists, bloggers, and others have detailed their experiences. While in the past the perspectives of individual reviewers may have been dismissed, the portrayal of a Landmark training – when aggregating the accounts of numerous independent sources – is more difficult to contest.

2.2.2 General description of LGATs

A depiction of the day to day processes and structure of an LGAT is provided by psychologist Dr Margaret Singer. Singer attended six prominent LGATs, in addition to conducting interviews with dozens of LGAT graduates and trainers. It should be noted that Singer had no personal experience of Landmark's programs when describing the processes and structure typical of LGATs¹²:

“I have studied the training manuals and videos used to train trainers and have interviewed a number of trainers” (Singer, 2003, pp. 191-192).

Singer (2003) explains that LGATs are usually between four and five days long and emphasises that they are marketed in a way that provides no indication that they are “highly confrontational” (p. 192) and psychologically stressful for many. She then goes on to provide a day-to-day summary, which is detailed below.

Day one is used to demonstrate the leader's absolute authority. The trainer takes control of the environment: he gives off the impression that he is powerful, in-charge, and that no one is to challenge him. He sets the precedent early on that anyone who questions him will be “humiliated and verbally mashed” (p. 193). Singer explains that LGAT trainers are well-prepared to deal with any challenges. The trainer tells participants that the program is effective and that only by being coachable, or obeying, will they get the results.

Day two focuses on the LGAT philosophy, which claims that you have caused everything that has ever happened to you, whether that be the parents you have “chosen”, the mental illness you may be suffering from or “having been molested by your stepfather as a child” (p. 194). “Your life is not working!” the trainer or leader yells, while he implies his is. If you just ‘get it,’ you’ll be able to ‘make your life work’” (p. 194).

¹¹ Landmark Education, which first offered the *Landmark* Forum, was formed in 1991. In 2013 the name was changed to Landmark Worldwide. Both organisations will simply be referred to as “Landmark” in this thesis.

¹² As Landmark's conditions and processes will be revealed throughout this thesis, readers should draw their own conclusions about the degree to which Singer (2003) inadvertently describes Landmark's processes.

Day three includes a number of exercises, most frequently “trance-inducing guided imagery” (p. 194). These exercises frequently involve regression - taking participants back to their childhoods to focus intently on painful experiences:

“Exercises about your mother and father, the promises you’ve broken, and the promises to you that others have broken – all the sad memories of your life up to now are brought forth. By the end of the third day, participants have been opened up psychologically” (p. 194).

On day four the mood begins to change from one of heavy oppression and anxiety to one of greater equality between the trainer and participants. “Much group sharing occurs, and the leader begins to change from the stern, domineering taskmaster into a seductive, charming, loving daddy or mommy who wants you to buy the next courses” (p. 195).

On day five the mood is very positive and it involves activities such as dancing, sharing, and hugging. A good deal of effort is spent convincing participants that they need to sign up for the more advanced course and that participants should recruit family and friends to attend the graduation, typically held a day or two after the course ends. “At the end of the day, a surprise is staged, with friends and family unexpectedly appearing to congratulate the graduate” (p. 195).

2.2.3 Description of the est training

Finkelstein, et al. (1982) outline an est training, “based on three sources endorsed in some way by the founder of est, Werner Erhard (Erhard & Gioscia 1978, Rhinehart 1976, Bry 1976)” (p. 518). Their description, while not intended to be a generic description of LGATs, bears a strong resemblance to the generic description provided by Singer (2003), while revealing additional aspects common to contemporary LGATs.

According to Finkelstein, et al. (1982) participants were introduced to est through a “guest seminar”, or graduation evening, where graduates provided personal testimonials and explained that est would “transform your ability to experience living so that the situations you have been trying to change or have been putting up with clear up just in the process of life itself”. The course was then briefly described and a guided imagery exercise was conducted to suggest what sorts of exercises the training would involve¹³. Before participating in the est training, those who chose to sign up at the guest seminar were encouraged to attend a pretraining briefing, where the est rules were emphasised:

“... trainees agree to forego alcohol, marijuana, and other nonprescription drugs for the period of training; to bring no timepiece into the training room; to use the bathroom, eat, and smoke only

¹³ Considering the content of the est training, a relaxing guided imagery exercise would have been a misleading representation of what the seminar would be like.

during breaks set aside for that purpose; to stay seated and silent unless called upon by the trainer; to wear nametags; to not sit in proximity to any familiar person” (p. 519).

Finkelstein, et al. (1982) explain that the first day of the training started at 08:30 A.M. on a Saturday morning, that each of the (up to 250) participants were given name tags bearing their first names, and that all trainees sat facing a dais, intended for the trainer. Before the training started, an est assistant trainer would read the (highly emphasised) rules once again, after which the trainer would enter the room. A description of the trainer – his appearance, his sense of superiority, and his harsh treatment of participants – is summarised by Finkelstein, et al. (1982) as follows:

“No account of est training could be complete without a description of the trainer’s extraordinary demeanor. Neatly dressed and clean shaven, the est trainer is distinguished from his assistants only by an air of absolute authority. He betrays no affect, even when he excoriates the trainees. During the course of the training, he will repeatedly refer to them as ‘assholes,’ and he will devalue their accomplishments with the repeated assertion that their lives ‘do not work’. He maintains complete control of the floor; trainees, who may only address the trainer, must raise their hands to stand and speak. Once recognized, they are expected to remain standing until their interaction with the trainer is terminated by his saying ‘thank you.’ The audience then applauds and the trainee resumes his or her seat. The trainer meets anger and criticism with studied indifference, reminding the trainees that they have chosen to be there and implying that their feelings are irrelevant in any event, since if they merely stay in the room for the duration of the training, they will ‘get it.’ At other times he tells trainees they will get nothing from the training, or that they should last it out and ‘take what you get’” (p. 519)¹⁴.

With reference to the long hours and lack of food, Finkelstein, et al. (1982) explain that the first day will last “... with only one meal break and two or three shorter toilet breaks – until the early hours of Sunday morning” (p. 519). Describing themes which are highly emphasised in LGATs, they explain that “choice, agreements, belief, and resistance to experience” (p. 519) are focused on until trainees make their way home (an explanation for the extreme focus on these themes will be provided in later sections). As part of the focus on agreements, participants are told that they lack integrity and are unable to keep to agreements:

“... the trainer predicts they will violate those agreements, and he asserts that, in fact, the trainees are incapable of abiding by any agreements they make, a major reason their lives and the world as a whole ‘don’t work’” (p. 520).

¹⁴ The uncertainty of the reward (“transformation”) is relevant to the production of mesolimbic dopamine.

In terms of “resistance to experience”, participants are told that their beliefs (thinking) prevent them from truly experiencing, and that they should abandon reason in favour of experience:

“The trainer argues that belief systems, understanding, and reasonableness isolate the trainees from the direct experience of reality which alone could make their lives work [...] Understanding is said to be the ‘booby prize’...” (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, p. 520).

Revealing how the tension of the environment is punctuated with stress-reducing exercises, Finkelstein, et al. (1982, p. 520) state:

“Two or three ‘processes,’ usually relaxation and guided imagery exercises, are conducted on the first day.”

The second day is described as being made up of participants describing (“sharing”) persistent problems they have been experiencing. Later in the day is the “Truth Process”, which requires that participants focus intently on a problem they have been experiencing:

“During the ‘Truth Process’ the trainees lie supine on the floor, which has been cleared for that purpose. With eyes closed, they meditate on the individual problem which they have defined as the object of the exercise. At the trainer’s command, the trainees imagine a situation in which that problem has occurred and systematically explore the detailed bodily sensations and images associated with the problem itself. As the trainer orders the trainees to examine images from the past and from childhood, powerful affects are released. The room is soon filled with the sound of sobbing, retching, and uncontrolled laughter, punctuated by the exclamations of those remonstrating with figures from their past or the quieter voices of those imagining earnest conversations” (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, p. 520).

Another exercise which takes place on the second day is the “Danger Process”, which requires groups of trainees to stand on the dais, facing the audience, while the trainer berates them. According to Finkelstein, et al. (1982) this seemingly innocuous exercise had a significant impact on trainees:

“The trainer exhorts those on the dais to ‘be’ themselves, and reprimands those who appear to be posturing or falsely smiling, or who fail to make eye contact with the seated trainees. It is not uncommon, apparently, for trainees to faint or cry when called to the dais in this fashion, and some later recount that they found the experience liberated them from social anxieties” (p. 520).

Day two ended “late Sunday night” (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, p. 520). Unlike contemporary LGATs, which tend to run over consecutive days, est was conducted over two consecutive weekends and on the Wednesday between the weekends, trainees were required to meet and report on any changes

they had experienced. Many would report on “dramatic improvements in their behavior and self-perception” and, less frequently – but notably – of “deterioration in their mood” (p. 521).

Referring again to the long hours, Finkelstein, et al. (1982, p. 521) explain that the third day of the training (Saturday of the second weekend) “begins early Saturday morning”. The day starts with the trainer demonstrating how most of the trainees lack integrity and have failed to honour their agreements (stress/guilt). The trainer then introduces the theme of reality, linking this theme to another core theme of the training: responsibility¹⁵. It is important to note the amount of time spent convincing participants that experience is the most valid way of knowing anything:

“In lectures and dialogues lasting nearly half the day, the trainer argues that trainees’ belief in the reality of the material, consensual world causes them to depreciate as unreal the world of subjective experience. Yet, he argues, subjective experience, the reality of which does not rest on consensual agreement but on the individual’s act of witness, is the most real thing known to the trainees. If, as the trainer argues, the subjective world of the individual is the real world in which he lives, then each trainee is the ‘source’ of his or her subjective experiences and must assume absolute responsibility for the experience of everything that occurs in his or her world” (p. 521).

This argument, which it will be asserted is central to the process of persuasion employed by LGATs, does not only take the form of lectures and discussions. Various exercises are also used to emphasise this idea, while simultaneously elevating self-consciousness and humiliation in participants:

“Closely following this epistemologic discussion are processes, or exercises, which subtly reinforce the trainer’s argument. In one exercise, for instance, trainees are asked to stand before other trainees and act out roles they would normally consider socially inappropriate, illustrating for them that their embarrassment results from their own construction of the experience rather than from an external source” (p. 521).

Day four (Sunday) includes a presentation which was referred to as “The Anatomy of the Mind” (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, p. 521). This presentation displays an understanding of associative learning which, since it will be argued LGATs cause participants to form unconscious associations between the training “experience” and the principles of the trainings, is worth noting. According to est:

“... enlightenment consists in recognition that one is a machine, and that emotional upsets of day-to-day life result from machinelike, illogical associative processes which link present experiences to past threats or losses. That one is a mechanical, illogical, ‘feeding tube’ is all there is to ‘get’ from

¹⁵ LGATs generally propose the idea that individuals have a choice in how they experience reality and are, thus, entirely responsible for anything that they experience (Singer, 2003).

est, although the trainees were that all along and so literally got 'nothing' from the training, as they were promised" (p. 522).

With reference to the "goal-attainment" aspect of est, Finkelstein, et al. (1982, p. 522) explain how this "profound" insight is delivered to trainees, and the impact of this goal-attainment on participants:

"This discourse, coming after the previous training, awaited with high expectations, dramatically executed, and lasting 6 hours, appears to create in many of the trainees a euphoric sense of well-being and community."

Inadvertently revealing the switch in atmosphere from hostile to affirming, the new behaviour of the trainer and the impact of the training on participants is described. Regardless of whether participants achieved "enlightenment" or not, the trainer frames their experience as having "gotten it":

"Therefore, when the trainer, who by now has adopted a less serious, even jocular manner, requests those who have 'gotten it' to stand, a large proportion of trainees rise to their feet, laughing and smiling. They are joined moments later by those who got it, but don't like it, by those who got it but already had it, by those who got it but found it depressing or confusing, and eventually by those who got the nothing which was all there was to get anyway, according to the trainer" (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, p. 522).

The trainer spends the rest of the final day revisiting ideas from earlier in the training, such as the nature of beliefs, the importance of experience (and the implicit limitations of rationality), and the responsibility each person has to "choose" how they interpret any experience. With even more direct reference to long hours and goal-attainment, Finkelstein, et al. (1982, p. 522) explain that:

"This extended dialogue, with exercises, culminates in an early morning graduation ceremony. The trainees, joined at that time by a hundred or so est graduates, observe the trainer formally acknowledge the end of the training by stepping from the dais, in this way explicitly becoming just another among the assembled graduates."

Finkelstein, et al. (1982) note that some graduates take part in numerous additional trainings and "special events" and "choose a proselytizing role among their friends and relations" (p. 522), while others become volunteers for the organisation. Reliance on volunteers is a common theme in LGATs:

"Both in training sessions and for organizational purposes the est enterprise is heavily dependent on volunteer labor. Volunteers are expected to be punctilious and businesslike, but they nonetheless have the opportunity, by virtue of their volunteer work, to develop social contacts with other est graduates and feel part of a larger community of like-minded persons. Volunteer work may be a major component of the est experience for many graduates" (p. 522).

2.2.4 Acknowledging the claim that est and Landmark are not LGATs

“Since their initiation, LGATs have been the subject of much controversy. While LGAT supporters argue that such interventions are vehicles for personal growth and societal change and are a cost-effective means of introducing beneficial therapeutic messages to larger audiences (Berger, 1977; Erhard & Gioscia, 1978; Shaw, 1977), others view them as a hazardous and irresponsible use of powerful therapeutic principles and psychotherapeutic procedures (see, e.g., Brewer, 1975; Rome, 1977). Opponents posit that LGAT participation may lead to psychological disturbances (Fenwick, 1976; Haaken & Adams, 1983), and some fear that these groups are a means of mass exploitation (Cinnamon & Farson, 1979; Conway & Siegelman, 1978)” (Fisher, et al., 1989, pp. 747-748).

Landmark has attempted to distance itself from an association with the controversial LGAT label, also claiming that est (its predecessor) was not an LGAT. Because Landmark is the largest LGAT organisation operating today (it claims to have trained over 2.4 million people in 22 countries since 1991) (Landmark, 2016c), and because of its association with est, the Forum, and – to a lesser extent – Lifespring, no meaningful discussion of LGATs as a category can take place until this issue has been resolved. In order to profitably discuss LGATs, and incorporate the information available on Landmark to produce generalisable findings, it is necessary to address Landmark’s claim that it and est are not LGATs. The starting point for this discussion is an online article for The Arizona Daily Star, published on 10 November 2009 (Stellar, 2009). Journalist Tim Stellar explains that an article, which linked the deaths of three people in sweat lodges run by James Arthur Ray to LGATs, resulted in a response from Landmark Education’s Director of Public Relations, Deborah Beronet. Stellar states that Beronet wrote to him to explain that Landmark, and est, are not LGATs. The following are excerpts from Landmark’s correspondence with Stellar:

“Regarding Landmark Education being referred to as a ‘large group awareness training’ or LGAT:

- a. Landmark Education is not a large group awareness training or LGAT. Landmark Education’s programs are acknowledged to be some of the most effective programs in the training and development industry. Our programs do not reflect or follow the parameters of this inherently negative psychological term Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT) that was coined during the 70’s era.
- b. Numerous top experts have stated that Landmark Education is not a LGAT, including Dr. Raymond Fowler, PhD¹⁶, retired CEO of the American Psychological Association, who

¹⁶ Dr Raymond Fowler is repeatedly used to defend and endorse Landmark (See Appendix 2 for his complete report). He is cited as saying that Landmark: (1) is not an LGAT; (2) does not resemble a cult; (3) uses no brainwashing techniques; (4) does not employ any techniques that are related to psychotherapy; and (5) does not use confrontational techniques in their programs. Some of these assertions will be addressed in this thesis.

observed the Landmark Forum and stated in an independent report that reflected his own opinion, 'Landmark's programs are totally distinct from LGATs in their methodology, structure, purpose, design and format.'...

... As I said during our conversation a bit ago, Landmark really has no place in a story about LGATs. To characterize Landmark Education as a LGAT would not only be inaccurate, it would damage the reputation of the company, its programs, and the approximately 1.2 million customers who have participated in Landmark Education's programs and derived value from them. I trust that once you've had the opportunity to examine the material and familiarize yourself with our company and our programs you'll agree.

Should you for some reason choose to mention Landmark in any way in this article, then it is crucial that you also mention the fact that top experts have stated that we are not a LGAT, as well as provide some of the facts that point to why Landmark is considered a leader in the personal training and development industry" (Stellar, 2009).

After outlining a number of positive reviews of Landmark, Beroset addresses the suggestion that est was an LGAT, and distances Landmark from est:

"I noticed your Profnet query mentioned 'est' as well as Landmark Education. Landmark Education is a different company (we were established in 1991), and the Landmark Forum is not the est program (the two programs differ in their focus, material, methodology, and delivery). The person who created est sold the founders of Landmark Education his intellectual property. Est doesn't belong in the category of LGAT either..." (Stellar, 2009).

Beroset then makes a few specific statements about est, how it was unrelated to LGATs in the 1970s, and addresses some "misconceptions" about the nature of the training:

"... The est program was like no other program in the 70's. It was cutting edge, extremely popular, and made an enormous difference in people's lives. It was experiential in nature, the hours were long, and the tone of the program was intense. While the training became controversial, much of what has been said about the program is actually not true, like stories of people not being allowed to go to the bathroom. Given this training hasn't been offered since 1984 and even when it was offered it was not an LGAT, I do not see this as appropriate to include in an article about LGATs either" (Stellar, 2009).

As a direct response to the "bathroom comment" made by Beroset, one might consider *The Book of est* (Rhinehart, 2010). The foreword of this book was written by the founder of est, Werner Erhard, who said, "I enjoyed reading Luke's book. It allowed me to get a sense of what someone taking the est

training might experience. I support Luke Rhinehart totally” (p. xiv). On page six Rhinehart provides insight into the all-important est rules, forcefully stated at the start of the training:

“THERE WILL BE NO BATHROOM BREAKS FOR ANYONE until the trainer says so, except for those with medical reasons, which we will go into soon” (p. 6).

In a Time Magazine article, which is referenced on the Landmark (2017) website, reporter Charlotte Faltermayer (2001) says of est:

“Trainers applauded bladder control and cursed those who didn’t get it.”

ABC News journalist Oliver Libaw is also misinformed, according to Beronet:

“Directed by Erhard, EST drew thousands with its promise of ‘transformation’ through gruelling 60-hour-long seminars known for their extreme methods. EST moderators often screamed at participants and forbade sleep, food, or bathroom breaks during the course” (Libaw, 2002).

A more recent article in Mother Jones Magazine indicates that limited bathroom breaks also occur during the Landmark Forum:

“... there hasn't been a bathroom break in three hours” (McLure, 2009).

According to attorneys Peter Skolnik and Michael Norwick of legal firm *Lowenstein Sandler*, numerous Landmark participants have made similar claims:

“Many persons have also complained that Landmark uses inappropriately aggressive recruiting techniques, and intimidates participants who wish to leave the program – or even use the bathroom, eat or take medication during the Landmark Forum” (Skolnik & Norwick, 2006).

Returning to Landmark’s distancing of itself from est, an Australian Broadcasting Corporation program, entitled *Landmark’s controversial training programs* (ABC, 2011), interviewed Deborah Beronet Miller, who again emphasised the fact that the est training was discontinued in 1984, and that Landmark Education – while using some of the est “technology” – was only established in 1991:

“... at some point the est training was discontinued. And then some years later in 1991, some of the people who had been involved with that earlier company decided they would found a new company called Landmark Education.”

According to journalist Rachel Jones (2003), Landmark General Counsel, Arthur “Art” Schreiber, made a similar misleading statement in 2003:

“The est Training was an educational programme that ceased being offered to the public in December 1984, more than six years prior to, and unrelated to, the establishment of Landmark.”

In her closing remarks Bersoset states, “We feel strongly that consumers need to have the facts about whatever program or company they are doing business with so that they may make informed, wise choices” (Stellar, 2009). Keeping Landmark’s commitment to transparency in mind, it should be noted that est was founded by Werner Erhard in 1971, and that when the est training ended in 1984 it was immediately replaced in the “mid 1980s” (Fisher, et al., 1989, p. 748) with a program called the Forum, owned by Werner Erhard and Associates (WE&A), and run by Werner Erhard. WE&A operated until early 1991, when its employees, many of whom had been est trainers, bought the “technology” to the Forum from WE&A and formed Landmark Education (Pressman, 1993). Not only did Erhard supply the “technology” to Landmark Education (Landmark, 2016c) but his brother, Harry Rosenberg¹⁷ (who had worked for est and WE&A) has been the CEO of Landmark since its formation (Landmark Worldwide, 2016). As an additional indication of their association, the primary course offered by Landmark is called “the Landmark Forum”, or simply “the Forum”, so the relatively distant relationship between est and Landmark, as portrayed by Beroset and Schreiber, is misleading.

2.2.5 Argument that est and Landmark are LGATs

“Even though it no longer officially exists, in the minds of many est is identified with the entire LGAT movement” (Langone, 1998).

The precise origin of the term “Large Group Awareness Training” is not stated in academic literature, but it has been used not only by academics, participants, and journalists, but also by the founders and employees of the trainings themselves. Because LGATs are controversial, it is understandable that organisations would want to distance themselves from the label, but the evidence demonstrates that early researchers identified est as an LGAT, apparently without objection, that subsequent research which labelled the Forum an LGAT was endorsed by Erhard, that research which labelled est and the Forum LGATs was endorsed by a senior Landmark trainer, and that Landmark, while having made superficial changes to its processes, employs essentially the same “technology” as est and the Forum.

In terms of early academic research, a 1982 article entitled *Large Group Awareness Training* was published in the peer-reviewed *Annual Review of Psychology* by Peter Finkelstein, Brant Wenegrat, and Irvin Yalom from Stanford University’s department of psychiatry. While reviewing the limited literature on LGATs as a whole, the article focused almost exclusively on est, and specifically named est among only three major LGATs:

“‘Lifespring,’ ‘Actualizations,’ and ‘est’ (Erhard Seminars Training) are the best known of these enterprises” (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, p. 515).

¹⁷ Werner Erhard was born John Paul “Jack” Rosenberg (Pressman, 1993).

In 1983 psychologist Janice Haaken and sociologist Richard Adams published an article in the peer reviewed journal *Psychiatry*, based upon their own participation in a Lifespring Basic Training. They do not explicitly state that est was an LGAT, but claim that est was the first of the type of training to which Lifespring belongs:

“These widely marketed programs, designed and organized to effect significant and positive changes in the lives of participants were first successfully initiated by Werner Erhard with est, and are now dominated by est and Lifespring” (Haaken & Adams, 1983, p. 270).

One of Lifespring’s founders, and long-term president, John Hanley, however, openly acknowledges that Lifespring was an LGAT in an interview made available on his corporate website:

“Now, this whole idea of what we now call Large Group Awareness Trainings simply didn’t exist before Lifespring and est started. [...] Well, we took it upon ourselves to hire experts to study this phenomenon which we called experiential learning, and one of the researchers who was sort of the lead on about 15 studies that we did over the course of seven or eight years, is Dr. Mort Lieberman, who is at the University of San Francisco. Prior to that, he was at the University of Chicago. He coined the phrase ‘Large Group Awareness Trainings’” (John Hanley, 2016a).

With reference to the move from sensitivity training in the 1940s, to encounter groups in the 1960s, and the domination of LGATs starting in the 1970s, Lieberman (1987), who seems to have coined the term, says:

“Beginning in the late 1970s the primary setting changed to large group awareness training. Organizations like *est* and Lifespring are two well-known examples of the for-profit expression of this motif in our society [...] Lifespring and est share many similarities, although their philosophy and proscriptive cognitive structures are distinct. Both use structured settings with sharp and specific ground rules of appropriate behaviour and demeanor, a philosophy that is distinct and articulate in order to provide a new cognitive framework, and a series of emotionally toned experiences that involve role playing, guided group interaction, and dyadic and small group exercises” (p. 460).

Hanley continues to explain that awareness trainings were being conducted by humanistic psychologists at the time, but that these were one-on-one, or involved five to ten people at the most (John Hanley, 2016a). He indicates that the goal was not to treat people who were dysfunctional, but to help people who were functional to “get up to the top of the Maslowian pyramid, if you will, the domain of self-actualisation”. Because they believed that this could be offered to hundreds of people, as opposed to five or ten at a time, the programs were referred to as large group awareness trainings.

At this point, it is clear that early academics, and Lifespring founder, John Hanley, considered est and Lifespring to be LGATs. In 1989 an article entitled *Psychological Effects of Participation in a Large Group Awareness Training* (Fisher, et al., 1989) was published, reviewing the impact of participation in the Forum. This article describes est and Lifespring as prototypical examples of LGATs, before presenting research on the psychological effects of participation in the Forum:

“The focus of this study was to evaluate the outcome of participating in the Forum, an intervention considered to be an LGAT. As the successor to the *est* training, the Forum has attracted a significant number of participants since it was introduced in the mid 1980s and has been viewed by some as a prototype of LGATs of the mid-and late 1980s” (p. 748).

Crucially, the article thanks WE&A, who sanctioned this research:

“The authors would like to thank Werner Erhard and Associates, who permitted the researchers to access the Forum subject population and under whose auspices the funds for conducting this study were provided. This program of research was conducted under a formal agreement between Werner Erhard and Associates and the researchers, dated May 6, 1985, guaranteeing the researchers complete independence in every phase of the project” (p. 747).

An article by the same group of researchers the following year (Klar, et al., 1990), which identifies “*est*, Lifespring, and the Forum” (p. 99) as LGATs, was also endorsed by Erhard. It, therefore, seems beyond dispute that est and the Forum were considered LGATs. While Beroset downplays the relationship between est and Landmark, Landmark acknowledges the fact that its “technology” is based on Werner Erhard’s methods. According to Dr Margaret Singer, a 1993 internal memorandum from Landmark’s Chief Operating Officer, Harry Rosenberg, confirms that The Landmark Forum is based on Werner Erhard’s original “technology” (i.e., the est training):

“The nature and material of Landmark Education’s initiatives, projects, and programs is based on a technology originally developed by Werner Erhard with whom Landmark has a licensing arrangement for the rights to this technology. It is on this technology that Landmark’s work stands today and from which it continues to evolve” (DECLARATION OF MARGARET THALER SINGER IN SUPPORT OF DEFENDENT’S SPECIAL MOTION TO STRIKE COMPLAINT, 1996).

As further evidence of Landmark’s close association with LGATs, one might consider the article, *The Promise of Philosophy and the Landmark Forum* (McCarl, Zaffron, McCarl, & Kennedy, 2001), co-authored by Steve Zaffron, a current member of Landmark’s faculty (Landmark, 2016d). According to Pressman (1993) – in addition to working for Landmark – Zaffron was a trainer at est, joining Erhard’s staff in 1979:

“Another one of Erhard’s new executives was an est trainer named Steven Zaffron...” (p. 217).

Furthermore, Zaffron was head of Erhard’s trainers in 1987, when the company was operating under the name *Werner Erhard and Associates*. Referring to an occurrence in 1988, Pressman (1993) states:

“A year earlier, during a staff conference call, Steve Zaffron, as head of the Forum leaders, had issued a stern warning about a ‘massive rash of serious incidents’ that, in his view, reflected directly on the integrity of the leaders and seminar directors” (pp. 232-233).

In the McCarl, et al. (2001) article, the *Review of literature on the Landmark Forum* section makes specific use (without protest) of a 1994 PhD dissertation written by Charles W. Dennison entitled *The Children of Est: A Study of the Experience and Perceived Effects of a Large Group Awareness Training (The Forum)*. In this dissertation, Dennison (1994) explicitly describes est and the Forum as large group awareness trainings. Zaffron does not question this categorisation at any point. McCarl, et al. (2001) also reference research published in the 1970s and 1980s, “summarized in Finkelstein, Wenegrat, and Yalom”. This research was entitled *Large Group Awareness Trainings*, and focused primarily on est. The use of literature on est and the Forum for a literature review on the Landmark Forum, by a current Landmark (and former est and the Forum) trainer reveals that Landmark understands the close relationship it has with these organisations. In summary:

1. Early researchers considered est and Lifespring to be LGATS.
2. Professor Morton Lieberman, who likely coined the term “large group awareness training”, considered est and Lifespring to be LGATS.
3. Lifespring’s founder, John Hanley, believed that est and Lifespring were LGATS.
4. The creator of the est training and the Forum, Werner Erhard, endorsed research which explicitly describes est, Lifespring, and the Forum as LGATS.
5. Landmark’s “technology” – according to its own documents – is based on est.
6. A former est and the Forum trainer, and current Landmark faculty member, co-authored an academic paper which accepted that both est and the Forum were LGATS.
7. Landmark, which purchased its “technology” from WE&A, and which offers a course called “The Forum” denies that either est or Landmark are LGATS.

While a growing awareness of LGATs through the internet may have a negative impact on Landmark’s reputation, it seems that, in explicitly denying an association with this form of training, Landmark distorts information relevant to participants about a “program or company they are doing business with” and, in doing so, curtails the ability of participants to “make informed, wise choices”.

2.2.6 The common ancestor to LGATs: Mind Dynamics

“Werner has explained that after a decade of immersing himself in many of the leading consciousness-expanding disciplines available - scientology, Mind Dynamics, Subud, gestalt therapy, Zen, Hinduism...” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 201).

In addition to the evidence provided in the previous section, LGATs are connected by a common ancestor. While most early LGATs were influenced by the human potential movement (Finkelstein, et al., 1982), they were also all founded by former employees of a company called Mind Dynamics (Pressman, 1993). Created by Alexander Everett in the late 1960s, this organisation claimed that students who went through its trainings could “achieve almost any goal they set, from improving their IQs and ending insomnia to curing cancer while learning to avoid life-threatening illnesses” (p. 34). It is worth noting that, according to O’Brien (2012), Landmark’s claims are similar to the grandiose promises of Mind Dynamics:

“... through the teachings of Landmark, you can have anything you want for yourself or your life.”

The connections between Mind Dynamics, est, Lifespring, Actualizations, the Forum, Landmark, and other LGATs, solidify the assertion that it is reasonable to associate est, Lifespring, the Forum, and Landmark with each other, and with many other trainings referred to as LGATs. According to Pressman (1993) Erhard became a student of Charlene Afremow at Mind Dynamics in 1970:

“Erhard started out as one of Charlene Afremow’s students, enrolling in the second Mind Dynamics course she taught in San Rafael’s Holiday Inn in December 1970” (p. 36).

It is further specified that Erhard bought his own Mind Dynamics franchise a few months later:

“In January 1971, with Afremow’s sponsorship, Erhard paid his \$1,000 training fee to Everett and was given the Mind Dynamics San Francisco franchise” (Pressman, 1993, p. 37).

Afremow is relevant because, along with four other Mind Dynamics instructors, she went on to co-found Lifespring (John Hanley, 2016a; Pressman, 1993), the other organisation representative of early LGATs. Significantly, Afremow left Lifespring and, along with Laurel Scheaf, who had also been employed by Mind Dynamics, became an est instructor in December 1978 (Pressman, 1993). More recently, Afremow has worked as a trainer at Landmark (Lyon, 2010; Gorlicky, 2016), while Scheaf, who has worked as a Forum leader since Landmark’s inception, remains listed as a Landmark Forum trainer on their website (Landmark, 2016d).

Erhard was portrayed by Pressman (1993) as a skilled, but unethical, salesman, who spent the first decade of his career selling used cars and encyclopaedias, and later driving teams of people to make challenging sales targets. Pressman argues that the hard-selling recruitment which has come to be

associated with LGATs, and which differentiated it from earlier Mind Dynamics trainings, was influenced to a significant degree by Erhard and his background in sales. With Erhard and the consciousness-altering techniques of Mind Dynamics were merged with a powerful drive to get graduates to enrol in further courses and to enrol new participants. The following description of Erhard-influenced Mind Dynamics guest evenings, where guests listened to testimonials before being strongly urged to sign up, is precisely what occurs in LGATs like Landmark today:

“People who had already taken the Mind Dynamics course were invited to bring guests, who listened while ‘graduates’ praised the course. Afterward, the guests were treated to a far more aggressive sales pitch for the next monthly Mind Dynamics session Erhard was leading. At the end of the guest seminar, while Erhard chatted in the living room with some of his graduates, Gonneke Spits or Laurel Scheaf took up their posts in the bedroom, pressuring new students into signing up for the \$200 course” (Pressman, 1993, p. 37).

Erhard also inserted an arguably manipulative sales element to his Mind Dynamics trainings:

“To boost the number of students who signed up, Erhard added his own new marketing twist to the program. Only through their willingness to introduce others to the program, Erhard told his ‘graduates’, could they really expect to gain its full results” (Pressman, 1993, pp. 37-38).

This specific connection between enrolling family and friends and gaining benefit from the training (i.e. the suggestion that if you do not recruit other people you are not committed to your own “breakthroughs” and “transformation” and will not achieve maximum results) is used by LGATs today. After significant emphasis is placed on commitments, participants are asked to commit to bring guests to the graduation and to sign up for the next (often more expensive) seminar. If they do not do this, they are singled out and asked to explain why they are not committed to their own futures. In 1998 Rosemary Mahoney (USA) made this claim about Landmark; as did Marie Lemonnier (France) in 2005:

“If we’re brave, we’ll call three people and invite them to the Tuesday meeting of the Forum. Unbelievably, unabashedly, Handel says, ‘Being unreasonable means doing it when you don’t even understand it!’ She is careful to say that we will still get full value from the Forum if we don’t do the super bonus, but if we do, our returns will be greater” (Mahoney, 1998).

“Alain Roth emphasizes the importance of signing up as the only [way] to succeed at transformation. ‘To inspire others and get them to share your experience will let you affirm the person you’ve decided to become.’ And then ‘if you sincerely love your close relatives, could you let them miss out on this?’” (Lemonnier, 2005).

Hagar Cohen (Australia) makes the same observation in 2009:

“Problems can arise for some participants when the philosophy morphs into a recruitment drive. Our research found that people who do the courses, which can cost anything between \$80 to more than \$1,000, are encouraged to enrol as many people as possible. They’re told this is an important part of their breakthrough or personal transformation to be whole and complete” (Cohen, 2009).

A number of other Landmark Forum graduates make the same specific, and unsolicited, claim:

“On the final day, when registrants are encouraged to bring friends and family to the large hotel ballroom and enroll them in the possibility of changing their lives through Landmark – we had even been guaranteed a ‘breakthrough’ if we brought three or more people...” (Sagan, n.d.).

“This brings me to my chief complaint with the Forum, and that has to do with the way it is marketed, or rather, the way it markets itself. The marketing involves ‘collapsing’ whatever sense of transformation participants have experienced with selling the Forum to other potential participants” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

“The course leader was busy psyching up the crowd for the ‘big reveal’ – the key teaching of the Forum that would come later that day, embracing which, we’d been promised, would lead to a life of ‘infinite possibilities’. So long as we ‘enrolled’ everyone else we knew into the Landmark conversation too...” (Warrington, 2015).

In spite of evidence that trainers make a clear association between recruiting others and gaining “breakthroughs”, Landmark’s Global Director of Training Policy, Dr Nancy Zapolski (NZ in the following quote), denies that this connection is made. She intimates that “sharing” is unsolicited, which suggests that either all of these trainers, from different parts of the world, were deliberately not following protocol, or that they unknowingly communicated this idea to participants. This would be concerning, as their trainers should – based upon Landmark’s claimed results – be experts in communication:

NZ: “I would certainly not at all equate breakthrough with registering people into the Landmark forum. Unless... now I’m just thinking about something, I mean many people participate in the forum, they really want to share it with somebody in their life” (Cohen, 2009).

The heavy focus on recruitment which, it is argued by Pressman (1993), began with Erhard at Mind Dynamics is a core feature of LGATs today. Zapolski’s claim – that Landmark Forum leaders do not suggest a direct relationship between recruiting others and having breakthroughs – therefore misrepresents information relevant to those trying to make an informed decision about participation. If participants understood, prior to participation, that pressure to recruit family and friends is a core part of the LGAT process, then it is likely that many would not take part.

Returning to the connection between Mind Dynamics and est, another person who arguably contributed to the confrontational nature of, and who went on to become the first CEO of, est was Stewart Emery (Pressman, 1993; stewartemery.com, 2013). Referring to Erhard, who was still working at Mind Dynamics in October 1971, Pressman (1993, p. 40) states:

“At the same time he tried to recruit to his own staff a witty and spritely irreverent Australian named Stewart Emery, who also worked for Mind Dynamics.”

Emery remained at est until 1975, when he left to form his own organisation – Actualizations – (stewartemery.com, 2013) which, along with est and Lifespring, was identified earlier by Finkelstein, et al. (1982) as an influential LGAT of the 1970s. With relevance to the connection between est and Landmark, Emery’s website describes him as:

“The first CEO of est (now Landmark Education)¹⁸ and cofounder of Actualizations in 1975...”

While Emery initially turned down Erhard’s offer, he was instrumental in his capacity at Mind Dynamics in leading Erhard’s staff through a version of another course called Leadership Dynamics. This course was more confrontational than Mind Dynamics and likely contributed to est’s abrasive style:

“By the time Erhard gathered his staff together for the session with Emery, the Leadership Dynamics course had become the target of lawsuits brought up by participants who had signed up only to find themselves the unwitting victims of cruel physical and emotional abuse during the sessions. In some cases instructors ordered participants into closed coffins. Others were hung onto large wooden crosses for hours at a time. Still others were forced to take off all their clothes while fellow participants taunted them with cruel insults. In one session, a man was forced to perform fellatio on an artificial penis while women attending a separate Leadership Dynamics class were brought in to watch” (Pressman, 1993, p. 41).

Lifespring founder, John Hanley, was also involved in Leadership Dynamics before working at Mind Dynamics (Fisher M. , 1987). A 1987 article in the Washington Post argues that, as a result of the influence of Leadership Dynamics, Mind Dynamics began offering a far more confrontational, and stressful, training. Describing Hanley’s exposure to Leadership Dynamics, journalist Marc Fisher states:

“While working for Holiday Magic, Hanley attended Patrick’s Leadership Dynamics Institute, a brutal training program in which salesmen were whipped, beaten, tied to crosses and forced to eat garbage and feces. Hanley made a name for himself at the institute when he reacted to being locked in a coffin for 14 hours by falling asleep” (Fisher M. , 1987).

¹⁸ Implying strongly that Emery considers est and Landmark synonymous.

“Damaske¹⁹ and others say Hanley was one of the trainers who pushed to give Mind Dynamics more flash, more physical contact, more emotional confrontation. The idea was to bare your soul, tear down your personality and build a new person” (Fisher M. , 1987).

While Emery was not able to bring in wooden crosses and coffins for the session he conducted with Erhard’s team, they were put through a highly confrontational experience and, as occurred in est, Lifespring, the Forum and, more recently, Landmark and other contemporary LGATs, when the stress was removed and participants “graduated” (goal-attainment), the mood of the group was elevated:

“The dark moment of violence ended almost as abruptly as it had begun, and by the end of the marathon session, on Sunday morning, everyone in the room seemed to be in giddy and jovial spirits” (Pressman, 1993, p. 42).

Shortly after experiencing the Leadership Dynamics-type training, Erhard “announced that he was quitting Mind Dynamics to begin his own self-awareness program. He had decided to call it Erhard Seminars Training, although he preferred that it be known only as est” (Pressman, 1993, p. 43). The powerful immediate results, coupled with Erhard’s hard selling approach, made est enormously successful in an era where alternative approaches to attaining enlightenment were gaining popularity. According to Pressman (1993), however, the success of est brought Erhard into the public eye, necessitating the acknowledgment of his first wife (from whom he was not divorced), and his first four children, who had been left in Philadelphia thirteen years earlier, and who were uncertain at the time whether their father was even alive²⁰. Two of his siblings soon became involved in est:

“Not long after Erhard’s reconnection with his Philadelphia relatives, his twenty-three-year-old brother, Harry Rosenberg, moved to San Francisco to begin working for est. Joan Rosenberg, Erhard’s sister, eventually followed him into a job at est” (Pressman, 1993, p. 55).

As previously mentioned, Harry Rosenberg has been the CEO of Landmark since its inception in 1991, while Joan Rosenberg has served on the Landmark Board of Directors (Dart, 2007). Est was one of a number of LGATs which were established by former Mind Dynamics trainers. The view expressed by earlier academics – that est and Lifespring were similar in nature – is supported by Pressman (1993), who explains that both incorporated a great deal of the “technology” from Everett’s Mind Dynamics training:

“Like est, Lifespring was aggressively marketed and copied many of the mental exercises at the core of Mind Dynamics” (p. 80).

¹⁹ A former Mind Dynamics instructor (Fisher M. , 1987).

²⁰ These facts were not disputed by Erhard (Pressman, 1993). Erhard framed this reconciliation (in 1973) as evidence that est allowed people to take responsibility and restore broken relationships.

In a recent interview, published on Hanley's corporate website, he explains that he was one of five Lifespring founders, the other four being Charlene Afremow, Robert White, Larry Jensen, and Randal Revell, who were, according to Hanley, "all with Mind Dynamics". These four individuals, who were bought out of Lifespring by 1978, all remained in the "personal development" industry:

- Charlene Afremow worked for est, and then later for Landmark.
- Robert White founded a company which ran *Life Dynamics* courses in Japan and other countries (mindbodynetwork.com, n.d.).
- Larry Jensen formed a company called *ASSET* and is described on his website as a "consultant to Werner Erhard and est", and a "pioneering leader in the human potential movement" (larryjensen.com, n.d.).
- Randal Revell formed a company called *Context International* (contextinternational.com, n.d.) (John Hanley, 2016a).

Because examples from *PSI Seminars*, described by Singer (2003) as an LGAT, will be used, it is worth noting that one of its primary founders, Thomas Willhite, was also a Mind Dynamics trainer (York, 2009). Considering the relationship between Mind Dynamics and other LGATs, and Landmark's close relationship with est, it is reasonable to associate Landmark with this form of training.

2.2.7 Possible public relations motives for the creation of Landmark

"How do I know I'm not the reincarnation of Jesus Christ?" Erhard once wondered of a friend" (Pressman, 1993, p. 147).

While the reasons for Landmark removing, or minimising, conspicuously abusive elements used in the est training can only be speculated on, many note that the Landmark Forum is not as overtly stressful. Charlotte Faltermayer of Time Magazine says of Landmark trainers:

"... they are less in your face, nearly devoid of the shouting and door monitoring imposed by est's stern instructors. Says a former estie who attended a 1997 Forum: 'est was much more militant. You had to have a doctor's note just to go to the bathroom. People humiliated themselves for it. est tried to break you. Landmark doesn't do that'" (Faltermayer, 2001).

This perception is repeated by journalists in 2003 and 2012:

"Landmark seminars are indistinguishable in basic techniques, differing from est mainly in their being less harsh and aggressive" (Jones, 2003).

"The Landmark Forum is the streamlined, slightly gentler offspring of that pinnacle of the '70s encounter movement, est" (O'Brien, 2012).

A number of journalists, and others, claim that leaving the room and accessing food remains challenging in the Landmark Forum; however, others argue that this is not the case:

“The truth was that we had breaks every two hours, at which point I stuffed myself with delicacies at various local London diners. Having restless leg syndrome, I also excused myself to the bathroom every half-hour” (Badt, 2011).

While it is conceded that screaming and other forms of overt abuse have been reduced since est days, it will be argued that subtler, but similarly potent, forms of stress-induction remain a core feature of Landmark’s trainings. It is not in the interests of modern LGATs to utilise processes that appear – to a layperson, academics, or the media – to be abusive; however, processes which are framed as: (1) assisting participants to reconnect with family; (2) showing participants the subjectivity of experience; or (3) empowering participants to “take responsibility” may be highly stressful. It will be argued that contemporary LGATs can generate as much, if not greater, humiliation, shame, trepidation, and general stress and, while more easily defended, their processes may be similarly traumatic for participants. Shouting may elicit a defence in another person, but the content of what is being said (and believed) determines the degree to which a person’s self-worth is undermined, and their sense of guilt and humiliation is accentuated. While Landmark does not employ overtly stressful tactics to the same extent as est, it should not be assumed that they lack the tools to cause significant distress.

In addition to arguing that Landmark employs stress-inducing techniques, disrupts the sleeping patterns of participants, and utilises a graduation-type process to signify goal-attainment (like est), it will be contended that there are numerous other similarities between the organisations and the core trainings that they offer. While Landmark has downplayed the similarities between the organisations in the past, there are plausible public relations motives for this which cannot be ignored.

According to Pressman (1993), damaging allegations about Erhard were to be aired on 60 Minutes in March 1991, including interviews with, and statements by, four of Erhard’s children. The other allegations – which included the testimonies of former senior employees that Erhard called himself God, and expected all employees to serve him – could reasonably have been expected to cause harm to Erhard’s reputation, and to WE&A’s (the Forum’s) revenue. Because the question of whether LGATs are cults or “cult-like” is often asked – a question that Landmark has more recently used an expert to formally address (Fowler, 1999) – it would be damaging to an LGAT to have a leader who, senior employees claimed, insisted he was God. While the allegations in the 60 minutes program have been contested, it is evident that est and WE&A were – at a minimum – strongly centred around Erhard. While former senior employees may be considered unreliable sources by some, est proponent Luke Rhinehart reveals Erhard’s extraordinary authority status in his book, *The Best of est*.

Erhard is described by Rhinehart (2010, p. 202) as having had an “enlightenment experience” and, while Landmark notes that they do not have a central figure who is the source of all knowledge and served by members, Erhard appears to have been regarded by est employees as an omniscient being:

EST TRAINER: “You won’t get it because you’ve *tried* to get it, you won’t get it because you’re intelligent and bright and reasonable, you won’t get it because you’re a *good* person. You’ll get it for one simple reason: Werner has created the training so that you’ll get it” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 11).

In attempting to rationalise (as opposed to dispute) Erhard’s status, and the servitude of est employees, Rhinehart (2010) reveals how Erhard was presented to participants by trainers, and how he was viewed by est employees. Because framing (often negative) events in a positive light is a core theme in LGATs, it is unsurprising how Rhinehart frames Erhard’s authoritarianism, and how his position of absolute supremacy is portrayed as a service to others, rather than anything less noble:

“The *est* organisation is not democratic (most American business organisations are not) but rather is authoritarian in a way that baffles many and antagonizes others. Werner Erhard expects staff members to be dedicated to serving *est* – which, because he and *est* are one and the same, means serving him. Late in the fourth day of the training, the trainer explains that Werner is in essence a power source serving masses of people, and individual staff members *supply* Werner with additional power. The power flows up from graduates and staff, through Werner, out into the world. This is a perfectly reasonable way to explain the essentially Eastern phenomenon of a powerful being (usually a guru or spiritual teacher) attracting other powerful beings who nevertheless *choose* to channel their power *through* the leader” (p. 219).

While Landmark has, at times in the past, distanced itself from est and WE&A, it was not formed by disgruntled employees, but by ostensibly loyal employees who plausibly felt that Erhard’s departure from the centre of the organisation at a particularly precarious time would be judicious from a business perspective. If Landmark condemned est and the Forum’s processes, then the association with these trainings would be more tenuous; however, Landmark has sued those who they believe have defamed Erhard (Skolnik & Norwick, 2006), and Landmark representatives have explicitly endorsed Erhard (Grigoriadis, 2001) and the est training (Stellar, 2009). Considering Erhard’s official announcement of the sale of WE&A to its employees (February 1991) relative to the 60 Minutes broadcast (March 1991) (Pressman, 1993), it would be naïve not to consider the possibility that the rebranding of WE&A, from an organisation centred around a man accused of extreme authoritarianism, abuse, and of claiming to be God, to Landmark Education, was a public relations strategy, rather than an altruistic gesture to place the company under the ownership of its employees.

2.2.8 LGATs and psychotherapy

“Many perceive the processes utilized in large group awareness training as similar to those found in psychotherapy; questioning the use of such ‘powerful processes’ by ‘untrained’ people or in settings where even the most astute clinician would find it difficult to practice responsibly is appropriate” (Lieberman, 1987, p. 460).

While leading experts have argued that LGATs incorporate psychotherapeutic techniques (Finkelstein, et al., 1982; Lieberman, 1987), there are reasons why LGATs would not want to associate themselves with professional therapy. The first is that therapy is regulated – those who charge others for psychotherapy must (in the US at least) have obtained a PhD, having endured a rigorous academic and practical training and assessment process. LGATs, on the other hand are not regulated, other than by the individual LGATs themselves. Anyone can, therefore, set up an LGAT, declare himself an expert and employ powerful, and arguably dangerous, techniques on a roomful of inadequately screened, and amateurlly monitored, participants (some of whom may be children and teenagers).

The second major reason that LGATs would not want to acknowledge a connection with psychotherapy is that it would dilute the mystique of their “sacred science”. If the sources of their “technology” were acknowledged it would – like a deconstructed magic trick – be stripped of its sparkle. Because the product being sold by LGATs is marketed as being “beyond understanding”, and because its mystical nature may engender a sense of superiority in graduates (Taylor, 2004), it is not in the interests of LGATs to admit that those who invented these trainings simply brought together a number of pre-existing techniques, and that many of these “esoteric” techniques came from mainstream psychotherapy.

Acknowledging that Erhard, est, the Forum, and (by extension) Landmark, were influenced by Scientology would similarly dilute the mystique of their “sacred science” and, perhaps more relevantly in the last decade as Scientology has received a great deal of negative publicity, Scientology’s influence on LGAT “technology” has been played down and denied by Erhard and Landmark. Pressman (1993), however, devotes a chapter of his book (pp. 23-41) to Erhard’s involvement with Scientology, while Psychology Today journalist, Mark Brewer, similarly states:

“Scientologists get a sort of glint in their eyes when Werner is mentioned, and a public information officer maintains, ‘we feel he took a lot of data from us and called it his’” (Brewer, 1975).

While it might be argued that these two sources are biased, est proponent Rhinehart (2010) confirms that Erhard spent a decade “immersing himself in many of the leading consciousness-expanding disciplines available” (p. 201), explicitly indicating that Scientology was one of these disciplines.

Though earlier LGATs like Lifespring acknowledge the influence of humanistic psychology on their own processes (John Hanley, 2016a), Landmark denies any connection with therapy and psychology (ABC, 2011; Schreiber, 1999). Landmark does not stop there, however, and, in a statement, which reflects either a concerning lack of understanding, or a misleading interpretation of the word “psychological”, claims that its courses are not even psychological in nature. In a 2011 interview with ABC (Australia) Landmark Director of Public Relations, Deborah Beronet Miller, claims:

“What we do is personal and professional growth training and development. It’s not therapy, it’s not psychology, it’s not psychological in nature” (ABC, 2011).

Landmark General Counsel, Art Schreiber, similarly states that the Landmark Forum is not psychotherapy and that it is not based on psychotherapy (Schreiber, 1999):

“The Landmark Forum is not based in psychology or upon any psychotherapeutic model...”

While the Landmark disclaimer requires participants to declare that they are not participating in the Forum to deal with emotional problems, the content of what is shared and addressed during the seminars reveals that emotional problems are a primary focus of the training. Participants who sign this disclaimer are, therefore, being dishonest about their intentions, or they are unaware that their emotional problems (and those of others) will be dealt with during the course:

“I represent that I am not participating in the Program to handle any physical, mental or emotional problems and I fully understand that no portion of the Program is delivered or supervised by health professionals” (Landmark, 2016f).

The way that LGAT trainers encourage sharing of problems, and then work with participants until they achieve a breakthrough does, however, resemble what therapists do. A therapist typically provides a safe space for a client to share a problem, after which the two work together until the client achieves a breakthrough of some sort. Certain examples of Landmark leaders’ coaching bear an even greater resemblance to specific forms of therapy. Amanda Scioscia of the Phoenix New Times and Karin Badt of the Huffington Post reveal the Freudian-type thinking employed by Landmark’s trainers:

“Richard explains to Larry that the problems with his girlfriend are really all about his mother” (Scioscia, 2000).

“Sophie would begin to smile, circle closer to the participant, look them up and down and with a steady glance, keeping her two feet firm on the ground, a rather effective theatre technique, and then suggest: ‘tell me what happened when you were seven. What happened that is similar to the way you are treating your husband now?’” (Badt, 2011).

Finkelstein, et al. (1982) present compelling arguments that est incorporated elements of “Behavior Therapy” (p. 531), “Group Psychotherapy” (p. 533), and “Existential Therapy” (p. 534) into their trainings. These arguments could equally be applied to Landmark through its association with est. While processes from these therapies may be employed to a degree, it will be argued that Landmark utilises a well-known form of cognitive therapy as a core component of its “technology”. According to Corey (2013, p. 267), “Rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) was the first of the cognitive behavior therapies, and today it continues to be a major cognitive behavioral approach”. Much of Landmark’s coaching revolves around the idea that people conflate the facts (F) of a situation with the stories (S) they have told themselves about that situation, and that it is the stories, rather than the facts, which result in the emotional consequence (C). As a direct comparison with Landmark’s “facts vs. stories” philosophy, REBT has – since the 1950s – employed the “A-B-C Framework”. Describing this framework, Corey (2013, p. 269) says:

“A is the existence of a fact, or an activating event, or an inference about an event, of an individual. C is the emotional and behavioral consequence or reaction of the individual; the reaction can either be healthy or unhealthy. A (the activating event) does not cause C (the emotional consequence). Instead, B, which is the person’s belief about A, largely creates C, the emotional reaction.”

Landmark’s “F-S-C Framework” (where the stories about a fact result in the emotional consequence) is practically identical to REBT’s A-B-C Framework. The strong assertions from Landmark that its “technology” is not therapy, psychology, psychological in nature, or based on any psychotherapeutic model, therefore, seem inconsistent with the evidence.

2.2.9 Guided visualisation and conditioned hypervigilance

“First, I will instruct you to remove your glasses and contact lenses, place any article on your lap on to the floor beneath your chair, and sit comfortably with your arms and legs uncrossed. I will ask you to place your hands on your thighs and to close your eyes. Then I will instruct you to ‘enter your space’...” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 32).

An element of LGATs which has not yet been described is the use of guided visualisation exercises. During these exercises participants are asked to relax, close their eyes and focus on the instructions of the trainer. Typically, the trainer will attempt to calm the participants (although some guided visualisation exercises, such as the *fear exercise* used by Landmark, appear to be designed to generate stress) and this serves as a break from the tension of the training environment. As described by Rhinehart (2010), the content of these exercises is frequently relaxing and encouraging:

“For perhaps fifteen more minutes the trainer describes in full detail the coming process and answers questions from the trainees about the process. As he goes over the instructions and begins to answer questions the tension in the room begins to drain” (p. 33).

“But the process goes on and on, and for twenty-five minutes the trainer’s voice – still loud and intense – guides the trainees in locating spaces and relaxing muscles [...] When the entire body has been gone over and the muscles of the face totally relaxed and the trainees have taken three deep breaths and RELAAAAXED on the exhale, the trainer begins to read a long set piece of poetry, a long declaration of self-affirmation, a saying yes to life and the expanding powers of the mind” (pp. 33-34).

“The affirmation goes on and on for almost five minutes” (p. 34).

This process, which first occurred in est after eight consecutive hours with the trainer, represents “goal-attainment” (stress removal) on a shorter timescale than what occurs at the end of the training. It is contended that the atmosphere of extreme oppression, punctuated with periods of stress removal, is key to establishing a hypervigilant stress response when the training ends. During the training, a number of relaxation exercises provide temporary respite and may elicit mini-breakthroughs. After the process described above, est participants were allowed to take their first break. When they returned, they were asked to reveal the impact of the process (which is likely the impact of the stress leading up to the relaxation process, coupled with the process). The results, as described by Rhinehart (2010), were impressive:

“‘Well, what happened to me during the process,’ she says animatedly, ‘is that... well, I just relaxed... I mean totally let go, and it felt *great*. And then when you brought us out of it, the room seemed so *beautiful*. I mean the rug, the colors of the rug were just terrific. It was like a grass high if you know what I mean. I really enjoyed it’” (p. 34).

“‘It was interesting,’ he says. ‘I do a lot of meditating, and I must admit that what you did with all those ‘locate a spaces’ is put me into the same blissed-out state I usually don’t reach until after an hour of deep breath-counting. I was pretty surprised’” (p. 35).

“... I’d like to share that someplace near the end of the process, I think I had an ‘ah-ha’ experience” (p. 36).

It will be argued that a period of stress abruptly replaced with relaxation and affirmation results in a moment of allostatic hypervigilance and that this is the likely source of these breakthroughs. Further, by inserting guided visualisation exercises throughout the training, participants’ anticipatory stress responses are conditioned to remain on high alert: each time that participants experience stress, and

then relax, stress is applied soon afterwards. What participants are being taught is that it is not safe to switch off the stress response. When, on the final day, all of the stress is replaced with joy and affirmation, participants' stress responses are likely to remain engaged for a period of time after the source of stress has been removed. This state of allostatic hypervigilance will be shown to be the likely cause of the LGAT "transformation".

2.2.10 Positive effects of LGATs

"The Landmark Forum is designed to bring about positive, permanent shifts in the quality of your life – in just three days" (Landmark, 2016g).

While it is acknowledged that LGATs elicit a powerful short-term "experience" in most participants²¹, and while some participants report long-term benefits from participation, evidence for *permanent* positive effects in the majority of participants is underwhelming. In order to ascertain whether LGATs bring about lasting transformations in most participants, it is necessary to review controlled studies on their effectiveness and, additionally, to consider the validity of LGAT-provided evidence. The only journal-published study on the long-term positive impact of a major LGAT was conducted on the Forum (with the full support of Werner Erhard) in 1989 (Fisher, et al., 1989). It concluded that the Forum resulted in no long-term psychological benefits and, while similar research indicates that the Lifespring basic training produced subjective long-term benefits (Lieberman, 1992), the results of this single, non-peer-reviewed, study do not justify the strong claims made by all LGATs. The approval levels of Lifespring and Landmark trainings have also been assessed in a number of unpublished studies; however, these studies (which unanimously reveal extremely high levels of short-term satisfaction) do little to support claims of *lasting* effectiveness in the majority of participants.

In terms of peer-reviewed research, the Fisher, et al. (1989) study compared 135 participants to 73 controls. Detailed questionnaires were completed 4-6 weeks pre-training, 4-6 weeks post-training (this would likely not capture the post-course "experience" for most), as well as 18 months later. A variety of measures, based on the claimed impact of the training, were assessed (perceived control, life satisfaction, daily coping, social functioning, positive and negative affect, self-esteem, physical health, and symptomatology). In summary of the findings, Fisher, et al. (1989) concluded:

"The short-term outcome analysis revealed that only perceived control was affected by Forum participation, and no long-term treatment effects were observed. Results suggest that claims about far-reaching positive or negative psychological effects of participation in LGATs such as the Forum may be exaggerated" (p. 747).

²¹ This transient LGAT "experience" is central to this thesis and is fully described in chapter 4 (section 4.3.2).

Research was also carried out on Lifespring. Referring to this research, Hanley states:

“Thus we hired Lieberman and Yalom from Stanford to begin a series of studies²². Lee Ross, another professor at Stanford, we hired to determine whether in fact we were making a difference or not making a difference. And, as it turned out – I think all the way up until the ‘90s now (‘94-’95 is the last study that they did) – it seems the case that Large Group Awareness Training did in fact exceed even our expectations of its ability to help people produce the kind of results that they were looking for in their lives” (John Hanley, 2016b).

While Lieberman’s (1987) research into the safety of Lifespring trainings was readily accessible, his research into the way it “exceeded expectations” was not. In early 2017 Professor Lieberman was contacted to ask if he could provide any relevant information. Regarding long-term changes in participants, he said that it was undeniable that Lifespring graduates made “substantive changes in their lives”, but conceded, “why it happens may be at this point unknown to me” (Lieberman, 2017). He also provided a chapter he had written from the book *The Social Psychology of Self-Initiated and Externally Imposed Personal Change* (Fisher, Chinskey, Klar, & Nadler, 1992). In it he *describes* earlier research²³ showing that, one year after participating in Lifespring, “participants increased significantly in their self-esteem and coping mastery, showed lower role strain and had more positive perceptions of their environment”. These results, if they can be accessed, should be taken into consideration, but weighed against those of Fisher, et al. (1989) whose journal-published study found “no long-term treatment effects” (p. 747) for similar measures in a similar training.

In addition to these studies, Lifespring and Landmark have conducted unpublished research into the satisfaction levels of their participants. In the case of Lifespring, Professor Ross conducted the research. Professor Ross describes his studies on the website www.lifespring-scientific-research.com, confirming that, shortly after the training ended, participants were highly enthused about it²⁴:

“As will become apparent to the reader, however, the responses of students on virtually every dimension proved to be overwhelmingly positive. Course content, procedures, and Lifespring personnel responsible for the courses were rated very highly by the vast majority of respondents. The participants, almost without exception, felt enriched and enlightened by their experiences; indeed, a substantial portion of them felt that it was one of the most significant learning experiences of their lives” (Lifespring, 2016).

²² This sentence is ambiguous, but only Yalom was from Stanford University.

²³ Attempts to access this research (manuscript - Lieberman and Stillinger, 1990) have been unsuccessful.

²⁴ It will be argued that a transient shift in perspective may render these ratings equally transient.

Because these studies were not published in an academic journal, it was also necessary to contact Professor Ross directly to understand the study's methodology, particularly the delay between the training and the assessment, and the measures used to establish the training's effectiveness. Late 2016 Professor Ross was contacted, and asked for access to both his study, and (if possible) to the studies of his former colleague, Professor Irvin Yalom. Professor Ross replied, explaining that the Lieberman-Yalom study (Lieberman, 1987), which assessed safety in a Lifespring training, found that no casualties were observed, but (in an unsolicited comment) added, "the high level of excitement and arousal seen in the trainings suggest that they are probably a bad idea for individuals with histories of hypomania or other psychiatric disorders" (Ross, 2016).

Describing his own studies, and the short-term nature of the benefits observed, Ross (2016) stated:

"The results showed that most thought they had derived some, or considerable benefit from the trainings. (Those were subjective reports upon completing the training – not measures of longer-term outcomes relevant to success in careers, life-satisfaction, or relationships – but with that proviso regarding the short-term and subjective nature of the outcomes measured, the results were actually quite impressive. They help explain why so many participants in the Basic training go on to enrol in subsequent programs and volunteer to assist in, and help promote, future trainings.) The summary in Lifespring literature, I notice, carefully avoids any mention of long-term results."

In summary of his current opinion of Lifespring trainings, Ross (2016) continued:

"Then, and now, my personal feelings about the Basic Training – the only one I personally witnessed as a participant observer, are mixed. I felt some of the particular exercises had value (for example, in indicating that one had some agency in determining the meaning one would derive from past successes and failures, or the value of openness and honesty in relationships) but I wondered at what depth those insights were being incorporated."

Landmark (2016g) heavily markets the claim that "94% of participants say that Landmark made a profound and lasting difference in their lives", and a section of their website entitled *Independent Research* describes seven pieces of research attesting to the claimed benefits of participation:

1. The Yankelovich Study
2. The Talent Foundation Study
3. The IMC, Inc. Report
4. The Harris Survey: Money
5. The Robert Marzano Study
6. The University of Southern California Case Study
7. The Harvard Business School Case Study

Two of these studies – (1) The Yankelovich Study and (3) The IMC, Inc. Report – make reference to the 94% rate of *lasting* value from participation. Because this satisfaction rate is extraordinarily high, and extraordinarily consistent, it is worth considering the validity of these studies. Academic research is conducted by specialists for a reason - strict methodological standards must be met to publish results in an academic journal and a lack of transparent methodology renders the findings of any research questionable. As Landmark’s “Independent Research” has not been published in peer-reviewed journals, and since comprehensive and verifiable methodologies are not provided, this research might convince participants, but it does not meet the standards of scientific validity.

The Yankelovich Study

Traci Hukill of Metro News San Francisco says of this study:

“Most Landmark brochures mention a study by social scientist Daniel Yankelovich, whose survey of Forum graduates reveals high satisfaction ratings of the program. ‘More than seven out of 10 people,’ he writes in his summary, ‘have found the Forum to be one of life’s most rewarding experiences’” (Hukill, 1998).

According to Landmark (2016j) this survey was conducted over a three-month period and drew a response from “more than 1300 people who completed The Landmark Forum”. It is unclear whether this survey was used as evidence of the claim that 94% of participants reported “a profound and lasting difference in their lives” but, according to the study, 94% of respondents believed the training was “Likely to have enduring value”. Rather than being evidence of lasting change, this suggests that the survey was completed shortly after the training, and that respondents *believed* that they were forever transformed. While the study reflects high satisfaction levels, the lack of accessible methodology raises concerns. It is essential to understand how the survey was conducted – when it took place, who constructed the survey questions, whether the measurement instrument was valid and reliable, how participants were recruited, how soon after participation they were surveyed, and how – other than by asking participants immediately after the training – *lasting* change was assessed.

The IMC, Inc. Report

The other possible source of this claim is a report by IMC, Inc., which found that 94% of Landmark Forum participants believed it had made a “profound, lasting difference in the way they live their lives” (Landmark, 2016k). Because this level of success is extraordinary, it is reasonable to ask for compelling evidence to support this claim. To start with, it is not even clear who IMC, Inc. is. It is not a well-known organisation, and Landmark simply describes it as “an independent marketing consulting firm”. Since details are not provided about IMC, Inc., the date of the research, and the methodology of the research, it would be prudent to be sceptical of its conclusions.

Given the scope, and effect sizes, of benefits promised by LGATs, peer-reviewed studies should be able to clearly verify their claims. Instead, published research on the Forum – produced with the support of Werner Erhard – could not even find evidence of marginal lasting change, and current LGATs appear conspicuously reluctant to conduct transparent research that would, if their trainings achieved a fraction of what they claim to, add scientific credibility to their “technology”.

As has been mentioned (and as will be expanded upon in later chapters), LGATs discourage critical analysis, and encourage participants to rely on other forms of “knowing”. This approach can be seen in the way that participants are urged to trust unpublished studies (from superficially credible sources), but also in LGATs’ use of endorsements, which are pointed to as evidence of the safety, validity, and effectiveness of their trainings. Like questionable studies, endorsements serve as a cognitive shortcut (“heuristic”), as potential customers, rather than personally conducting a time-consuming assessment of the risks and rewards of the training in question, can “outsource” their thinking to esteemed individuals or institutions who, presumably, have performed this assessment themselves. The mechanism which makes endorsements so compelling is that people are likely to unconsciously associate the esteem and credibility of the individual or institution making the endorsement with the training itself. LGATs, like other sales-based organisations, are well aware of the tendency to make these associations, as revealed by this est trainer:

“The mind is an associative machine which associates one thing or event with every other thing within that event” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 158).

While they are often useful, cognitive shortcuts can cause problems when the esteemed individual or organisation’s assessment is not accurate, or impartial. Dr Fowler’s report (Fowler, 1999), asserting that Landmark’s screening methods are adequate, that the Landmark Forum is “pleasant”, that their trainers are “sensitive”, that participants seem “relaxed”, and that no thought reform processes are employed, is an example of a questionable endorsement by an authority figure. While the validity of Fowler’s endorsement (in terms of content) will be challenged, it is not disputed that he endorsed Landmark (see Appendix 2). The same cannot be said of the Dalai Lama and Harvard University, with whom Landmark has claimed questionable positive associations. While associative learning is problematic when the endorsement is inaccurate, it is even more problematic when the esteemed individual or organisation did not endorse the company at all. According to Jones (2003), Forum leader, David Ure, manufactured a misleading association between the Dalai Lama and Landmark:

“Some of the ‘graduates’ of David Ure, once a seminar leader in Cape Town, have been firing up their recruiting with the story of ‘a seminar held for 300 monks and the Dalai Lama in the foothills of Tibet’: a seminar by which ‘Landmark took on transforming the political situation there’. When

we contacted Tibetan exile officialdom for comment, we got a very polite version of ‘What the @#%& are you talking about?’ The UK Landmark office, where Ure is now based, promised that he would get back to us, but repeated reminders produced no contact. Indian Landmark offices were likewise unresponsive.”

The “endorsement” by the Dalai Lama is not the only questionable association employed by Landmark. In a section of the Landmark website entitled *Independent Research*, Landmark includes a case study produced by the Harvard Business School (this is one of seven pieces of “independent research” cited on the official Landmark site) (Landmark, 2016a). In his 1999 letter to www.stelling.nl, Landmark attorney Art Schreiber, after acknowledging that Harvard did not endorse Landmark, specifically mentions this study, while emphasising the distinguished reputation of the university:

“In response to your interest in Landmark Education, I am enclosing a copy of the Case Study on Landmark Education which was recently published by Harvard University Business School, one of the most prestigious institutions of higher education in the United States...” (Schreiber, 1999).

Landmark (2016a) states that the “case study is copyrighted by the President and Fellows of Harvard College and is no longer in print”, after summarising some of the key findings:

“Landmark refers to the concepts used in its conversation management technology as ‘distinctions’ ... In total, Landmark’s technology contains approximately 150 unique distinctions, each of which is intended to provide individuals and organizations with an insight into how to become more effective and/or access to a way of being which they had not thought possible.”

Since the above statement is all that Landmark is able to reveal about this analysis, since it can be assumed that if Harvard stood by its “endorsement” Landmark would have shared it, and since the above statement – if even briefly considered – says nothing positive about Landmark, its only plausible use is to create a misleading positive association between Landmark and Harvard University.

According to Cohen (2009), Landmark disregards explicit instructions by Harvard not to use the study:

“**Hagar Cohen:** Background Briefing attended an information evening organised by Landmark Education in Sydney where guests were encouraged to enrol to the forum. During the evening, the presenter mentioned that the Harvard Business School wrote a case study about Landmark Education’s business practices. We contacted Harvard to verify, and received an email in return which said:

Reader: Cases are, for pedagogical purposes only, serving as a basis for classroom discussion, rather than to illustrate the effective or ineffective use of an administrative setting. Cases do not in any way constitute an endorsement of any product or service. Landmark was ignoring this

dictum, and as a result at the school's insistence, had to offer clarification in a press release dated September 4th, 1998.”

Post-1998, a New York Magazine article not only confirms that Harvard stopped using the case study, but that they were concerned by Landmark's intention to associate themselves with the university:

“As of this year, Harvard is no longer printing the study, teaching from it in courses or keeping it in its library. ‘Landmark ordered 75,000 copies of the study,’ says a source at the school. ‘That’s when we knew we had a problem’” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

Journalist Rachel Jones, who was sent the case study by Landmark in 2003, adds:

“Harvard also made Landmark agree not to use the study for promotional purposes. I guess that means, to Landmark, that recruiters can still cite the study, and that journalists can still get copies they are told they need to assimilate in order to write ‘the facts’ and not get sued” (Jones, 2003).

When Background Briefing (Cohen, 2009) contacted Harvard Business School in 2009 about Landmark's use of the case study, they responded:

“This would be a matter of concern, and yes, I will confer to the appropriate people at HBS, and at Harvard University, to see how we would go about requiring them to cease and desist.”²⁵

It is interesting that Lifespring claimed similar dubious endorsements by prominent organisations. Lifespring included many companies on its “client roster”, however this term was misleading because (1) a company which indiscriminately refunds employees for personal development courses is not a client, and (2) many of the companies had not even done this:

“The ‘client roster’ is not a list of employers that have hired Lifespring to conduct trainings, but of employers who have reimbursed workers for taking the course. Lifespring provided The Post with a list of five such Washington-area companies. Spokesmen for four of the five businesses – IBM, Pan American Health Organization, Rosenthal Chevrolet and ComSearch – say they have never reimbursed anyone for doing Lifespring. Lifespring marketing director Patti Cohn says she cannot explain the discrepancy” (Fisher M. , 1987).

It is argued in this thesis that LGATs generate powerful positive, but transient, experiences which participants uncritically associate with the principles and obligations of the training. In the same way that participants may unconsciously associate Landmark with Harvard or the Dalai Lama, it is argued that LGAT participants form an uncritical positive association between the LGAT “experience” and the ideas put forward during the training. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) describe “evidence” which

²⁵ As of 8 August 2017, Landmark still includes the Harvard Business School case study on their website as “Independent Research” (although no details of the study are provided).

circumnavigates critical thinking as employing the *peripheral route* (as opposed to the *central route*) of persuasion. Positive associations, as may be created through misleading “endorsements”, would target the peripheral route, while peer-reviewed studies are more likely to engage the central route.

While the studies used by LGATs to support their claims of lasting effectiveness are questionable, and the endorsements of esteemed individuals and organisations are likewise questionable, the primary form of marketing employed by LGATs is word-of-mouth. Because graduates are used to “enrol” their families, friends, and colleagues, the primary source of information about the training is often a graduate, providing a personal testimony shortly after the training ends. While the enthusiastic testimonies of new graduates may be convincing to many, anecdotal evidence may be highly unreliable (Riffenburgh, 1999), a point emphasised by Finkelstein, et al. (1982) with reference to est:

“Reports of testimonials have been compiled by est advocates and suffer from inadequate methodology. More objective and rigorous research reports fail to demonstrate that the positive testimony evidence of psychological change among est graduates result from specific attributes of est training” (p. 538).

In addition to the sampling bias associated with testimonial evidence, a key problem with LGAT testimonials is that they are generally made soon after the training ends. If LGATs trigger a transient “experience”, which peaks after a few days and subsides in the days and weeks which follow, then graduation testimonies – and surveys conducted shortly after the trainings end – do not provide evidence of the degree to which long-term transformations occur. While testimonies offer insight into the short-term power of the “experience”, a distinction must be made between the frequency with which LGATs generate transient highs and the frequency with which they generate “transformations” which endure without continuous exposure to LGAT “technology”.

While it is not being challenged that LGATs trigger transient feelings of love, joy, confidence, energy, enlightenment, connectedness, and sociability in most participants, controlled studies have not demonstrated that they achieve permanent transformations in the vast majority of participants. It is also argued that the endorsements of Landmark by Dr Raymond Fowler, the Dalai Lama, and Harvard University are problematic, and that Lifespring similarly claimed associations with prominent organisations which did not actually endorse them. Finally – and while the problems specific to LGAT testimonial evidence will be more fully explored in later chapters – it has been argued that testimonial evidence is generally problematic. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, and LGATs make extraordinary claims while providing weak evidence to support these claims. While significant questions have been raised about the rewards of LGAT participation, concerns have similarly been raised about the risks. The following section considers the possible negative effects of participation.

2.2.11 Negative effects of LGATs

Since their inception there have been claims of psychological harm arising from LGAT participation, and both early and current LGATs attempt to screen out “particularly vulnerable” participants. Some studies indicate that the risk of harm is low; however, other research indicates that severe casualties do occur. A limitation at the time of the published studies (pre-1990) was that the authors could not see a theoretical link between the nature of the trainings and the problems reported by participants, academics, and others (often extreme fluctuations in mood and/or transient psychosis). Another limitation, relating to the assertions of this thesis, was that hypomanic behaviour was not assessed as a negative outcome. Since bipolar disorder was only separated into bipolar I and bipolar II in the DSM in 1994 (Nemede & Dombeck, 2009), the lack of focus on a subtle, and enjoyable, symptom like hypomania is unsurprising. In addition to considering research on psychological harm such as psychosis and severe mood swings, it will be argued that less obvious effects – such as damaging hypomanic behaviour and the disruption of some relationships – should also be contemplated.

Damaging hypomanic behaviour such as foolish business decisions, excessive spending, extra-marital affairs, quitting jobs, or abruptly getting married or divorced (Miklowitz, 2011), may not have been considered in previous studies, and often the energetic and over-confident behaviour of a hypomanic person is concerning for others, even if it is highly pleasurable to the person himself. Another key feature of hypomania of relevance to studies which assess the subjective value of participation is the fact that, when hypomanic, everything seems to be *amazing*. A person in a hypomanic state could find beauty, meaning, and joy in the most mundane, or unpleasant, event (this will be covered in the next section). If LGATs trigger a hypomanic state and participants are surveyed, while in this *transient* state, it is likely that they will overstate the training’s *lasting* value and understate its risks.

Hypomania is also associated with the perception that one is more liked, more capable, and generally higher functioning, but this perspective is often not shared by others or supported by objective evaluation (Jamison, 1995). It would, therefore, be valuable to assess the opinions of family, friends, and colleagues of graduates to assess their views of the trainings. If a person leaves a training feeling more self-assured, determined, and pro-active this is wonderful, but if his behaviour, as viewed by others, deteriorates then this may be problematic. While LGATs promise to strengthen relationships, it has been argued that the use of jargon, frequent fanaticism, and insistence on trying to recruit others may isolate graduates from non-graduates (Hukill, 1998; Singer, 2003). The degree to which LGATs improve some relationships should be weighed against the degree to which other relationships are strained or abandoned. Professor Lieberman, for example, indicated that he had performed a study which showed that the peer groups of Lifespring participants changed significantly after taking a training (Lieberman, 2017). This suggests that some LGAT graduates may find a “new family”.

While the less overt negative effects of LGATs must be analysed, most of the claims, and the limited research which exists, address overt psychological harm from participation. Finkelstein, et al. (1982) consolidated the research on those harmed in LGATs up until the early 1980s in a section of their article entitled *Psychiatric Casualties Among est Trainees*. The first two studies referenced – by Glass, Kirsch and Parris (1977), and Kirsch and Glass (1977) – describe seven participants who developed psychiatric disturbances during or immediately after the est training:

“Glass and associates (1977) and Kirsch & Glass (1977), in reports of est casualties (described above), suggest that ‘identification with the aggressor’ is a central dynamic in all est outcomes. They argue that est trainees exposed to a regimen of deprivation and an attacking charismatic leader attempt to master the situation by unconsciously identifying with, or merging with, the trainer” (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, p. 534).

Six of the seven patients – who were diagnosed with schizophrenia, manic depression, paranoid symptomatology, and depressive neurosis – had *no history of psychiatric illness*, and three years after the training six of the seven patients were still suffering “marked psychological impairment” (p. 528). According to these two studies, “mood swings, grandiose delusions, and delusional identification with Werner Erhart were prominent among the symptoms...” (p. 528). While similar accounts can be found on discussion forums, there is no formal, large-scale longitudinal research on the relationship between LGAT participation and psychological casualties. Finkelstein, et al. (1982) indicated that more objective research was required, and warned that the research by Glass, et al. (1977) and Kirsch and Glass (1977) was not *necessarily* evidence of high rates of psychological harm. While the case studies presented by these authors did not indicate the incidence of harm, the executive director of New York City’s Lincoln Institute for Psychotherapy intimated that est casualties were not uncommon:

“‘Most of the people I’ve seen at our clinic – and they come in after the training in fairly substantial numbers – have suffered reactions that range from moderately bad to dreadful,’ the executive director of New York City’s Lincoln Institute for Psychotherapy reported in 1978. ‘They are confused and jarred, and the same pattern – elation, depression, feelings of omnipotence followed by feelings of helplessness – is repeated over and over again’” (Pressman, 1993, p. 194).

Finkelstein, et al. (1982) cite other studies, such as Babbie and Stone (1977), Simon (1978), and the Hamsher (est 1977) survey, which reviewed the perspectives of 242 mental health professionals who had sent their patients through est. These professionals indicated that less than 4% of the est graduates they had treated were harmed by the training; however, since the mental health professionals who took part in the Hamsher survey were est graduates and had sent their patients to est (Finkelstein, et al., 1982), they may have understated the frequency with which harm occurred:

“Because, as we have noted, the professionals responding to the Hamsher survey are a highly self-selected group with very positive regard for the role est training has played in their own lives, the patient observations they report are likely to be severely flawed by observer bias” (p. 530).

Finkelstein, et al. (1982) make the point that, up until 1982, studies produced on the effectiveness, and risks, of est were methodologically flawed, and generally produced by est advocates. Referring to early researchers of any “therapy”, they state:

“Their research typically shows highly positive results, which are gradually qualified by later, more unbiased research [...] Only from the next generation of studies will the true measure of est training emerge” (pp. 530-531).

While est was discontinued in 1984, Erhard commissioned a high-quality study on the Forum²⁶, which was published in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* in 1989. This study was “designed to assess the psychological effects of participation in an intervention that has been classified as a large group awareness training (LGAT)” (Fisher, et al., 1989, p. 747) and might be considered the next generation of studies. It included, as a measure of psychological symptomatology, the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) which “provides a measure of an individual’s subjective stress” (p. 749). The study found that there were no “short-term” (4-6 weeks after the training)²⁷ or “long-term” (18 months after the training) negative effects for “any of the symptoms measured by this instrument” (p. 753). It is vital to mention, however, that the symptoms measured by this instrument only included “depression and hostility”, “anxiety, obsessive-compulsiveness, and phobic anxiety”, and “psychoticism and paranoid ideation” (p. 749). The argument of this thesis, however, is that stress endured during an LGAT results, for most, in a post-training sense of wellbeing and that, in order to assess stress experienced *during* the training, objective measures, such as the elevation of cortisol levels (Sapolsky, 2004), should be considered. While the Fisher, et al. (1989) study revealed no long-term severe psychological harm, it also revealed no long-term psychological benefits, as mentioned earlier.

In 1987 Lieberman and Yalom similarly conducted a study on Lifespring to evaluate the “toxic effects” of LGATs. Describing the rationale for the study, Lieberman (1987) states:

“Psychiatry’s interest in the effects of experiential education appears to be straightforward; practitioners have encountered patients who were distraught and at times seriously psychiatrically ill subsequent to their participation” (p. 460).

²⁶ “the successor to the est training and at present the most widespread LGAT” (Fisher, et al., 1989, p. 747).

²⁷ If LGATs result in transient psychosis or mood swings for some, these transient effects would likely not be present in most trainees 4-6 weeks after participation.

Before outlining his own methodology and results, Lieberman explains the wide range of approaches used by other investigators, noting that the criteria for harm, the sample being assessed, the method of assessment (e.g. clinical interview vs. paper and pencil test) and the time frames all vary. Meta-analysis is, therefore, challenging if not impossible. Lieberman (1987) performed three analyses with the first (on an introductory/primary training) being the most relevant to this thesis. In this study thirty participants – deemed “potentially vulnerable” – were interviewed within a month of participation in a Lifespring Basic Training. Of the thirty, three refused to be interviewed and four others moved out of the area. Explaining the results, Lieberman (1987, p. 462) states:

“The clinical interviews revealed no evidence sufficient to classify interviewees as psychiatric ‘casualties.’ Casualty criteria were identical to those developed in the previous study (10): the individual is ‘functioning significantly poorer than [he or she] had prior to the training, ... the decrement in functioning has some enduring implications in the person’s life,’ and the poor functioning was associated with the group experience. Within the limitations of our methodology, no positive evidence was found that permanent psychological harm to the participants occurred.”

In addition to acknowledging the limitations of the methodology, Lieberman (1987) stresses that these findings did not prove LGATs to be safe, and that stress reactions were observed in participants:

“The finding that serious psychological casualties did not occur should not be construed as a finding that casualties could not occur in a large group awareness training. Evidence that some participants reacted to the training by experiencing high distress was found. Five people showed behaviors indicative of high stress. For example, one who had a history of ulcers developed bleeding directly related to the training; another experienced what can best be described as a transitory psychotic episode lasting 1.5 days; others experienced milder states of disorientation and depression. All of these states, however, were transitory, and within a week or less after the training all of the affected participants had reorganized themselves and resumed their previous level of functioning” (p. 462).

Referring to exercises that were common to LGATs, but which seemed unlikely to cause problems on their own, Lieberman (1987) states:

“Some authors have pointed to specific processes that are presumed to be characteristic of large group awareness training (14). These processes range from an emphasis on regressive characteristics of the setting to an overidentification with the aggressor, the group leader. Beyond retrospective case studies, there is little compelling evidence and less theory implicating particular processes as toxic for specific people” (p. 461).

Lieberman (1987) concluded that it was plausible that LGATs could cause psychiatric harm, but that, at the time, there was no theoretical link between what took place in these trainings and the harm which has been claimed and observed:

“There is no reason to assume, on the basis of the evidence we have so far been able to gather, that large group awareness training could not create psychiatric risk for some. What is clearly lacking, however, is a coherent theory for linking a set of experiences ordinarily encountered in large group awareness training to the development, exacerbation, or intensification of psychopathology” (p. 463).

The claims made by academics (Finkelstein, et al., 1982; Haaken & Adams, 1983; Pressman, 1993; Singer, 2003) and others of psychological harm tend to involve, but are not limited to, transitory psychosis, and extreme fluctuations in mood. If the training is seen holistically as a stressful experience (rather than evaluating individual exercises in terms of their “toxicity”), and if stress could be linked to psychosis and mood fluctuations, then “a coherent theory for linking a set of experiences ordinarily encountered in large group awareness training to the development, exacerbation, or intensification of psychopathology” would exist. The *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* is such a theory, and the relationship between stress, mood, and psychosis will be fully explicated in the sections which follow.

While a high incidence of severe psychological harm was not revealed in two studies, casualties have been witnessed often enough over the years for academics and others to take notice. Because these cases reveal the stressful circumstances under which the casualties occurred, they will be reviewed in the results sections which look at LGAT triggers (sections 4.2 and 4.3.1). In addition, the problematic behaviour often associated with hypomania/mania, and the negative impact of LGATs on some pre-existing relationships have not yet been fully investigated. If it can be demonstrated that LGATs elicit a hypomanic/manic state in the majority of participants then it follows that the negative behaviours and consequences associated with this state should be carefully assessed in LGAT graduates.

This concludes the literature review section on LGATs; however, while generic descriptions of LGAT conditions have been provided, sections of chapter 4 (4.2 and 4.3.1) describe in detail the specific exercises, interactions between trainers and participants, and numerous other elements of the training which combine to create an environment of extraordinary stress, exhaustion, sleep disruption and, finally, goal-attainment. It is only through an examination of these specific factors that (highly disputed) claims of deliberate stress-induction can be objectively assessed, and true insight into the nature of these trainings can be achieved. The following section of the literature review provides necessary insights into bipolar disorder.

2.3 Bipolar Disorder

Having offered an overview of LGATs – their history, their common ancestor, their common processes, the similarities in their philosophies, their conditions, and their results – it is necessary to provide relevant insights into bipolar disorder. The following section of the literature review describes the disorder, reviews its most common triggers, and provides a detailed discussion of the symptoms. To appreciate the similarities between bipolar triggers and LGAT conditions, and hypomanic/manic symptoms and the LGAT “experience”, it is vital that an in-depth grasp of bipolar disorder is achieved.

2.3.1 Overview

Bipolar disorder (also referred to as manic depression, manic depressive illness, bipolar illness, bipolar depression, bipolar mood disorder, and bipolar affective disorder) is a psychiatric illness characterised by abnormal extremes of mood (affect) and energy (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), although extended periods of normal mood (“euthymia”) often occur between mood episodes (Jamison, 1993; Miklowitz, 2011; Otto, et al., 2011). Two major forms of the disorder exist – bipolar I disorder (BDI) and bipolar II disorder (BDII); the key difference being that the elevation of mood in BDI (“mania”) is greater than in BDII (“hypomania”). While mood exists on a spectrum, and there is no clear cut-off between the two, mania is considered the most extreme mood elevation, with hypomania being above the normal range of mood, but not as excessive. The DSM separates the two based on the severity of symptoms, stating that hypomania causes no significant problems, while mania – even when it does not involve psychosis – can interfere considerably with an individual’s life:

“Hypomania involves the same symptoms as mania. The major difference is that in hypomania these symptoms are not severe enough to interfere with daily functioning and do not involve hallucinations or delusions” (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011, p. 187).

According to the World Health Organisation the combined prevalence of bipolar I and II is approximately 1%, with an additional 1.4% of the population showing symptoms which are similar to these core classifications, but which fail to meet the diagnostic threshold (The National Institute of Mental Health, 2011). Men and women, as well as members of different ethnic groups, are equally likely to develop the disorder, and biology plays a significant role in the illness; however, evidence reveals that environmental triggers must also be present for the disorder to be activated (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011). Bipolar disorder, therefore, conforms to the diathesis-stress model, which postulates that individuals who develop an illness have a genetic/biological predisposition which remains dormant until it is activated by exposure to stress (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011).

The general ignorance of the public regarding the illness prior to the turn of the century, and the general misrepresentation of mental illness in the mainstream media since then, is relevant to participants entertaining the notion that their LGAT experience may have resembled hypomania/mania. With regards to the presentation of the mentally ill expressed in film and print, Corrigan (1998) explains that three ideas are common: “people with mental illness are homicidal maniacs who need to be feared; they have childlike perceptions of the world that should be marvelled; or they are rebellious, free spirits who should be cultivated (Hyler, Gabbard, & Schneider, 1991; Mayer & Barry, 1992; Wahl, 1995)” (pp. 207-208). According to Corker, et al. (2013), stigma magnifies the challenges experienced by those with mental health problems and, according to Thornicroft (2006), as cited in Semarau, Evans-Lacko, Koschorke, Ashenafi, and Thornicroft (2015), many people affected by mental illness consider the effects of stigma worse than the condition itself. There is little doubt that, because of stigma, labelling the LGAT “experience” hypomania, or hypomania-like, will result in both conscious and unconscious resistance from LGAT graduates, particularly when a more empowering way of framing their “transformation” has been provided. By removing some of the caricatured and inaccurate ideas about bipolar disorder, and including some lesser-known advantages of hypomania, perhaps this resistance can be allayed.

Bipolar disorder is an illness that is demonstrably associated with high intelligence, creativity, confidence, an increased ability to communicate, gregariousness, euphoria, energy, enthusiasm, motivation, productivity and – possibly most pertinently – a way of viewing oneself, the world, and the future that is, at times, highly optimistic. Professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University, Kay Redfield Jamison (who has lived with bipolar disorder for decades) dedicates a book to the relationship between creativity and hypomania/mania (Jamison, *Touched With Fire: Manic Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*, 1993), while a 2010 study involving over 700,000 people showed that students who obtained A grades at school were nearly four times as likely to develop the illness as students who obtained average grades (Maccabe, et al., 2010). This study concluded that “exceptional intellectual ability is associated with bipolar disorder” (p. 109). The caricatured perception of manic depressives fluctuating perpetually between mania and depression is also not how the illness typically presents itself. While there is variation in the severity, the dominant symptoms, and the frequency of episodes, only one in eight sufferers experiences more than four mood episodes in a year, with most experiencing fewer than one episode every two years (Otto, et al., 2011).

The effects are not, however, always positive. Maccabe, et al. (2010) also found that students with lower than average grades were nearly twice as likely to develop the illness. Miklowitz (2011) similarly notes that individuals with the illness may experience cognitive difficulties, while Otto, et al. (2011) explain that the distorted perceptions of events and ourselves brought about by extremes in mood –

which during hypomania may make the world seem beautiful – may equally be negative (depression), or become too positive (mania/delusions of grandeur). While it potentially confers advantage, bipolar disorder is more commonly a devastating illness that substantially increases the risk of suicide and, despite affecting a minority of the population, is a leading cause of disability worldwide (World Health Organization, 2004). According to Jamison (2000), at least 25% to 50% of patients with bipolar disorder attempt suicide and, according to Chen and Dilsaver (1996), attempted suicides are almost twice as common among those with bipolar disorder than among those with unipolar depression. While the exact pathogenesis of bipolar disorder is not known, it is understood to be influenced by genetic and environmental factors (Craddock & Jones, 1999). While artificial triggers, such as recreational drugs (particularly stimulants such as cocaine and amphetamines) and antidepressants are known to trigger and exacerbate hypomania and mania in those who are predisposed to the illness (Miklowitz, 2011), the most prominent environmental triggers are:

1. Stress
2. Sleep disruption (a form of stress)
3. Goal-attainment (arguably synonymous with stress removal)

As will be demonstrated, these factors are core features of the LGAT environment, and so evidence for their role in the triggering of hypomanic/manic states will be considered below.

2.3.2 Environmental triggers for hypomania/mania

2.3.2.1 Stress

Bostock, et al. (2015), when comparing the triggers of mania and temporal lobe epilepsy (which has similar symptoms), performed an extensive review of the literature. According to the article, “The search strategy identified 126 articles that discussed precipitants of mania or temporal lobe epilepsy” (p. 59), providing a comprehensive overview. Other than stimulants, antidepressant medication, seasonality, and postpartum – which are not variables that could be incorporated into a controlled environment – the three key triggers of mania were (1) stress; (2) sleep disruption; and (3) goal-attainment. Bostock, et al. (2015) summarise the role of stress in the onset of mania:

“Proudfoot et al. (2011) reviewed the impact of stressful life events on the onset of manic episodes and identified several retrospective studies which supported their role as a precipitating factor (Kennedy et al., 1983; Ambelas, 1987; Joffe et al., 1989)” (p. 59).

The stress referred to in these studies is described as “death or suicide of a family member, divorce, unemployment and/or disability” (p. 59), which are traumatic events that may elicit feelings of grief, an inability to cope, diminished self-worth, uncertainty, and guilt. The data for these studies were

obtained from 1556 patients over a period of seventeen years. Bostock, et al. (2015) also reference a longitudinal prospective study, which showed that a variety of stressful events increased the risks of both a first manic episode and new episodes in the study population:

“A prospective study examined the effects of stressors on first episode and recurrent mania over three years (Gilman et al., 2014). Relapse of mania was more likely in participants who had experienced recent personal loss, interpersonal or economic difficulties, or past childhood maltreatment and abuse” (p. 59).

The article also refers to research which highlights the role of stress in mania, while noting that it may also cause depression:

“Following a common stressor, a hurricane in that instance, BD²⁸ patients attending a lithium clinic had significantly increased depressive and manic relapses, despite adequate lithium levels during and subsequent to the event” (Aronson and Shukula, 1987, as cited in Bostock, et al., 2015, p. 59).

McPherson, et al. (1993, as cited in Bostock, et al., 2015) argue that stressful events may be more relevant to the onset of bipolar disorder than to relapses, concluding that stressful life events are “a precipitating factor in first episode of mania” (p. 59). In a separate study, Koenders, et al. (2014) investigated whether stressful life events were the cause or consequence of mood symptoms, highlighting numerous studies (Hall, et al., 1977; Hosang, et al., 2012a; Joffe, et al., 1989; Kim, et al., 2007; Mathew, et al., 1994; Pardoen, et al., 1996) which found that negative life events preceded manic episodes. They cited evidence that stress not only precipitates the first episode of mania, but also increases the chances of relapse for those who already have the illness:

“Stressful life events play an important role in the course of BD. The occurrence of major events in the life of BD patients has been associated with an increased risk of relapse into mood episodes” (Ellicott, et al., 1990; Hammen and Gitlin, 1997, as cited in Koenders, et al., 2014, p. 55).

In addition, stress intensifies the severity of mania for those with elevated mood states:

“Negative life events were strongly and consistently associated with increases in... mania severity/functional impact of the life chart and YMRS²⁹” (Koenders, et al., 2014, p. 59).

Referring to their own study, and confirming the Aronson and Shukula (1987) article, they explain that negative life events trigger both elevated and depressed moods, adding (citing Johnson, et al., 2000, 2008b and Nusslock, et al., 2007) that positive events can also trigger hypomania/mania:

²⁸ Bipolar Disorder.

²⁹ Young Mania Rating Scale, a common tool used to assess mood.

“The most significant findings were that negative life events preceded both (hypo-) manic and depressive symptoms and functional impairment, while positive life events predicted only (hypo-) manic mood and functional impairment due to mania” (Koenders, et al., 2014, p. 61).

The idea that stress plays a key role in the triggering of hypomania/mania is prevalent in journal articles, textbooks, and specialist books on bipolar disorder. *The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide* (Miklovitz, 2011), makes this point throughout the book, stating, “Stress is implicated as a cause of new episodes in bipolar disorder” (p. 74); that most professionals believe that “stress agents”, whether positive or negative, contribute to the cycling of bipolar disorder (p. 75); and that “... we are reasonably certain that stress and trauma affect the course of your illness or increase the chances that you will have a recurrence of mania or depression” (p. 90). As just one example of the sort of stress which might cause hypomania/mania, Miklowitz (2011) describes how – after apparently coping with her divorce – the anxiety of potentially losing time with her child (a psychosocial stressor) appeared to trigger a woman’s manic episode:

“It wasn’t until she had to undergo a child-custody evaluation that she began to show symptoms of mania” (p. 73).

Similarly, the book *Living with Bipolar Disorder* (Otto, et al., 2011) asserts that stress leads to the onset of the illness, increases the risk of relapse, and may result in other key triggers like sleep disruption:

“Often, a stressful event seems to trigger the first episode” (p. 13).

“Stress is hard on everyone, but in bipolar disorder, stress (such as interpersonal conflicts or financial setbacks) can make it more likely that mood episodes will occur” (p. 57).

“Stressful life events also may lead to a loss of sleep or a change of usual routines. Such changes in one’s schedule can contribute to the onset and recurrence of depression and mania” (p. 13).

Finally, the textbook *Abnormal Psychology* refers to three studies which show that “Experiencing stressful events and living in an unsupportive family may trigger new episodes of bipolar disorder” (Altman, et al., 2006; Frank, Swartz, & Kupfer, 2000; Hlastsala, et al., 2000, as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011, p. 199). In summary, there is considerable evidence that stress both triggers new episodes of mania and increases the severity of these episodes. Since it will be demonstrated that stress is a core feature of LGAT participation, and since it is contended that LGATs result in symptoms which resemble hypomania/mania, it would be valuable to find a mechanism to explain this relationship.

2.3.2.2 Sleep disruption

Bostock, et al. (2015) highlight “sleep reduction” as a key factor in bipolar disorder, citing research by Plante and Winkelman (2008) as evidence that it is “an aetiological agent, a predictor for future episodes, a therapeutic target and an indicator for treatment response” (p. 60). They also refer to research which indicates that merely altering sleeping patterns, or reducing sleep, may result in new manic episodes. This is relevant because LGATs do not keep participants awake for days, but disrupt what would be normal sleeping patterns for the average participant:

“Patients with BDI retrospectively identify altered sleep patterns due to social rhythm disruption in recurrences of manic episodes” (Malkoff-Schwartz, et al., 2000, as cited in Bostock, et al., 2015, p. 60).

“Other prospective studies have provided support for the role of sleep deprivation and sleep reduction in the onset of mania” (Leibenluft, et al., 1996; Colombo, et al., 1999; Bauer, et al., 2006, as cited in Bostock, et al., 2015, p. 60).

The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide echoes the sentiment that even small changes to sleep can be significant for those with the illness:

“Researchers believe that people with bipolar disorder are very sensitive to even minor changes in sleep-wake rhythms, such as when they go to bed, when they actually fall asleep, and when they wake up” (Frank, 2005, as cited in Miklowitz, 2011, p. 94).

“Losing even a single night’s sleep can precipitate a manic episode in people with bipolar disorder who have otherwise been stable” (Malkoff-Schwartz, et al., 1998, as cited in Miklowitz, 2011, p. 94).

Otto, et al. (2011, p. 57) contribute to the consensus, saying “Research has shown that changes in a normal sleep cycle increase the risk of episodes of mania or depression”, while Nolen-Hoeksema (2011) – citing changes in sleep and eating patterns as examples – claims that “Changes in bodily rhythms or usual routines also can trigger episodes in people with bipolar disorder” (p. 199). Since it will be demonstrated that both sleep disruption and eating restrictions are common features of the LGAT environment, this statement is worth noting. Sleep disruption has also been shown to transiently elevate the moods of individuals with depression:

“In parallel, sleep deprivation can improve the mood of a person with depression, although only briefly” (Harvey, 2008, as cited in Miklowitz, 2011, p. 94).

Since LGATs disrupt normal sleeping patterns and result in a transient elevation in mood for most participants, this observation is also worth noting.

2.3.2.3 Goal-attainment (stress removal)

As with stress and sleep disruption, there is evidence that goal-attainment precedes manic episodes. There is a subtlety to this class of triggers, as goal-attainment might be seen as (1) attaining a reward; (2) the end of a period of stress; or (3) some combination of these factors. Many rewards – getting a new job, completing a marathon, or reconciling with an estranged family member – are rewarding partially because it has been stressful to attain them, while other positive events, such as getting married or having a child, often represent the end of a period of conflict management, planning, vigilance, disruption of routine, uncertainty, and general concern. If a wedding takes place without incident, or if a child is born without problems, it is both rewarding and an abrupt removal of stress.

Cabib and Puglisi-Allegra (2012, p. 80), citing Paykel (1997), reveal the fact that many positive events represent the end of stress or striving, stating: “Indeed the list of stressful life events includes some events considered ‘positive’ such as marriage”, while Nolen-Hoeksema (2011, p. 199) makes a similar point, saying, “Even positive events can trigger new episodes of mania or hypomania, particularly if they involve striving for goals seen as highly rewarding”. Nusslock, et al. (2007, as cited in Bostock, et al., 2015, p. 60) likewise explain: “A study of college students found that among those with bipolar disorder, preparing for and completing exams tended to trigger hypomanic symptoms...” and Otto, et al. (2011) cite marriage or starting a new job as potential triggers. Starting a new job is often the culmination of searching for a new position, going through an interview process, feeling uncertain about whether you will get the offer, and then receiving the offer. As with marriage or the birth of a child, the pattern of stress, abruptly replaced by goal-attainment is apparent.

Edge, et al. (2013, as cited in Bostock, et al., 2015, p. 60) state that, “Individuals with BDI reported mania after achieving an important success and avoiding rewarding activities to prevent mania”; Bostock, et al. (2015, p. 60, citing Johnson, et al., 2000 and Johnson, et al., 2008) found that “goal-attainment events were associated with increased manic symptoms”, while Koenders, et al. (2014, p. 55), citing what was claimed to be the largest follow-up study to date on bipolar disorder at the time (Johnson, et al., 2008), concluded that “life events involving goal-attainment precede manic symptoms”. Along with stress and sleep disruption, there is therefore considerable consensus that goal-attainment is a trigger for hypomanic/manic episodes. The *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* will argue that stress (which includes sleep disruption) elicits an allostatic “defence”, and that the abrupt removal of stress which occurs when a goal is attained results in a period during which the allostatic defence is activated in the absence of the allostatic challenge (the stressor). The result, which will be detailed later, is a transient hypomanic/manic state.

An example of social stress leading to mania – Kay Redfield Jamison:

Kay Jamison is one of few academics who provides insights into bipolar disorder that are grounded not only in research, but also in personal experience. As a Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University, an Honorary Professor of English at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, and as someone who has lived with a severe form of bipolar disorder for decades, she not only has access to academic resources, and to the experience of the illness, but also – as far as is possible – to an ability to communicate this experience. Excerpts from her 1993 book *Touched with Fire – Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*, and her 1995 book *An Unquiet Mind – A memoir of moods and madness*, provide useful insights into the experience of the illness not only by Jamison, but also by those arguably most gifted at articulating their experiences (poets, novelists, artists, and musicians). Referring to the events which led to her first manic episode, Jamison (1995) talks about the stress of moving to a new city at the age of fifteen:

“For a long time I felt totally adrift. I missed Washington terribly. I had left behind a boyfriend, without whom I was desperately unhappy...” (p. 31).

“I had also had left behind a life that had been filled with good friends, family closeness, great quantities of warmth and laughter, traditions I knew and loved, and a city that was home. More important, I had left behind a conservative military lifestyle that I had known for as long as I could remember” (p. 31).

Jamison (1995) does not describe anything horrifically traumatic; rather her stress occurred as a result of a change in routine, a separation from people she loved, and a sense of loneliness, inadequacy, and unpredictability:

“I lost my moorings almost entirely...” (p. 31).

“I was deeply unhappy” (p. 31).

“... I knew no one, and it took a very long time to re-establish myself as an athlete. More disturbing, the level of academic competition was fierce” (p. 32).

“On the one hand, it was exhilarating to be around so many smart and competitive students; on the other hand, it was new, humiliating, and very discouraging. It was not easy to have to acknowledge my very real limitations in background and ability” (p. 32).

Jamison does not comment on whether sleep disruption or goal-attainment (stress removal) also played a role (any single trigger has the potential to cause the first episode), but does describe her first manic and depressive episodes. It should be kept in mind that the symptoms she describes are for mania and that hypomanic symptoms would be subtler:

“I was a senior in high school when I had my first attack of manic-depressive illness; once the siege began, I lost my mind rather rapidly. At first, everything seemed so easy. I raced about like a crazed weasel, bubbling with plans and enthusiasms, immersed in sports, and staying up all night, night after night, out with friends, reading everything that wasn’t nailed down, filling manuscript books with poems and fragments of plays, and making expansive, completely unrealistic plans for my future. The world was filled with pleasure and promise; I felt great. Not just great, I felt *really* great. I felt that I could do anything, that no task was too difficult. My mind seemed clear, fabulously focused, and able to make intuitive mathematical leaps that had up to that point entirely eluded me. Indeed, they elude me still. At the same time, however, not only did everything make perfect sense, but it all began to fit into a marvellous kind of cosmic relatedness. My sense of enchantment with the laws of the natural world caused me to fizz over, and I found myself buttonholing my friends to tell them how beautiful it all was” (Jamison, 1995, pp. 36-37).

Describing the relatively sudden switch from mania to depression, she continues:

“Then the bottom began to fall out of my life and my mind. My thinking, far from being clearer than a crystal, was torturous. I would read the same passage over and over again only to realize that I had no memory at all for what I just had read” (Jamison, 1995, p. 37).

“I dreaded having to talk with people, avoided my friends whenever possible, and sat in the school library in the early mornings and late afternoons, virtually inert, with a dead heart and a brain as cold as clay” (p. 38).

“Each day I awoke deeply tired, a feeling as foreign to my natural self as being bored or indifferent to life. Those were next. Then a gray, bleak preoccupation with death, dying, decaying, that everything was born but to die, best to die now and save the pain while waiting. I dragged exhausted mind and body around a local cemetery, ruminating about how long each of its inhabitants had lived before the final moment. I sat on the graves writing long, dreary, morbid poems, convinced that my brain and body were rotting, that everyone knew and no one would say” (p. 38).

“For several weeks, I drank vodka in my orange juice before setting off for school in the mornings, and I thought obsessively about killing myself” (p. 39).

Jamison’s manic triggers were uncertainty, inadequacy, and altered routines (psychosocial stress); while her hypomanic/manic symptoms included energy, productivity, optimism, joy, confidence, connectedness, and sociability. In order to comprehensively understand hypomanic/manic symptoms, and identify them in LGAT participants, it is necessary, however, to review a variety of sources, and consider the different ways that these symptoms might be framed.

2.3.3 Symptoms of hypomania/mania

“It has been difficult at times to weave together the scientific discipline of my intellectual field with the more compelling realities of my own emotional experiences” (Jamison, 1995, p. 7).

Love is not a red lorry – it cannot be satisfactorily described using unambiguous terms relating to colour, length, weight, make, or model. To describe love to someone who has never experienced it is challenging and, in spite of it being the most covered topic in film, art, literature, and music, new ways of depicting it are constantly being found. Hypomania/mania, like love, is real but elusive; powerful, yet ethereal. Because of its ethereal nature, it can be described in many ways and it is, therefore, necessary to provide a variety of perspectives to create a distinct picture for the uninitiated. Clinicians who suspect hypomania/mania in patients are able to ask questions using the DSM terminology, but the unsolicited accounts of LGAT graduates may describe these symptoms using a different vocabulary. The starting point for understanding hypomania/mania will therefore be the DSM-5, but it is necessary to go beyond these descriptions and consider what these – necessarily limited – symptoms are essentially portraying. After considering the DSM-5, a number of other sources (specialist books, textbooks, as well as the reflections of poets, novelists and other individuals) will be included to allow a deeper grasp of mood, how extreme fluctuations in mood feel, and how these fluctuations distort perspective and affect behaviour.

Because LGATs frequently, though not always, use the same vocabulary as academics, symptoms will be grouped in a manner which makes the similarities more discernible. While the DSM-5 divides symptoms into discrete categories, there are conspicuous overlaps between some of these categories, and a single factor (optimism) which runs through many of the recognised symptoms will, therefore, be highlighted. Because the DSM-5 and LGAT accounts do not describe the symptoms using a common diagnostic tool, the following seven categories have been created for the purposes of this thesis to bridge the gap between clinical descriptions and the vocabulary of journalists, bloggers, online contributors, academics (who did not specifically investigate the “highs”), and LGAT spokespersons:

1. Perspective
2. Confidence
3. Euphoria
4. Sociability/openness
5. Creativity
6. Motivation/energy/productivity
7. Decisiveness/impulsivity

An altered Perspective (1) is a symptom of mood not specified in the DSM, but it is central to understanding hypomania and LGATs. An elevated mood brings with it a positively distorted outlook, where the world seems beautiful and full of possibilities - people are more interesting, work is more fulfilling, and problems seem to disappear. It is difficult to separate Perspective from Confidence (2), as a positive perspective applied inwards elevates self-esteem, while a positive perspective applied to the future elicits the belief that the consequences of one's behaviour will be good (which elicits confidence). While a moderately positive perspective (hypomania) may result in confidence, mood occurs on a spectrum and a hyper-positive perspective (mania) may lead to an extreme elevation of self-worth, and delusions of grandeur. Euphoria (3) describes a discernibly elevated mood, where one may feel incredibly happy and alive. People who are confident and find others particularly interesting are also more likely to engage with others and are, thus, more Sociable (4).

Creativity (5) involves the generation of new ideas, seeing things in a new way, or having an ability to see novel associations between seemingly unconnected events. Creativity and Perspective are also related, as a new perspective may result in new ideas. When ideas are flowing and it is easy to relate one topic to another, then conversations will seem comfortable. However, those speaking to a hypomanic person may not feel that the interaction was as positive as the individual perceives it to be. Again, ideas which are moderately creative (hypomania) are welcomed as interesting, whereas if creative associations become too tenuous (mania) they may be seen as delusional. A positive filter also results in individuals expressing thoughts and feelings that they may have otherwise kept to themselves, leading to more open interactions (Openness (4)). Depending on the content of these thoughts, the effects of this frankness may be positive or negative³⁰.

Motivation is a function of the anticipated pleasure of doing something and, since hypomania/mania causes a shift in perspective which positively colours the future, it makes sense that an increase in anticipated pleasure would result in an increase in Motivation/energy/productivity (6). Finally, Decisiveness (7) is a function of the confidence one has in a given decision, and the belief that the consequences of that decision will be good. While decisiveness is typically a positive trait, too much confidence – and making life-altering decisions without consideration – can be problematic. The extreme of decisiveness is *Impulsivity*, which is often seen in hypomania/mania. The common factor which runs through most of these categories is a sense of *optimism* – a positively distorted view of oneself, the world, and the future. Perspective, confidence, euphoria, sociability/openness, motivation/energy/productivity, and decisiveness/impulsivity can all be explained by this factor.

³⁰ Everyone has inappropriate thoughts, but typically censors them. If the mechanism by which one censors private thoughts and actions is faulty then one might express affection more freely (which may be beneficial) but may equally reveal inappropriate ideas at inappropriate times (which may have disastrous consequences).

Diagnostic criteria for hypomania as per the DSM-5:

The diagnosis of hypomania according to The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, pp. 124-125) requires:

- A. A distinct period of abnormally and persistently elevated, expansive, or irritable mood and abnormally and persistently increased activity or energy, lasting at least 4 consecutive days and present most of the day, nearly every day.
- B. During the period of mood disturbance and increased energy and activity, three (or more) of the following symptoms (four if the mood is only irritable) have persisted, represent a notable change from usual behaviour, and have been present to a significant degree:
 - 1. Inflated self-esteem or grandiosity.
 - 2. Decreased need for sleep (e.g. feels rested after only three hours of sleep).
 - 3. More talkative than usual or pressure to keep talking.
 - 4. Flight of ideas or subjective experience that thoughts are racing.
 - 5. Distractibility (i.e. attention too easily drawn to unimportant or irrelevant external stimuli), as reported or observed.
 - 6. Increase in goal-directed activity (either socially, at work or school, or sexually) or psychomotor agitation.
 - 7. Excessive involvement in activities that have a high potential for painful consequences (e.g. engaging in unrestrained buying sprees, sexual indiscretions, or foolish business investments).
- C. The episode is associated with an unequivocal change in functioning that is uncharacteristic of the individual when not symptomatic.
- D. The disturbance in mood and the change in functioning are observable by others.
- E. The episode is not severe enough to cause marked impairment in social or occupational functioning or to necessitate hospitalization. If there are psychotic features, the episode is, by definition, manic.
- F. The episode is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance (e.g. a drug of abuse, a medication, other treatment).

DSM-V categorisation	Thesis categorisation
A. Elevated mood	3. Euphoria
A. Expansiveness	4. Sociability/openness
A. Increased activity or energy	6. Motivation/energy/productivity
B1. Inflated self-esteem or grandiosity	2. Confidence
B2. Decreased need for sleep	6. Motivation/energy/productivity
B3. More talkative than usual or pressure to keep talking	4. Sociability/openness
B4. Flight of ideas and subjective experience that thoughts are racing	4. Sociability/openness; 5. Creativity
B5. Distractibility	5. Creativity
B6. Goal-directed activity	6. Motivation/energy/productivity
B7. Excessive involvement in activities that have a high potential for painful consequences	7. Decisiveness/impulsivity

Figure 5: DSM-V symptoms as categorised using thesis framework

As indicated in Figure 5, the *elevated mood* described in the DSM would be classed under *Euphoria* according to the terminology adopted for this thesis, while *expansiveness* describes a person who is communicative, forthcoming, sociable, friendly, gregarious, or generally extroverted (*Sociability/openness*). The specific requirement for *increased activity or energy* was not a diagnostic criterion in the DSM-IV-TR³¹, but bipolar disorder is now considered a disorder of both mood and energy. This symptom fits into the *Motivation/energy/productivity* category. In order to diagnose hypomania there must be a period of at least four days when the individual's mood was elevated, expansive, or irritable, and their energy and activity levels were abnormally high. In addition, three of the aforementioned seven symptoms (B) must also be present (four, if the mood was only irritable).

Inflated self-esteem or grandiosity would fit under *Confidence*. It relates not only to a person's sense of self-worth, but also to that person's surety that their actions will have positive consequences and, hence, that they have no problems. *Decreased need for sleep* falls under *Motivation/energy/productivity* as hypomanic individuals feel rested after very little sleep. *More talkative than usual or pressure to keep talking* is related to *Sociability/openness*, while *Flight of ideas and subjective experience that thoughts are racing* – related to being more talkative and sociable – would contribute to *Sociability/openness* and *Creativity*. *Distractibility* and *Goal-directed activity* appear contradictory – one describes an inability to focus, while the other portrays an extreme level of focus and drive. *Distractibility* reflects a reduced ability to screen out irrelevant stimuli, and to discern between topics that are related and those which are not. As creativity is associated with an ability to find loose associations between seemingly unconnected ideas, *Distractibility* plausibly fits under *Creativity* while *Goal-directed activity* fits more appropriately under *Motivation/energy/productivity*. *Excessive involvement in activities that have a high potential for painful consequences* describes the extreme of *Decisiveness/impulsivity*.

³¹ The previous version of the DSM, published in 2000.

Because LGAT graduates do not express themselves in relation to a psychiatric diagnosis, the “symptoms” they describe are often in isolation. They may inadvertently refer to euphoria, confidence, or impulsivity, but may not frame them in these terms, and do not contemplate other hypomanic/manic symptoms before deciding whether or not to comment on them as well. It is only by considering the aggregated unsolicited experiences of numerous participants, and the results promised by LGATs, that it might be argued that a hypomania/mania-like state occurs. To build a case for the seven groupings outlined, which will later be used when assessing the impact of LGATs, additional literature on bipolar symptoms – sorted into these categories – will now be reviewed.

General statements on hypomania/mania:

Before exploring each of the seven categories separately, certain statements cover several of the symptoms. Jamison (1993) provides a useful foundation from which to build:

“Thus, during hypomania and mania, mood is generally elevated and expansive (or, not infrequently, paranoid and irritable); activity and energy levels are greatly increased; the need for sleep is decreased; speech is often rapid, excitable and intrusive; and thinking is fast, moving quickly from topic to topic. Hypomanic or manic individuals usually have an inflated sense of self-esteem, as well as a certainty of conviction about the correctness and importance of their ideas. This grandiosity can contribute to poor judgment, which, in turn, often results in chaotic patterns of personal and professional relationships. Other common features of hypomania and mania include spending excessive amounts of money, impulsive involvements in questionable endeavours, reckless driving, extreme impatience, intense and impulsive romantic or sexual liaisons, and volatility. In its extreme forms mania is characterized by violent agitation, bizarre behaviour, delusional thinking, and visual and auditory hallucinations. In its milder variants, the increased energy, expansiveness, risk taking, and fluency of thought associated with hypomania can result in highly productive periods” (pp. 13-14).

Jamison (1993) later reiterates her statements on increased mental and physical activity and impulsivity, while also commenting on sociability:

“Mania is characterized by an exalted or irritable mood, more and faster speech, rapid thought, brisker physical and mental activity levels, quickened and more finely tuned senses, suspiciousness, a marked tendency to seek out other people³², and impulsiveness. In hypomania, the less severe form of mania, these changes tend to be moderate and may or may not result in serious difficulties for the individual experiencing them” (pp. 27-28).

³² Referred to as “expansiveness”.

After reflecting on the interaction between, among other things, altered perception and elevated mood, Jamison (1993) adds that grandiosity, expansiveness, and euphoria are common in creative people:

“The perceptual and physical changes that almost always accompany hypomania and mania generally reflect the close and subtle links that exist between elevated mood, a sense of well-being, expansive and grandiose thought, and intensified perceptual awareness. Examples of manic grandiosity, visionary expansiveness, and unbridled euphoria are abundant in writers and artists” (p. 28).

1. Perspective

The DSM does not directly specify the impact of mood on perspective, but it is an implicitly acknowledged element of both hypomanic/manic and depressed states. Cognitive scientist, Antonio Damasio, who specialises in the relationship between the body and the mind, reflects on this observation:

“... when there is a sustained negative body state, as happens in depression, the proportion of thoughts which are likely to be associated with negative situations does increase, and the style and efficiency of reasoning suffer. The sustained elation of manic states produces the opposite result” (Damasio, 2006, p. 147).

A compelling piece of evidence for the distortion of perception in mood is the ubiquity of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), the most prevalent form of psychotherapy. CBT is the treatment of choice for depression (Cacioppo & Freburg, 2016), its premise being that depressed individuals have an unrealistically negative perception of themselves, the world and the future (“Beck’s Cognitive Triad”) (Corey, 2013). Cognitive therapy techniques frequently involve “fact checking”, asking patients to provide evidence for the feelings they have about themselves, the world and the future, in order to demonstrate (without harassment) that what seems like reality to them is a negative perception. Therapists work with clients who are understood to be filtering the world through a negative lens. In hypomania/mania the lens may be equally distorted, but it is too positive rather than too negative.

An important fact to note about perspective is that, to the person involved, that perspective is reality. It takes a great deal of practiced introspection to accept that your brain can “lie to you” about your own worth, the beauty/ugliness of the world, and whether the future is going to be positive or negative. It should also be appreciated that few (if any) people have an objective process through which they assign values to all of the variables in their lives, in order to calculate their own self-worth and arrive at a fact-based level of optimism for the day. An individual’s sense of self-worth and optimism, while impacted by real events, is heuristically estimated and dictated by the brain. Because

most people's moods (which are a function of activity in the brain - the source of this heuristic) do not stray beyond the "normal" range, they mistakenly assume that their sense of self-worth is reasoned and rational. They are unaware that if the neurological mechanism which regulated their mood became faulty their sense of self-worth could be obliterated, or elevated to an abnormally high, and even delusional, level. It is more comforting for "normal" people to believe that they are logical and would not be fooled by mood, but considering the intellects of many of those affected by mood disorders over the course of history, this belief is – ironically – an emotional rather than rational one.

Referring to feelings, Damasio (2006, p. 159) states, "they come first in development and retain a primacy that subtly pervades our mental life..." and – describing their impact on thoughts – he states "... feelings have a say on how the rest of the brain and cognition go about their business. Their influence is immense" (p. 160). Continuing with academic comments on this phenomenon, Otto, et. al (2011, p. 79) similarly explain, "Mood disorders change the accuracy of thoughts: in depression they tend to be too negative and in mania they tend to be too positive". Providing advice that might be described as cognitive therapy, Otto, et. al. (2011) urge patients to be aware of how an abnormal mood can "fool you" if you are not vigilant:

"Remember that your thoughts will be influenced by your current mood. Don't let your moods push you into believing inaccurate thoughts" (p. 79).

Fletcher, Parker, and Manicavasagar (2013) provide further insight into the optimistic thinking patterns of hypomanic individuals. Their research revealed that common "ascent beliefs" expressed by those with hypomania were that "... people will like you more" (p. 461); and that "Everything you don't like about yourself is non-existent..." (p. 461). Additionally, they found that hypomanic individuals considered their own likeability and abilities to have increased:

"Participants believed that their abilities whilst hypomanic were increased, allowing them to function at a superior level..." (p. 462).

"Socially, participants believed they were more 'likeable', perceived as more 'fun' (both by themselves and others), attracting praise, recognition and approval from others when hypomanic" (p. 462).

Highlighting what appears to be the common factor in hypomania, "optimistic" (Fletcher, Parker, & Manicavasagar, p. 463) was one of the key words used by participants to describe this pleasurable state. Otto, et al. (2011, p. 78) list a number of common "hyperpositive thoughts" associated with hypomania/mania:

- “This is a great idea; my thinking is better than ever!
- They (including my friends) are just trying to hold me back because they don’t know how special I am.
- No one knows how to have fun anymore.
- People worry about rules too much; rules are for slow thinkers.
- I can do anything.
- My work is too important; I don’t need sleep.
- I have never felt so sexy; I need to share myself with more partners.”

Barlow and Durand (2002) comment on the way that clearly bad decisions, and situations, do not seem negative to people in manic states (a milder level of distortion would be seen in hypomania):

“Even after spending inordinate amounts of money or making foolish business decisions, these individuals, particularly if they are in the midst of a full manic episode, are so wrapped up in their enthusiasm and expansiveness that their behavior seems perfectly reasonable to them” (p. 199).

Kay Jamison reflects on how everything becomes more beautiful when you are manic:

“When it’s two o’clock in the morning, and you’re manic, even the UCLA Medical Center has a certain appeal” (Jamison, 1995, p. 3).

Edgar Allan Poe, believed to be bipolar, provided similar sentiments about his elevated states:

“Merely to breathe was enjoyment; and I derived positive pleasure even from many of the legitimate sources of pain” (Jamison, 1993, p. 31).

Jamison also comments on the distorted perspective she had of herself, and her behaviour, when manic at a party:

“I was perhaps a bit high, but primarily I remember talking to scads of people, feeling that I was irresistibly charming... Whatever he actually felt, I was sure he was finding me captivating” (Jamison, 1995, p. 70).

Like the distorted perspective a hypomanic person may have on reckless spending, the overly positive view a person has of himself/herself may not be shared by others. Jamison (1995) reflects on the more objective opinion of her psychiatrist, who saw her at that party:

“My memories of the garden party were that I had had a fabulous, bubbly, seductive, assured time. My psychiatrist, however, in talking with me about it much later, recollected it very differently. I was, he said, dressed in a remarkably provocative way, totally unlike the conservative manner in

which he had seen me dressed over the preceding year. I had on much more makeup than usual and seemed, to him, to be frenetic and far too talkative. He says he remembers having thought to himself, Kay looks manic. I, on the other hand, had thought I was splendid” (p. 71).

The difficulty with hypomania is that – while it allows the individual to view himself, the world, and the future in a positive light – it also distorts the individual’s perception of his own behaviour. They may see their behaviour as positive, even when it causes issues with friends, family members, partners, and spouses. Miklowitz (2011), in comments relevant to the previously discussed section on the negative effects of LGATs, notes the problems associated with this tendency:

“The rapid changes in energy and activity that accompany highs and lows are often a source of family conflicts. To observers, your activated behaviour while manic may look attractive or encouraging at first, especially if you were formerly depressed” (p. 22).

“Observers (for example, family members) are usually unaware of the purposefulness that you may be experiencing. Family members or friends may become angry about your agitated, driven quality and apparent lack of concern for others” (pp. 22-23).

“A key point to remember here is that, to you, the increases in energy and activity that accompany manic episodes may feel good, productive, and purposeful. To others, including your doctor, they may be seen as pointless, unrealistic, or signs of a developing illness” (p. 23).

“Likewise, your family members, and perhaps your doctor, will be frustrated if you seem oblivious to or unconcerned about the effects of your behavior on others” (p. 28).

Fletcher, Parker, Paterson, and Synnott (2013) likewise explain that people often do not acknowledge the harm that may be caused during hypomanic episodes:

“The risk is of joining with bipolar II individuals in ‘romanticising’ the episodes and minimising their down side and recognising that – in contrast with the DSM-IV definition – they may be distinctly ‘impairing’ when reviewed objectively” (p. 54).

“Clinical observation suggests that hypomania – whilst enjoyable for many and often leading to feelings of invulnerability – tends (as observed earlier) to be romanticised by many patients, and can be associated with more severe consequences than judged or perceived by patients” (p. 55).

Others do realise the harm their hypomanic behaviour has caused and Fletcher, Parker, and Manicavasagar (2013) reveal that many acknowledge: that “Some people don’t actually enjoy you being over-the-top” (p. 461); that “Interpersonal tension with close others was linked to the participant becoming irritable, self-focused, arrogant or ‘over-bearing’, and perceiving others as being critical or unsupportive” (p. 464); that “... family members or close friends tended to tell the

participant to 'settle down' or 'pull back'..." (p. 464); and, as one participant explained, "[My friends] were a bit miffed by my changes in personality... and that eventually caused us to not be friends anymore... I've lost so *many* friends..." (p. 464).

Finally, as opposed to simply making everything seem more positive, Jamison (1995) explains how, when hypomanic, everything "starts to fit into a marvellous kind of cosmic relatedness" (pp. 36-37). This sense of being profoundly connected to other people and other experiences is a seldom articulated feature of the hypomanic/manic experience, unless it progresses to *delusions of reference* – the belief that unrelated people/events are related to you in some way (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011). Jamison also comments on how, in a hypomanic/manic state, things which are not significant may seem particularly important and relevant to yourself and others. Referring to three articles she found which, looking back, were not especially insightful, Jamison (1995) says:

"All three of these articles seemed to me, quite suddenly, to have profound meaning and relevance for the clinical staff in the ward. So I passed them out to everyone I could" (p. 72).

According to Matthäus Willeit of MedUni Vienna's Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, "excessive dopamine release at the wrong moment can cause insignificant things to take on an unwarranted significance" (Science Daily, 2016). As will be demonstrated later, hypomania/mania has been associated with elevated levels of dopamine and, thus, Jamison's comment is worth noting.

2. Confidence

A significantly more positive perspective of oneself, the world, and the future is synonymous with confidence. Fletcher, Parker, and Manicavasagar (2013) explain that in their study "Participants described the 'hypomanic self' as a desirable, idealised self, contrasted with their 'normal' or 'real' self – generally perceived as shy, lacking self-esteem and confidence" (p. 462). Otto, et al. (2011) similarly state that, "In contrast to depression, a hypomanic or manic mood brings with it feelings of overconfidence with your abilities, decisions, and ideas, and underestimations of the potential risks. New ideas may feel especially good, and friends and colleagues may seem too conservative or not open to good ideas or fun" (p. 78).

Mania, being a more extreme state, results in grandiosity and, frequently, delusional thoughts about one's ideas, and the importance of those ideas. Miklowitz (2011, p. 15) lists "grandiosity (an inflated sense of themselves and their abilities)" as a symptom of mania, while Nolen-Hoeksema (2011) describes a woman who is manic, saying, "When she is manic, she has tremendous energy and vibrancy, her self-esteem is soaring, and she is filled with ideas and confidence" (p. 186). She further explains that "People with mania have unrealistically positive and grandiose (inflated) self-esteem" (p. 187).

When confidence is marginally increased (hypomania) the impact on self-worth and self-belief may be positive; however, when confidence is elevated too much (mania) a person's thoughts about himself, the world and the future can become problematic. As thoughts fall in line with an abnormal mood, they may become psychotic and, coupled with a new ability to find loose associations between unrelated events, delusions may result. Common delusions of grandeur are that one has supernatural powers, is supremely gifted, that one has made a scientific breakthrough or discovery, or that one has been chosen by God for a special purpose (Barlow & Durand, 2002; Jamison, 1995). These delusions, while sometimes paranoid, tend to be mood-congruent and grandiose (Miklowitz, 2011).

3. Euphoria

The elevation of mood experienced in hypomania can be an incredibly pleasant state to be in. It is difficult to separate feelings of euphoria from seeing oneself, the world, and the future in the most positive way – there can be nothing more exciting and pleasurable than feeling complete confidence in yourself and believing that the future has only wonderful things in store for you. According to Otto, et al. (2011, p. 7), a person who is hypomanic is typically “high”, “happy”, and “euphoric”, while Miklowitz (2011, p. 15) describes hypomania as an “elated or euphoric mood (excessive happiness or expansiveness)”, adding “... the elated, euphoric periods of the manic experience feel exceptionally good to the person with the disorder” (p. 19).

Miklowitz (2011, p. 17) provides further insight into this elusive state, saying, “When in a manic phase, your thoughts may flow rapidly and life may feel exotic and wonderful”, while in Stephen Fry's documentary, *The Secret Life of the Manic-Depressive*, those who had experienced hypomania and mania said of it, “I felt so intensely alive...”; and “... you are the centre of your own universe” (Fry & Wilson, 2006). Nolen-Hoeksema (2011, p. 187) states, “The moods of people who are manic can be elated” while Jamison (1993, p. 28) describes the mood in hypomania as “ebullient, self-confident, and often transcendent” noting, “the highs associated with mania are generally only pleasant and productive during the earlier, milder stages” (pp. 47-48). Jamison (1995, p. 54) also described her highs as “giddy” and “intoxicating”.

Others describe hypomania like a drug, with one participant from the Fletcher, Parker, and Manicavasagar (2013) study saying of hypomania, “‘You know that you're... falling upwards. You know that you're doing it, but because the past experiences have been so good, you... chase [it]. It's like a drug... you chase that euphoria...’ (Participant 4)” (p. 466). As will be outlined later, there are important similarities between the effects of drugs like cocaine and amphetamines, and the hypomanic/manic state, so this comparison is worth noting. Commenting on the drug-like euphoria of hypomania and mania, Jamison (1993) states:

“... there is evidence that most patients report using cocaine, primarily when hypomanic or manic, in order to enhance or induce the euphoric moods associated with these states³³. One group of clinical investigators has reported that the majority of bipolar and cyclothymic³⁴ patients who abused cocaine stated they were not self-medicating their depressions; rather, they were attempting to lengthen or intensify the euphoric effects of mild mania” (p. 39).

4. Sociability/openness

Sociability is related to optimism, confidence, euphoria, and seeing others through a positive filter. A person who believes he will be liked by those he interacts with, who is full of joy, and who believes he will like those he interacts with, is more likely to engage with others. The increase in thoughts, and the ability to link ideas with each other (creativity) frequently associated with hypomania, also makes conversations seem to flow more easily and create the impression, sometimes inaccurately, that one is communicating more powerfully with others:

“When you’re high it’s tremendous. The ideas and feelings are fast and frequent like shooting stars and you follow them until you find better and brighter ones. Shyness goes, the right words and gestures are suddenly there, the power to seduce and captivate others a felt certainty. There are interests found in uninteresting people. Sensuality is pervasive and the desire to seduce and be seduced irresistible. Feelings of ease, intensity, power, well-being, financial omnipotence, and euphoria pervade one’s marrow” (Goodwin & Jamison, 1990, pp. 17-18).

The enjoyment of human interaction, and confidence in this interaction, results in expansiveness and increased sociability. Fletcher, Parker, and Manicavasagar (2013) list “Seeking social stimulation” (p. 460) as a common hypomanic behaviour, while Jamison (1993, p. 32) states, “Mania also tends to bring with it indefatigability, a markedly decreased need for sleep, and the aggressive pursuing of human contact”. The extreme desire for interaction seen in hypomania/mania, which can be contrasted with the social withdrawal seen in depression, is captured in a letter written by American poet (and manic-depressive) Robert Lowell to T.S. Elliot in March, 1964:

“I want to apologise for plaguing you with so many telephone calls last November and December. When the ‘enthusiasm’ is coming on me it is accompanied by a feverish reaching to my friends. After it’s over I wince and wither” (Jamison, 1993, p. 32).

³³ This refers to patients who do use cocaine. The quote is ambiguous, but it does not indicate (although substance abuse is relatively common in bipolar disorder) that most people with bipolar disorder use cocaine.

³⁴ Cyclothymia is a mild form of bipolar disorder, where one moves between brief periods of hypomania and mild depression for at least two years (Miklowitz, 2011).

Commenting specifically on the expansiveness brought about by hypomania/mania, Jamison (1993) states:

“The grandiosity of spirit and vision so characteristic of mania, coupled with manic drive and intensity, can add expansiveness and boldness as well” (p. 109).

Reflecting on the shift in perception, enjoyment of life, sociability, and creativity which often accompany hypomania/mania, Jamison (1993) further comments:

“Hypomania and mania often generate ideas and associations, propel contact with life and other people, induce frenzied energies and enthusiasms, and cast an ecstatic, rather cosmic hue over life” (p. 118).

With regards to openness, the positive filter of hypomania/mania affects every component of one’s perceptions. Those who are hypomanic/manic are also more likely to view thoughts that would normally be considered inappropriate as appropriate and, as a result, say or do things that would otherwise be censored. Referring to the effects of hypomania/mania, Miklowitz (2011) says:

“You may speak more than usual and more freely reveal your inner thoughts” (p. 17).

This new freedom of expression may result in greater gregariousness, telling the woman that you are in love with about your feelings, or demanding a raise (which may or may not have positive consequences), but those who are hypomanic/manic may also come across as callous and opinionated. Jamison (1995) provides a benign example of this, commenting on how, during a manic episode, she said whatever she was thinking, without considering the ramifications:

“The ward rounds *were* a complete waste of time, although the ward chief was less than appreciative of my pointing it out to everyone...” (p. 72).

In its inoffensive and (sometimes) welcomed form, the willingness to reflect on inner thoughts and express them to others may take the form of poetry and other forms of creativity. While not every person with bipolar disorder is capable of writing the next *Moby Dick* or *The Raven*, the relationship between hypomania and creativity is well-established.

5. Creativity

“Great wits are sure to madness near allied, and thin partitions do their bounds divide”

– John Dryden (1681)

While it is not a DSM-listed symptom of hypomania/mania, evidence shows that there is a far greater incidence of creativity among people with bipolar disorder than among the general population. This does not mean that most creatives (a difficult concept to define) have bipolar disorder (they do not),

or that most people with bipolar disorder are creatives, but simply that a greater proportion of the 2% who have bipolar disorder are creatives than of the 98% who do not:

“Recent research strongly suggests that, compared with the general population, writers and artists show a vastly disproportionate rate of manic-depressive or depressive illness; clearly however, not all (not even most) writers and artists suffer from major mood disorders” (Jamison, 1993, p. 5).

Katherine P. Rankin, PhD and colleagues at the University of California-San Francisco more recently commented:

“It is well-established that people with affective disorders tend to be overrepresented in the creative artist population (especially those with bipolar disorder). Bipolar disorder may carry certain advantages for creativity, especially in those who have milder symptoms” (Collingwood, 2010).

Since “breakthroughs”, according to Landmark, involve seeing things in a new way (Mace, 2010) and creativity is a touted benefit of LGAT participation (Emery, 1973, as cited in Finkelstein, et al., 1982; Landmark, 2016i), this category is worth exploring. Jamison (1993) confronts the caricatured image of bipolar disorder early in her book, *Touched with Fire – Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*, stating, “Most people find the thought that a destructive, often psychotic, and frequently lethal disease such as manic-depressive illness might convey certain advantages (such as heightened imaginative powers, intensified emotional responses, and increased energy) counterintuitive” (p. 3), but argues that some bipolar symptoms can be useful:

“Who would *not* want an illness that has among its symptoms elevated and expansive mood, inflated self-esteem, abundance of energy, less need for sleep, intensified sexuality, and – most germane to our argument here – ‘sharpened and unusually creative thinking’ and ‘increased productivity’?” (p. 103).

The relationship between “mania, mental acuity, and artistic talent” (Jamison, 1993, p. 52) was noted before Jamison commented on it, however. In 1812, for example, Professor Benjamin Rush stated:

“From a part of the brain preternaturally elevated, but not diseased, the mind sometimes discovers not only unusual strength and acuteness, but certain talents it never exhibited before... Talents for eloquence, poetry, music and painting, and uncommon ingenuity in several of the mechanical arts, are often involved in this state of madness” (Jamison, 1993, p. 53).

Not everyone who experiences hypomania/mania, however, becomes a Melville, a Woolf or a Plath; a Schumann, a van Gogh, or a Poe (Jamison, 1993). In the 1940s Dr A. Myerson and R.D. Boyle

suggested caveats to the link between mood and creativity, asserting that only those with a combination of talent and mania could produce anything of artistic value:

“The manic drive in its controlled form and phase is of value only if joined to ability. A feeble-minded person of hypomanic temperament would simply be one who carried on more activity at a feeble-minded level, and this is also true of mediocrity, so the bulk of manic-depressive temperaments are of no special value in the world, and certainly not of distinguished value. If, however, the hypomanic temperament is joined to high ability, an independent characteristic, then the combination may well be more effective than the union of high ability with normal temperament and drive might be” (Jamison, 1993, p. 55).

Supporting this distinction, Jamison (1993, p. 117) comments:

“Changes or extremes in mood and experience alone do not guarantee good art, of course.”

Nevertheless, various studies have shown that the rates of mood disorders among artists, novelists, and poets exceed those in the general population. Describing research conducted by Dr Nancy Andreasen of the University of Iowa, Jamison (1993) states:

“The artists and writers were also asked about changes in sleep and mood occurring just prior to these intensely creative episodes. Almost all of them reported a clearly noticeable decrease in the need for sleep. Twenty-eight percent described waking spontaneously at 03:00 or 04:00 a.m. and being unable to return to sleep. Mood changes were profound. One-half reported a sharp increase in mood just prior to the beginning of the intensely creative period. For example, one person described feeling ‘excited, anticipatory, energetic,’ while others said they were ‘elated,’ ‘euphoric,’ or ‘ecstatic’; yet another said, ‘I have a fever to write, and throw myself energetically into new projects’” (p. 78).

Psychologist J.P. Guilford, who focused much of his research on the nature of creativity, concluded – among other things – that creative individuals were also more likely to exhibit divergent than convergent thinking:

“Divergent thinking... is characterized... as being less goal-bound. There is the freedom to go off in different directions... rejecting the old solution and striking out in some direction is necessary, and the resourceful organism will more probably succeed” (Jamison, 1993, p. 106).

Providing some specifics on the nature of hypomanic creativity, Jamison (1993) says:

“Two aspects of thinking in particular are pronounced in both creative and hypomanic thought: fluency, rapidity, and flexibility of thought on the one hand, and the ability to combine ideas or categories of thought in order to form new and original connections on the other” (p. 105).

In a statement that is particularly relevant to my own experience of hypomania/mania, she continues:

“Other studies have found that rhymes, punning, and sound associations increase during mania, and many patients spontaneously start writing poetry while manic (often without any previous interest in either reading or writing poetry)” (Jamison, 1993, p. 108).

Thinking also changes when hypomanic/manic - the ability to link ideas with each other adds to the sense of being profoundly connected to other people and with the world around you (Jamison, 1993):

“Likewise, in studies of word-associational patterns, researchers have found that the number of original responses to a word-association task (in which an individual is asked to give as many associations as possible to a particular word) increase three-fold during mania; the number of statistically common or predictable responses falls by approximately one-third” (p. 108).

Maccabe, et al. (2010) substantiate this perspective, stating:

“... people with hypomania have apparently enhanced access to vocabulary, memory and other cognitive resources, with successive ideas being linked in innovative ways, and individuals in this mental state can often be witty and inventive” (p. 114).

A sense of connectedness is the result of an ability to see associations that others might not. Jamison (1993) notes that, in its milder state (hypomania) this may result in creative associations, while in its more extreme state (mania) it may be impossible to understand these associations³⁵:

“Manic and hypomanic thought are flighty and leap from topic to topic; in milder manic states the pattern of association between ideas is usually clear, but as the mania increases in severity, thinking becomes fragmented and often psychotic. Paranoid, religious, and grandiose delusions are common, as are illusions and hallucinations” (p. 29).

“Thinking can range from florid psychosis, or ‘madness,’ to patterns of unusually clear, fast and creative associations, to retardation so profound that no meaningful mental activity can occur” (p. 47).

“Making connections between opposites, crucial to the creative process, is in many respects a specialized case of making connections in general, of seeing resemblances between previously unassociated conditions or objects” (p. 112).

Antonio Damasio makes a similar comment about the ability of those who are hypomanic/manic to form creative associations. Like Jamison – and providing tacit support for Dryden’s observation about the fine line between insight and madness – he warns that, when manic, things which are not remotely

³⁵ “Great wits are sure to madness near allied, and thin partitions do their bounds divide” – John Dryden, 1681.

associated may seem to be. This, again, explains the feeling of connectedness often described by those who are hypomanic/manic:

“As an example, the cognitive mode which accompanies a feeling of elation permits the rapid generation of multiple images such that the associative process is richer and associations are made to a larger variety of cues available in the images under scrutiny. The images are not attended for long. The ensuing wealth promotes ease of inference, which may become overinclusive. This cognitive mode is accompanied by an enhancement of motor efficiency and even disinhibition, as well as an increase in appetite and exploratory behaviors. The extreme of this cognitive mode can be found in manic states” (Damasio, 2006, p. 164).

Commenting on hypomanic/manic attributes which lend themselves to creativity, Jamison (1993) explains:

“High energy levels and boldness are clearly essential to virtually all creative endeavors; they tend to be characteristic of manic-depressive temperaments as well” (p. 112).

Dr Nancy Andreasen also noted that those related to writers did not, necessarily, show creativity as writers, but often showed creativity in other areas:

“It is perhaps noteworthy that the types of creativity observed in the relatives of creative writers were far broader than literary creativity. Some relatives of creative writers were indeed also in literary fields, but many were creative in other areas, such as art, music, dance, or mathematics” (Jamison, 1993, p. 84).

Describing the processes which must be undertaken for “inspiration” to occur, Arthur Koestler stated, “We have seen that the creative act always involves a regression to earlier, more primitive levels in the mental hierarchy...” (Jamison, 1993, p. 103). LGATs typically employ regression-inducing exercises as a core feature. Jamison (1993) refers to the balancing act required to tread the fine line between great wits and madness:

“... The capacity to regress, more or less at will, to the games of the underground, without losing contact with the surface, seems to be the essence of the poetic, and of many other forms of creativity” (p. 104).

Jamison (1993) similarly describes a shift away from rationality – another core feature of LGATs – as a vital step towards creative breakthroughs:

“From virtually all perspectives – early Greek philosopher to twentieth-century specialist – there is agreement that artistic creativity and inspiration involve, indeed require, a dipping into prerational or irrational sources while maintaining contact with reality and ‘life at the surface’” (p. 104).

While scepticism remained at the time of Jamison's (1993) book, larger studies and meta-analyses have more recently confirmed these perspectives. A 2011 study (Kyaga, et al., 2011) looked at over 300,000 individuals with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and unipolar depression and found that there is an overrepresentation in creative professions for people with bipolar disorder. This potentially reflects an inability of manic-depressives to perform "non-creative" work, but two recent meta-analyses reveal that elevated moods are strongly associated with creativity (Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008; Davis, 2009). In line with these meta-analyses, Carter (2009) explains that "Biographical studies suggest that bipolar disorder may be more common among accomplished artists than in the general population, and some artists seem to be able to utilise periods of mania as a spur to creativity" (p. 231). Studies of famous creatives who suffered from bipolar disorder sometimes map periods of productivity against the moods of the person. Using Robert Schumann as an example, Carter explains, "He was most productive during manic phases and least productive when depressed" (p. 231).

Jamison argues that regression and a move away from rationality are necessary for creativity to occur. It will be argued that LGATs facilitate regression and discourage rationality. Jamison further asserts that suffering (stress) often stimulates creativity. Since it is argued that suffering (stress) is a major component of the LGAT experience, it is useful to consider comments related to this assertion. The first is from poet John Berryman who, reflecting on the role of suffering in creativity, said:

"I do strongly feel that among the greatest pieces of luck for high achievement is ordeal. Certain great artists can make out without it, Titian and others, but mostly you need ordeal. My idea is this: The artist is extremely lucky who is presented with the worst possible ordeal which will not actually kill him. At that point, he's in business. Beethoven's deafness, Goya's deafness, Milton's blindness, that kind of thing" (Jamison, 1993, pp. 114-115).

(Percy Bysshe) Shelley makes a similar point in poem:

"Most wretched men are cradled into poetry by wrong, they learn in suffering what they teach in song" (Jamison, 1993, p. 115).

Revealing the way that some escape into creativity when stressed, poet Antonin Artaud (who spent time as a patient in various psychiatric wards) declared, "No one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modelled, built, or invented except literally to get out of hell" (Jamison, 1993, p. 121), poet Robert Lowell wrote of "wrapping himself in words for protection" (p. 123), while novelist Graham Greene, who acknowledged being bipolar, stated:

"Writing is a form of therapy. Sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human situation" (p. 124).

A creative escape is not always, or even generally, pathological - even *The Beatles* sang “There’s a place where I can go... when I feel low... when I feel blue... and it’s my mind...” (“There’s a place”). The same traumatic event which inspires some may, however, overwhelm others and, as noted by John Dryden (1681), the partitions between breakthroughs and breakdowns may be narrow.

6. Motivation/energy/productivity

According to Miklowitz (2011, p. 15) individuals with hypomania/mania have “an increase in activity and energy levels”, and a “decreased need for sleep”. While a person who is manic may find it difficult to focus this energy and activity in a useful way, Otto, et al. (2011, p. 8) state, “By definition, hypomania does not cause problems to the same extent as mania, and for some patients hypomania can be a pleasant state of good humor and high productivity”. Maccabe, et al. (2010, p. 114) add to this observation, stating, “... individuals with hypomania often have extraordinary stamina, and a tireless capacity for sustained concentration”, while Fletcher, Parker and Manicavasagar (2013, p. 460) found that hypomania ascent behaviours included a tendency to “Take on more tasks/work longer hours” and to “Increase physical activities”. Referring to hypomania descent beliefs, Fletcher, Parker and Manicavasagar (2013, p. 462) state, “Participants believed that their abilities whilst hypomanic were increased, allowing them to function at a superior level (e.g. increased focus, problem-solving, lateral thinking and creativity), and to excel occupationally... As a result, many believed they were more able to achieve goals and increase their productivity”. It should be noted that these researchers are reporting on the beliefs of participants, and not necessarily the capabilities of participants. Given the distortion in perception already described, it is likely that hypomania results in increased focus and productivity, but that the degree to which it occurs is exaggerated by those who are hypomanic.

Describing the goal-directed, but often misdirected, behaviour which results from increased energy, focus, and the belief that a task is of great importance, Nolen-Hoeksema (2011, p. 187) says, “Often, they will frenetically pursue grand plans and goals”. While increased energy, motivation, and productivity may be common among many of those with hypomania/mania, other individual-specific factors determine how this energy will manifest. Miklowitz (2011) comments:

“Consider the increases in energy that accompany manic episodes. For Lauren, this took the form of an intense drive to accomplish a particular activity (exercising and getting in shape). For Cynthia it took the form of a strong desire for social contact and stimulation. When manic, she would call people all over the world whom she hadn’t spoken to in years, double – and triple – schedule her social calendar, and become bored quickly with the company of others” (pp. 20-21).

Jamison provides further insight into this aspect of bipolar disorder, commenting first on the potential of hypomania to result in accomplishing goals:

“In fact, many features of hypomania – such as outgoingness, increased energy, intensified sexuality, increased risk-taking, persuasiveness, self-confidence, and heightened productivity – have been linked with increased achievement and accomplishments” (Jamison, 1993, p. 87).

“My manias, at least in their early and mild forms, were absolutely intoxicating states that gave rise to great personal pleasure, an incomparable flow of thoughts, and a ceaseless energy that allowed the translation of new ideas into papers and projects” (Jamison, 1995, p. 6).

Describing her tendency to become involved in idealistic and altruistic social causes (not unlike LGATs present themselves to be to participants), Jamison (1995) continues:

“I also would become immersed in a variety of political and social causes that included everything from campus anti-war activities to slightly more idiosyncratic zealotries, such as protesting cosmetic firms that killed turtles in order to manufacture and sell beauty products” (p. 45).

Finally, reflecting on how good hypomanic productivity and joy feel to the individual, Jamison states:

“People say, when I complain of being less lively, less energetic, less high-spirited, ‘Well, now you’re just like the rest of us,’ meaning, among other things, to be reassuring. But I compare myself with my former self, not with others. Not only that, I tend to compare my current self with the best I have been, which is when I have been mildly manic. When I am at my present ‘normal’ self, I am far removed from when I have been my liveliest, most productive, most intense, most outgoing and effervescent. In short, for myself, I am a hard act to follow” (Jamison, 1995, p. 92).

7. *Decisiveness/impulsivity*

While it is clear that greater optimism, confidence, sociability, and energy can be beneficial – particularly to those whose baseline of self-worth is low – too much confidence, too great a tendency to say what is on your mind, too great a willingness to take risks, and too much energy to accomplish these risky ventures can be disastrous. The nature of risk is that it is risky, and if you take a large group of people and elicit over-confident, hedonistic, risk-taking behaviour in all of them there will be some whose risks pay off, but there will also be some whose risks result in negative consequences. LGATs, in the political language they are adept at using, may claim that “decisiveness” is a common benefit of the training, while avoiding more perjorative terms like “impulsivity” or “recklessness”. LGATs suggest that extreme decisiveness (impulsivity) reflects an improper application of their “technology”, and that graduates should be responsible for their own lives:

“A Landmark media spokesperson, Sharon Spaulding said from Utah that people could not blame Landmark for things that go wrong in their lives. People exercise choice in how they use the skills learned through Landmark courses” (Woodhouse & Vandenberg, 2000).

The degree to which a person is decisive or impulsive is a function of the degree to which that person feels a course of behaviour will result in pleasure, or have a positive outcome. If an individual's perspective is abnormally optimistic, he has a distorted view of his own capabilities, and he believes that whatever he does will lead to something good rather than something bad, then the intuitive cost/benefit analysis which occurs for all decisions will be stacked more heavily on the benefit side. Because the benefits of options which would normally be rejected, or carefully contemplated, may seem to a hypomanic/manic person to outweigh the risks, destructive decisions may be made. It should be re-emphasised that, while people tend to believe that they always make considered, rational decisions, a significant component of their thinking is intuitive (Cialdini, 2007; Gilovich & Ross, 2016; Kahneman, 2012). The difference between "normal" people and those who are bipolar is not, primarily, an ability to think analytically – it is the extremes in moods which distort intuitive thinking. If a "normal" person's mood is elevated beyond the normal range, it is contended that his thinking and behaviour will – like that of a person with bipolar disorder – become abnormal.

Describing the general, rather than specific, behaviour of those with bipolar disorder, Miklowitz (2011, p. 26) says, "... when people get manic, they often lose their inhibitions and behave impulsively". Miklowitz also explains that hypomanic/manic behaviour can be "reckless" (p. 15), warning that "Many of these behaviors can be threatening to one's life or health, such as driving recklessly on the freeway..." (p. 26). Fletcher, Parker, and Manicavasagar (2013, p. 460) similarly list "Risk-taking/impulsive activities" as hypomania ascent behaviours, while providing the following insight into the mind-set which results in this behaviour:

"It's like... turning the switch from being down and moping around to... let's just go and not *care*... don't have to think about anything...' (Participant 7)" (p. 463).

Various commentators provide insight into the sorts of behaviour which may accompany hypomania/mania. It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list of impulsive behaviours, but that they reflect a hypomanic/manic tendency to take risks and make consequential decisions with less deliberation than normal. Miklowitz (2011, p. 26) explains "Some people make unwise decisions, like spending a lot of money indiscriminately", while Fletcher, Parker, Paterson, and Synnott (2013, p. 52) reveal similar behaviour:

"[My] wife worried about paying the credit card debt, she was very disappointed in me for being selfish'. (Male, aged 49)."

"My partner wanted to end our relationship, I could not afford to pay off my credit cards... I thought it would just sort itself out'. (Female, aged 27)."

"Participants described feel ashamed, guilty and remorseful for over-spending."

Jamison repeatedly reflects on the extravagance which accompanies hypomania/mania. It is contended that LGATs elicit a hypomanic/manic state in participants, and then pressure participants into paying for additional courses (possibly with money that they do not have), and into paying for others to take part as well, while the newly-graduated participant is in this particularly vulnerable state. Referring to hypomanic/manic behaviour, Jamison (1993) says:

“... impulsive patterns of behaviour are common; irrational financial activities, including massive overspending and unwise investments, often occur” (p. 31).

Describing her own behaviour, Jamison (1995) states:

“Almost everything was done to excess: instead of buying one Beethoven symphony, I would buy nine; instead of enrolling for five classes, I would enroll in seven; instead of buying two tickets for a concert I would buy eight or ten” (p. 42).

“I could ill-afford the kind of impulsive buying that this represented. I was working twenty to thirty hours a week in order to pay my way through college, and there was no margin at all for the expenses I ran up during these times of high enthusiasms” (p. 43).

“Spending a lot of money that you don’t have – or, as the formal diagnostic criteria so quaintly put it, ‘engaging in unrestrained buying sprees’ – is a classic part of mania” (p. 74).

“When I am high I couldn’t worry about money if I tried. So I don’t. The money will come from somewhere; I am entitled; God will provide” (p. 74).

“I imagine I must have spent far more than thirty thousand dollars during my two major manic episodes, and God only knows how much more during my frequent milder manias” (p. 74).

Describing hypomanic/manic behaviour, Nolen-Hoeksema (2011, p. 187) notes “spending sprees”, and adds “sexual indiscretions”. Fletcher, Parker, Paterson, and Synnott (2013, p. 53) found three common disinhibited hypomanic behaviours to be: (1) being ‘sexually disinhibited’, (2) telling people what you really think of them, and (3) ‘driving too fast,’ while Jamison (1993, p. 13) includes “impulsive involvements in questionable endeavours, reckless driving, extreme impatience, intense and impulsive romantic or sexual liaisons, and volatility” as possible hypomanic/manic behaviours.

LGATs market their ability to help participants to become more open with loved ones – an ostensibly laudable goal – but if this is accomplished by pushing participants into hypomanic/manic states, then there are bound to be negative consequences for some participants:

“High-risk behaviours and their negative consequences – including interpersonal difficulties and loss of relationships (Michalak et al., 2006; Angst, 1998; Tranvag and Kristofferson, 2008) – have

been examined broadly as a general issue of relevance to the bipolar disorders” (Fletcher, Parker, Paterson, & Synnott, 2013, p. 51).

“These thoughts share the themes of overconfidence and the inability to predict negative consequences. As a result, serious social, family, career and financial complications may happen to you. Often these types of thinking patterns start gradually in a hypo-manic phase and escalate as mania develops” (Otto, et al., 2011, p. 79).

As an example of impulsive, pleasure-seeking behaviour, Jamison (1995) explains how she abruptly left her kind and loving husband in search of greater excitement:

“During this same period of increasingly feverish behaviour at my work, my marriage was falling apart. I separated from my husband, ostensibly because I wanted children and he didn’t – which was true and important – but it was far more complicated than that. I was increasingly restless, irritable, and I craved excitement; all of a sudden, I found myself rebelling against the very things I loved about my husband: his kindness, stability, warmth and love. I impulsively reached out for a new life” (p. 73).

Impulsivity, in its more controlled form, may be experienced as decisiveness. With reference to the decisiveness which comes with hypomania/mania, Jamison (1993, p. 125) comments:

“Where depression questions, ruminates, and is tentative, mania answers with vigor and certainty.”

2.3.4 Symptoms of depression

The DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for depression offer further insight into the seven categories outlined for hypomania/mania and employ a slightly different vocabulary. Depressive symptoms are often the opposites of hypomanic/manic symptoms (Jamison, 1993), so they are worth consideration. As opposed to *Euphoria* (or elation), core symptoms of depression include a “depressed mood”, as well as feeling “sad” and “empty”. Instead of an optimistic hypomanic/manic perspective, those with depression frequently feel “hopeless” and, instead of finding everything more interesting, exciting, and enjoyable, depression often results in a “markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities...” (“anhedonia”). As opposed to increased energy and a decreased need for sleep, depression often causes “fatigue or loss of energy” and “hypersomnia”³⁶. While hypomania/mania elevates confidence, depression causes “feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt”, and instead of enhanced focus and goal-directed behaviour, depression often results in a “diminished ability to think or concentrate”. While the DSM-5 refers to impulsive behaviour in hypomania, it does not call it “decisiveness”. A DSM-5 symptom of depression is, however, “indecisiveness”. Having noted

³⁶ Although insomnia also occurs.

that depressive symptoms are frequently the opposites of hypomanic/manic symptoms, Jamison (1993, p. 21) again speaks about the impact of mood on perspective and decision-making:

“Depression affects not only mood but the nature and content of thoughts as well. Thinking processes almost always slow down, and decisiveness is replaced by indecision and rumination.”

Both hypomania/mania and depression represent disequilibrium and are sub-optimal, unsustainable states. Jamison (1995) provides insight into some of her depressive symptoms:

“I would sit for hour after hour in the undergraduate library, unable to muster up enough energy to go to class. I would stare out the window, stare at my books, rearrange them, shuffle them around, leave them unopened, and think about dropping out of college. When I did go to class it was pointless. Pointless and painful. I understood very little of what was going on, and I felt as though dying would release me from the overwhelming sense of inadequacy and blackness that surrounded me. I felt utterly alone, and watching the animated conversations between my fellow students only made me feel more so. I stopped answering the telephone...” (pp. 44-45).

As with hypomania/mania, depression brings with it a distorted perspective – only, with depression, one’s view of oneself, the world, and the future becomes unrealistically negative:

“An example, a middle-aged man, out of the blue, has a major heart-attack. Overwhelmed by his implied mortality, the transformation of his life, he slips into a major depression. Despite this, he is recovering from the attack reasonably well, and there is every chance that he will resume a normal life. But each day he’s sure he’s getting worse [...] the everyday world is interpreted in a way that leads to depressive conclusions – it’s awful, getting worse, and this is what I deserve” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 274).

The pain of depression was articulated by Edgar Allan Poe in a letter written in his mid-twenties. What should be noted is the impact of mood on perspective. Poe understands that, objectively, his life is improving, but this does not change how he feels (his intuition):

“My feelings at this moment are pitiable indeed. I am suffering under a depression of spirits such as I have never felt before. I have struggled in vain against the influence of this melancholy – You will believe me when I say that I am still miserable in spite of the great improvement in my circumstances...” (Jamison, 1993, pp. 18-19).

American artist Ralph Barton explains, immediately prior to committing suicide, that he too understood that – objectively – his life was good (Jamison, 1993):

“I have had few real difficulties. I have had, on the contrary, an exceptionally glamorous life – as lives go. And I have had more than my share of affection and appreciation. The most charming,

intelligent, and important people I have known have liked me – and the list of my enemies is very flattering to me. I have always had excellent health. But, since my early childhood, I have suffered with a melancholia which, in the past five years, has begun to show definite symptoms of manic-depressive insanity. It has prevented me from getting anything like the full value out of my talents, and for the past three years, has made work a torture to do at all. It has made it impossible for me to enjoy the simple pleasures of life that seem to get other people through” (p. 42).

With reference to the inability to experience pleasure, Sapolsky (2004) states:

“Anhedonia is consistent among depressives. A woman has just received the long-sought promotion; a man has just become engaged to the woman of his dreams – and, amid their depression, they will tell you how they feel nothing, how it doesn’t really count, how they don’t deserve it. Friendship, achievement, sex, food, humor – none can bring any pleasure” (p. 272).

Jamison (1993) similarly explains how, in spite of a good life, Leo Tolstoy was heavily suicidal:

“And there I was, a fortunate man, carrying a rope from my room, where I was alone every night as I undressed, so that I would not hang myself from the beam between the closets. And I quit going hunting with a gun, so that I would not be too easily tempted to rid myself of life [...] And this was happening to me at a time when, from all indications, I should have been considered a completely happy man; this was when I was not yet fifty years old. I had a good, loving, and beloved wife, fine children, and a large estate that was growing and expanding without any effort on my part. More than ever before I was respected by friends and acquaintances, praised by strangers, and I could claim a certain renown without really deluding myself” (pp. 44-45).

Jamison (1993) then quotes from the memoirs of French composer Hector Berlioz, who attempts to capture the anguish of major depression. (With each of these descriptions, it is useful to consider what the “opposite” – hypomania/mania – might feel like):

“It is difficult to put into words what I suffered – the longing that seemed to be tearing my heart out by the roots, the dreadful sense of being alone in an empty universe, the agonies that thrilled through me as if the blood were running ice-cold in my veins, the disgust with living, the impossibility of dying. Shakespeare himself never described this torture; but he counts it, in Hamlet, among the terrible of all the evils of existence. I had stopped composing; my mind seemed to become feebler as my feelings grew more intense. I did nothing. One power was left me – to suffer” (p. 19).

Novelist William Styron similarly wrote about the inescapability of his suicidal depression:

“The pain is unrelenting, and what makes the condition intolerable is the foreknowledge that no remedy will come – not in a day, not in an hour, a month, or a minute. If there is mild relief, one knows that it is only temporary; more pain will follow. It is hopelessness more than pain that crushes the soul. So the decision-making of daily life involves not, as in normal affairs, shifting from one annoying situation to another less annoying – or from discomfort to relative comfort, or from boredom to activity – but moving from pain to pain. One does not abandon, even briefly, one’s bed of nails, but is attached to it wherever one goes” (Jamison, 1993, p. 44).

Poet William Cooper reveals how rational argument cannot convince a deeply depressed person that the future is bright. His reality was shaped by mood – his mood was not shaped by reality:

“You will tell me that this cold gloom will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, and endeavour to encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it. But it will be lost labour” (Jamison, 1993, p. 21).

The mortality rate for untreated bipolar disorder is higher than it is for many forms of heart disease and cancer (Jamison, 1993), a fact which those who are not intimately familiar with the illness may struggle to appreciate. Emil Kraepelin, considered by many to be the founder of modern psychiatry, provided insight into the psychological torment from which his manic-depressive patients were evidently trying to escape:

“The patients, therefore, often try to starve themselves, to hang themselves, to cut their arteries; they beg that they may be burned, buried alive, driven out into the woods and there allowed to die... One of my patients struck his neck so often on the edge of a chisel fixed on the ground that all the soft parts were cut through to the vertebrae” (Jamison, 1993, p. 41).

It is useful to understand the abnormal depths to which a person’s mood may fall in order to have some understanding of the abnormal heights to which it may rise. Jamison (1993) comments:

“A recent review of thirty studies found that, on average, one-fifth of manic-depressive patients die by suicide. From a slightly different perspective, at least two-thirds of those people who commit suicide have been found to have suffered from depressive or manic-depressive illness” (p. 41).

“In an extensive clinical investigation carried out in Sweden, suicide was almost eighty times more likely among patients with depressive illness – unipolar or bipolar – than in those individuals with no psychiatric disorder” (p. 41).

Having considered the symptoms of bipolar disorder, it is useful to consider the challenges in diagnosing the illness. The following section reveals why it would be unlikely that LGAT participants would have been diagnosed based upon the post-training “experience”.

2.3.5 Diagnostic challenges

Bipolar disorder has historically presented a number of diagnostic challenges. Conditions such as ADHD, temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE), borderline personality disorder, and schizophrenia share features with hypomania/mania, but potentially the greatest barrier to early diagnosis is that hypomania is subtle, often pleasurable, and may not feel pathological to the person experiencing it. Because the post-LGAT “experience” is framed as a “breakthrough”, a “transformation”, or “getting it”, graduates will be disinclined to consider the possibility that this euphoric state may be, or become, problematic for some. Arguing that bipolar disorder is difficult to diagnose is a double-edged sword – it provides an explanation as to why the observation of hypomania in LGATs has not been given serious consideration in the past, but it also demands that evidence for this assertion be compelling. The first thing which should be noted is that, because bipolar disorder is often assumed to present as a perpetual state of switching between extreme mania and suicidal depression, it is unlikely that members of the public would associate their pleasurable post-LGAT high with the illness:

“Many are unaware of the milder, temperamental expressions of the disease or do not know that most people who have manic-depressive illness are, in fact, without symptoms (that is, they are psychologically normal) most of the time” (Jamison, 1993, p. 5).

The truth is that there are many forms of the illness, with varying levels of severity:

“Manic-depressive, or bipolar, illness encompasses a wide range of mood disorders and temperaments. These vary in severity from cyclothymia – characterized by pronounced, but not totally debilitating changes in mood, behaviour, thinking, sleep, and energy levels – to extremely severe, life-threatening, and psychotic forms of the disease” (Jamison, 1993, p. 13).

Those with a limited exposure to hypomania/mania, may also assume that only specific behaviours reflect an abnormally elevated mood. Hypomania/mania may, however, present itself differently depending on the person and the context:

“As you already know or have just seen, people with bipolar disorder have distinct experiences that comprise their mood disorder” (Miklowitz, 2011, p. 28).

Providing insight into the delay between first symptoms and diagnosis, and the way that symptoms may be interpreted differently by different people, Miklowitz (2011) states:

“Though bipolar disorder is very difficult to diagnose, the textbook descriptions of it make it sound like it shouldn’t be so hard. After all, what could be more dramatic than shifting between extraordinarily manic behaviour, feeling on top of the world and supercharged with energy, to feeling withdrawn, and suicidal? Consider a surprising fact: On average there is an 8-year lag

between a first episode of depression or manic symptoms and the first time the disorder is diagnosed and treated (Lewis, 2000; Post & Leverich, 2006). Why should it take so long for a person with the disorder to come to the attention of the mental health profession? In part, the answer is that the behaviors we summarise with the term *bipolar disorder* can look quite different, depending on your perspective” (p. 13).

Otto, et al (2011, p. 12) similarly state, “... the delay between the first signs and symptoms of the disorder and treatment is often 10 years”, while Malhi and Berk (2014) note that feeling incredible is (unsurprisingly) seldom reported as a problem by undiagnosed members of the public:

“In practice, the likelihood of detecting hypomania is further diminished by the fact that people quite understandably fail to recognize a period of ‘profound well-being’ as mental illness and don’t seek treatment for ‘feeling wonderful’” (p. 501).

They further contend that its complexity contributes to diagnostic difficulties:

“Bipolar disorder is, by its very nature, a complex illness (Malhi et al., 2012), partly because of the many domains it affects. It is therefore not surprising that it generates considerable diagnostic uneasiness” (Malhi & Berk, 2014, p. 501).

Importantly, Malhi and Berk (2014) stress that hypomania in particular is difficult to separate from normal mood. (This is because, by definition, hypomania does not cause significant impairment in social or occupational functioning, or necessitate hospitalisation):

“Hypomania is also poorly demarcated from the normal vicissitudes of mood, and briefer and less severe manic syndromes (Malhi et al., 2011)” (p. 501).

Fletcher, Parker, and Manicavasagar (2013, p. 456) make similar points about BP II (hypomania):

“BP II prevalence may be underestimated, reflecting difficulties in detection and diagnosis.”

“This is particularly relevant in BP II disorder, whereby hypomania (unlike mania) may be appraised as a positive experience rather than a threat, prompting stimulation seeking.”

Not only are members of the public generally unaware of the nature of hypomania, but bipolar disorder was only separated into Bipolar I and Bipolar II in the DSM in 1994, 23 years after the formation of DSM-III-R, and several years after published studies on the impact of LGATs on participants:

“In the DSM-IV (1994) and the most recent DSM-IV-TR (DSM-IV-text revision, 2000), the definition of bipolar disorder diagnosis has evolved from a monolithic disorder with a single set of criteria, to a more nuanced subtype system, where Bipolar I and Bipolar II forms of the disorder are recognized and separately diagnosed” (Nemade & Dombeck, 2009).

It is also unlikely that LGAT participants will search for a negative explanation for their “experience” when a positive one has been provided. Jamison (1995) explains how, even after she had experienced mania (not simply hypomania), and while she was learning about the illness at the time, she did not recognise the symptoms in herself:

“It never occurred to me that I was ill; my brain just didn’t put it in those terms” (p. 45).

“Despite the fact that we were being taught how to make clinical diagnoses, I still did not make any connection between the problems I had experienced and what was described as manic-depressive illness in the textbooks” (p. 58).

It took an outside expert to convince her of the diagnosis - something which, understandably, considering the negative connotations, she resisted at first:

“He listened to all of my convoluted, alternative explanations for my breakdown – the stress of a stressed marriage, the stress of joining the psychiatry faculty, the stress of overwork – and he remained firm in his diagnosis and recommendations for treatment” (Jamison, 1995, p. 87).

2.3.6 Autoethnographic account of bipolar triggers and symptoms

“All are lunatics, but he who can analyze his delusion is called a philosopher” – Ambrose Bierce³⁷

My own experience of bipolar disorder is also instructive, as it illustrates the way that hypomanic/manic triggers may naturally occur, and how my unique circumstances and psychology contributed to my breakdown. I concede that most would not respond to these circumstances in the same way, but this reveals an important insight regarding the LGAT experience: while the LGAT experience is superficially homogeneous, individuals may respond very differently to the same processes. If, for example, a person “shares”³⁸ about being raped – while upsetting to witness for most – this may be particularly distressing for participants who have been through, or who have had loved ones go through, a similar experience. Similarly, the degree to which participants’ senses of self-worth are undermined by the trainer, and the degree to which participants feel a sense of shame, guilt, and humiliation, would depend quite significantly on a number of difficult-to-assess, and interacting, factors, not limited to their physiological and psychological make-ups, and their life histories.

Psychologist John Neale, an advocate of the *manic-defence hypothesis*³⁹, suggested in the late 1980s that those at risk of manic episodes tend to have “unrealistic standards for success and unstable self-esteem” (Bentall, 2003). He went on to say that, if significant enough, negative events could

³⁷ (Bierce & Fadiman, 1947).

³⁸ “Sharing” is a process that occurs in most LGATs. Participants are encouraged to reveal distressing personal events and are “coached” by the trainer until they “accept responsibility” and have a “breakthrough”.

³⁹ A theory first proposed in 1911, which should be distinguished from the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis*.

overwhelm such an individual's fickle sense of self-worth, and that grandiose ideas would be unconsciously generated in these circumstances as a defence. Similarly, psychoanalyst, Sandor Rado, argued that manic-depressives are exceedingly concerned with, and sensitive to, the approval of others - that the manic defence is activated by an abnormal need for affirmation, and that these individuals are excessively focused on themselves (Bentall, 2003). While the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* is based on the idea that threats to self-esteem (and other psychological stress) trigger a defence, it asserts that there are explicable biological underpinnings to this defence.

In order to explain the psychological stress which resulted in my first manic episode, I must acknowledge that words like perfectionist, insecure, and hypersensitive (to the opinions of others) described, and probably still describe, me well. From a young age my sense of self-worth was tied to an unsustainable level of superficial success, I was pathologically competitive, obsessed with looking good and yet, in spite of being a high-achiever, my self-esteem was frequently, and seriously, wounded by my perceived shortcomings. These characteristics, I believe, made me particularly vulnerable to events which threatened my self-worth. This does not mean that others are immune to similar events, and if – as occurs in LGATs – the prolonged attacks on self-worth are meticulously planned, and systematically executed over a period of days then, it is contended, “normal” people may experience similar feelings of worthlessness, guilt, uncertainty, or “stress” in the context of supposed control.

The observation which prompted this thesis was that the triggers leading to my most severe manic episodes (London, 2003 and Johannesburg, 2009) (triggers which have been shown to elicit hypomania/mania in others) were strikingly similar to the conditions I experienced in an LGAT in 2010, and that the symptoms I experienced when hypomanic/manic closely resembled the promised, observed, and reported experiences of LGAT graduates. While my London experience occurred over a number of months – and was the result of a sense of inferiority and guilt which occurred naturally – the inadequacy, guilt, humiliation, and uncertainty which occurs in LGATs is engineered by those running the training. Likewise, while the circumstances which resulted in my switch from feelings of inadequacy to a sense of success (goal-attainment) occurred organically in London, during LGATs this switch is orchestrated through “graduation” and the much sought-after acceptance of the trainer and other participants. To clarify the parallels between (1) the stress leading to my two most severe manic episodes, the abrupt removal of this stress, and the resulting feelings of euphoria, energy, optimism, creativity, excitement, and confidence, and (2) the LGAT experience, it is necessary to explain the (flawed) model by which I constructed my self-esteem as a child, and how this model failed me as I moved from childhood, to adolescence, and into my early twenties.

2.3.6.1 A flawed model for self-esteem

“Although we may well know intellectually that humans are not perfect, emotionally we often feel that there is little room for error” (Corey, 2013, p. 29).

Humanistic psychology asserts that psychological distress occurs when there is a difference between the way that you see yourself (the *self*) and what you think you ought to be (the *idealised self*) (Corey, 2013; Lieberman, 1992). The distress which led to my 2003 manic episode could be attributed to a growing chasm between these two points, and a feeling that I could do little to narrow this gap. My idealised self began to develop at an early age and was shaped by what appeared to be valued by my family and others. While it was never overtly stated that academic and sporting achievements made a person better than anyone else, the reverence with which family members and others were spoken about in the context of such accomplishments was unmistakable, and the attention paid to those who excelled in these areas revealed that success was a vehicle through which to gain love and recognition. It was a short step to equating my self-worth with performance, and I soon began to benchmark my performance (and self-worth) against those close to me. Gilovich and Ross (2016) warn that “social comparisons that put you at the short end of the stick” (p. 173) cause despair and measuring myself against my family – some of whom are extraordinary – proved to be unwise. While competitiveness made me “successful” as a child and adolescent, as I approached adulthood I could no longer meet the standards by which I valued myself and, as a result, I lost my sense of self-worth.

Since my standards for achievement were shaped by my family, it is necessary to provide insight into the capability and drive on both my mother and father’s sides, and to demonstrate that – while my response to this environment was extreme – the environment was also atypical. Firstly, my immediate family is highly academic - my father was dux of his high school and headed the mathematics department at the Durban University of Technology for many years, while my mother was a top student at school, a university graduate, and a grade 12 mathematics teacher. My older brother obtained 8 As in grade 12 (including 98% for mathematics), was dux of his high school and has a degree in actuarial science, as well as an MBA from a leading US business school (4.0 GPA); my sister obtained 7 As in grade 12 (including 97% for mathematics), now teaches high school mathematics and has a master’s degree *cum laude* in creative writing. My father’s older brother is a professor extra-ordinary in physics at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, an emeritus researcher at the CSIR⁴⁰ and has published over 150 scientific and technical papers locally and internationally (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 2015); and, of the cousins I see on my father’s side, one co-owns a highly successful business, while the other is an orthopaedic surgeon. My mother’s side of the family are

⁴⁰ The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

both academic and gifted at sports. While my mother held national age group records for swimming, her youngest sister held national open records, and another of her sisters recently obtained a PhD in biblical studies. Two of my cousins on my mother's side run their own businesses, two are chartered accountants, one has a computer science degree from Harvard, and the youngest has a degree in international affairs from the University of Georgia (3.97 GPA), a master's degree in international development from Institute d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, swam in two Olympics, won a silver medal at the Commonwealth Games, and holds one South African and one all-African record.

While more distant family members provided a general sense of standards to aspire to, it was my brother Graeme who, at eighteen months older, was both the person who I most wanted to emulate and the person who was least possible to emulate. By age five we were playing soccer against each other, by age six we were starting to play tennis against each other and, in line with family tradition, we swam against each other by age seven. In 1986 both Graeme (aged 8) and I (aged 7) competed in the Natal Schools swimming trials and, after my brother made the team and I saw the response, I was determined to gain the same recognition and approval. After false starting in my strongest race (the 50m freestyle), my only hope of making the team was in the 50m backstroke, a race that, based on prior performance, I had no chance of winning. While I had been swimming backstroke for years (and had arguably reached a level of performance close to my potential), I was so desperate to succeed that, through a frantic effort which perhaps perfectly captures my desperation for achievement, I took thirteen seconds off my personal best to make the team. This brought me the affirmation I craved and accelerated the formation of an identity and sense of self-worth based entirely on winning.

This, and a multitude of subtler events, contributed to a growing pathological competitiveness - I became addicted to success and over the next five or six years when I wasn't at swimming training, I was hitting a tennis ball against a wall, practicing hockey drills, spending hours bowling, training for rugby, or studying obsessively to come top of my class. Each time that I triumphed the recognition I received reinforced the idea that I was of value, and that it was these achievements which gave me value. I put enormous pressure on myself to maintain the image of invincibility I had begun to cultivate and saw any hint of failure as a threat to this self-image. From barely making the provincial swimming team for one stroke in 1986, I pushed myself harder in the pool every day and, from just eight possible races, won seven gold medals (and one silver) at the national winter championships in 1988. I distinctly remember the sense of failure I experienced for missing out on eight golds. In 1989 I took up junior lifesaving ("nippers") and by 1991 I was the national champion in my age group. In the same year (aged 12) I was the captain of my primary school's rugby team, hockey team, tennis team, and swimming team, and while I didn't captain the cricket team, I was the fastest bowler in the district.

While sports were important, with a father as a lecturer and a mother as a teacher, academics were paramount and, while my brother was a good sportsman, it was in the classroom that he truly excelled. In 1989 he won the major academic scholarship to the prestigious Kearsney College - a scholarship based primarily on academic ability, awarded to the top applicant from all of the primary schools in the province (and many applicants from across the country). There were far more applicants (and just one recipient) for this award than for any sports team I had made and, rather than seeing it as a goal to work towards, I felt that failing to win it would be evidence of my ineptitude. At primary school I was, in addition to being obsessively competitive at sports, relentlessly hardworking, and following in my brother's footsteps, managed to win this scholarship in 1991. While it would seem logical that these achievements would build my confidence, they were instead validating an unhealthy model for self-esteem, and laying the groundwork for my inevitable downfall. Most children fail early on and must learn to find a sense of value from other sources. As a twelve-year-old I was blind to the superficiality of my achievements, I lacked the wisdom to question and discard this mind-set and, as I entered adolescence, I did not realise that basing my value on such fickle and unsustainable measures would cause significant distress when I inevitably faltered.

I began to stumble as soon as I reached high school. Because I had won the major scholarship I told myself that I had to be the top student and, in spite of performing well (I was coming second) and continuing to do well at sports, I saw this as failure and spent countless hours studying, going so far as to memorise textbooks word for word in order to do better. By mid-year the pressure I put on myself had translated into frequent headaches, so severe and disturbing – both for me and for anyone who witnessed them – that I was taken to a neurologist, who indicated that stress was the most likely cause. Before my final exams in 1992 I was in such distress that, walking to breakfast one morning in tears, a teacher pulled me aside and insisted I reveal what was worrying me. My brother was called in to speak with me and assured me that I was doing well, that my scholarship would not be taken away, and that I would not “fail” the upcoming exams (the binary way in which I viewed success and failure meant that we had different understandings of the concept, however). It is only in retrospect that I can see how extreme my behaviour was and how the pressure I put on myself undoubtedly contributed to my current diagnosis. According to Sapolsky (2004) and Wallenstein (2003), elevated levels of stress hormones are often found in individuals with mood disorders, and Wallenstein (2003) notes how early life stress may result in a mood disorder later in life:

“It’s unknown how severe the traumatic event must be, and how long the change to the HPA system lasts, but some researchers estimate the alteration in the response may last a lifetime. That’s right – you get super stressed out as a kid, and you may end up having an exaggerated stress response to all stressors for the rest of your life” (pp. 55-56).

It should be re-emphasised that my abnormal psychology as a child, the stress which resulted, and the physiological changes which these factors precipitated may have made me more vulnerable to ordinary stressors, but this does not mean that “normal” people are immune to the extraordinary allostatic challenges of an LGAT. Humanistic psychology’s core therapy – Person Centred Therapy – asserts that, in order to bring about congruity; that is, to minimise the difference between a person’s *self* and their *idealised self*, one of the three necessary conditions is *unconditional positive regard* (Corker, et al., 2013). This condition is self-explanatory - regardless of what the client says there should be no judgement and complete support of the person. If this is a condition which leads to the greatest level of congruence, then *unconditional negative regard* – which arguably occurs in LGATs – may have the opposite effect. LGAT participants are made to feel ignorant, guilty, uncertain, and humiliated. This process likely undermines their self-concept, while the trainer artificially models an *idealised self* - the result is the greatest possible degree of incongruence.

2.3.6.2 A widening gap between the self and the idealised self

“Any man who has based his self-esteem upon physical courage, skill, and endurance, whether or not combined with sexual prowess and leadership, will understand the depressing and disturbing effect such a disabling injury must have” (Storr, 1997, p. 131).

Referring to Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus, psychiatrist Anthony Storr comments on the danger of basing your self-esteem on anything that may abruptly be removed. As I moved through high school I remained competitive, but my dominance subsided, something I found difficult to deal with. After my near break-down in grade 8, I consciously put less pressure on myself and my academic performance slipped over the next few years. By grade 10 (1994) I was still in the top five in my class – the same year my brother was possibly the top grade 12 student in the province – but by grade 12 (1996) I was not even in the top ten. As opposed to my brother, who got 98% for his final high school mathematics exams, and my sister who went on to get 97%, I got 77% - a result that is strong in most contexts, but which made me feel inadequate in a family so strong in the subject. (When playing scrabble with my mother, father, brother, or sister I would also consistently come last, so it felt as though my intellectual inferiority was not restricted to mathematics.) While weak by family standards, my grade 12 results were sufficient to get me into the University of Cape Town and, perhaps unwisely, I followed my brother to study commerce in 1997.

By the time I reached university, my interest in academics was minimal. I did what was needed to pass, but my life revolved around parties, friends, and, to maintain one obsessive habit, lifting weights for two hours a day in the gym. I had little interest in commerce, or in competing academically, and I managed to attach my sense of self-worth to my new girlfriend, to exercise, and to sport. I did not

think beyond the following week of social events or, when they became imminent, the following set of exams and, while others had a sense of where their degree would take them, I did not give it much thought. I tried to convince myself, at this stage, that strong results were not an indicator of self-worth (they were an indicator that you were not taking advantage of the university experience) and even my brother did not get distinctions for every subject. I did, however, feel that everyone had not just caught up with me, but had rapidly overtaken me. Of my group of friends, my results were the lowest and, in addition to a superior academic grasp of the content, they had greater insight into, and enthusiasm for, the way businesses functioned and how what we were learning could be applied.

In my third year at university (1999) I broke up with my girlfriend and, while it was my decision, I plunged into a state of despair that I had never believed possible. This was my first taste of major depression – I was unable to focus, my sleeping became disrupted, I was overwhelmed with despair and, having never considered it before, I thought constantly of suicide. As had become typical, I had left studying late for my mid-year exams, but in this state found it impossible to concentrate on, comprehend, or recall anything; the greater my inability to understand my work, the greater my frustration and panic, and the greater my frustration and panic, the greater my inability to understand. Having never failed a test or exam in my life before then, I got 22%, 23%, 50%, 50%, and 52% in my mid-year exams. This forced me to confront my parents and try to explain what had happened.

Before experiencing depression, it is possible to feel invincible – the master of your own destiny – but when something you cannot see nor understand renders you unable to think, robs you of all self-worth, has you ruminating on death, and filters everything through a lens which makes even the most innocuous daily tasks seem overwhelming, you lose not only your sense of invincibility, but your sense of basic dignity. There's nothing like not being able to deal with anything to convince you that you are not able to deal with anything. Before depression you can look at almost any challenge and say, "If I set my mind to it, it can be done...", while after depression, you must soberly conclude, "I can do it... if my mind allows me to do it..."

1999 was also an important year for the purposes of explaining the *stress in the context of control* I experienced in London, as I became a Christian that year⁴¹. While my eleven months in London would prove to be immensely challenging, I believed at the time that my life was under God's control and that, like Job⁴², an end to my struggling would come if I maintained my faith. Because I approached Christianity with the same sense of perfectionism that I applied in other areas, it undoubtedly

⁴¹ While I had grown up as a "Christian", in 1999 – in the terminology often used – I "gave my life to Christ".

⁴² Job is a book of the bible, which tells the story of a man (Job) who is put through terrible suffering as a test of his faith, remains faithful, and is ultimately rewarded for that faith.

contributed to my sense of guilt and inadequacy as I searched desperately for His presence, yet felt no closeness, acceptance, or favour from God.

2.3.6.3 London – the perfect storm

Most of my friends completed their degrees in 2000 and, like many South African graduates at the time, went to London in 2001 to earn pounds, travel around Europe and experience life abroad. Because of my mid-year performance in 1999, I only graduated in December 2001, and in mid-2002, with interviews set up by a friend at Credit Suisse First Boston (CSFB), I headed to London to enjoy what in previous years had been a strong job market, high earnings and a relatively painless transition into the real world. In the same year, my brother had been accepted into two prestigious US business schools: Wharton and Kellogg. Wharton was ranked as the #1 business school in the world in 2002 by the Financial Times (Financial Times, 2016), while Bloomberg ranked Kellogg as the #1 school in the same year (Kellogg MBA, 2016). Graeme chose to go to Kellogg and, since I could not downplay the importance of this stage of my life, I found myself once again competing against him. My brother became a benchmark for my idealised self in business and, as a Christian, Jesus became a benchmark for my idealised self as a person. My self-concept in both areas would become progressively eroded as time passed, and the ever-growing chasm between these points was reflected in my accelerating psychological decompensation.

After two hours of interviews at CSFB on my first day in London, I was invited back for the second round (another two hours), and then a final hour-long interview, described as “a confirmation” by the HR manager. I had to wait the weekend for the offer but was told the following Monday that – because it was not an entry level position and I did not have a master’s degree in finance (something they had not initially picked up) – they were unable to offer me the job. This was frustrating, as a (relatively) high-paying job at a prominent investment bank represented financial independence, a step towards building a career, stability, and a sense of success and self-worth. I was not too concerned, however – although heavy lay-offs from investment banks were being announced almost daily, I was confident that God had a plan for me and that I would soon be gainfully employed.

In the same way that I believe that LGATs are designed to create the perfect storm of an environment, my first nine months in London were the perfect storm of challenges to my self-worth. To begin with, those nine months were the worst period in the FTSE-100⁴³ in decades. Figure 6 shows the FTSE-100 over time, with my first nine months in London circled in red. Note that the FTSE-100 dropped lower in this period than during the 2008 market crash:

⁴³ The FTSE-100 is a popular index which reflects the performance of both the UK and world economies.



Figure 6: FTSE-100 over time (macrorends.net, 2018).

After being turned down by CSFB, I signed up with numerous recruitment agents, but since banks were laying off hundreds of employees, I was competing with people who had years of experience, and for six weeks – calling my agents every day – there was not a hint of an interview. I took jobs doing various things to earn money, but none could be considered potential careers. I spent days cleaning someone’s office and filing his credit card receipts, I spent a night at Virgin Records peeling off price stickers and applying new ones, I did short-term data-entry jobs and even – when money started to become very tight – arrived one morning at the destination specified by a newspaper advertisement which read, “If you are motivated and keen to earn then be at [location] at 07:00 am tomorrow”. (I discovered that this was an advertisement for becoming a paintball salesman.) It turns out that I am not a particularly charismatic salesman, and my success rate (approaching strangers in the street) was about zero in 300 on the day that I attempted it. Since it was commission-based, I was effectively paid nothing to be rejected by hundreds of strangers for the better part of that day.

In addition to my brother, who would let me know how he was doing (“... 97% for Finance... 100% for strategy... I’m meeting so many amazing people... this place is the best!”), I was living with people who seemed to be doing very well – Jimmy had a good job at CSFB; Jason was the financial director of a software company; and, if the size of a shoe collection is a proxy for success, then Angie was also quite comfortable. They were all very supportive, but their success was a constant reminder of my failure. It was humiliating that I could not find a job, while everyone in my new group was thriving, and my self-doubt grew as the weeks passed and the last of my money disappeared. In a final attempt to survive, and with the intention of moving to a prestigious bank as soon as a position became available,

I accepted a job at a shipping company in Dartford when the opportunity presented itself. I remember, prior to my interview, my housemates and I looking for Dartford on a map, when one of them said, “I think we need a bigger map”. Dartford was in Kent, nearly a two-hour commute from where I was living, but it was my only option if I did not want to give up and return home:

“... a long commute turns out to be one of the sources of dissatisfaction with everyday life to which people seem *not* to adapt” (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 190).

Over the next seven months I woke up at 05:15am, got to work just before 08:00, worked until 17:00, and got home at about 19:00 every evening. While I couldn’t afford a gym contract, I was involved in martial arts at the time and would spend nearly two hours every night stretching, doing abdominal exercises, and trying to stay strong. 500 press-ups and 100 pull-ups every night – six nights a week – then dinner, some TV and then, exhausted, go to sleep. I would eagerly call my employment agents every day, praying that an opportunity had come up, but there was never good news. My job was also not ideal. I was managing the import of cars from Europe, which – while possibly sounding impressive – meant that I spent my days walking around in the rain and the snow in steel-toed boots, wearing a giant high-visibility jacket so that tugs and straddle carriers didn’t run me over, while looking for missing car keys and, more often than you might imagine, intervening in fist fights between the men in the car hut and the truck drivers who came to collect the vehicles.

As I passed through Waterloo station every morning I would do my best to avoid running into friends from university – always dressed in suits – who were off to their high-paying jobs at Merrill Lynch, “Goldman’s”, Deutsche Bank, JP Morgan, or Morgan Stanley. They would inevitably tell me about their recent trip to Europe or ask whether I was a snowboarder or a skier, and I would not let them know that I could barely afford getting to Kent every day. While my housemates did all that they could to include me, they could afford to do many things I could not. They went skiing in Europe and took a number of other trips – Jimmy and Jason even flew to New York on the Concorde one weekend. Since I was eating baked beans on toast every night, I found it difficult to look positively at my own situation. My faith in God kept me going during this period, and the greater my struggles, the more I placed trust in what he had planned for me. I believed that he was in control of my life and that, as with Job, this was a trial that would come to an end, and be replaced by the love, acceptance, and joy I had learned to associate with a closeness to Him. This, I believe, relates to Sapolsky’s (2004) comments about stress inducing dopamine if that stress occurs in the context of control, and of dopamine being related to an anticipation of pleasure. I felt uncertain, and worried, and humiliated, and my self-worth was heavily challenged, but I believed firmly that this period of distress was transient, that God was in control, and that my distress would ultimately be replaced by something non-specific, but wonderful:

“What God has planned for people who love Him is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds” (1 Cor. 2: 9 New International Version).

While I earned a relatively low salary, I tithed a tenth of my gross income every month, I prayed and read my bible on the train and, wanting to become a better person, reflected on my shortcomings, sought forgiveness, and tried to see people as God would. While my housemates thought I was crazy, I tried to be honest in everything I did and adhere to my understanding of what the bible said. I remained celibate throughout my time as a Christian and, even though transport costs were exorbitant and tickets were almost never checked outside of London, I would not cheat the system. I endeavoured, like Job, to be faithful to God in spite of the strain I was taking, but as days turned to weeks and weeks to months I wondered what it was about me that prevented God from allowing me to achieve even modest success. In trying to understand this, I searched myself for flaws and impurities – of which there were many – and tried to eliminate them. The effect of this introspection was that I spent a great deal of time focused on my failings as a person, which caused further guilt and shame.

While my long days of commuting, unfulfilling work, lack of income, and fixated obsession with getting an interview at a bank had me desperate, exasperated and, on many nights, in tears, there were also many good times in London and my housemates helped me to see the humour in the situation. This pattern of stress, interspersed with periods during which the stress was removed, is similar (although on a greater time-scale) to what occurs during LGATs. In London, the laughter which followed recollections of some of my experiences were among the most enjoyable of my life – gallows humour, as prescribed by Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl:

“Humor was another of the soul’s weapons in the fight for self-preservation. It is well-known that humor, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds” (Frankl, 2008, p. 54).

If there could be a perfect metaphor for my time in London, it took place on the 23rd November 2002, when the Springbok rugby team played England at Twickenham. Having splurged on a ticket, I hoped that a victory would lift my spirits, give me something to celebrate, and stimulate a sense of pride and self-worth. This was not to be. Surrounded by tens of thousands of English fans, the Springboks suffered the greatest defeat in their 111 year history. Sometimes, it seems, the stars align to produce extraordinary conditions and an extraordinary result – something that may only occur once in a century. I feel like my time in London was the perfect storm of psychological vulnerability, market weakness, and a string of unfortunate events. Whether my decompensation would have occurred inevitably is difficult to say, but to quote Viktor Frankl, with an insight that I believe relates equally to LGATs, “an abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behaviour” (Frankl, 2008, p. 32).

After about eight months of commuting two hours to work, spending the day driving cars from the ship to the yard, commuting two hours home, trying desperately to stay fit, eating badly, praying, hoping, calling my employment agents, studying Jimmy's options pricing file, praying, tithing, searching myself for the things which made me unworthy of success, and – not wanting to look weak – playing down my strain to my housemates and parents, I was called one morning by my agent about an interview at Merrill Lynch. I was pulling a Mercedes off a ship when the call came through, and was told that the interview was in two hours' time. Since it took me about two hours to get from Dartford to London, I had no time to shower, or shave, or change, so I arrived at possibly the most ostentatious of the investment banks wearing steel-toed boots, khaki pants, a red golf shirt, a blue fleece top, and a bright yellow high-visibility jacket, with dirt under my fingernails, grease on my clothes and three days' worth of stubble. Despite being more than qualified for the job I was not offered the position.

A few weeks after the first interview I had another opportunity at JP Morgan. In this case I had a few days' notice so I was showered, shaved, deodorised, and in a suit. It was a low-key meeting – in the reception area of their building on the Thames – and while it was for an entry-level position, it paid far more than I was earning, it wasn't two hours from where I was living, and it would have been a foot in the door. The interview went well and my agent contacted me later. "Great interview, John" he said. "They loved you. It's 99% certain that you have the job." Those were his exact words. I was relieved and delighted and so were my housemates. It was a Friday evening so we all went down to the pub to celebrate. On Wednesday morning the following week I received the much-anticipated confirmatory call. It was not good news. "I'm very sorry John. They had to make cuts at the bank and one of the people who would have been laid off has been moved to that position. It's their policy to hire internally first." My entire sense of self-worth – correctly or incorrectly – was tied to getting a job at an investment bank. After struggling and hoping and praying for so long, it had seemed just within my grasp, only to be snatched away at the last second.

This final rejection devastated me. I felt dejected and worthless and close to giving up, and for the next two days I meditated on what I should do. On Saturday morning I called my parents in South Africa to let them know how things were going. While they were aware that I had not found the perfect position, I had not let them know how much strain I was taking. I did not like to be seen as weak or incapable and thought that, as soon as I found that job, my strain during this period would become irrelevant. Typically I spoke with my dad, who would then relay the news to my mom, and that morning I broke down as I told him how much I was struggling and how, in spite of my best efforts, I could not find success. Landmark refers to "stories" – how we interpret facts – and "breakthroughs" – how we are able to see things from a perspective that allows freedom and growth. Many of these breakthroughs occur during LGATs after emotional encounters which end with a sense of

reconciliation or acceptance. My father, as he had always done, showed me unconditional love and support. He told me how proud of me he was, and how my value had nothing to do with getting a job at JP Morgan, Merrill Lynch, or CSFB. While I had always known this to be true, at that moment I really experienced it to be true. The story I had been carrying with me my whole life was just that – a story. Although I did not know the terminology at the time, that unconditional acceptance pushed me into my first clear hypomanic state and produced what I believe was a breakthrough.

2.3.6.4 Minor stress removal and hypomania

In addition to clear feelings of euphoria, and acceptance, I felt highly energised after that phone call. I also felt, for the first time that I could remember, that my value was not tied to superficial measures of achievement, or to the approval of other people. I thought about my parents, and my father in particular, whose life revolved around making other people happy. He seldom drew attention to his own achievements and even those who knew him well would have had little idea of the lengths to which he would go to help other people and make people around him smile. It is not a profound idea that people like this are more valuable than the self-serving ideal I had built for myself – the virtues of kindness and selflessness, rather than greed and self-promotion, can be found throughout film and literature – but before that morning I had not experienced the “natural knowing” that this was true.

I was so overwhelmed by this revelation that I felt driven to express it – to capture this insight so I would never forget it. It has been noted of manic-depressives that “many patients spontaneously start writing poetry while manic (often without any previous interest in either reading or writing poetry)” (Jamison, 1993, p. 108). Having never willingly written a poem before, or even considered writing one, on that day I felt a tremendous compulsion to communicate what I was experiencing. Over the next few hours I reflected on what I felt was truly important – on whose opinions do, in fact, count – and tearfully attempted to articulate my breakthrough:

Success

What is it that you'd have me say – your son who knew you well?

Of your strengths – that there were many,

That your weaknesses were few

That every man you'd ever met would have looked up to you

That you'd climbed a mountain through a raging storm,

That your wit brought laughter, your passion drew tears

That a stronger man was never born,

And in your presence I had no fears

*That thousands worked beneath you
- you commanded their respect
That as a businessman you were admired by peers
For your power and intellect
That you could silence a room when you broke into song,
Play like Clapton, or dance like Fred Astaire
That for every critic of your talents,
There were fifty to say that one was wrong
That in love you were envied
- your gorgeous, new, young wife
Showered with gifts this modern-day Venus
A tribute to your life
That you'd built up a great fortune
Left to your wife and son
The private jet, the villa in France
- a reminder of what you'd done
OR, that an empire wasn't left behind
To show the life you'd led
But rather a mass of people
Better off for what you'd said
That you'd tried to climb through a fierce storm
But the mountain, in the end, had won
Yet you'd convinced me that, with my strength,
You knew it could be done
And that of your talents
I'd been made aware of few
But of every skill I'd ever had
I was convinced you knew
That just eleven worked with you
- you knew them all by name
That they laughed with you – they were your friends
And of you, they'd say the same*

*Or of the last gift you'd given mom,
She couldn't say just when
But that she knew, with the pick of the world,
You would choose her again*

*And while you'd worked as hard as most
And may have amassed great wealth
You chose a simple life
And passed the benefits to someone else*

*That you'd gifted not just with notes and coins,
But had given me your time
You'd listened to my hopes and fears,
And then said, "I'll tell you mine"*

*I know that recognition, power and wealth
Were things not sought by you
So I'm glad I could pay tribute
To the great things you did do*

*I realise that your value
Was not confined to things you said
But that you gave up some of your own dreams
To work on mine instead*

*Success, as I'd like to find it,
Is what you've shown it to be
As, for all my faults, you made me feel
Like you were looking up at me*

Oscar Wilde said of creative undertakings that any portrait painting with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The purpose of sharing this poem, and the two which follow, is not to convey anything profound, but – hopefully – to reveal my state of mind when I wrote them. Since I am arguing that one sees the world differently when hypomanic/manic, these poems – since they were “painted with feeling” – serve as a reflection of what seemed important to me at the time. Because I am only compelled to write when I am hypomanic, these poems do seem deeply profound to me, but I realise that this is likely just a case of classical conditioning. In much the same way as I will argue that the LGAT ideology becomes associated with the profound post-training euphoria, I associate these poems with the feelings of euphoria, connectedness, and profundity I felt when writing them.

2.3.6.5 Major stress removal (goal-attainment) and the start of mania

This experience brought about insight, but it did not change the fact that I was commuting nearly four hours a day, earning very little, and not doing what I had studied five years to do. What did change somewhat in the weeks which followed was my outlook and my behaviour. Allostasis suggests that a combination of mechanisms contribute to resilience (Sapolsky, 2004) – the realisation that business success was less important than I had built it up to be alleviated some of my distress, but not all of it. Having never had the urge to write before, in the weeks leading up to my manic episode I used my long commute as an opportunity to make considerable progress on my first book. The tendency to use writing as an escape has been discussed and, while I was not fully conscious of this at the time, the relief I got from writing was primarily because it allowed me to retreat into a world where I did not have to be myself. Writing was an opportunity for me to play a role that was more confident, more successful, more entertaining, and more intelligent than I saw myself to be, and it allowed me to point out the flaws in a world that I had found little success in. It allowed me to cast restraint aside, and be as open, honest and, occasionally, offensive as I wanted to be. Because of the need to separate my writing persona from myself, the book was written under a pseudonym (Jack Adams) and made excessive use of quotes, ideas, and lyrics from writers, musicians, and others who I admired. In John Lennon's song, "God", he argues that we tend to identify with more powerful individuals, groups, or philosophies when we feel inadequate or hurt, and – by associating myself with these people – I felt a sense of connectedness; of sharing in their wisdom, wit, eloquence, and authority⁴⁴.

In addition to a revised perspective and the escapism of writing, I continued to pray (another likely allostatic defence), and meditate on Job, and – while still feeling uncertain about myself – I believed that my period of suffering was nearing an end. Perhaps six weeks after writing my first poem, I decided to take action and ask the managing director for a raise. Having exposed a significant problem with costing in the car division a month or so earlier, I had been given more responsibility and was doing projects which had consequences worth tens of millions of pounds. I was, however, still not being paid much more than I had earned to remove price stickers at Virgin Records, and so – having discussed it with my housemates – I thought it was reasonable to request a moderate increase.

On Friday 2nd May 2003 I made the two-hour commute to Dartford, knocked anxiously on the MD's door, and went in to plead for that raise. The shipping company was a subsidiary of a South African listed company and the MD – also a South African – had been brought in to turn its profitability around. I argued my case, pointing out the value of the work I was doing and explaining (naïvely) that entry

⁴⁴ Much as I do right now, having referenced a song by John Lennon.

level banking positions paid double what I earned and didn't require four hours commuting every day. He countered that jobs in banking were scarce (which was true), and that it was my choice to live in London (also true). While acknowledging the value of the work I was doing and thanking me for it, he explained that they could not give me an increase. As I returned home that evening I was devastated – exhausted from the commuting and from trying to stay fit, unhealthy from my diet of cereal, pasta, and baked beans on toast, humiliated by my general lack of money, sleep-deprived from the stress and early mornings, and wondering why God would not help me when everyone I knew seemed to be thriving. After nine months of stress, uncertainty, guilt, humiliation, and heavily challenged self-worth – interspersed with moments of fun, and with the enduring belief that something wonderful stood on the other side of this challenge – I headed back to London that evening and told Jimmy about the meeting. What Jimmy said to me triggered my first manic episode.

I explained what I had told the managing director and how he had responded – specifically that it was irrelevant for me to bring up jobs in banking as there were few available. “Funny you say that...”, Jimmy replied. “One of the guys working in our office (at CSFB) handed in his resignation today. The job would be perfect for you, it pays [more than double what I was earning], you would be reporting to me (he was quite senior) and, since you've already been through five hours of interviews, they know what you're capable of. I've given my manager your name and he just wants to meet you on Tuesday (Monday was a public holiday) to confirm.” In spite of my earlier breakthrough, my sense of self-worth, of social isolation, and even my sense of closeness to God, were all inextricably tied to getting this job. This job was the single switch which, when flicked, removed all uncertainty, humiliation, exhaustion, and inadequacy and replaced it with acceptance, certainty, and validation. It might be argued that, over those first nine months, my mind had been through a perfect process of conditioning – of being coaxed into a state of hypervigilance in anticipation of the next challenge to my self-worth – and that as Jimmy told me that the “perfect” job was essentially mine the need for that vigilance was removed. If, as will be argued, the brain produces a substance to counter challenges to self-worth, then at that moment my brain was producing an excessive quantity of that substance, but no longer needed to.

The following day my housemates and some other friends headed to Oxford for the long weekend, but I felt as though I was getting sick, so I stayed behind. On Sunday morning I woke up early feeling good and, when a friend called and invited me to travel to Devon to play cricket for the weekend, I immediately agreed. I experienced everything about that weekend intensely – conversations, colours, driving past Stonehenge, the hedge-lined roads around Devon, the wok-shaped cricket field we played on (in Babbacombe, Torquay) – and over the weekend my sense of wellbeing grew. Even on Sunday morning, just sitting, waiting to be picked up at the station was immensely enjoyable. The likely position at CSFB did not only represent practical things, such as earnings and a sense of dignity; it also

suggested, based on my reading of the bible and my focus on Job, that my trial was over and that God was about to make things in my life much better. This anticipation of pleasure, I believe, elevated the euphoria and made me more likely to look for evidence which confirmed this expectation.

Having been writing my book for a month (and having completed a substantial portion of it) prior to that weekend, it seemed more than just chance when the person giving my friend and I a lift to Devon was a director at Random House Publishers. It has been explained that, when hypomanic/manic, events which may not seem connected or significant seem far more meaningful, and this coincidence seemed to be just one of the many ways that God would be intervening in my life:

“What God has planned for people who love Him is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds” (1 Cor. 2: 9).

At that time, I lacked the self-monitoring which I now employ, imperfect as it may be, but other than being excitable, and perhaps a little intense, during that ride to Devon, I don't feel that my behaviour was particularly strange over those first few days. I merely felt very good, enjoyed the trip enormously and, if I had returned to normal after that weekend, may have never thought that anything was wrong. My state on Saturday, Sunday, and most of Monday was hypomanic - it was only on Monday night (three days after *goal-attainment*) that it progressed, explosively, into mania. If hypomania can be thought of as the thrill of surfing the biggest set wave at your local beach, then mania – as I experienced it – might be compared to making a 50-foot drop at Mavericks; just because they both involve water, surfboards, paddling, a take-off, and a rush does not mean that they are the same thing.

2.3.6.6 Mania peaks (three days after “goal-attainment”)

On Monday 5th May 2003, as I got ready to go to sleep, I was feeling very good. I began to think about the interview the next day and how the previous nine months of struggle and strain had come to an end. As I lay on my bed I thanked God for finally answering my prayers and, as I did this, started to feel an incredible sense of love and acceptance. This euphoria served as confirmation of what I was thanking God for; the more euphoric I became, the more convinced I became that this was a divine revelation, and the more convinced I became that this was a divine revelation, the more euphoric I became. It is important to understand that, because feelings of love, joy, hope, self-worth, and connectedness are not restricted to any single experience, the context in which these feelings occur has a significant impact on how they are interpreted. After my Job-like struggle I was expecting a closeness with God and saw my experience as spiritual, while during an LGAT the post-course euphoria is likely to be interpreted as the promised, and anticipated, “transformation” of the training.

Having never taken hard drugs, I don't have a basis for comparison, but I struggle to believe that any high could exceed what I felt that evening. As I lay on my bed, wide-eyed and in absolute ecstasy, my body trembled and I cried shamelessly as pure joy began to pulse through me in waves of immeasurable bliss. My heart pounded, and – as I tried to make sense of this extraordinary experience – I felt an inhuman level of excitement, anticipation, assuredness, and energy. At the same time my mind was exploding with thoughts, profound connections were being made, and it seemed that everywhere I looked there were confirmations that I was in the loving presence of God. Flipping randomly through my bible, passages seemed to relate to me, and my growing delusion – that God was revealing himself to me – was being validated by my increasingly flexible and overactive mind.

I did not sleep at all that night – I spent it praying and reflecting and becoming increasingly euphoric and delusional. By morning I was one hundred percent certain that God was communicating with me, and that my future lay in something more meaningful than working in an investment bank. Having studied for five years, moved to London to find this “perfect” job, and having endured the worst nine months of my life fixated on it, I told Jimmy the next morning that I was no longer interested. This was just one of many decisive (impulsive) things that I did over the months which followed, and – fortunately for the ease of my diagnosis, but less fortunately for my sense of sanity – my behaviour during this period clearly revealed all seven previously identified hypomanic/manic features:

1. Perspective
2. Confidence
3. Euphoria
4. Sociability/openness
5. Creativity
6. Motivation/energy/ productivity
7. Decisiveness/impulsivity

In terms of perspective, my view of the world, the future, and myself was completely transformed. I saw beauty in every situation, in every person, and – for the first time since my “breakthrough” – in myself. Any sense of embarrassment or guilt was entirely removed, which meant that I felt no shame in expressing previously concealed thoughts and saying things that I might otherwise have kept to myself. I felt confident and empowered, but it is important to note that nothing had objectively changed in my life. The problems that I had before that evening were still there, but my outlook had been radically altered. Problems might be thought of as the perception of challenges relative to one's perception of the ability to deal with those challenges:

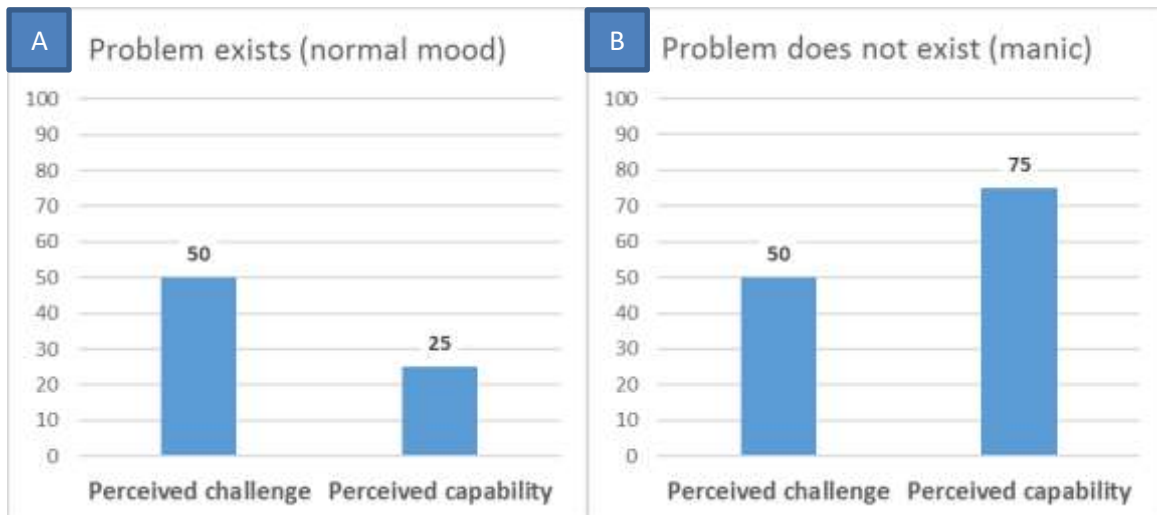


Figure 7 (A and B): The effect of increased confidence/optimism on the perception of problems

Figure 7 illustrates how, when hypomanic/manic, pre-existing challenges may remain (and frequently worsen) but, because you feel capable of dealing with anything, problems *seem to* disappear. A sense of optimism can defend one’s self-esteem and result in the confidence to take on challenges that might otherwise seem overwhelming, but it may also result in taking excessive risks and underestimating the consequences of major decisions. Kahneman (2012) reflects on the way that optimism may confer advantage, but – equally – how it can result in poor decision-making:

“In terms of its consequences for decisions, the optimistic bias may well be the most significant of the cognitive biases. Because optimistic bias can be both a blessing and a risk, you should be both happy and wary if you are temperamentally optimistic” (p. 255).

Commenting on the fine line between enhanced and delusional thinking, he continues:

“Of course, the blessings of optimism are offered only to individuals who are only mildly biased and who are able to ‘accentuate the positive’ without losing track of reality” (p. 256).

He then addresses the relationship between optimism and risk-taking (impulsive) behaviour:

“The evidence suggests that an optimism bias plays a role – sometimes the dominant role – whenever individuals or institutions voluntarily take on significant risks. More often than not, risk takers underestimate the odds they face, and do not invest sufficient effort to find out what the odds are” (p. 256).

In addition to turning down the likely position at CSFB, I travelled to Dartford on Tuesday morning and, without another form of income, resigned from my job at the shipping company (impulsivity). I was ecstatic about the prospect of working for God, writing my book (which I became certain would be immensely successful), and enjoying the people and world around me. It is important to explain that,

while my (describable) thinking and behaviour was strange over the weeks and months which followed, it was no less strange than my (indescribable) mood. If your mood becomes significantly distorted, then your thinking and behaviour, unless checked, are likely to follow suit. While most people know what it feels like to be energised, or excited – and may think that what I am describing is something that everyone experiences – consider that, in addition to staying awake on that Monday night (05/05/2003), I did not sleep again until the following Tuesday (13/05/2003) ... eight days later. Every morning I would go for a run, I would spend much of the day writing my book, and then I would exercise for two hours each evening, before going out to socialise with strangers. At the time (before Google could be accessed on a phone) I was unaware that it was even possible to stay awake for this long, so with each additional, energised, euphoric day – without sleep and with no sign of slowing down – I became increasingly convinced that something supernatural was taking place.

The next few months of my life were the ultimate adventure – each day was filled with pleasure and promise and I was able to draw meaning and bliss from every ostensibly mundane encounter and every previously avoided or overlooked experience. In the mornings, I would walk around Earlsfield, striking up conversations with people on the street, waiting for the train, or begging for change. I felt overwhelmed with love and compassion, had an openness to others that I had never felt before and, instead of avoiding people, I wanted to hear their stories. While I had previously been restricted by a fear of what others might think of me, I no longer worried about the opinions of others, and this allowed me to drop my guard and meet a number of “wonderful” and “interesting” people.

To provide some sense of what I was feeling, and as a good example of my impulsivity, on Wednesday morning (07/05/2003) I was walking along Garratt Lane in Earlsfield and noticed a tattoo shop on my right. Having never considered getting a tattoo before, and without hesitation, I turned into the shop, greeted the woman who worked there and within a minute had chosen the four symbols I wanted permanently carved into my body. (While tattoos have become common, in 2003 they were far less so and, at the time, I knew no one personally who had any.) The tattoos I chose represented: how I was feeling (“love”); the fact that I no longer felt a need to filter my thoughts (“truth”); and my extraordinary desire to change the lives of those around me (“servant”). The fourth symbol apparently meant “Only God can judge me”, which reflected the freedom I felt from the opinions of others. When asked where I wanted them I suggested the inside of my arm, but was told that they would not all fit. It turned out that “Only God can judge me” was not a single character but six separate symbols. Without a moment’s hesitation, I instructed the bewildered tattoo artist to just put those extra six figures down the middle of my back. Having never considered it before, I left the shop just a few hours later with nine symbols down my back and arm.

When in this state, you feel as though you know a secret that others do not. There is a sense of seeing the world in such a beautiful, clear, and joyful way that you want to grab those who fail to see it, shake them and share with them the glorious perfection of life. LGATs, while expressing the idea differently, describe some of the goals of their trainings as achieving love, joy, and “aliveness”:

“est gives to most of its graduates what it values most: aliveness, joy, love and self-expression”
(Rhinehart, 2010, p. 222).

Love and joy will be linked with hypomania/mania and elevated levels of dopamine in section 2.5 (Dopamine), but aliveness has not been specifically explored as a symptom of hypomania/mania. While it might be sufficient to argue that aliveness and energy/joy/euphoria are synonymous, or claim that when manic I felt more alive than I’d believed possible (which I did), the book I was writing at the time of my manic episode (2003), and a poem I wrote at the time (2003), suggest that I saw myself as being uniquely alive, while I saw those around me – by contrast – as “dead”. Firstly, the book I was writing was called *The World Through My Eyes – A Book for Dead People*, which reflected how I saw many people as lacking the *aliveness* I was feeling. In addition, a poem I wrote while manic reflected my belief that most people were “dead” – stuck, afraid, and closed off to experiencing others and living their lives. As I stood one evening, watching people coming down from the Earlsfield Station (a strange thing in itself to do), I saw people who, to me, were depressed and disconnected. I saw people trapped in jobs and in routines, but more specifically, I saw people trapped in themselves. I was interested to see if just one of them would look me in the eye, smile, and make any sort of connection, but – rather than risking interaction – they chose to remain isolated. Because I saw engaging with others as exciting and powerful and the reason for being alive, I saw these hundreds of people as clones, broken and beaten and – by avoiding contact with others – as good as dead:

Soul Train

*From the platform they came, pacing one by one
A day more behind, their work had been done
Not one eye greeted as I stood and smiled
Is my warmth just too chilling – my calmness too wild?*

*My open presence, it appeared, caused fright
As without exception they evaded my sight
Are we all so sick that the floor should replace
The welcome of a friendly face?*

*“We are”, I must alas confess
You too would choose the back of a head
Your shelter – so sturdy it blocks out the sun
The world is alive with the marching dead*

I, on the other hand, was excessively confident, expansive, and sociable. Without alcohol or drugs, I would go out on my own every evening and meet new people. Having previously been shy to approach women and attempt to strike up conversations, I felt no concern at all about rejection. This was grounded in a sense that rejection was unlikely (which was a new perspective), but even more in a sense that rejection said nothing negative about me. I was so comfortable with myself that the opinion of a stranger did not affect my self-esteem. While before it would take a number of drinks and clear signals from a woman before I would approach her, in the first few weeks of my manic episode I would often choose a table made up only of beautiful women and just pull up a chair. Being so brazen, this was sometimes welcomed with interest, or laughter, but sometimes it was met with hostility. In most instances, it was not long before I had won at least some of the group over and it felt amazing that every person and every situation was not a source of anxiety, but the chance of an adventure.

As weeks passed my unchecked confidence became more delusional, my expansiveness became abnormal, and my openness and honesty became problematic. In terms of confidence, I became certain that the book I was writing somehow proved God’s existence and would, consequently, be very popular. I had also developed an aversion to wealth, and decided I wanted to help people with the money that the book would make. While walking through Wimbledon one day, I noticed some people collecting for a charity and decided to donate the proceeds from my book to this charity. In 2004 I tried to make light of this delusional confidence in a later chapter of the book I was writing:

“Since there would be a couple of people who may have been interested in having a look at the proof of God I knew I could sell a couple billion copies of my book. I made a conservative estimate of one copy for every literate person on the planet and contacted a Welsh businessman named John Davis, who ran a charity. Since I already had eternal happiness and got chosen as the messenger and all that I thought it would only be fair that I gave away all the money I’d make. I sat down with John to what, in retrospect, can only be described as a weird conversation. It went along these lines:

John: So, what can I do for you?

Me: I’ve been writing a book and I’d like to donate all proceeds from the sale to your charity.

John: That sounds very generous. Do you have a copy of this book?

Me: No, but it's nearly finished and it will sell more copies than... I believe my words were... all the Harry Potter books combined.

John: How on earth can you predict something like that?

Me: God told me.

The meeting was adjourned pretty soon after that" (Hunter, 2004, pp. 146-147).

I had also been spending a lot of time with homeless people around South London, including a man named Roy who slept in the Earlsfield cemetery and often sat outside the Earlsfield library. One afternoon my housemate Angie asked if I wanted to join her to watch the tennis at Wimbledon, something I'd never seen live before. While walking to meet Angie at the station, I saw Roy and – without giving it a second thought – invited him to come along. While this is arguably a compassionate gesture, it was also inconsiderate (and impulsive) to impose a dishevelled, bearded, alcoholic man on Angie, who had been kind enough to invite me with her. In another instance, a homeless man was sitting in Garret Lane, screaming at passers-by, swearing, and generally behaving aggressively. Because I felt that only good could come from any situation (optimism), I walked calmly up to him and sat down. He stopped screaming, I bought him some tea, and we spoke for more than an hour.

In terms of revealing inner thoughts, when a friend of mine – who I was somewhat in love with – arrived in London I also did not hesitate to tell her exactly how I felt. While she didn't feel the same, I thoroughly enjoyed articulating my feelings so unambiguously and being able to have an open conversation without any fear of rejection. She was moved by my sincerity and I felt that it was a positive experience; however, my openness was not always so well-received. Because I was so certain of God's existence, I was disappointed by what I perceived as uncertainty in others and became frustrated that our church seemed to be more of a social club than having anything to do with helping other people. One Sunday evening – when members of the congregation were given the opportunity to share what God had been doing in their lives – I walked to the front and told a packed church that if they really believed in God they would behave differently. My comments were met with clear disapproval by the minister and, as I later found out, by many members of the congregation as well⁴⁵.

In addition to the other symptoms of hypomania/mania, my thoughts were constantly racing and I was increasingly making obscure connections between things that I would read, the lyrics of songs, conversations that I'd had and things I had already written. I felt incredibly creative, but the

⁴⁵ To confirm that this took place, former Springbok rugby captain, Andre Vos, was among the large congregation at St Michaels that evening. It was a very uncomfortable moment and, while my intentions were good, my reading of the situation was not.

associations I made were driving me more and more delusional. Because I was so convinced that God was guiding my life, whenever an opportunity presented itself, I assumed that it was predestined, so when a friend mentioned a large church conference in Los Angeles, I believed that I was supposed to be there and immediately bought myself a non-refundable ticket (impulsivity). When I later realised that I needed a visa – something I hadn't considered – I spent days outside the embassy trying to expedite its issue but, when this failed, still confidently headed to Gatwick airport, expecting to be let onto the plane. As a Christian, I had read that if you have faith the size of a mustard seed you can tell a mountain to get up and move (Mat. 17: 20); however, while I had faith the size of a mountain, they did not let me on that plane. At the peak of my mania – as my euphoria and confidence, and energy, and the sense that the whole universe was perfectly connected, reached its pinnacle – I began to sense that I may, in fact, be God in human form, or the Second Coming. This, of course, is an abnormal thought, but it is merely the level of confidence which corresponds with an equally abnormal mood.

I spent my last few months in London at St Michaels (my church), Southfields, working with a man named Dan, pulling up the parquet tiles, cleaning the floor, sanding the wooden blocks and replacing them. I refused to be paid for this work (“servant”) and, in those two months, the little money I had saved quickly disappeared. In addition to not earning, I would give money to anyone who asked, feeling nothing to hand 100 pounds to a person begging on the side of the road, or to drop a few hundred pounds into the collection plate at church. Much like Kay Jamison, and so many people who are hypomanic/manic, I felt financially omnipotent and parted with money without appreciating the consequences. By the time that I was to return to South Africa, I had spent so much that I did not even have enough to get to the airport - I had to approach Dan and ask for some of the wages I had previously refused. Because of the tendency of those who are hypomanic/manic to spend unwisely, if LGATs do elicit a temporary state of hypomania/mania, then urging participants to pay for themselves or others, after pushing them into this state, raises ethical concerns.

Since it is a symptom of hypomania/mania that is not listed in the DSM, and because it is more difficult to convey and comprehend than the other symptoms, it seems necessary to provide further insight into the way that hypomania/mania brings with it a positive filter – a *perspective* which allows individuals to see the world in a way that is not seen by others. In 2009, six years after my first manic episode – under similar conditions to those which triggered my first episode (stress, sleep disruption, and stress removal) – I started to become manic and began to write poems for the first time in years. The poem which follows was not written to explain hypomania/mania – it was written to put a friend at ease about an email she had sent me the previous day. In the email she had told me of a recent breakup and had held nothing back while expressing her vulnerability, and her complete brokenness. The following day, embarrassed by the extent of her openness, she wrote to apologise and so I wrote

this poem to (try to) let her know what I thought of what she had written. I wanted to convey that only a person who could love deeply and without restraint could experience true loss and true pain so, while she saw her vulnerability as something ugly, my perspective was quite the opposite:

Dr Johnson

*There's an old man I see on the corner
He screams at me as I walk past
His eyes are black with bitter hatred
He tells me this day is my last*

*On his body the sores – they are weeping
Leaking pus over malnourished bones
On his urine-soaked rug he's been sleeping
Soaking odours of rank, vulgar tones*

*His coarse hands they tremble with fury
At every sane soul that he sees
He laughs, flashing untreated growths
Taunting all to enjoy his disease*

*With his fingers he scratches the tarmac
Then himself with the black, bloodied stumps
Lacerated, he sheds crimson whimpers
And then gnaws like a dog on his lumps*

*At a young boy he spits rancid phlegm
At a young girl he whispers abuse
At a priest he sings praise to the devil
At a couple he gestures a noose*

*Without warning he wails like a siren
Howling pitiful, piercing, sad cries
Now his dark holes – they are seeping
Dirt-stained tears escape tormented eyes*

*The old vagrant was once Dr Johnson
- a man who at one time had shone
It's been thirty-five years since he practiced
It's been thirty-five years she's been gone*

*"I knew him back then..." said a stranger
"He just lost it..." he started to say
"It was like someone reached in and took out his soul...
... like both of them died on that day"*

*So often I'd walked past the old man
Yet only today it would seem
I saw to the root of his hatred
- to the source of his maddening screams*

*So much praise is bestowed on the stoic
And while there is worth in control
There is also a splendour in falling apart
- stating boldly "I'll never be whole"*

*As I looked through new eyes at this vagrant
I saw not the old man broke and torn
I saw a beast formed by the fiercest love
I saw beauty in its purest form*

While the intention was not to capture hypomania/mania, this poem provides insight into the change in *perspective* resulting from an elevated mood. It reveals how, when hypomanic/manic, even the most unpleasant, aggressive, intimidating, and objectively negative experience may be interpreted as positive. Because hypomania/mania is able to distort perspective like this, if temporarily hypomanic/manic LGAT graduates are asked by researchers, or family, friends, and colleagues, what they thought of the training, then it might be expected that – even if it was unpleasant, aggressive, intimidating, and objectively unpleasant – they may provide a distorted perspective of the experience. Their answers may accurately reflect how they are feeling (which is what graduates are urged to reveal), but this arguably transient feeling may be a misleading indicator of what the training was actually like. For this reason, research which only considers the short-term subjective experience of LGAT graduates is limited in its usefulness, and it is unlikely that new participants (who are largely recruited by graduates) will have a realistic sense of what the LGAT experience will be like.

Bipolar disorder involves shifts between hypomania/mania and depression, and so it is useful to consider how I switched, quite rapidly, from being manic to being severely depressed. My experience of depression, described in the following section, also reveals how, regardless of whether one's thinking is positive or not, a shift in mood may occur and completely overwhelm a person's ability to cope with life.

2.3.6.7 Depression

While it is easy to dismiss those with depression as weak, the evidence demonstrates that this thinking is naïve, and insensitive to those who suffer in ways that the uninitiated cannot fathom. To illustrate how depression can distort the perspectives of those it affects, Purves, et al. (2008, p. 750) reveal the anguish of one man amidst a depressive episode. Few would argue that he was malingering, seeking pity, or lacked strength of character:

“I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell; I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible. I must die or be better, it appears to me” – Abraham Lincoln

There is a tendency to assume that one’s own range of experience represents the full spectrum and that one’s own limited perspective is the only valid perspective. Social psychologist, Lee Ross, refers to this as the objectivity illusion (Gilovich & Ross, 2016), and it can be seen in the response of many to those with depression. Because most have experienced periods of sorrow and suffering, and because the word “depression” has been usurped by the public and diluted of meaning, there is a false assumption that every person has experienced the same degree of psychological torment. Here, Sapolsky (2004) distinguishes depression from the sadness experienced by most:

“... this is a vastly crippling disorder that leads people to attempt suicide; its victims may lose their jobs, family, and all social contact because they cannot force themselves to get out of bed, or refuse to go to a psychiatrist because they feel they don’t deserve to get better. It is a horrific disease, and throughout this chapter I will be referring to this major, devastating form of depression, rather than the transient blues that we may casually signify with the term ‘feeling depressed’” (p. 272).

The World Through My Eyes was written years before I experienced an LGAT or studied psychology and, as such, should be considered an untainted account of my shift from mania to depression. Importantly, *my thinking was positive* when my mood began to change. I was convinced that I was a messenger from God and it was only the overwhelming misery brought about by a change in my mood that pulled my thinking from positive to negative. It is clear to me now that I used writing and humour to cope with my diagnosis, so these chapters (Hunter, 2004, pp. 181-187) provide insight into my return to South Africa after almost two months of being manic in London. In these pages, I describe how the mania switched abruptly to depression, the experience of that depression, and my subsequent diagnosis. It is worth noting that, because of the sense of profound connectedness which comes with hypomania/mania, most chapter titles were somehow related to films, statements by comedians, music albums, song lyrics, or songs:

The Passion of the Christ

“If you’re ever giving a speech, when you start out, act nervous and get mixed up a little bit. Then as you go along, get better and better. Then, at the end, give off a white glowing light and have rays shoot out of you” – Jack Handey⁴⁶

I left many confused people and headed back to South Africa on 1st of July 2003, arriving on the 2nd in Durban. My grandmother had cancer and was in her room when I arrived back. She looked weak and spoke to me for a while. The next day she couldn’t talk and she died on the 7th. This didn’t really trouble me and I knew that there was something strange about that⁴⁷. Despite dire distress from the side of my parents, I jumped at the opportunity when a spot opened up for a youth pastor at the local church, beginning in August. I went through two interviews, without any severe concern expressed, and the perfect job – as I saw it – became all mine.

My work began with the enthusiasm and excitement that I can only compare to my dog’s joy when I arrive home. It’s not like I sprinted laps around the church and then pissed everywhere (as my dog might have done), but I was just so pleased to be doing God’s work. I went to prayer meetings twice a week; church council once a week, helped out at the Alpha course on Tuesday evenings and, of course, hung out with the younger guys and girls on Sundays. In my infinite enthusiasm, I called up my old high school and told them I wanted to give a testimony of what God was all about. I said that I was an old boy of the school and that I was working at a church, so I suppose they assumed I had been checked for chronic mental illness. It’s pretty intimidating standing up in front of hundreds of people for the first time, but despite my fear of public speaking I went through with it and, from all accounts, it seemed to have been well received. My facts were thought provoking, my reasoning sharp, my wit engaging and my failure to mention that I might be Jesus – absolutely crucial. That evening was a critical milestone for me as, although I believed God’s purpose for me involved using a talent in preaching, I had always felt nauseas at the thought of a large audience. With success in front of an entire high school, teachers and some parents, I was on a cloud – nothing could stop me now.

⁴⁶ (Handey, 1998).

⁴⁷ I was very close to my grandmother, who had lived with us since I was three years old. This relates to the shift in perspective and the way that problems do not seem like problems.

Black Days

“Just when every day seemed to greet me with a smile, sunspots have faded and now I’m doing time, ‘cause I fell on black days” – Soundgarden

It must have been in my fourth week at the church – it all got so confusing around then that it’s difficult to tell. I was at one of those Alpha meetings on a Tuesday night and something just went wrong. I realise that’s vague but it was literally as if a switch had been flicked. It started as a really claustrophobic sensation as though I desperately needed to get some air. I was sitting, watching this tape of Nicky Gumble, and I couldn’t stay on my chair. That enormously tense feeling, when you become so agitated that you can’t sit still? I didn’t understand it at all and I told my dad that I’d started to feel a bit strange. I just couldn’t sit still – that sort of restlessness that results from a lack of oxygen.

It began with my book, actually. I’d initially been able to write endless amounts, but for some reason I developed writer’s block after being at home for a while. I was still very happy, but I just couldn’t write. My inability to get things written down transferred to other areas and when I started with these panic attacks I couldn’t understand what was going on. “This doesn’t feel right. I’m past all the suffering now, aren’t I? I can’t be feeling bad again – this can’t be happening. Surely God wouldn’t let it start all over again?” My faith in God was without bounds and I trusted Him so deeply that when this all began I refused to accept any of it.

I was pretty perplexed for that week, but things got rapidly worse – my mind seemed to just slow down and all the clarity I’d been feeling came to a complete standstill. I prayed about it constantly, because it made no sense to me whatsoever. I was one hundred percent sure that God was with me and, according to the bible, “If God is for me, then who can be against me?” I’d spent the past couple of months on a spiritual high and was certain that my depression and distance from God had been finally closed. On arriving back in Durban, someone had given me a bookmark with the following bible verse imprinted on it:

“For I know the plans I have for you”, declares the Lord, “plans to prosper and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” – Jeremiah 29: 11

When I first got it, it seemed obvious. “Sure” I thought. “I’ve never trusted you more”, but when all this other stuff started to happen, that trust seemed to slowly slip away.

Melon Collie and the Infinite Sadness

“When a man sits with a pretty girl for an hour, it seems like a minute, but let him sit on a hot stove for a minute – and it’s longer than any hour. That’s relativity” – Albert Einstein

On the fourth Sunday of August I broke down an hour or so before going to my youth group. Nothing in particular had triggered it, but I began to feel hugely stressed out – like my brain just wasn’t ticking over. I couldn’t seem to make sense of anything – every task was a marathon – and the thought of holding an evening together seemed too much for me to handle. When I couldn’t find my car keys, I pretty much collapsed.

“How could God let me go through this again?” I just couldn’t believe it. “I’ve trusted Him absolutely. I’ve gone against my better judgment and done what was right, instead of what I wanted to.” I felt so let down and hugely embarrassed by everything I’d been trying to achieve.

To give you an idea of the extent to which my brain switched off, here’s a short example. The guys and girls at youth would occasionally buy food and drinks from the church, and the money would be kept in this kitty, which was an old ice cream tub. I’d say that the most I ever took in on a single evening was about twenty Rand, but on that last Sunday evening I just couldn’t work out how much money was supposed to be there. My degree in finance would argue that the task was not beyond me, but the view expressed by my mind that evening told a different and more perplexing story.

What happened over the next few months can’t be described in words and I have difficulty believing that what I went through has ever been felt by another person. I don’t mean to be insensitive, but the depths of despair to which I sank in a few days are beyond anything I’d ever believed possible. It wasn’t really like the incident in Cape Town, either. That had been triggered by something. There was some sort of catalyst for that one, but for this there was nothing and I just couldn’t work it out. When you don’t have any idea what’s causing the pain or why it hurts, it’s a lonely place to be.

What ached more than anything was the betrayal I felt from God. If I’d understood why it was happening, my ability to endure that first month may have been lifted. I’d believed with all my heart that He was there – that He’d been instrumental in my decision to turn down that job and that He had ‘plans to prosper me and not harm me, plans to give me hope and a future’. I had loved him more than anything and He turned his back on me for no reason. My life became pain. The worst type of fear, the worst kind of confusion, the worst sort of mental anguish – it was not of this world. It gripped me and would not let me go.

You may be thinking that I'm just feeling sorry for myself – that other people have gone through worse, but what do you know? Unless you've spent night after night screaming into your pillow, twisting and kicking and writhing in pain. Unless you've torn at your sheets, scratched at your own body and bloodied yourself to try to get just one second of relief. If you haven't smashed the walls and fallen from your bed onto the cold floor and contorted and winced and shaken with agony. If you've never felt complete betrayal from your closest friend – had your tears falling silently to your great protector, silently to your friend who had the power to save you at any time. If you've never spent the darkest hours begging and begging and begging that your good friend would just make it stop – just for one second... just for one second... just for one second... please make it stop! If you haven't spent every night of every week for over a month pleading for an end – for death to come to you – and then finally collapsed from exhaustion, then I'm afraid you don't have any idea what I'm talking about.

When the tensing and turning, and clenching of fists and legs and teeth had driven every last bit of energy from my body, then sleep would find me and some relief would come. No dream could compare. As a child I'd often awoken from the most sickening of nightmares and felt extreme relief that the dawn had saved me. To fight to remain with those very nightmares gives an eye into the horror of my reality.

Days were not much better – I had become almost entirely non-functional. I could do little other than sit in our living room, hoping to die. Every second of every day – just praying that it would end. There couldn't possibly be anything worse – nothing could come close. My parents did what they could, but what I felt was beyond their control – they could just sit and watch as I sat thoughtless, motionless and devoid of all the life they knew me to have. They could just hold my hand, hold my head as I cried and cried. They did everything, but they could do nothing. As night approached my terror would grow and I would be paralysed with the anticipation of the next six hours – alone with my ruthless thoughts. I won't pretend that I've endured every type of pain, but I ask that you do the same for me. No suffering I've seen or considered, either physical or mental, would hold a candle to the nights of that first month and all I'm left with is this question for my very good friend: "Why?"

2.3.6.8 Diagnosis

*“True intuitive expertise is learned from prolonged experience with good feedback on mistakes”
(Kahneman, 2011).*

Because the consequences of acknowledging a bipolar disorder diagnosis are unpleasant, it is understandable that many reject it outright, or – when confronted with these consequences – choose a less plausible, but more comforting, explanation for their experience. A diagnosis of bipolar disorder means that you must take unpleasant medication, educate yourself on the illness, make changes to your lifestyle and – perhaps most challengingly – accept that you have a highly stigmatised illness. In some ways, I was fortunate to have displayed clear manic symptoms, followed directly by clear depressive symptoms. As a result, the diagnosis was difficult to dispute, prompting me – instead of rationalising the experience – to focus my attention on understanding it.

While medication(s), therapy, and changes relating to diet, exercise, sleep, and stress management form the core of dealing with the illness, I found that understanding the triggers and symptoms allowed me to better control my mood, thinking, and behaviour. I believed that, if I could gain an intimate grasp of the factors which triggered hypomania/mania and pick up on subtle changes in my mood before it spiralled out of control, I could protect myself from the destruction so often caused by mania, and the agony associated with depression. To achieve an in-depth understanding, I turned to academic books, memoirs, blogs, DVDs, and friends of mine who were psychologists. I spent thousands of hours reading and re-reading these sources – watching YouTube clips and engaging in online discussions – and noted that, while the meaning of “stress” in the context of hypomania/mania was seldom articulated, and while symptoms were often only superficially described, there was considerable consistency between sources, and with my own experience of the illness.

In addition to reviewing the experiences of others, I spent years trying to understand both my first manic episode and the relatively frequent periods of hypomania that I experienced in the years which followed. With respect to my first manic episode, I was also fortunate that my triggers were distinct, and that I could clearly identify the delay between goal-attainment and the start of the manic episode. What I found, through this reflection, was that challenges to self-worth, feelings of uncertainty, and being overwhelmed, affected my mood, and that this was exacerbated by disrupted sleep, and general exhaustion (all of these being forms of stress). In terms of symptoms, I monitored myself constantly and from years of relentlessly studying the early signs – initially missing indicators, which resulted in painful consequences – I became proficient in recognising hypomanic triggers, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. It was based on seven years of ceaselessly studying these triggers and symptoms that I noted what I perceived to be hypomanic/manic triggers and symptoms during and after a 2010 LGAT.

Having described LGATs and bipolar disorder, it is now necessary to consider a subject that is central to both topics: stress. Stress has been identified as a key element of the LGAT “technology”, and the common factor in environmental triggers for hypomania/mania. In order to understand how stress can lead to feelings of euphoria, optimism, confidence, control, and enhanced self-worth, a sound understanding of the function of stress is required. By understanding what the stress response has evolved for, and how it functions under “normal” stressful conditions, it is possible to understand how this response might malfunction under extraordinary conditions (as occur in an LGAT). The following section of the literature review discusses stress.

2.4 Stress

Having addressed the triggers, symptoms, and diagnostic challenges of bipolar disorder, it is necessary to delve deeper into the common feature in the identified environmental triggers – stress. By explaining the causes of stress, the function of stress, and the impact of stress on the body and the brain, an argument can be made that strategically applied stress, intermittently punctuated with relaxation exercises, in a controlled environment, results in allostatic hypervigilance. It is contended that this hypervigilance is a form of “manic-defence”, and that this the primary source of the LGAT “transformation”. To understand the *allostatic manic defence hypothesis*, the relationship between bipolar triggers and bipolar results, and the relationship between LGAT conditions and LGAT results, it is essential to grasp the information presented in this section.

2.4.1 Preliminary definition

Because stress is the common element in the environmental triggers for hypomania/mania, it is important to understand what stress is, what purpose it serves, and what changes it causes to levels of hormones and neurotransmitters. The following definitions, provided by researchers Pani, Porchella, and Gezza (2000) in the introduction to an article addressing the role of stress in the dopaminergic system, are a sound starting point from which to expand upon the concept:

“In 1973, Hans Selye defined stress as ‘the non-specific response of the body to any demands made upon it,’ while more recent definitions have tended to see the stress response in terms of being both a survival mechanism and an indicator of internal and external cues. The word ‘stress,’ in the meaning we intend to use in the present review, describes a general reaction of the mammalian central nervous system (CNS) which plays a vital role in the way an organism monitors internal conditions, as well as the world around it, in order to attempt to survive” (p. 14).

2.4.2 Homeostasis and allostasis

In order to understand stress, and its influence within the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis*, it is necessary to define homeostasis and allostasis. Sapolsky (2004) says of homeostasis:

“Ah, that dimly remembered concept, the idea that the body has an ideal level of oxygen that it needs, an ideal level of acidity, an ideal temperature, and so on. All these different variables are maintained in homeostatic balance, the state in which all sorts of physiological measures are being kept at the optimal level. The brain, it has been noted, has evolved to seek homeostasis” (p. 6).

A basic definition of homeostasis is, therefore, *the state of equilibrium towards which the body constantly strives*. After noting that the brain has evolved to perpetually strive for homeostasis, Sapolsky provides a preliminary definition of stressors and the stress response:

“A *stressor* is anything in the outside world that knocks you out of homeostatic balance, and the *stress response* is what your body does to reestablish homeostasis” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 6).

The way that one responds to changes in external temperatures in order to maintain a relatively constant body temperature is one easily observable homeostatic response, illustrative of other (often less overt) regulatory mechanisms:

“Warming a body causes sweating and dilation of blood vessels in the skin. Chilling a body causes just the opposite – constriction of those blood vessels and shivering” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 10).

Sapolsky (2004) later acknowledges his reluctant acceptance of the concept of *allostasis* - a revision of homeostasis, introduced by Peter Sterling and Joseph Eyer of the University of Pennsylvania, and elaborated on by Bruce McEwen of Rockefeller University:

“They have produced a new framework that I steadfastly tried to ignore at first and have now succumbed to, because it brilliantly modernizes the homeostasis concept in a way that works even better in making sense of stress” (p. 9).

The first difference between homeostasis and allostasis is that homeostasis submits that there is an fixed ideal level for various measures in the body, while allostasis recognises that this ideal level changes based on the circumstances. Sapolsky (2004) uses the example of blood pressure, explaining that it should be lower when a person is sleeping than when they are ski jumping. The second crucial difference between the two is that allostasis, unlike homeostasis, acknowledges that the state of dynamic equilibrium (the ideal level for the given circumstances) can be regulated in a variety of ways:

“The second idea in homeostasis is that you reach that ideal set point through some local regulatory mechanism, whereas allostasis recognizes that any given set point can be regulated in a zillion different ways, each with its own consequences [...] Homeostasis is about tinkering with this valve or that gizmo. Allostasis is about the brain coordinating body-wide changes, often including changes in behavior” (p. 9).

While acknowledging that some researchers still use the term homeostasis and believe that there is little if any difference between the concepts, Sapolsky (2004) updates his initial definition of stressors and the stress response:

“Within this expanded framework, a stressor can be defined as anything that throws your body out of allostatic balance and the stress response is your body’s attempt to restore allostasis” (p. 10).

Researchers Cabib and Puglisi-Allegra (2012), provide a similar definition:

“Homeostatic response mechanisms are the organism’s primary means of responding to challenges, therefore stressors are stimuli or conditions that overwhelm these mechanisms (Herman et al., 2003; Day, 2005)” (p. 80).

Neuroscientist Gene Wallenstein, in his 2003 book, *Mind, Stress, & Emotions – The New Science of Mood*, explicates the evolutionary need for the stress response:

“From an evolutionary perspective, it’s easy to see that the stress response – your body’s reaction to a stressor – can be a very useful thing. All organisms need a monitoring system capable of responding to environmental challenges that threaten their survival. These challenges come in many shapes and forms” (Wallenstein, 2003, p. 43).

Cabib and Puglisi-Allegra (2012, p. 80) reiterate the point that organisms have evolved to allow them to cope with most stressors:

“Stress responses have major adaptive value because they support the organism in the difficult process of developing ways to deal with challenges appraised as stressful. Indeed, a stressful experience cannot be sustained as such (McEwen, 2007); therefore, the organism needs to develop effective coping strategies. These, in turn, require major physiological and psychological changes.”

2.4.3 Responding to physical stressors

The way that the body has evolved to increase the chances of survival in physically threatening situations is well-established and serves as a useful starting point from which to build towards the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis*. The brain activates two major systems in response to perceived threats, the first of which is the sympathetic nervous system (Sapolsky, 2004). When a person feels threatened, the sympathetic nervous system facilitates vigilance, arousal, activation, and mobilisation, through what is commonly known as the *fight-or-flight* response. Within a few seconds of a perceived stressor, the sympathetic nervous system stimulates the adrenal gland to release the hormones adrenaline (*epinephrine* in the US) and noradrenaline (*norepinephrine* in the US), which ensure that the body is prepared for a short-term physical threat. When a person encounters a physical threat, these hormones facilitate the redirection of resources from temporarily non-essential functions (such as salivation, digestion, and reproduction) towards functions that increase the chances of survival: blood flow is diverted to your muscles, pupils become dilated, and heartbeat is accelerated.

As well as enhanced muscular strength allowing the physical responses of fight-or-flight, Sapolsky (2004) explains that cognitive abilities and the senses are also enhanced during stress. Temporarily improved thinking and senses during a threatening situation allow for an increased chance of survival - the combination of physical and cognitive changes described exemplify the concept of allostasis:

“Finally, during stress, shifts occur in cognitive and sensory skills. Suddenly certain aspects of memory improve, which is always helpful if you’re trying to figure out how to get out of an emergency (Has this happened before? Is there a good hiding place?). Moreover, your senses become sharper. Think about watching a terrifying movie on television, on the edge of your seat for the tensest part. The slightest noise – a creaking door – and you nearly jump out of your skin. Better memory, sharper detection of sensations – all quite adaptive and helpful” (p. 12).

The sympathetic nervous system is one division of the autonomic nervous system; the other is the parasympathetic nervous system. While the role of the sympathetic nervous system is to increase arousal and prepare an organism for fight-or-flight, the function of the parasympathetic nervous system is to calm the body down when the threat has been dealt with (“*rest and digest*”). Essentially, the two divisions perform the opposite functions of one another and, as a consequence, if the parasympathetic division does not operate effectively, the body may remain in a state of arousal after the threat disappears. This general idea is central to the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis*.

The first major system activated in response to stress is the sympathetic nervous system and this system facilitates a short-term response; the second major system makes use of other hormones to facilitate longer-term coping with stressful situations (Sapolsky, 2004). For a long time it was believed that the glands which secreted hormones operated independently of the brain, and were controlled by the pituitary gland (the “master gland”), an idea that was popularised by Reader’s Digest’s “*I am Joe’s*” articles:

“This understanding was disseminated far and wide, mostly in the *Reader’s Digest*, which ran the ‘I am Joe’s’ series of articles (‘I am Joe’s Pancreas,’ ‘I am Joe’s Shinbone,’ ‘I am Joe’s Ovaries,’ and so on)” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 26).

It was later found that stressors activate a part of the brain known as the hypothalamus, which provides instructions to the pituitary gland (located directly below the hypothalamus), which then communicates with the adrenal gland, thereby releasing the other class of major stress hormones (the first two being adrenaline and noradrenaline) called *glucocorticoids*. This second system, which involves the hypothalamus, the pituitary gland, and the adrenal gland, is referred to as the HPA Axis (Wallenstein, 2003). Sapolsky (2004) outlines the way that this system operates, and explains that the sympathetic nervous system and the HPA Axis are the two key systems in the stress response:

“Because the adrenal gland is basically witless, glucocorticoid release must ultimately be under the control of the hormones of the brain. When something stressful happens or you think a stressful thought, the hypothalamus secretes an array of releasing hormones into the hypothalamic-pituitary circulatory system that gets the ball rolling. The principle such releaser is called CRH

(corticotropin releasing hormone), while a variety of more minor players synergize with CRH. Within fifteen seconds or so, CRH triggers the pituitary to release the hormone ACTH (also known as corticotropin). After ACTH is released into the bloodstream, it reaches the adrenal gland and, within a few minutes, triggers glucocorticoid release. Together, glucocorticoids and the secretions of the sympathetic nervous system (epinephrine and norepinephrine) account for a large percentage of what happens in your body during stress. These are the workhorses of the stress response” (pp. 30-31).

Because glucocorticoids play a central role in the relationship between stress and mood (Sapolsky, 2004; Wallenstein, 2003), and because different researchers use different terms to refer to essentially the same hormone, it is necessary to provide a clarification of terminology before proceeding further. Sapolsky employs the term “glucocorticoid” and defines it as such:

“Glucocorticoids are steroid hormones [...] Secreted by the adrenal gland, they often act, as we shall see, in ways similar to epinephrine. Epinephrine acts within seconds; glucocorticoids back this activity up over the course of minutes or hours” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 30).

The most commonly referred to glucocorticoid in humans is *cortisol* and, since many researchers use this term, it is important to understand that, for the purposes of this research, the two words are practically synonymous:

“ACTH enters the general circulation (the bloodstream) and travels to the adrenal cortex, where within minutes, it stimulates the release of (you guessed it, yet another hormone) glucocorticoid (also known as cortisol)” (Wallenstein, 2003, p. 49).

2.4.4 Responding to psychological stressors

Central to this thesis is the relationship between the body and the mind. It will be argued that the brain produces certain neurotransmitters to help individuals cope with psychological stress, and that sustained production of these neurotransmitters when the stressor is removed results in an elevated mood. Sapolsky (2004) provides insight into the mind/body relationship:

“You sit in your chair not moving a muscle, and simply think a thought, a thought having to do with feeling angry or sad or euphoric or lustful, and suddenly your pancreas secretes some hormone. Your *pancreas*? How did you manage to do that with your pancreas? You don’t even know where your pancreas is. Your liver is making an enzyme that wasn’t there before, your spleen is text-messaging something to your thymus gland, blood flow in little capillaries in your ankles has changed. All from thinking a thought” (p. 20).

Because appreciating the relationship between thoughts and bodily changes is central to the argument of this thesis, it is worth reiterating the concept with a passage from neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's book, *Descartes' Error*:

"If you meet an old friend (in your imagination), your heart may race, your skin may flush, the muscles in your face change around the mouth and eyes to design a happy expression, and muscles elsewhere will relax. If you hear of an acquaintance's death, your heart may pound, your mouth dry up, your skin blanch, a section of your gut contract, the muscles in your neck and back tense up while those in your face design a mask of sadness. In either case, there are changes in a number of parameters in the function of the viscera (heart, lungs, gut, skin), skeletal muscles (those that are attached to your bones), and endocrine glands (such as the pituitary and adrenals). A number of peptide modulators are released from the brain into the bloodstream. The immune system is also modified rapidly. The baseline activity of smooth muscles in artery walls may increase, and produce contraction and thinning blood vessels (the result is pallor); or decrease, in which case the smooth muscle would relax and blood vessels would dilate (the result is flushing). As a whole, the set of alterations defines a profile of departures from a range of average states corresponding to functional balance, or homeostasis, within which the organism's economy operates probably at its best, with lesser energy expenditure and simpler and faster adjustments. This range of functional balance should not be seen as static; it is a continuous succession of profile changes within upper and lower limits, in constant motion" (Damasio, 2006, p. 135).

While the conditions in LGATs – uncomfortable chairs, limited food, and long hours – may be described as physically stressful, the primary stressors in LGATs are psychological and so it is important to understand how psychological stressors activate the stress response. Sapolsky (2004) makes the point that, as opposed to most animals, humans are often affected by sustained psychological, rather than short-term physical, stressors (hence the title of his book, *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*⁴⁸). Sapolsky explains that one of the most influential early researchers on stress, Hans Selye, noted the physical changes which occurred in rats in response to psychological stress - "peptic ulcers, greatly enlarged adrenal glands (the source of two important stress hormones), and shrunken immune tissues" (p. 8). Selye hypothesised that these biological changes were "some sort of nonspecific responses of the body to generic unpleasantness" (p. 8). A great deal of progress has been made since this observation and, according to Sapolsky:

⁴⁸ Written by Stanford University professor, Robert Sapolsky, this book was intended for a non-academic audience. While the language used is informal, it is fully referenced for review.

“We have come to recognize the vastly complex intertwining of our biology and our emotions, the endless ways in which our personalities, feelings, and thoughts both reflect and influence the events in our bodies” (p. 3).

With specific reference to the ever-growing understanding of psychological stressors, Sapolsky (2004) continues:

“As a result, there is now an extraordinary amount of physiological, biochemical, and molecular information as to how all sorts of intangibles in our lives can affect very real bodily events. These intangibles can include emotional turmoil, psychological characteristics, our position in society, and how society treats people of that position” (p. 3).

Wallenstein (2003) corroborates Sapolsky’s position – that it is not just physical stressors that elicit a stress response:

“A very similar set of response actions occur when we encounter *psychological or social stressors* rather than physical stressors. With notable exceptions, our society has developed to the degree that, as humans, we no longer need to deal on a day-to-day basis with most acute physical stressors that shaped the evolution of the body’s stress response. Most of us have adequate food and shelter, and rarely are we chased across the savannah by a predator. We have removed a sufficient number of physical threats from our lives, and improved basic health conditions to the degree, that we now live long enough and have ample free time on our hands to invent a spectacularly impressive array of psychological stressors. Thus from the vantage point of human evolutionary history, psychological stressors can be considered a relatively new addition to the list of stimuli that evoke a stress response. Most animals, after all, are not overly concerned about how their 401K is doing, or whether they should re-mortgage their home since the federal reserve just dropped interest rates by a quarter of a percentage point.

Psychological stressors turn on essentially the same sequence of adaptive physiological responses as that of a physical threat, however, they are far more insidious in that they often lead to a chronic activation of the response” (pp. 44-45).

Wallenstein (2003) explains that there is a dynamic interaction between the biological mechanisms which facilitate allostasis, and our minds, and that the various established changes which occur in response to stressors have a direct impact on our brains:

“Rather, what I wish to emphasize here is that what we think, feel, and perceive influences a number of fundamental regulatory processes of the body. These include basic immunological

regulatory functions, such as body temperature, heart rate, blood pressure, levels of circulating hormones, and many others.

Likewise the homeostatic and allostatic mechanisms that regulate bodily functions can influence how we think, learn, remember, and perceive the world around us. The mind influences the body and the body influences the mind” (p. 43).

Researchers Cabib and Puglisi-Allegra (2012) have focused much of their research on the relationship between stress and the production of neurotransmitters such as dopamine. Their comments on psychological, or “psychogenic”, stressors are therefore worth noting:

“Stressors are usually identified with stimuli (or conditions) able to promote classical stress responses, such as activation of hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) axis. There is, however, general agreement that two distinct classes of stressors exist. The first class includes systematic stressors, such as marked changes in cardiovascular tone, respiratory distress, visceral or somatic pain, and signals of infection or inflammation, which represent homeostatic challenges recognized by somatic, visceral or circumventricular sensory pathways (Herman et al., 2003; Anisman and Matheson, 2005). By contrast, the class of psychogenic/neurogenic stressors requires appraisal, which involves higher order cortical areas and the limbic systems (Lazarus, 1993; Huether et al., 1999; Herman et al., 2003; Ursin and Eriksen, 2004; Anisman and Matheson, 2005; Day, 2005)” (p. 80).

Cabib and Puglisi-Allegra (2012) explain:

“Psychogenic stressors are challenges appraised by the organism as demanding beyond its actual means (Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus, 1993)” (p. 80).

Finally, they note that the limbic system (the emotion-regulating part of the brain influenced significantly by dopamine) is crucial in the response to psychogenic stressors:

“These considerations support the view that psychogenic stress is a dynamic process involving interactions between the organism and the environment (i.e., environmental challenge-appraisal-responses-appraisal-adaptation). The brain, in particular the frontal cortical and limbic systems, plays a leading role at all stages of this process” (Cabib & Puglisi-Allegra, 2012, p. 81)⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ The relationship between stress and the limbic system will be revisited in depth in a later section.

2.4.5 Hypervigilance and extended activation of the stress response

It will be argued that the basic structure of LGATs – abnormal stress sustained for a few days (punctuated with relaxation exercises) and then the abrupt removal thereof – results in an extended activation of the stress response. As the atmosphere of the LGAT environment is both stressful and unpredictable, participants are conditioned into a state of psychological hypervigilance, which remains activated for a few days to a few weeks after the training ends. The stress response, as described by Sapolsky (2004) (and as one might intuitively expect), has evolved not only to respond to threats, but also to anticipate threats:

“And these anticipatory defences can be quite protective, in that a lot of what the stress response is about is preparative [...] Thus, the stress-response can be mobilized not only in response to physical or psychological insults, but also in expectation of them...” (p. 7).

Referring to allostatic systems, Sapolsky (2004) emphasises the fact that, under extremely stressful conditions, an inability to turn off an element of the system when other elements remain engaged can cause problems. Sapolsky presents the analogy of two small children playing on a seesaw:

“This is allostatic balance when nothing stressful is going on, with the children representing the low levels of the various stress hormones that will be presented in coming chapters. In contrast, the torrents of these same stress hormones released by a stressor can be thought of as two massive elephants on the seesaw. With great effort, they can balance themselves as well” (p. 14).

Sapolsky (2004) uses this analogy to explain the wear and tear which accumulates if your body is constantly experiencing extreme stress, and notes that sometimes you cannot turn off the stress response at the end of a stressful event, or you turn it off too slowly. Continuing with the seesaw analogy, he makes a point that is central to the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* (pp. 14-15):

“A final, subtle problem: when two elephants are balanced on a seesaw, it’s tough for them to get off. Either one hops off and the other comes crashing to the ground, or there’s the extremely delicate task of coordinating their delicate, lithe leaps at the same time. This is a metaphor for another theme that will run through subsequent chapters – sometimes stress-related disease can arise from turning off the stress-response too slowly, or turning off the different components of the stress response at different speeds. When the secretion rate of one of the hormones of the stress response returns to normal yet another of the hormones is still being secreted like mad, it can be the equivalent of one elephant being left alone on the seesaw, crashing to earth.”

Sapolsky is referring to potential overcompensation and inefficiency in the production of hormones involved in the stress response, which can be readily measured with blood tests. The *allostatic manic-*

defence hypothesis asserts that psychological stress also results in changes to neurotransmitter activity and – unlike with hormones – non-invasive, low cost, and accurate measures of changes to neurotransmitter activity do not yet exist. While a general relationship between stress and certain mood-mediating neurotransmitters has been observed (Sapolsky, 2004; Wallenstein, 2003), and will be expanded upon in the sections which follow, the precise interaction requires further investigation. Finally, Sapolsky (2004) makes the point that individuals may perceive the same psychological stressor differently, and that their bodies may vary in their ability to restore balance when the stressor is removed. Because LGATs produce a relatively homogeneous set of stressors, it is important to understand this variability in individual responses when considering the degree to which hypomanic/manic symptoms may appear in different LGAT participants:

“Furthermore, at the end of the stressor, everyone’s glucocorticoid levels don’t return to baseline at the same rate. The sources of these individual differences can be psychological – the experimental stressor may be an utter misery for one person and no big deal for another. Differences can also arise from physiology – one person’s liver may be pokier at breaking down glucocorticoids than the next person’s” (p. 75).

2.4.6 Emotional allostasis

It is well established that physical and cognitive changes occur in response to stressors (real, anticipated, and imaginary), but literature on the emotional response to stressors is less comprehensive. If, however, evolution has ensured that, when faced with a physical threat, you become stronger and more alert – that your senses sharpen and your cognitive faculties are enhanced – then it is plausible, if not likely, that evolution would also have ensured that you are able to cope emotionally with a stressor. If it is not your physical wellbeing, but your sense of self-worth that is threatened, then it would be useful if your brain produced something (or, as per allostatic theory, some *things*) which countered that threat to self-esteem. If a situation made you feel intimidated, it would be useful if your brain produced something which made you feel bold; if a situation made you feel inferior, it would be useful if your brain produced something to make you feel superior; if a situation made you feel guilty, it would be useful if your brain produced something which made you feel unashamed; if you were made to feel self-conscious, it would be useful if your brain produced something which made you feel self-assured; and if a situation that required immediate action made you feel unsure, then it would be useful if your brain produced something that made you decisive.

Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, who survived the Holocaust and experienced some of the most extreme physical conditions imaginable, explains the often underestimated impact of psychological pain – that the assault on his dignity in the death camps was more painful than any beating he received:

“... suddenly I received two sharp blows on my head. Only then did I spot the guard at my side who was using his stick. At such a moment it is not the physical pain which hurts the most (and this applies to adults as much as to punished children); it is the mental agony caused by the injustice, the unreasonableness of it all [...] The most painful part of beatings is the insult which they imply” (Frankl, 2008, p. 36).

When one considers the elephant analogy in emotional terms – the extreme allostatic activation which occurs when coping with an abnormally stressful condition – and the usefulness of some substance to enhance self-esteem and optimism in the face of emotional threats, the consequences of one of the elephants (the allostatic challenge) jumping off, while the other elephant (the allostatic defence) stays on emerges. If this confidence enhancing substance (the allostatic defence) was produced for a few days, or a few weeks, after the stressor (the allostatic challenge) was removed, and there was a surplus of this substance, then very particular feelings, thoughts, and behaviours might be expected.

As will be shown, LGATs challenge the self-worth of participants, while inducing fear, guilt, and frustration, and leveraging empathy, in an environment of extraordinary uncertainty. Because the atmosphere is so extreme, and designed to be unlike any environment that humans would have been exposed to throughout evolution, the allostatic response to the environment may be equally unusual. This thesis argues that a state which is usually associated with approximately 2% of the population is experienced by most “normal” LGAT participants. This may be a bold claim, but Frankl (2008) perhaps provided insight into this phenomenon, when he said, “An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behavior” (p. 32). Because LGAT conditions are extreme it is plausible that they elicit an equally extreme allostatic defence.

2.4.7 Sleep disruption as a stressor

Sleep disruption is the second major environmental trigger for hypomania/mania and is a common factor in LGATs. Not only do LGATs tend to end late on consecutive evenings, but homework is given to all participants which must be completed before the training begins the next morning. Sapolsky (2004) explains that “sleep deprivation and altered sleep patterns (such as with night shifts) are major stressors” (p. 173) and, of particular relevance to LGATs, that “being stressed makes it harder to sleep” (p. 227). Cacioppo and Freburg (2016) similarly state that the stress hormone cortisol helps to maintain wakefulness and, consequently, that stress in the evenings makes it difficult to fall asleep.

Researchers Leproult, Copinschi, Buxton, and Van Cauter (1997) similarly demonstrated that sleep deprivation increases cortisol levels, while Sapolsky (2004), likewise, explains that, when asleep, the levels of a number of stress hormones fall, but that sleep disruption has the opposite effect:

“So deprive yourself of sleep, and the sleep-induced decline in the levels of those stress hormones doesn’t occur. And, no surprise, they rise instead. Glucocorticoid levels increase and the sympathetic nervous system is activated...” (p. 233).

Explaining how sleep disruption refers not only to reduced hours sleeping, but also to a person’s sleeping routine, Sapolsky (2004) says:

“We’re not a nocturnal species and if a person works at night or works swing shifts, regardless of how many total hours of sleep she’s getting, it’s going against her biological nature” (p. 234).

Revealing the relationship between stress and an inability to fall asleep, he continues:

“Not surprisingly, about 75 percent of cases of insomnia are triggered by some major stressor. Moreover, many (but not all) studies show that poor sleepers tend to have higher levels of sympathetic arousal or of glucocorticoids in their bloodstream” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 236).

Research into insomnia reveals that elevated levels of cortisol in the evening are closely associated with delayed and disrupted sleep (Rodenbeck & Hajak, 2001; Rodenbeck, Huether, Ruther, & Hajak, 2002; Vgontzas, et al., 2001; Vgontzas, et al., 1998). Increased HPA activity (stress) in the evenings, has been shown to cause sleep disruption in “normal” individuals as well:

“Since nocturnal exposure to increased HPA activity promotes sleep fragmentation even in healthy controls, increased evening cortisol levels may be a crucial factor in inducing and maintaining sleep disturbances” (Rodenbeck & Hajak, 2001, p. 57).

Given the stressful LGAT environment, which often lasts until midnight or later, and psychologically stressful homework like contacting relatives and friends to apologise to them (“accept responsibility”), it should be noted that, when stressed, the quality of sleep is also negatively impacted:

“But stress not only can decrease the total amount of sleep but can compromise the *quality* of whatever sleep you do manage [...] When people are stressed pre-sleep, or are infused with glucocorticoids during sleep, you get less of that helpful sleep pattern during slow wave sleep” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 236).

“If you experience a big jolt of cortisol because of a stressor late in the evening, getting to sleep is going to be difficult, even when you are tired. Even when you do get sleep, high levels of cortisol interfere with good sleep quality (Van Cauter, Leproult, & Plat, 2000)” (Cacioppo & Freburg, 2016, p. 632).

2.4.8 Hunger as a stressor

Because LGATs do not tend to allow food or drinks (other than water) in the training room, strongly encourage participants to use the few breaks to complete tasks, and have just one meal break scheduled in the evening, it is notable that Sapolsky (2004) mentions lack of food as a stressor:

“Not having enough food or water definitely counts as a stressor” (p. 71).

Glucocorticoids (i.e. cortisol) are also released in response to low blood glucose concentration (Hoehn & Marieb, 2010), so stress hormones are released when a person is deprived of food. One way to reduce stress is to allow a person to eat “comfort foods” (water would not qualify as a comfort food) and, by restricting eating during LGATs, the stress of the environment – and glucocorticoid production – is maximised:

“... consuming lots of those comfort foods and bulking up on abdominal fat are stress-reducers. They tend to decrease the size of the stress-response (both in terms of glucocorticoid secretion and sympathetic nervous system activity)” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 78).

2.4.9 Stress and memory

“... just a few days of high doses of synthetic glucocorticoids impairs explicit memory in healthy volunteers” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 214).

Because LGATs do not allow note-taking, because hours are long and the trainings are stressful, it will be argued that – because of what is called the “peak-end” rule by social psychologists, and discussed under *The Experiencing versus The Remembering Self* by psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2012) – LGAT graduates are likely to recall only how they felt at the end of the training and fail to retain an objective memory of what actually took place during the training:

“The training normally lasts fifteen to twenty hours a day, and as a result every trainee suffers from a period of ‘unconsciousness.’ At times he is so bored, angry, involved in his own fantasies, or simply exhausted that he is unable to *experience* or recall what is happening in the training itself” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. xiii).

“There will be no note-taking or tape recording...” (p. 6).

Referring to the way that elevated glucocorticoid levels contribute to the breakdown of stored energy in the brain, Sapolsky (2004) comments:

“This, along with many of the glucocorticoid effects on memory, could have something to do with why learning and memory are so lousy when you’re sleep-deprived” (p. 234).

The hippocampus is the brain structure which is vital to the formation of long-term, explicit memories and also in the regulation of cortisol levels (Purves, et al., 2008). Additionally, excessive cortisol levels can damage the hippocampus, which diminishes its ability to regulate cortisol levels, which in turn results in further hippocampal damage (Wallenstein, 2003). As a result, a highly stressful experience may result in an exaggerated stress-response and elevated cortisol levels for far longer than is optimal:

“Cortisol levels are maintained within a specific biological range through a negative feedback system. Once cortisol concentrations increase in general circulation, it binds to glucocorticoid receptors in the pituitary, hypothalamus, and the hippocampus, and this reduces activity in the entire stress circuit (the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis or ‘HPA axis’), thereby shunting further release of cortisol. As we will see shortly, this negative feedback system may be damaged in some individuals who have endured very traumatic experiences, and is often weakened in patients with mood and anxiety disorders” (Wallenstein, 2003, p. 49).

A few days of high stress can limit the degree to which people explicitly remember an experience. If these people are not allowed to record anything, and if the experience ends on an emotional high, they may retain a distorted perspective of what they have endured. Because these graduates are the primary source of information for future participants – and because they are specifically instructed to share only how they feel, rather than the specifics of what has taken place – their distorted memory and elevated mood pose concerns relating to informed consent.

2.4.10 Stress and impulsivity

Since stress is an established trigger for hypomania/mania, and since impulsivity is a common symptom of hypomania/mania, it is interesting to note the relationship between stress and impulsivity in “normal” people. Sapolsky (2004) explains that, when stressed, it is generally important to act quickly (to be decisive) and, consequently, decisions that allow short-term survival, but which may not be beneficial in the long-term, are useful:

“That the stress-response itself can become harmful makes a certain sense when you examine the things that occur in reaction to stress. They are generally shortsighted, inefficient, and penny-wise and dollar-foolish, but they are the sorts of costly things your body has to do to respond effectively in an emergency” (p. 13).

Social psychologists Thomas Gilovich and Lee Ross make a similar comment about chronic stress, noting that people who are exhausted (which LGAT participants tend to be by the end of the training) are likely to behave impulsively (which renders pressurised sales and recruiting as the training ends particularly concerning):

“Earlier investigators had documented similar effects of chronic high stress and provided evidence that willpower is an exhaustible resource that, when taxed too long or too hard, similarly leads to impulsive, maladaptive, and unwise behaviour” (Gilovich & Ross, p. 67).

2.4.11 Breaking point

While we have evolved to deal with stress and maintain allostasis, there are certain stressors that are either so extreme, last so long, or some combination of the two, which overwhelm allostatic mechanisms. While certain stimuli are more likely to cause stress than others, people perceive specific stressors differently and have differing stress tolerances. Genetics, childhood experiences, perception of the stressors, diet, sleep, outlets for frustration, perceived sense of control, perception of declining social rank, and perception of social support all contribute to the overall stress experience, and some people are more resilient than others:

“Despite the endless ways that stress can disrupt, we do not all collapse into puddles of stress-related disease and psychiatric dysfunction. Of course, we are not all exposed to identical stressors, but given the same stressors, even the same major stressors, we vary tremendously in how our bodies and psyches cope” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 387).

Notably, a person who is vulnerable to stress-related illnesses such as depression or bipolar disorder may never develop these illnesses until he is exposed to a sufficiently stressful event. Participation in an LGAT may be that stressful event for some people, so screening out people who do not yet have depression or bipolar disorder does not protect those who are vulnerable⁵⁰:

“No degree of neurochemical recovery mechanisms can maintain your equilibrium in the face of some of the nightmares that life can produce. Conversely, have a life sufficiently free of stress, and even with a genetic predisposition, you may be safe – a car whose brakes are faulty presents no danger if it is never driven” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 308).

Since it will be argued that dopamine plays a crucial role during LGATs as part of the allostatic defence, Sapolsky’s comment (below) on the potential flaws in this mechanism is worth noting. If LGATs do have a significant impact on dopamine levels, then it is unlikely that a non-professional self-report on psychological stability (based on vague, but glowing, descriptions of the training by a trusted friend or paid expert) is sufficient to screen out those who may respond negatively to participation:

⁵⁰ This is true for the *adult* versions of these trainings, but even more so for the *young people* (children) and *teen* versions. Childhood stress can have a lasting impact and is considered a key contributor to mood disorders in adulthood (Wallenstein, 2003).

“What if someone’s brain happens to not be great at keeping up with dopamine reserves in the pleasure pathway? As a result, at the end of a stimulating increase in dopamine release, dopamine levels not only drop back to baseline, but to a smidgen *below* baseline” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 343).

The relationship between stress and mood is best understood with regards to depression, although the relationship between stress and hypomania/mania will be outlined in section 2.5 (Dopamine). With reference to the relationship between stress and the neurotransmitters most commonly associated with depression (dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin), Sapolsky (2004) states:

“... the glucocorticoid angle fits well, in that the hormones can alter features of all three neurotransmitter systems – the amount of neurotransmitter synthesized, how fast it is broken down, how many receptors there are for each neurotransmitter, how well the receptors work, and so on. Moreover, stress has been shown to cause many of the same changes as well. Sustained stress will deplete dopamine from those ‘pleasure pathways’, and norepinephrine from that alerting locus ceruleus part of the brain. Moreover, stress alters all sorts of aspects of the synthesis, release, efficacy, and breakdown of serotonin” (p. 295).

In the same way that hypomania and mania involve excessive optimism, motivation, and an ability to experience pleasure, so depression often involves pessimism, a lack of motivation and anhedonia. Sapolsky explains that this may occur if exposed to chronic stress:

“Subjected to enough uncontrollable stress, we learn to be helpless – we lack the motivation to try to live because we assume the worst; we lack the cognitive clarity to perceive when things are actually going fine, and we feel an aching lack of pleasure in everything” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 304).

2.4.12 Responsibility and guilt

Interestingly, Sapolsky (2004) comments on the relationship between responsibility and guilt, noting that while it may be empowering to tell medical patients that their attitude has an impact on their chances of recovery, it can also cause harm to those whose “magical thinking” does not work:

“When that proves to be false, there is a corrosive, poisonous flip side: if you falsely believe that you had the power to prevent or cure cancer through positive thinking, you may then come to believe that it is your own fault if you are dying of the disease” (p. 178).

The parallels between this example and the LGAT mentality are clear. There are authority figures in other fields that make unsubstantiated claims, backed only with anecdotal evidence, and selected case studies. Like LGATs, which assert that they do not blame anyone, Yale University surgeon, Bernie S. Siegel, claims not to blame victims, but advocates a philosophy which is likely to elicit guilt:

“No matter how often he puts in his disclaimers saying he’s not trying to make people feel guilty, the book’s premise is that (a) cancer can be caused by psychosocial factors in the person; (b) cancer (or any other disease, as far as I can tell) is curable if the patient has sufficient courage, love, and spirit; (c) if the patient is not cured, it is because of insufficient amounts of those admirable traits. As we have just seen, this is not how cancer works, and a physician simply should not go about telling seriously ill people otherwise” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 179).

This type of intuitively appealing, but demonstrably false, thinking is core to LGATs and their focus on taking responsibility. LGATs also refer to the “pay-offs” that people get from their complaints, asserting that it is because people enjoy attention that they hold onto these “rackets” (Landmark jargon), or “grungies” (Lifespring jargon). Sapolsky (2004) argues that Siegel promotes a similar philosophy:

“Naturally, those who do have enough courage, love, and spirit can defeat cancer. Sometimes it takes a little prodding from Siegel. He advises on page 108 that people with serious diseases consider the ways in which they have wanted their illness because we are trained to associate sickness with reward [...] Thus, presumably, people who die from cancer never got around to deciding to live to be a hundred. According to Siegel, cancer is curable with the right combination of attributes, and those people without them may get cancer and die of it. An incurable disease is the fault of the victim” (pp. 179-180).

While Sapolsky (2004) endorses the fact that thoughts impact health and behaviour, he cautions against overstating the extent of this relationship. Responsibility is important, and learning to view painful experiences in a more empowering way is also useful. These concepts, when taken too far, however, are likely to elicit a sense of guilt and failure in some:

“Obviously, a theme of this book is just how many things can go wrong in the body because of stress and how important it is for everyone to recognize this. However, it would be utterly negligent to exaggerate the implications of this idea. Every child cannot grow up to be the president; it turned out that merely by holding hands and singing folk songs we couldn’t end all war, and hunger does not disappear just by visualising a world without it” (pp. 181-182).

Having discussed stress and alluded to the role of dopamine in providing a defence in times of psychological stress, it is necessary to describe its role in the brain and how an elevation of dopamine during psychological threats would be a useful allostatic defence. The following section describes the effects of dopamine, reveals the relationship between hypomania/mania triggers and dopamine, describes its impact in a key pathway, and attempts to provide relatable examples which illustrate the feelings and change of perspective brought about by an abnormal elevation of this neurotransmitter.

2.5 Dopamine

2.5.1 Neurotransmitter introduction

Because reviewers of this thesis may be specialists in other areas, an expertise in neuropsychology is not assumed in the reader and fundamental neuropsychological concepts must, therefore, be explained. To appreciate the mechanism by which stress may result in hypomania/mania, an understanding of the way that neurons communicate with each other is required. Purves, et al. (2008) explain that the brain is made up of approximately 90 billion neurons, each of which may be in communication with thousands of other neurons, resulting in trillions of connections. While a small minority of neurons are in direct contact, most are not and must utilise chemical messengers (neurotransmitters), to pass information across the gap which separates them from one another (the synaptic cleft). The neuron which releases the neurotransmitter is known as “presynaptic”, and the neuron which receives the neurotransmitter is referred to as “postsynaptic”. The degree to which released neurotransmitters bind to receptors on postsynaptic neurons is directly proportional to the strength of communication and, in line with the concept of allostasis, an optimal range of signal strength exists (this optimal range may change based upon the circumstances).

While a relatively limited number of neurotransmitters exist (less than 200 have been discovered), they may be likened to words or short phrases which serve different purposes in different situations. In the same way that a restricted number of words can create an almost infinite number of sentences, or conversations, a limited number of neurotransmitters – when acting together – result in a wide array of thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Some are specialised for movement, some for cognition, others are involved in memory, vigilance, planning, and sleep; some mediate the experience of pain, while still others are involved in the general excitation or inhibition of brain activity (Cacioppo & Freburg, 2016). Three neurotransmitters in particular – dopamine, noradrenaline, and serotonin – are associated with mood, and most antidepressant medications, as well as many recreational drugs, manipulate the synthesis, availability, and binding of these chemical messengers (Purves, et al., 2008). As mentioned, an optimal range of inter-neuronal communication (signal strength) exists and, because signal strength is dependent on the degree to which neurotransmitters bind to postsynaptic neurons, it is valuable to consider factors which might impact this rate of binding. These factors include:

1. The number of neurotransmitters secreted by the presynaptic neuron.
2. The length of time the neurotransmitters are present in the synaptic cleft (they may bind to receptors more than once if they are not removed, increasing their impact).
3. The availability of suitable postsynaptic receptors (Purves, et al., 2008; Sapolsky, 2004).

Since the number of neurotransmitters secreted is directly related to the degree to which the presynaptic neuron is excited, anything which causes the presynaptic neuron to increase its rate of secretion will indirectly increase the rate of binding on the postsynaptic neuron. Presynaptic neurons also utilise *transporters* to reabsorb neurotransmitters shortly after they have been released (for recycling) while, additionally, *enzymes* may break down neurotransmitters in the synaptic cleft; both processes reduce the time the neurotransmitters are available to bind to the postsynaptic neuron, and thereby modulate signal strength. A dopamine-producing neuron will, for example, contain dopamine transporters (DATs), and if these DATs are inefficient or disrupted then dopamine will build up in the synaptic cleft, binding repeatedly to postsynaptic receptors and causing a stronger signal. (Cocaine, for example, works primarily by blocking DATs, while MAOIs⁵¹ limit the impact of the enzymes which break down key neurotransmitters, resulting in greater availability of these neurotransmitters) (Purves, et al., 2008).

In addition to the ability to produce and reabsorb neurotransmitters, presynaptic neurons contain *autoreceptors*, which assess synaptic neurotransmitter levels and regulate release accordingly (Purves, et al., 2008). If autoreceptors are not functioning optimally then too many neurotransmitters may be released and the signal may become too strong. Finally, the postsynaptic neuron can regulate signal strength by upregulating or downregulating receptors (Sapolsky, 2004). If the number of neurotransmitters in the synaptic cleft is too high, and the rate of binding on the postsynaptic neuron is assessed to be too high, the postsynaptic neuron may downregulate the number of receptors, which limits the signal strength. While decreasing the secretion of neurotransmitters may be likened to turning the volume of the music down at a party, and while transporters and enzymes might be considered similar to background noise at the party interfering with the clarity of the music, the downregulation of receptors is like someone blocking his ears if the music is too loud.

This non-exhaustive list provides a sense of the mechanisms by which inter-neuronal communication may be regulated, revealing the variety of ways that problems with signal strength may occur, particularly when extreme events take place. If, as will be argued, dopamine provides a sense of optimism then, when signal strength is normal, a person will feel confident but not grandiose, and humble but not worthless. If an excessive amount of dopamine is produced, or the removal of dopamine from the synapse is impaired, or receptors are not regulated optimally, an individual's sense of self-worth may become excessive. The following sections explain how this may take place.

⁵¹ *Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors* are an early form of anti-depressant medication (Purves, et al., 2008).

2.5.2 Dopamine overview

The *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* is based on the idea that humans have evolved to maintain physical and psychological stability. While allostasis involves a variety of mechanisms, it is argued that dopamine plays a key role in the defence against feelings of guilt, inadequacy, pessimism, and uncertainty, and is well-suited to maintaining psychological allostasis in circumstances which undermine self-belief, and which require optimism in order to endure. Existing evidence suggests that dopamine in the mesolimbic pathway of the brain elicits optimism (Sapolsky, 2004), which may be experienced as euphoria, motivation, confidence, and a positive worldview. It is, therefore, crucial to explain dopamine's role in the brain and how elevated levels of dopamine in this pathway can alter a person's perspective, result in energy and euphoria, and cause changes in behaviour.

Dopamine is an important neurotransmitter which operates in four major pathways in the brain: (1) the mesolimbic pathway; (2) the mesocortical pathway; (3) the nigrostriatal pathway; and (4) the tuberoinfundibular pathway. In terms of the mesolimbic and mesocortical pathways, "meso" refers to the location of the dopaminergic (dopamine-producing) neurons found in the ventral tegmental area (also referred to as the VTA, or ventral tegmentum) of the midbrain. In the mesolimbic pathway, these neurons project primarily onto the nucleus accumbens (a structure in the ventral striatum), while in the mesocortical pathway these neurons project onto areas of the prefrontal cortex. The nigrostriatal pathway runs from the substantia nigra (located near the VTA), projecting onto structures in the dorsal striatum, while the tuberoinfundibular pathway projects from the hypothalamus to the pituitary gland (Dunnett, Bentivoglio, Bjorklund, & Hokfelt, 2005).

As a neurotransmitter, the function of dopamine is to pass information from one neuron to another and, depending on the part of the brain in which dopamine is released, the impact will vary. While other dopamine pathways play crucial roles in cognition (mesocortical) and in the coordination of movement (nigrostriatal⁵²), it is the mesolimbic pathway – sometimes referred to as the "pleasure pathway", or "reward pathway" – that is most relevant to this research. While the aforementioned pathways appear distinct, the nucleus accumbens receives dopamine from both the VTA and the substantia nigra. Cabib and Puglisi-Allegra (2012) explain that VTA dopamine neurons primarily target the nucleus accumbens shell whereas substantia nigra neurons (which target the nucleus accumbens) primarily target the nucleus accumbens core. The mesolimbic pathway, therefore, predominantly involves projections from the VTA to the *shell* of the nucleus accumbens.

⁵²Parkinson's disease is caused, to a significant degree, by a reduction of dopaminergic neurons in the substantia nigra (Purves, et al., 2008).

There is consensus that dopaminergic projections from the VTA to the nucleus accumbens contribute significantly to the experience of pleasure, and the anticipation of reward (or motivation) (Berk, et al., 2007; Cabib & Puglisi-Allegra, 2012; Pani, et al., 2000; Purves, et al., 2008). These two effects of dopamine in the mesolimbic pathway, as will be demonstrated, are synonymous with optimism. Feeling like everything will turn out well (optimism) is pleasurable, and feeling as though you will overcome hardships or achieve rewards (optimism) is at the core of motivation. While dopamine is released in anticipation of, and during, normal pleasurable experiences, it is more pronounced, and its effects are therefore easier to understand, at extreme levels. Recreational drug use elevates mesolimbic dopamine levels considerably and it is worth considering the effects of these drugs to gain insight into dopamine's effects in the mesolimbic pathway.

2.5.3 Dopamine and recreational drugs

"It has long been known that chemical substances can change emotions and moods; alcohol, narcotics, and a host of pharmacological agents can modify how we feel" (Damasio, 2006, p. 160).

In order to understand the draw of LGATs to certain participants, and the recommendations to family and friends of an ostensibly unpleasant experience, it is necessary to appreciate the effects of dopamine in the "pleasure pathway" of the limbic system. The intuitive understanding of reward/joy/pleasure is that when one does something rewarding or anticipates something rewarding, pleasure results – there is an assumption that without that thing which is pleasurable, or which signifies achievement, success, or acceptance, there can be no pleasure, but this assumption is demonstrably false. Dopamine is elevated by rewarding experiences like food, sex, affection, and achievement, but it can equally be elevated without these stimuli. A sense of joy, confidence, reward, optimism, motivation, and decisiveness can be triggered by cutting out the "middle-man" (the stimulating event) and manipulating dopamine levels directly. Put simply, without changing an individual's circumstances in any way (he does not, for example, have to get a promotion, meet the love of his life, win the lottery, or feel the affection of friends and approval of strangers), it is possible to directly elevate a person's sense of joy, confidence, optimism, and sense of self-worth, and furthermore, this direct route may be more compelling than indirect routes associated with pleasure:

"Dopamine, meanwhile, has something to do with pleasure, a connection that will be reviewed at length in chapter 16. Several decades ago, some neuroscientists made a fundamental discovery. They had implanted electrodes into the brains of rats and stimulated areas here and there, seeing what would happen. By doing so, they found an extraordinary area of the brain. Whenever this area was stimulated, the rat became unbelievably happy. So how can one tell when a rat is unbelievably happy? You ask the rat to tell you, by charting how many times it is willing to press a

lever in order to be rewarded with stimulation in that part of the brain. It turns out that rats will work themselves to death on that lever to get stimulation. They would rather be stimulated there than get food when they are starving, or have sex, or receive drugs even when they're addicted and going through withdrawal. The region of the brain targeted in these studies was promptly called the 'pleasure pathway' and has been famous since" (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 283).

It has been demonstrated that the mesolimbic pathway ("pleasure pathway") relies extensively on dopamine, and that certain drugs manipulate dopamine levels:

"This pleasure pathway seems to make heavy use of dopamine as a neurotransmitter (and in chapter 16, we'll see how dopamine signals the anticipation of reward more than it signals reward itself). The strongest evidence of this is the ability of drugs that mimic dopamine, such as cocaine, to act as euphorians" (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 284).

"Amphetamine has been shown to increase levels of synaptic dopamine and noradrenaline through mechanisms including reversing the direction of dopamine transport from the inside to the outside of the cell through exchange diffusion" (Berk, et al., 2007, p. 43).

Purves, et al. (2008) similarly explain that, while drug addiction is not fully understood, the mesolimbic pathway appears crucial:

"Although it is fair to say that the neurobiology of addiction is incompletely understood, for cocaine and many other agents of abuse the addictive effects involve activation of dopamine receptors in critical brain regions involved in motivation and emotional reinforcement. The most important of these areas is the ventral tegmentum to the nucleus accumbens. Agents such as cocaine appear to act by raising dopamine levels in these areas, making this transmitter more available to receptors by interfering with re-uptake of synaptically released dopamine by the dopamine transporter. The reinforcement and motivation of drug-taking behaviors is thought to be related to the projections to the nucleus accumbens" (p. 139).

Describing the (hypomania-like) dopamine-induced euphoria, they further state:

"The 'high' is described as a feeling of well-being, self-confidence, and satisfaction" (p. 139).

In addition to hypomania-like feelings of euphoria, reward, and motivation, Purves, et al. (2008) explain that dopamine agonists also cause hypomania-like energy in animals:

"... administration of dopamine receptor agents elicits hyperactivity and repetitive, stereotyped behavior in laboratory animals" (pp. 139-141).

It is important to understand that the brain produces dopamine naturally and allows people to experience, and anticipate, pleasure:

“Activation of these complex limbic circuits is believed to instantiate the rewarding effects of natural agents and experiences, such as food, water, micturition, sex, and more complex social rewards” (Purves, et al., 2008, p. 756).

Various everyday rewarding stimuli cause an increase in dopamine but, in order to understand how mood can be elevated above the normal range, it is important to understand that everyday experiences do not elevate dopamine levels to the extremes to which they can rise:

“Consider some of the sources of pleasure we have – promotion at work, beautiful sunset, great sex, getting a parking spot where there’s still time on the meter. They all release dopamine for most people. Same thing for a rat. Food for a hungry rat, sex for a horny one, and dopamine levels rise 50 to 100 percent in this pathway. But give the rat some cocaine and there is a THOUSAND-FOLD increase in dopamine release” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 344).

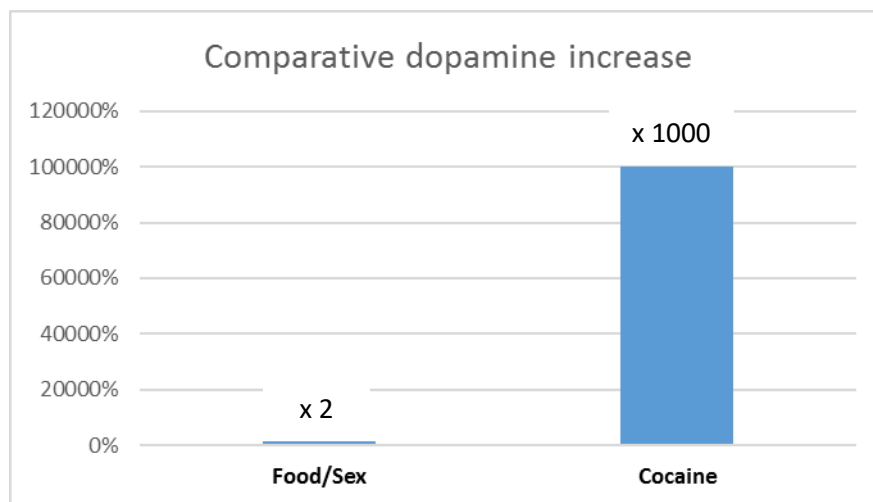


Figure 8: Comparative dopamine increase – Food/Sex vs. Cocaine

Figure 8 illustrates that cocaine can increase dopamine levels approximately one thousand times more than natural rewards like food or sex. While there are some, like Professor Irving Kirsch⁵³, who question the non-placebo-related effectiveness of antidepressant medications (which theoretically elevate mood by modifying neurotransmitter levels), it is more difficult to argue that the effects of drugs such as cocaine and amphetamines are placebos. By comparing the global sales of Coca-Cola and cocaine, it can be inferred that, without any above-the-line marketing, agents which elevate dopamine levels in the mesolimbic pathway elicit significant pleasure:

⁵³ Author of *The Emperor's New Drugs: Exploding the Antidepressant Myth*.

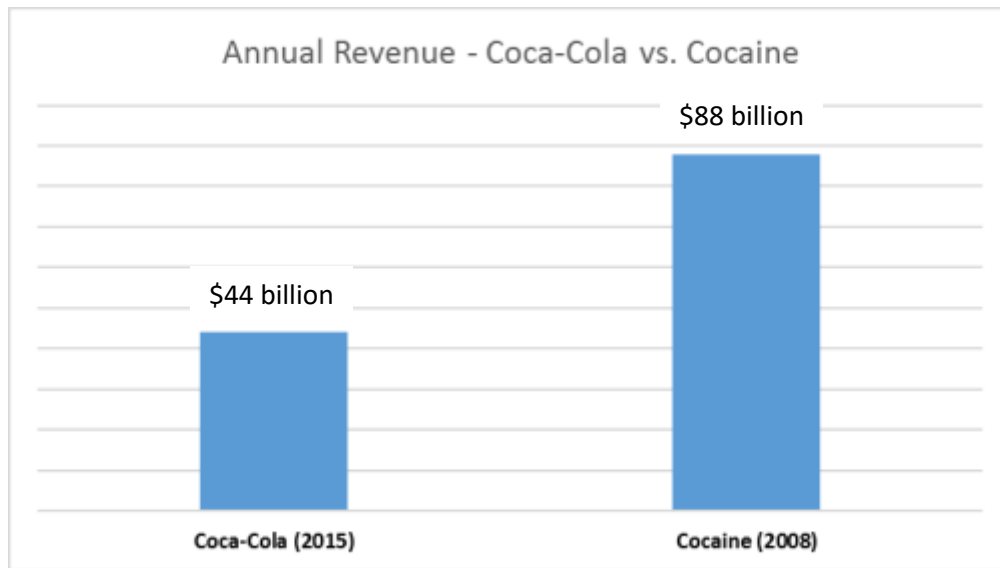


Figure 9: Global Annual Revenue – Coca-Cola vs. Cocaine⁵⁴

Figure 9 illustrates the size of the world cocaine market relative to the revenue of the Coca-Cola company – an illustration which hints at the ability of altered neurotransmitters to generate feelings of energy, confidence, and euphoria. It is important to note that drugs like cocaine do not change the user’s circumstances – they change the person’s *perception* of those circumstances. Snorting a line of cocaine does not make a person wealthier, or better looking, and it does not cause the future to magically transform, but the person suddenly feels more confident, desirable, and optimistic. A similar change in perspective has been noted in hypomania/mania, and it will be argued that the hypomanic/ manic shift in perspective may, similarly, be mediated by elevated subcortical dopamine.

Cocaine and amphetamines are the stimulants most closely associated with dopamine elevation; however, drugs like alcohol also act upon the “pleasure pathway”:

“It’s true that, like ether, alcohol – especially at moderate to high doses – can act as a general anesthetic, depressing a broad range of central nervous system functions. But alcohol also mimics the action of the drugs cocaine, amphetamine, Valium, and opium (Charness et al. 1989; Koob and Bloom 1988; Weight et al. 1993). Like cocaine and amphetamine, alcohol directly stimulates certain brain cells. At low doses, it increases electrical activity in the same brain systems affected by these classic stimulants and can lead to feelings of pleasure and euphoria...” (Braun S. , 1996, p. 39).

Dopamine is relevant to the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* because it has been theorised that it is a critical neurotransmitter in bipolar disorder. The following section outlines the *dopamine hypothesis of bipolar disorder*, which will serve as a bridge between hypomanic/manic symptoms and LGAT results.

⁵⁴ Coca-Cola Revenue 2015 (Google Finance, 2016); Cocaine Revenue 2008 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010).

2.5.4 The dopamine hypothesis of bipolar disorder

“Multiple lines of evidence, including data from pharmacological interventions and structural and functional magnetic resonance imaging studies, suggest that the dopaminergic system may play a central role in bipolar disorder” (Cousins, et al., 2009, p. 787).

It was first suggested that dopamine was involved in the pathophysiology of mania in the 1970s and, according to articles published as recently as 2017, current understanding of the illness remains in line with a dopaminergic model. Berk et al. (2007) reviewed 100 articles, 75 of which were relevant to the role of dopamine in both the manic and depressed phases of bipolar disorder, and concluded that “pharmacological models suggest a role of increased dopaminergic drive in mania and the converse in depression” (p. 41). Cousins et al. (2009), incorporating imaging evidence, supported this perspective, while Ashok et al. (2017) concluded that “... there is consistent pharmacological evidence, especially from treatment studies, to support the hypothesis that a state of hyperdopaminergia can lead to mania” (p. 675). While it is acknowledged that additional evidence is required, if the dopamine hypothesis of bipolar disorder was to be confirmed it would facilitate the development of more focused treatments for the illness. It is understood that other neurotransmitters and other factors play a part in the aetiology of the illness, but there are reasons to believe that dopamine’s contribution is significant.

In evidence of dopamine’s role, it has been noted that administration of the dopamine precursor levodopa (L-DOPA) to individuals with bipolar disorder results in hypomanic symptoms (Van Praag & Korf, 1975) and, in a similar way, a single dose of amphetamine elicits hypomania-like symptoms in healthy individuals (Jacobs & Silverstone, 1986). When amphetamine is withdrawn the “crash” into depression mirrors bipolar depression and, additionally, selective dopamine antagonists minimise manic symptoms (Christie, Whalley, Hunter, Bennie, & Fink, 1989; Tohen, et al., 2003; Vieta, et al., 2005). In addition to these observations it has been noted that activities which reduce dopamine alleviate manic symptoms and, in terms of common treatments for the illness, lithium, carbamazepine, and valproate also inhibit dopaminergic transmission. In addition, “people with bipolar disorder, even when they are asymptomatic, show greater sensitivity to reward than do people without the disorder” (Alloy, et al., 2008; Johnson, Cueller, & Miller, 2009, as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011, p. 199). While these facts indicate a relationship between elevated dopamine and hypomania/mania, there is also evidence to imply an association between reduced dopaminergic transmission and depression:

“Several agents which enhance dopaminergic activity have been demonstrated to be effective antidepressants” (Berk, et al., 2007, p. 44).

Important in understanding the possible process by which the cycling of bipolar disorder occurs is the homeostatic regulation suggested by this hypothesis. Berk, et al. (2007) assert that elevated dopamine for a sustained period may result in a downregulation of dopaminergic receptor sensitivity, which may cause diminished dopaminergic transmission. Assuming that a baseline level of dopaminergic transmission is required for normal mood, this period of reduced transmission would translate into a period of depression. Basically, the brain attempts to regulate the dopamine signal and if the signal is too strong (as occurs during mania), it must be moderated in some way. One way the brain can achieve a “normal” dopamine signal with high synaptic levels of dopamine is by reducing the sensitivity/availability of post-synaptic receptors. The problem with this is that the downregulation of receptors may not immediately correct itself when synaptic dopamine levels return to baseline levels. When this occurs, the level of dopamine in the synapse may be “normal” (or depleted), *and* there may be reduced sensitivity in post-synaptic receptors – the result would be extremely low dopaminergic transmission, which may result in depression. Hurd, Weiss, Koob, And, and Ungerstedt (1989) demonstrated reduced dopaminergic transmission, and “depression” in rats, after application and withdrawal of cocaine/amphetamine. While humans and rats are not identical, it should be noted that in this experiment cocaine/amphetamine (excessive dopamine) was administered for just 15 consecutive days, while manic episodes (excessive dopamine) may last for three months or longer:

“... when dopamine output in the nucleus accumbens was monitored by microdialysis in freely moving rats over 15 days of chronic administration of cocaine or amphetamine, the dopamine release increased during the first 3-5 days and afterwards both amphetamine-and cocaine-induced dopamine output fell to less than 20% of control values” (Berk, et al., 2007, p. 46).

According to Berk, et al. (2007), further evidence is required to support or refute the dopamine hypothesis of bipolar disorder. In later sections evidence will be provided that stress, goal-attainment (stress removal) and, possibly, sleep disruption (the environmental triggers for bipolar disorder) result in increased mesolimbic dopamine transmission. Since it is argued that these three triggers are core components of the LGAT experience, demonstrating that LGATs elicit hypomanic/manic symptoms will further legitimise the dopamine hypothesis of bipolar disorder.

2.5.5 Dopamine and love

“Love... is a beautiful thing. When you find it the whole world tastes like Daffodil Daydream”
– *Deadpool, 2016*

Because romantic love is believed to be a human universal (Fisher, Aron, & Brown, 2005), and because there are similarities between love and hypomania/mania, it is instructive to consider how love, like certain drugs, affects perception, mood, motivation, energy, sleep, focus, judgement, goal-directed

behaviour, and impulsivity. Like hypomania/mania, love is difficult to describe to those who have not experienced it and, while they are not identical, a familiarity with romantic love allows those without first-hand experience of bipolar disorder to gain some insight into a state of mind that is not triggered by drugs, but is naturally attained. It also demonstrates, to those who question whether “normal” people can experience elevated states, that our brains are all capable of extended periods of heightened production of the neurotransmitters which may be relevant to hypomania/mania.

It has been noted by researchers that love often elicits goal-directed behaviour, productivity, an inability to sleep, and changes in appetite (Fisher, et al., 2005). In addition, it frequently results in “focused attention on the beloved, increased energy, elation, and mood swings” (p. 59), it can lead to poor judgement, and it inspires creativity more often than any other topic. These symptoms have been established as typical of hypomania/mania. In the context of this thesis, however, perhaps the most relevant aspect of love is its ability to distort perception. LGATs promise that they will transform participants, allowing them to see the world – their relationships, their problems, their jobs, etc. – in new ways. LGATs do not commit to necessarily changing participants’ circumstances, but instead promise to change the way that participants view those circumstances (a shift in perception):

“In general, LGATs espouse the idea that people are capable of changing their lives, not so much by modifying their external circumstances, but by changing the way they interpret them” (Klar, et al., 1990, p. 99).

The perceptions of people who are in love are frequently distorted, and this is most apparent in the way that they view their object of affection. People who are in love tend to exaggerate the positives of their beloved and, while they may be aware of their faults, they tend to fixate on and overvalue features of the person which seem, to an objective observer, to be unextraordinary (Fisher H. , 1994). With reference to its ability to distort perception, George Bernard Shaw described love as “a gross exaggeration of the difference between one person and everybody else”, while W. Somerset Maugham commented that love is “a dirty trick played on us to achieve continuation of the species”. Similarly, psychiatrist Anthony Storr notes, “We know that there is no point in arguing with someone who is in love. We may think the object of infatuation to be totally unworthy of such devotion, but it is quite useless to say so. The most reasonable and equable people are not immune to love’s charms and delusions” (Storr, 1997, p. 188).

The point is that love distorts perception – Shaw reflects on how the beloved appears far better to the person in love than to anyone else, Maugham asserts that we may be temporarily fooled about the appeal of someone with whom we are in love (and suggests that when the state of love ends we might see the person more objectively), and Storr notes how it is only possible for an outsider to view a

person's object of affection with impartiality. Psychologist Dorothy Tennov, who conducted much research on romantic love, noted that romantic love starts when another person is seen in a "new perspective" (Fisher H. , 1994, p. 59), but supplements this observation with the experience of one of her smitten study participants:

"My whole world had been transformed" (p. 59).

The point made by Tennov is that romantic love does not only colour the perception of the beloved - it often also results in a more general filtering of the world through a positive lens. While a quote from a movie like *Deadpool* is in no way conclusive evidence that being in love makes "the whole world taste like Daffodil Daydream", the fact that audience members are expected to identify with this statement hints at the ubiquity of this experience. Another depiction of this phenomenon in popular culture is from the song *Till There Was You*, taken from the 1963 album *With the Beatles*:

"There were bells on a hill, but I never heard them ringing. No, I never heard them at all, till there was you. There were birds in the sky, but I never saw them winging. No, I never saw them at all, till there was you..."

Having experienced both romantic love and hypomania, I can testify that the overlaps are striking. When hypomanic you may feel euphoria, energy, intense focus, motivation, a reduced need for sleep, decreased appetite, productivity, creativity, impulsivity, and – as this Beatles song describes – you may find extraordinary beauty in everyday things that you had previously taken for granted. In terms of symptoms there are, therefore, similarities between love and hypomania. From a biological perspective, there are also possible overlaps between the two states. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), researchers Fisher, et al. (2005) explored the neural mechanisms associated with romantic love, and found that the dopaminergic reward system played a central role:

"... data suggest that this 'attraction system' is associated with the dopaminergic reward system. It has been proposed that intense romantic love, a cross-cultural universal, is a developed form of this attraction system" (p. 58).

Describing the specific brain structures activated in individuals who were deeply in love, they state:

"Activation specific to the beloved occurred in the right ventral tegmental area and right caudate nucleus⁵⁵, dopamine-rich areas associated with mammalian reward and motivation" (p. 58).

The fact that there are similarities between hypomania/mania, romantic love, and cocaine-induced highs does not mean that these states are identical, however. While elevated dopamine in the limbic

⁵⁵ Both the nucleus accumbens and the caudate nucleus are components of a subcortical structure called the striatum (Purves, et al., 2008).

system may be common to these states, the degree to which dopamine is elevated, the precise structures which are activated, and the array of additional biological changes that occur concurrently all have an impact on the experience. A useful analogy might be to compare dopamine-based highs to vodka-based cocktails. A Cosmopolitan (vodka, triple sec, and cranberry juice), a Long Island Ice Tea (vodka, tequila, rum, triple sec, gin, and cola), a Screwdriver (vodka and orange juice), and a Bloody Mary (vodka and tomato juice) all contain vodka and while they may have similar effects, they do not look the same or taste the same. As opposed to hypomania, romantic love, for example, is thought to consist of attraction and attachment – attraction is considered to be facilitated by the dopaminergic reward system, while attachment is believed to be related to the peptide neurotransmitters oxytocin, vasopressin, and endorphins (Fisher, et al., 2005). In spite of their differences it is, however, invaluable for those who do not have personal experience of hypomania/mania to carefully consider romantic love, the way that it distorts perspective and the other similarities it has with hypomania/mania.

2.5.6 Dopamine and optimism

In order to explain the usefulness of dopamine in times of stress, it is necessary to understand that, while at first it was thought to primarily mediate *pleasure*, closer analysis revealed that dopamine has more to do with *the anticipation of pleasure*. Of course, anticipating pleasure is pleasurable, but it has been shown that dopamine levels rise when there exists the potential to achieve something rewarding – it is believed that this anticipation of pleasure motivates us to perform the behaviour necessary to obtain that reward. Framed differently, it might be argued that anticipation of pleasure is *optimism* – that the feeling that something positive will arise from behaving in a particular way drives behaviour. Sapolsky (2004) provides insight into dopamine's role in the anticipation of pleasure:

“The relationship between dopamine and pleasure is subtle and critical. On first pass, one might predict that the neurotransmitter is about pleasure, about reward. For example, take a monkey who has been trained in a task: a distinctive bell sounds, which means that the monkey now presses a lever ten times; this leads, ten seconds later, to a desirable food reward. You might initially guess that activation of the dopamine pathway causes neurons in the frontal cortex to become their most active in response to the reward. Some brilliant studies by Wolfram Schultz of the University of Fribourg in Switzerland showed something more interesting. Yes, frontal neurons became excited in response to reward. But the biggest response comes earlier, around the time of the bell sounding and the task commencing. This isn't a signal of, 'This feels great.' It's about mastery and expectation and confidence. It's 'I know what that light means. I know the rules: IF I press this lever, THEN I'm going to get some food. I'm all over this. This is going to be great.' The pleasure is in the *anticipation* of a reward; from the standpoint of dopamine, the reward is almost an afterthought.

Psychologists refer to this period of anticipation, or expectation, of working for reward as the 'appetitive' stage, one filled with appetite, and call the stage that commences with the reward the 'consummatory' stage. What Schultz's findings show is that if you know your appetite is going to be sated, pleasure is more about the appetite than about the sating" (pp. 337-338).

A crucial inference from this is that because dopamine increases in anticipation of a reward, it serves as an ideal mechanism in the activation of motivation:

"The next key thing to learn is that the dopamine and its associated sense of pleasurable anticipation fuels the work needed to get that reward. Paul Phillips from the University of North Carolina has used some immensely fancy techniques to measure millisecond bursts of dopamine in rats and has shown with the best time resolution to date that the burst comes just before the behaviour. Then, in the clincher, he artificially stimulated dopamine release and, suddenly, the rat would start lever pushing. The dopamine does indeed fuel the behavior" (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 339).

It is then explained that if the expected reward is great (e.g. "transformation") then anticipatory bursts of dopamine allow people to endure hardship to attain the reward:

"The next critical point is that the strength of these pathways can change, just like in any other part of the brain. There's the burst of dopaminergic pleasure once that light comes on, and all that is required is to train for longer and longer intervals between light and reward, for those anticipatory bursts of dopamine to fuel ever increasing amounts of lever pressing. This is how gratification postponement works – the core of goal-directed behavior⁵⁶ is expectation. Soon we're foregoing immediate pleasure to get good grades in order to get into a good college in order to get a good job in order to get into the nursing home of our choice" (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 339).

Sapolsky (2004) adds that uncertainty (e.g. of "transformation") increases dopamine levels:

"Recent work by Schultz adds a twist to this. Suppose in one setup, the subject gets a signal, does a task, and then gets a reward. In the second situation, there's the signal, the task, and then, rather than certainty of reward, there's simply a high probability of it. In other words, with a generally benevolent context (that is, the outcome is still likely to be good), there's an element of surprise. Under those conditions, there is even greater release of dopamine. Right after the task is completed, dopamine release starts to rise far higher than usual, peaking right around the time that the reward, if it's going to happen, should be arriving. Introduce, 'This is going to be great... maybe... probably...' and your neurons spritz dopamine all over the place in anticipation" (p. 339).

⁵⁶ A DSM-5 symptom of hypomania and mania (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

In summary of the motivating/energising effects of dopamine, Sapolsky (2004) states:

“The tegmentum/accumbens dopamine system seems to be about edgy, make-you-crazy-with-anticipation passion” (p. 140).

“So dopamine plays an important role in the anticipation of pleasure and in energizing you in order to respond to incentives” (p. 339).

Purves, et al. (2008) reiterate the role of dopamine in motivation:

“The integration of such signals in the nucleus accumbens, orbital-medial prefrontal cortex, and amygdala leads to the activation of instrumental behaviors directed at obtaining and consolidating the benefits of the rewarding event” (p. 756).

Returning to the link between motivation and optimism, if you believe that the rewards of a given behaviour (exercising, working hard, speaking to a pretty girl) will be high you will be more likely to engage in that behaviour, and you will be more likely to endure hardship to achieve those (high) rewards. If the expectations of reward are low then there is nothing to motivate the behaviour, particularly if the anticipated difficulty/costs are high. Optimism – the belief/feeling that future outcomes will be good – is, therefore, likely to motivate behaviour. Because LGATs promise a reward (“transformation”), that is “going to be great... maybe... probably...”, and because they require participants to endure significant discomfort, conditions are ideal for stimulating dopamine production to motivate the behaviour required to attain that (uncertain) reward.

If dopamine produces a general sense of optimism, and if this drives goal-directed behaviour in certain circumstances, then dopamine could also be useful in other circumstances. If, for example, a person felt inadequate, or guilty, or humiliated, or uncertain, and these negative feelings were deemed to be disadvantageous from an allostatic perspective, then a substance which allowed the individual to view themselves, the world, and the future from a more optimistic perspective might counter these negative feelings. The following section considers the relationship between stress and dopamine.

2.5.7 Stress and dopamine

The central argument of this thesis is that LGATs create conditions of stress, sleep disruption (stress), and goal-attainment (stress removal), and that these conditions result in hypomanic/manic symptoms in healthy participants. The effects of dopamine, particularly in the nucleus accumbens, have now been articulated and, according to the dopamine hypothesis of bipolar disorder, high levels of dopamine are a major contributor to hypomania/mania. In order to connect the aforementioned triggers with hypomanic/manic symptoms, it is essential then to look at the relationships between the three identified environmental triggers and dopamine.

The first association to be considered is that between stress and dopamine. With regards to this association, Sapolsky (2004) makes an important point relating to the central argument of this thesis - stress hormones (glucocorticoids/cortisol) trigger dopamine release in the mesolimbic pathway:

“Glucocorticoids, those hormones which have been discovered at the scene of the crime for virtually all the stress-related pathology we’ve been learning about, those same villainous glucocorticoids... will trigger the release of dopamine from pleasure pathways. It’s not some generic effect upon all the dopamine pathways in the brain. Just the pleasure pathway” (p. 341).

Like Sapolsky (2004), Cabib and Puglisi-Allegra (2012) explain that there is a well-established relationship between stress and the mesoaccumbens dopamine (DA) system, referencing a substantial body of evidence from the last four decades:

“Stress-induced changes in DA metabolism within the nucleus accumbens (NAc) were first reported in the late seventies (Fadd et al., 1978) and eighties (Robinson and Becker, 1986; Dunn and Berridge, 1987; Antelman et al., 1988; Cabib et al., 1988; Kalivas and Duffy, 1989). Data collected using intracerebral microdialysis and voltammetry in vivo confirmed the view that stressors modulate DA release in the NAc (Abercrombie et al., 1989; Imperato et al., 1991; Puglisi-Allegra et al., 1991; Doherty and Gratton, 1992; Rossetti et al., 1993; Porthos et al., 1995). Finally, DA transmission in the NAc has been shown to modulate the behavioral responses to stress (Rossetti et al., 1993; Ventura et al., 2002; Scornaiencki et al., 2009)” (p. 80).

Other researchers have reached similar conclusions:

“Stressful situations activate mesolimbic and mesocortical DA neurons (see references in Lookingland et al., 1991; Fleckenstein et al., 1994; Le Moal, 1995)” (Dunnett, et al., 2005, p. 493).

According to Cabib and Puglisi-Allegra (2012), the relationship between stress and nucleus accumbens dopamine release is complex, but “most studies report enhanced DA release” (p. 80). On the question of whether stress enhances or diminishes dopamine, it is contended that the nature and duration of the stressor plays a key role. Some stress is considered inescapable and when confronted with this type of stressor dopamine release is curtailed. If, however, the stressor is escapable – i.e. it is possible to endure the stress and get through it – then dopamine release in the nucleus accumbens is enhanced. Cabib and Puglisi-Allegra (2012) argue that this provides an organism with the motivation to endure difficult situations in order to obtain a highly valued goal (e.g. LGAT “transformation”):

“In line with this hypothesis, results obtained by studies on the role of DA and NAc in different forms of decision making support the view that high DA levels help an organism to pursue highly valued goals despite costs (i.e., time, work and risk)” (p. 85).

Pani, et al. (2000, p. 14) concur that dopamine's usefulness is not limited to euphoria or learning, but that it assists organisms in dealing with external stressors:

"Compelling results have demonstrated that the dopaminergic system is important not only for hedonic impact or reward learning but also, in a broader sense, for reactivity to perturbation in environmental conditions, for selective information processing, and for general emotional responses, which are essential functions in the ability (or failure) to cope with the external world."

Cabib and Puglisi-Allegra (2012) specify that this glucocorticoid-induced dopamine increase occurs in the mesolimbic pathway (in the nucleus accumbens shell), and conclude that "... high levels of NAc DA might be required to sustain attempts to avoid, remove or control stressful conditions" (p. 85):

"These considerations suggest that activation of mesoaccumbens DA release in stressful conditions may be associated with activation of defence against threatening stimuli. In stressed animals, DA releases has been reported to increase in the shell but not the core component of the NAc (Kalivas and Duffy, 1995; Wu et al., 1999; Barrot et al., 2000), a selectivity that may depend on glucocorticoids (Barrot et al., 2000; Marinelli and Piazza, 2002)" (pp. 82-83).

It has been argued that dopamine is associated with optimism and motivation – it makes sense then that an elevation of dopamine would be allostatically advantageous in psychologically stressful situations. Inadvertently hinting at the hypomanic/manic perspective, psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2012, p. 256) comments on the usefulness of optimism when confronted with a challenge:

"When action is needed, optimism, even of the mildly delusional variety, may be a good thing."

Without the belief that one can survive an ordeal, or that the ordeal is worth surviving, it is likely that a person would give up. Optimism counters both of these barriers to survival, and if dopamine is related to optimism, then it would make sense that it would be produced in a challenging situation when a person believes that surviving it will result in a highly valued goal:

"One of the benefits of an optimistic temperament is that it encourages persistence in the face of obstacles" (Kahneman, 2012, p. 257).

Related to the concept of escapable vs. inescapable stressors, Sapolsky (2004) explains that the magnitude of the stressor and length of time that the stressor is present both have a significant impact on the dopamine produced in the pleasure pathway:

"... if you get just the right amount of stress, if you get allostatically challenged just right, it doesn't just feel less awful; it can feel *great*" (p. 337).

“Experience severe and prolonged glucocorticoid exposure, and we’ve returned to chapter 14 – dopamine depletion, dysphoria, and depression. But with moderate and transient glucocorticoid elevation you release dopamine. And transient activation of the amygdala⁵⁷ releases dopamine as well” (p. 341).

Other sources reinforce the importance of the magnitude and duration of the stressor. If the stress is too mild, or does not last long enough, the rise in dopamine will be minimal, and if the stress continues for too long then dopamine levels return to normal. (The implication is that there is an optimal process, in terms of stress application, to elevate mesolimbic dopamine, and not cause depression):

“Loose restraint stress induces acutely significant increases in DA release in the anterior MFC and NAc septum (NAS), but the increased DA levels return to control values if the stress is chronically applied” (Pani, et al., 2000, p. 16).

“Enhanced dopamine release is observable in novel, short-lasting or controllable stressful situations, while inhibition of DA release is caused by prolonged experience with uncontrollable-unavoidable stressors” (Cabib & Puglisi-Allegra, 2012, p. 83).

Both of these concepts are relevant to LGATs and the proposal that LGATs elicit elevated dopamine production. The Landmark Forum is described by the trainer as an emotional “roller coaster ride” (Di Matteo, 2000; Faltermayer, 2001; Howard, 2001), as was Lifespring (Fisher M., 1987). LGATs tend to last from three to five days, with approximately the first 75% involving high stress, and the next 25% switching to affirmation and acceptance (“goal-attainment”), as described earlier. Compared to a roller coaster, a few days may not be considered acute stress, but when compared with a thirty-year mortgage it is not chronic stress either. The impact of two to three days of structured stress (punctuated with relaxation exercises), sleep disruption, and stress removal on dopamine levels has never been measured on a large scale. Sapolsky makes the point that, when incentivised with sufficient rewards, humans have the unique ability to keep their dopamine levels up for long periods of time (Fora TV, 2011). It has also been independently found that longer-lasting dopamine changes are suited to challenging environments. Since the argument of this thesis is that LGATs induce elevated dopamine transmission for a few days to a few weeks, it is relevant that LGAT processes are associated with slower changes in extrasynaptic concentrations of dopamine:

“Indeed, it has been proposed that short-lasting and topographically confined phasic changes in DA transients are especially suited to support associative learning, whereas slow changes in extrasynaptic concentrations of tonic DA are most suited to code for the emotional/motivational

⁵⁷ The amygdala is activated in response to emotional stimuli – particularly when experiencing fear, or when observing fear in others (Purves, et al., 2008). This is highly relevant to LGAT participation.

state needed to support interactions with challenging environments” (Cabib & Puglisi-Allegra, 2012, p. 82).

The extra blood glucose and energy triggered by a *physical* stressor allows a person (or animal) to escape from a physical threat, after which these levels generally return to baseline. Wallenstein (2003), however, explains that this is often not the case with *psychological* stressors. He asserts that the long-lasting effects of glucocorticoids may be due to “anticipatory reactions to future stressors” (p. 55), a distinct possibility in an uncertain LGAT environment, where participants are conditioned to expect further distress. This stress is often in the form of confrontations between the trainer and participants – participants are publicly chastised for their opinions, for their lack of integrity, and for failing to take responsibility for every aspect of their lives. Cabib and Puglisi-Allegra (2012) explain that aggressive “social confrontations” result in increased dopaminergic transmission:

“In line with this hypothesis 30 min of restraint (a prototypical psychogenic stressor) or 5 min of interaction with an aggressive conspecific were reported to produce consistent burst firing by VTA DA neurons in rats (Anstrom and Woodward, 2005; Anstrom et al., 2009). Moreover, in social confrontations the response of DA neurons was associated with increased DA transient frequency in the NAc as measured by fast-scan cyclic voltammetry (Anstrom et al., 2009)” (p. 81).

LGATs are also a perfect example of stress occurring within a “larger package of control and predictability”. LGAT participants, while made to feel confronted, humiliated, ashamed, guilty, and uncertain, have been convinced by a friend, family member, or trusted colleague (as well as the trainer) that the program works, that it is safe, that they can leave at any moment, and that the stress will only last for the specified time of the training (which makes the stress “escapable”). The majority also trust that the organisations are responsible and that the trainers are experts - this facilitates a sense of transient stress within the context of control. Sapolsky (2004, p. 341) explains that *transient stress within the context of control* is particularly conducive to mesolimbic dopamine production:

“Pleasurable lack of control is all about transience – it’s not for nothing that roller coaster rides are three minutes, rather than three weeks, long. Another thing that biases toward uncertainty being pleasurable is if it comes bound within a larger package of control and predictability [...] No matter how wild and scary and unpredictable and exhilarating the bungee jumping is, it’s still in the context of having assured yourself that these folks have a licence from the Bungee Jumping Safety Police.”

Horvitz (2002) states that dopamine responds to both rewarding (e.g. goal-attainment) and aversive events (e.g. stress). Among the factors which result in elevated VTA dopamine Horvitz includes “novelty”, and “primary and conditioned aversive properties” (p. 66). In other words, events that are unexpected and hostile are likely to increase mesoaccumbens dopaminergic signalling. This too is

relevant to LGATs, as a lack of predictability is a core feature of the trainings. One of the primary rules of LGATs is that graduates do not talk to anyone about the specifics of what goes on in the LGAT, which means that the hostile, and highly novel, LGAT events are unexpected. Singer (2003) outlines this rule, which is common to all major LGATs:

“The program trainers and leaders typically get agreement from participants that they will not tell anyone about the processes that occur. To do so will ‘spoil it’ for your friends, family, co-workers when they take the course [...] Because of this promise, consumers who buy and attend these seminars do so without information about how psychologically, socially, and sometimes physically stressing the event can be” (p. 193).

It has, therefore, been argued that psychological stress often results in increased mesolimbic dopamine production, and suggested that psychological stress, because it triggers longer-term elevation of glucocorticoids, may result in longer-lasting dopamine production. It has been asserted that, because it results in enhanced optimism, dopamine is a useful agent to facilitate coping with, and enduring, challenging situations, particularly when there is a worthwhile goal to work towards (as is the case in an LGAT). It has further been specified that social confrontations (as occur in LGATs) trigger dopamine production, that when a stressful situation is seen as escapable (as is the case in an LGAT) dopamine production will remain elevated, and that transient stress (as occurs in an LGAT) elevates dopamine, while chronic stress is likely to deplete dopamine (and result in depressive symptoms). It has also been noted that it is significant for mesolimbic dopamine production that the stress occurs within the greater context of control (as occurs in an LGAT) and, finally, that “novel”, “aversive” conditions (as occur in LGATs) are particularly effective in triggering dopamine elevation.

Perhaps, through evolution rather than intelligent design, LGATs have developed an extremely effective tool by which to elicit a powerful, and relatively lasting, dopamine high. It is not implausible that LGAT “technology” is the legal cocaine of the last half century – that with Freudian naïvety it is ingested, and lauded by many, without understanding the mechanism by which it operates, and the serious risks that it poses to some. It has been asserted that this mechanism involves three of the most prominent environmental triggers for bipolar disorder, and the relationship between *stress* and dopamine has now been elucidated. The next step is to consider the second environmental trigger – *sleep disruption* – and its relationship with mesolimbic dopamine production.

2.5.8 Sleep disruption and dopamine

It has been argued that psychological stress of the right intensity – particularly when it occurs over a limited period of time and within a greater context of control – results in dopamine-mediated pleasure. This provides a compelling link between the first (and most relevant) environmental trigger of bipolar disorder and dopamine. Since sleep disruption has already been identified by Sapolsky (2004) as a form of stress, it may seem redundant to examine the relationship between the second environmental trigger and dopamine but, while it is clear that sleep disruption and the dopaminergic reward system are interrelated, the relationship between the two is ambiguous.

Gujar, Yoo, Hu, and Walker (2011) assessed the impact of sleep deprivation on mesolimbic reward networks by assessing participants' response to emotional stimuli. They found that sleep deprivation “amplifies reactivity throughout human mesolimbic reward brain networks in response to pleasure-evoking stimuli” (p. 4466). Study participants were shown 100 pictures and asked to rate them as either emotionally positive, neutral, or negative – those who were sleep deprived were significantly more likely to rate pictures reviewed as positive (a shift in *perspective*), adding to existing evidence that sleep deprivation interacts with mesolimbic dopaminergic pathways which mediate reactivity to pleasurable and rewarding experiences.

Gujar, et al. (2011) used fMRI to assess brain activity during the experimental task and noted that significantly greater activation was recorded in the sleep deprived group in a number of mesolimbic regions, “including an area consistent with the VTA of the brainstem” (p. 4469). A second notable observation in the study was that sleep deprivation has a marked impact on the amygdala and reduces connectivity with the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC). This is relevant because the amygdala is particularly sensitive to threatening stimuli (Purves, et al., 2008); and because reduced dopamine in the mPFC enhances dopamine signaling in the mesolimbic pathway (Cabib & Puglisi-Allegra, 2012). According to Gujar, et al. (2011), sleep deprivation could make threatening circumstances more threatening, and exaggerate the mesolimbic dopamine response to stress:

“Moreover, acute sleep deprivation significantly amplifies amygdala reactivity in response to negative emotional stimuli, associated with a loss of medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) connectivity (Yoo et al., 2007b)” (p. 4466).

Some researchers have produced findings contrary to those of Gujar, et al. (2011). While dopamine binding cannot be directly assessed using positron emission tomography (PET), the binding of [¹¹C]raclopride (which competes with dopamine for binding to D₂ and D₃ receptors) can be measured, and researchers Volkow, et al. (2008) used PET to assess the impact of sleep deprivation on dopamine signaling. It was hypothesised that sleep deprivation would result in increased dopamine, and reduced

dopamine transporter activity (to further enhance dopamine transmission), which would be reflected in reduced binding of [¹¹C]raclopride in the striatum. The logic behind this hypothesis included the fact that medications which maintain wakefulness enhance dopaminergic activity (Boutrel & Koob, 2004), and that people with Parkinson's Disease (who suffer from a reduction in dopamine-producing cells) sleep significantly more than average during the day (Happe, Helmschmeid, Meller, Tatsch, & Paulus, 2007). From an allostatic perspective, it also makes sense that the brain would have a mechanism by which to stay awake when experiencing sleep deprivation (SD). The results of the experiment seemed to confirm the hypothesis, as stated by Volkow, et al. (2008):

“We interpret the findings of decreases in the specific binding of [¹¹C]raclopride as an indication of increases in DA release with SD” (p. 8456).

The article did, however, include a caveat, cautioning that reduced binding of [¹¹C]raclopride could be due to a downregulation of D₂ receptors. The reasoning was that sleep deprivation might cause a lower availability of D₂ receptors, and that this lower availability of receptors resulted in the reduced binding of [¹¹C]raclopride, rather than an increase in dopamine. Volkow, et al. (2009) maintained that sleep deprivation enhanced dopamine levels in the striatum, however, more recently, Volkow, et al. (2012) argue that sleep deprivation interacts with dopamine signalling not through a dopamine increase in the ventral striatum, but through a downregulation of D₂ and D₃ receptors. This study supports an interaction between sleep deprivation and dopamine, particularly in the ventral striatum (nucleus accumbens), but argues that this does not necessarily occur through an increase in the binding of dopamine to D₂ and D₃ receptors.

Because LGATs tend to disrupt sleep over a period of days, but allow for a few hours' rest every night, the results of these studies may not be perfectly applicable; however, one cannot dismiss these findings. While consensus has not been reached regarding the exact relationship between sleep disruption and dopamine signaling, there appears to be consensus that these two factors are related, and so it is interesting that LGATs often involve long hours, late nights, and time-consuming (and stress-inducing) homework, all of which disrupt normal sleep time and quality. While sleep disruption is an element of the LGAT experience for many – and while sleep disruption is a noted environmental trigger for hypomania/mania – the stress of the trainings is certainly more extraordinary than the disruptions to sleep. As the internet allows greater transparency into LGAT practices, overtly concerning features like sleep disruption appear to be getting less common, and it does not appear that this has tangibly affected their ability to generate “transformations”. It is contended that, while sleep disruption is a distinct trigger for hypomania/mania, it is just one of many tools used by LGATs to trigger an allostatic defence. Goal-attainment is another such tool, and one which exists in all LGATs.

2.5.9 Goal-attainment (stress removal) and dopamine

The structure, as opposed to duration, of LGAT stress application is also noteworthy. Stress in an LGAT is applied for a few days, and then suddenly removed, which may also contribute to the dopamine high. There is reason to believe that, if dopamine is produced in response to stress, it will stop being produced when the stressor is removed. If then, the stressor is abruptly removed, and allostatic mechanisms remain activated, there will be a period of excess dopamine production (when the level of dopamine produced is disproportionately large when compared to the stressor⁵⁸). Furthermore, if dopamine is produced in response to pleasure (or as reinforcement for doing rewarding activities), then it makes sense that it will be produced when unpleasantness is removed. A pattern of sustained stress induction, followed by a sudden removal of that stress (goal-attainment) results in precisely this - a significant increase in dopaminergic activity in the nucleus accumbens:

“Restraint stress rapidly stimulated the release and the metabolism of dopamine in the medial prefrontal cortex and in the nucleus accumbens (NAc), and acetylcholine release in the hippocampus. Fifty-sixty min later, although rats were still restrained, dopamine and acetylcholine release gradually returned to basal levels. When the animals were freed a considerable increase in the release of both neurotransmitters was observed” (Imperato, Puglisi-Allegra, Casolini, & Angelucci, 1991).

Cabib and Puglisi-Allegra (2012, p. 82), referring to similar studies, make the point in another way:

“Nevertheless, repeated daily experiences do not reduce the activation of NAc DA promoted by the release from the restraining apparatus, supporting the idea that the response is related to the positive experience of the end of a condition that is still aversive for the animal (Imperato et al., 1991, 1992).”

Goal-attainment (or “stress removal”) is an established trigger for hypomania/mania and, through graduation, it is a distinct feature of the LGAT experience. While an overwhelming body of research does not yet prove that stress removal results in a short-term increase in dopamine, cited studies indicate that this relationship is quite plausible. It has, therefore, been demonstrated that psychological stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment (stress removal) are related to mesolimbic dopamine production and, while the precise relationship with sleep disruption remains unclear, there is evidence that both transient stress and goal-attainment elevate mesolimbic dopamine. Since these are established triggers for bipolar disorder, and since hypomania/mania has been linked with elevated mesolimbic dopamine, it is perhaps unsurprising that they are all connected.

⁵⁸ This relates to Sapolsky’s (2004) *elephant on a seesaw* analogy.

While it has been alluded to throughout the thesis, an understanding of bipolar disorder, stress, dopamine, and the relationship between stress and dopamine, allows a complete appreciation of the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis*. Before outlining this hypothesis – which explains how LGATs generate hypomania-like experiences in most participants and potentially cause harm to a portion of those who participate – it is necessary to establish that LGATs do, in fact, involve stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment, and do generate hypomania/mania-like experiences in most participants. The following chapter describes the methodology used to gather and analyse information relating to these assertions.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

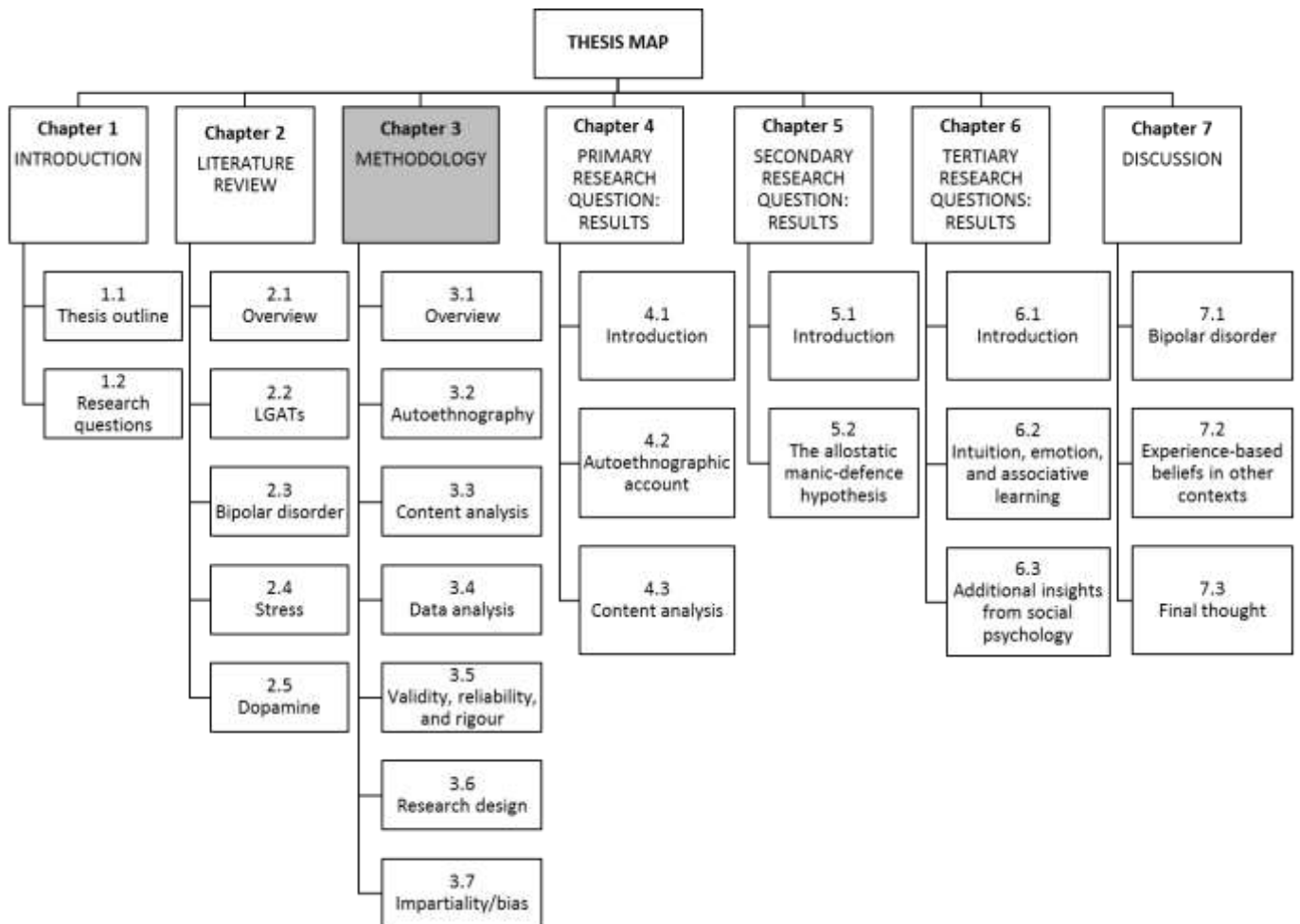


Figure 10: THESIS MAP_METHODODOLOGY

As indicated by Figure 10, the literature review is complete and the following chapter is “Methodology”. The methodology explains how information relating to the primary research question was gathered and analysed, and how findings from the primary research question and the literature review are used to address the secondary and tertiary research questions.

3.1 Overview

“But does a man who makes his observations while he himself is a prisoner possess the necessary detachment? Such detachment is granted to the outsider, but he is too far removed to make any statements of real value. Only the man inside knows” – Viktor Frankl⁵⁹

The aim of the methodology is to provide confidence in the processes used to gather evidence supporting the assertions of this thesis. Because the goal of this research is to outline an accessible, but inconspicuous, observation regarding bipolar disorder and LGATs, an intimate understanding of both topics is required. I am at a potential advantage in this regard as I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2003 (and, as a result, have frequently experienced distortions in mood, and contemplated the triggers and symptoms of mood fluctuations), and I have experienced an LGAT (which cannot be fully captured in a narrative). While experience permitted the observation, and prompted this research, it would be illogical to argue that LGATs and bipolar disorder distort mood, that abnormal moods distort perception, and then use only (potentially distorted) observations from my own bipolar and LGAT experiences as evidence of this. Interpretive social science as a methodology “emphasizes conducting a very close, detailed reading of *text* to acquire a profound, deep understanding” (Neuman, 2011, p. 101), specifically with regard to experiences of a particular social setting, and so while personal experience (autoethnography) forms the starting point of this text, numerous independent sources (content analysis) have been reviewed to lend credibility to the observation.

In the case of bipolar disorder, the triggers are described in textbooks (e.g. Barlow & Durand, 2002; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011), specialist books (e.g. Miklowitz, 2011; Otto, et al., 2011), as well as review articles (e.g. Bostock, et al., 2015; Koenders, et al., 2014). An understanding of the symptoms is based upon the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), and various textbooks and specialist books (e.g. Miklowitz, 2011; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011; Otto, et al., 2011), but this review has crucially been expanded to include more descriptive accounts found in memoirs (Jamison, 1995) and the reflections of artists, poets, composers and novelists who are believed, or confirmed, to have had the illness (Jamison, 1993). This information is then supplemented by an autoethnographic account of bipolar triggers and symptoms, so that the reviewer has an in-depth understanding of the causes of the illness, what hypomania/mania feels like to the sufferer, and the distortions in perception which accompany mood fluctuations.

With regards to LGATs, the text in question consists primarily of descriptions of LGAT promises, processes, and results, and it comes from academic research on LGATs, books generally supportive of LGATs, books generally critical of LGATs, the unsolicited reported experiences of LGAT graduates (from

⁵⁹ (Frankl, 2008, p. 20).

magazine articles, blogs, online discussion forums, YouTube), personal experience of an LGAT, and – crucially – proprietary LGAT websites. Because the opinions on LGATs tend to be polarised, it was important to incorporate descriptions from LGAT advocates, including participants, spokespersons of well-known LGATs, the head of the company which insisted that I took part in one of these trainings, and the trainers themselves. Since LGAT proponents tend not to reveal details about what takes place during trainings, accounts which describe the specific conditions tend to be from those who have not entirely bought into the LGAT philosophy. This presents a conundrum: those who describe the specific behaviour of the trainer and the exercises used are considered by some proponents to lack integrity (as they have broken a “rule”), while LGAT advocates tend not to provide specific information about what takes place. Although notable exceptions exist, the result is the unavoidable charge that the details used in the content analysis come primarily from sceptical participants.

With regards to data collection, Silverman (2013, p. 125) states, “There are no right or wrong methods. There are only methods that are appropriate to your research topic and the model with which you are working”. The methodology of this thesis is unconventional, but – given the subject matter – it is the most effective means by which to gather and present the evidence. The following pages describe the two methods being employed (autoethnography and content analysis), highlight the advantages and concerns with each, and argue how combining the two results in the optimal hybrid approach. Following this, the data analysis process is explained, after which validity, reliability, and rigour are reviewed. The next step is to describe the research design - the order of events from data collection to discussion. Because the definition of an LGAT (which would typically be a section in the literature review) necessarily reveals some of the ways in which stress is generated during the trainings (which would, ideally, be a distinct section in the data analysis), there is a conspicuous overlap of the sections. It is not possible to define LGATs without referring to their rules, processes, control of information, constructionist philosophy, the demeanour of trainers, structure, etc. – all of which directly impact the stress experienced by participants. As a result, some of the evidence on stress experienced by participants has already been described in the literature review. The obscuring of boundaries between literature review and data analysis is compounded by the fact that content analysis, like a traditional literature review, relies on existing material. While a distinct section of Chapter 4 (section 4.3.1.1) examines stress-generation in LGATs, the reader should be aware that some stressors have been described, or were alluded to, in the literature review.

3.2 Autoethnography

Autoethnography, according to Maréchal (2010), is “a form of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing” (p. 43). Because I have both lived with bipolar disorder for fourteen years, and experienced an LGAT, it is useful – although potentially risky – to draw from these experiences to provide insight and context to the perspectives offered by academics and other sources (content analysis).

As is typically the case for autoethnographic studies, I did not experience bipolar disorder or the LGAT to collect data, but rather endured these experiences and subsequently tried to make sense of them. According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), autoethnographies are presented in the form of stories “that incorporate the ethnographer’s experiences into the ethnographic descriptions and analysis of others” (p. 6). My bipolar disorder account is based on memory, but crucial elements were also captured in three unpublished books. The account of my LGAT experience (“Field Notes, 2010”) was written in the days following the course, based on brief notes taken between sessions, but largely on memory. Given the stress and sleep deprivation endured during the training, this narrative is not a perfect recollection, but rather a subjective account created under difficult circumstances. While flawed, this account may, however, enjoy certain advantages over that of a detached spectator.

The alternative, provided by commentators such as Dr Margaret Singer (who observed six LGATs), is that of a dispassionate observer – of someone who did not fully take part in the trainings. Since what is being commented on in this thesis are not only the processes participants are put through, but also the experience of these processes, there is utility to a perspective which reflects full immersion in the training. Referring to the benefits of autoethnography, Plummer (2001) states, “What matters is the way in which the story enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller – to see the world from his or her point of view, even if this world does not match reality” (p. 401).

Autoethnographies are, however, criticised for their focus on subjective experience and disparaged for being self-absorbed, egotistical, brooding, and one-sided (Atkinson, 1997; Coffey, 1999). It seems that the greatest strength of autoethnography – its subjectivity – is also its greatest weakness. However, in the case of a type of training billed as practical, rather than intelligible, the subjectivity of the author should be celebrated, rather than sullied. LGATs are described by proponents as “experiential” - something that cannot be explained, but which a person has to personally experience. The perspective of a dispassionate observer is, therefore, considered by many to be invalid or incomplete. Only the naïve review of a person with no prior knowledge of the training, like most who participate, provides an untainted insight into the experience, and so autoethnography, while problematic if used in isolation, offers a useful starting point for researching this topic.

3.3 Content analysis

Ellis (2004) argues that the self-reflection of an autoethnography should not stand alone – that it should be supported by, and connected to, wider issues. This thesis takes heed of this perspective and constructs a more complete picture of the LGAT experience through the incorporation of numerous, and varied, independent resources. Rather than autoethnography making up the majority of an argument which is buffered by other sources, it serves only as a starting point for an analysis that is dominated by independent perspectives, both with regards to bipolar disorder and LGAT participation. While personal experience can be customised to support any narrative, the views of dozens of independent and unsolicited sources are less malleable and, therefore, more compelling. The approach used to gather and review these autonomous, pre-existing perspectives is *content analysis*.

Content analysis involves gathering and analysing the content of text. “The **text** is anything written, visual, or spoken that serves as a medium for communication. It includes books, newspaper or magazine articles, advertisements, speeches, official documents, films or videotapes, musical lyrics, photographs, articles of clothing, Web sites, or works of art” (Neuman, 2011, p. 361). According to Neuman (2011), content analysis is appropriate for analysing common themes within an array of texts and is, therefore, suitable for assessing commonalities in LGAT conditions, processes, promises, and results, as described in journal articles, newspaper articles, magazine articles, books, websites, blogs, online discussion forums, documentaries, investigative journalism programs, and YouTube. It is also appropriate for comparing these conditions, promises, processes and results to the triggers and symptoms of bipolar disorder, as described in journal articles, textbooks, books and other sources.

To find relevant content academic search engines EbscoHost and Google Scholar were used, with the search phrases “large group awareness training”, “LGAT”, “est”, “Lifespring”, “the Forum”, “Landmark Education”, “Landmark Forum”, and “Landmark Worldwide” employed. The same search terms were used to find data using public search engine, Google, and YouTube. These searches produced a body of data, and content was incorporated based upon the degree to which it revealed relevant features of the training, and the reactions of participants to the training. As indicated earlier, and as is covered in some depth in chapter 4 (pp. 209-212), LGATs require participants to agree not to reveal details about what takes place in the training. Because of this, those who are highly supportive of LGATs tend to describe the trainings without revealing specifics (see pp. 212-213), while those who are less convinced are more likely to provide details. A notable exception is Rhinehart (2010), who describes the est training in detail, but others who are positive about their Landmark Forum experiences (e.g. Bennett, 2011; Hill, 2003; Odasso, 2011; Rofe, 2010), or who are specifically cited by Landmark (2017) (Faltermayer, 2001; Thornburgh, 2011), also reveal relevant specifics. Additionally, statements by LGATs and their spokespersons have been integrated when they reveal specific processes or results.

3.4 Data analysis

While autoethnography and content analysis are the methodologies employed to gather data, thematic analysis will be used to analyse it. “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Because the themes present in bipolar disorder, stress, and dopamine research will be compared with the themes which exist in the LGAT texts, this is the most appropriate approach for data analysis. Thematic analysis is used to establish agreed upon environmental triggers for, and symptoms of, hypomania/mania. Thematic analysis is also used to identify commonalities among LGATs operated by different companies around the world, to establish that the processes and conditions of LGATs involve stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment, and to demonstrate that LGAT results closely resemble hypomanic/manic symptoms for the vast majority of participants.

3.5 Validity, reliability, and rigour

Validity, as defined by Hammersley (1990), is “truth: interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers” (p. 57). The validity of this study is dependent upon the degree to which legitimate hypomanic/manic triggers are established and explained, the degree to which hypomanic/manic symptoms are accurately portrayed, and the degree to which these triggers and symptoms can be justifiably identified in LGATs. An extensive array of independent sources, combined with personal experience of bipolar triggers and symptoms, as well as LGAT processes, provides confidence in the validity of the account being presented.

Reliability is described by Hammersley (1992) as “the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions” (p. 67). In the case of bipolar triggers and symptoms, review articles and other sources reveal that there is consensus about the major issues. In order to provide more insight into mood, descriptions from poets, novelists, psychologists, and myself are also used. These descriptions, while not incorporating academic nomenclature, are often consistent in their content, yet differ based upon personal experience and the varying abilities of people to put their experiences into words. The utilisation of numerous independent sources – from academics, to LGAT proponents and opponents – to describe the LGAT conditions and “experience” ensures a high degree of reliability. While there will almost certainly be contention about whether the trainings are inherently stressful, there should, based on the number of independent sources and the consistency of these accounts, be little debate about what typically takes place in the major LGATs.

3.6 Research design

In terms of research design, three distinct sections address the primary, secondary, and tertiary research questions. Excerpts from an autoethnographic account and content analysis are used in Chapter 4 to argue that LGATs incorporate stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment, and result in hypomania/mania-like symptoms in most participants. The autoethnographic account is a 35-page document, written in the days, as opposed to weeks, after I participated in an LGAT in 2010. A few additions to this account were made in the months subsequent to my own experience, based on interactions with other participants and relevant descriptions of their results. In addition to the autoethnographic account, content analysis involved the review of journal articles, books, magazines, newspapers, YouTube videos, blogs, online discussion forums, and – crucially – the statements of LGAT spokespersons themselves. This text was accumulated in the seven years after participating in the LGAT. Having established the triggers and symptoms of hypomania/mania in the literature review, a thematic analysis of LGAT conditions and results reveals the parallels between bipolar disorder and LGATs and provides an answer to the primary research question.

After demonstrating that most healthy individuals experience hypomania/mania-like symptoms after being subjected to established bipolar triggers, Chapter 5 offers an explanation for this observation. This chapter, which relies on a sound understanding of LGAT conditions and results, bipolar triggers and symptoms, stress, dopamine, and the relationship between stress and dopamine, provides a plausible biological mechanism by which LGATs achieve their results, asserting that hypomania/mania is an exaggerated defence against feelings of guilt, shame, inadequacy, fear, and uncertainty. This hypothesis, in addition to explaining the “positive” results achieved in most LGAT participants, may also provide insight into the negative results reported by an unfortunate minority.

Chapter 6 is dependent upon an understanding of both the primary and secondary research questions (chapters 4 and 5). The first component of this chapter reviews research which explains the often-unacknowledged prominence of unconscious thought, how extreme emotions impact the reliability of this type of thinking, and how – particularly when primed – participants may unconsciously conflate powerful feelings of euphoria, optimism, energy, and confidence with the principles and obligations of the LGAT in question. It will be argued that – just as Pavlov’s dogs learned to associate a bell with food – LGAT participants, having been mentally exhausted and convinced of the validity of experience as a source of “knowing”, associate the LGAT principles and obligations with the LGAT “experience”. This section also outlines *The four-step process of persuasion*, the process by which LGATs, and arguably other organisations, circumnavigate critical thinking when convincing participants of the validity of their assertions.

The second component of this section considers other elements of LGATs and, referencing established social psychology theory, explains how LGATs use these conditions, processes, and rules to subtly influence participants without their knowing. It explains how LGATs maximise the tendency to outsource thinking to authorities, how they make use of public commitments, how associations are generated through priming techniques, how information control impacts persuasion, how an objective recall of the training is minimised, how the post-training euphoria undermines informed consent for future participants, how repetition is strategically employed by trainers, and how an obligation to “pay it forward” is used to compel participants to invite family, friends, and colleagues.

While the secondary and tertiary research questions add depth to this thesis, it is the primary research question that is specifically informed by the literature review, and which involves a formal gathering, and analysis of data. The research design is, therefore, centred on investigating this research question, and making the case that most healthy individuals will experience hypomania/mania if exposed to certain known bipolar triggers. The research questions which follow, while informed by the literature review and primary research question, are treated as related, but incidental, topics.

3.7 Impartiality/bias

“An important step in achieving wisdom, then, is recognizing that bias is not something that afflicts only the eyes of others. It can distort our own views as well” (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 28).

I cannot claim a personal understanding of bipolar disorder without acknowledging the distorted judgement which frequently accompanies an elevated mood. With hypomania/mania there is a tendency to find creative associations between sometimes unrelated events (Damasio, 2006), and delusions of reference involve a tendency to believe that unrelated events are tied to your own life in some way (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011). It is also possible, if not likely, that I have an unconscious desire to narrow the gap between the “sick” and the “well” and demonstrating that the majority of healthy people can experience bipolar symptoms would achieve this to an extent. Because of these and other factors it is necessary to be cautious and insist that reviewers of this research are cognisant of bipolar-related distortions which might impact my objectivity.

The same argument can be made with regards to LGATs. Because my participation in 2010 occurred organically and was not with research in mind, I entered the training like almost every other LGAT participant, experienced the training as they would have and, in the days following the course, compiled a document describing what I believed had taken place. My motivation for doing so is described in my 2015 master’s dissertation (p. 48):

“I was disturbed by the abuse I had experienced, and witnessed, during the training yet equally fascinated – as someone who had lived with bipolar disorder for seven years – by the hypomania-like symptoms I observed in the vast majority of participants. I was driven to write my account (Field Notes) by a desire to make sense of the processes which, in my opinion, managed to manipulate a roomful of intelligent people, and a deep concern that other people might experience mental health issues as a result of participation.”

My reaction to my 2010 LGAT participation was of anger, disbelief, and disgust. The charge may be made that this disqualifies me from commenting on the matter. This rationale, however, would only allow researchers with strong antisocial tendencies to investigate phenomena which demand empathy and concern. While I acknowledge that personal experience leads to bias as often as insight, it should not heuristically be assumed that my illness and initial reaction to the training render my arguments invalid. This thesis seeks to explicate an observation and suggest an explanation which may not have been accessible to someone without an intimate understanding of both bipolar disorder and LGATs, a tendency to make loose associations, and a strong personal incentive to better understand this illness. If the weight of evidence does not allay concerns regarding my initial assessment, then perhaps it will prompt further investigation by truly detached experts.

Chapter 4: PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION: RESULTS

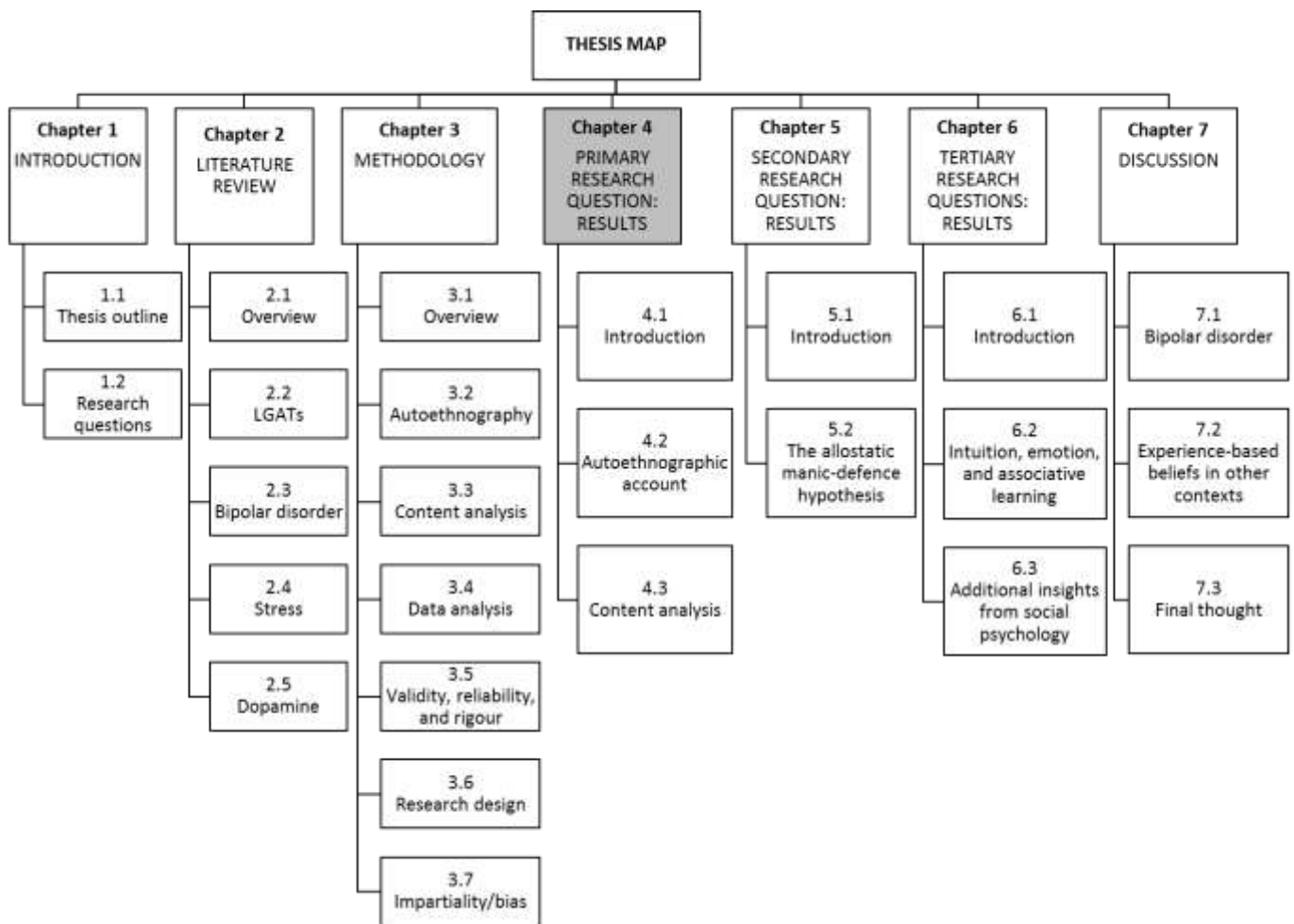


Figure 11: THESIS MAP_PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION: RESULTS

Figure 11 indicates that the following chapter is “Primary Research Question: Results”.

Primary research question:

1. Will most healthy individuals exposed to a structured process of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment (as occurs in LGATs) experience transient hypomanic/manic symptoms?

Secondary research question:

2. Is there a plausible biological explanation for a structured process of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment triggering transient hypomanic/manic symptoms in healthy individuals?

Tertiary research questions:

3. What are the implications of an ability to manufacture a powerful emotional (hypomanic) experience – at a strategic point in time – on intuition, associative learning, and persuasion?
4. What does social psychology reveal about the conditions and processes employed by LGATs?

4.1 Introduction

“The Landmark Forum is a self-help program that offers to make you a new, more powerful dude. The catch? Try three days of scant sleep, humiliating revelations, and verbal abuse. So why are people signing up by the thousands?” (O'Brien, 2012).

Stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment have been identified as key environmental triggers for hypomania/mania. In order to advance the primary argument of this thesis – that LGATs contain triggers for hypomania/mania and cause symptoms that closely resemble hypomania/mania in the majority of participants – it is necessary to demonstrate that stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment are central elements of the LGAT training experience. The conditions and results of LGAT participation are revealed through an *autoethnographic account* (my own experience), and *content analysis* (a review of information provided by other sources).

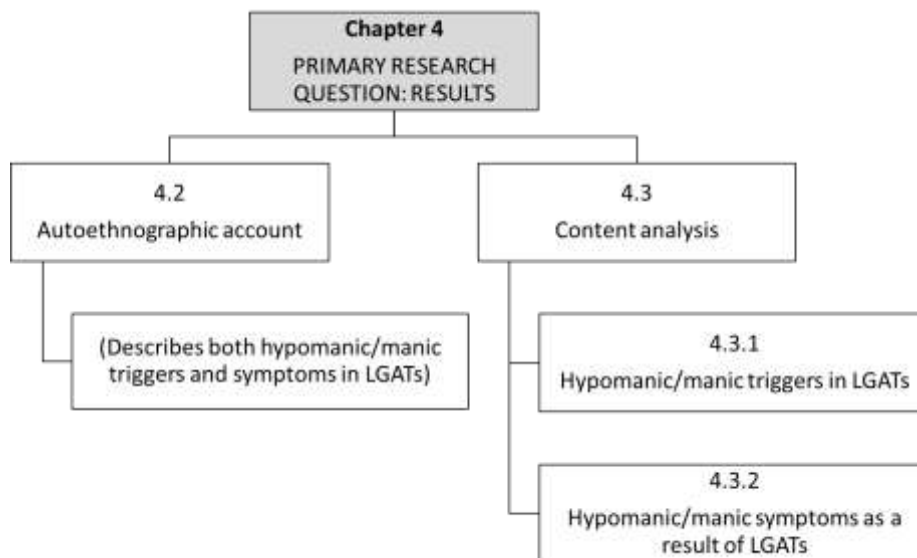


Figure 12: PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION: RESULTS (Outline)

Figure 12 illustrates how results of the primary research question will be broken into an autoethnographic account and content analysis. The autoethnographic account provides an introduction to the primary argument of this thesis. It explains how I came to take part in an LGAT, my impressions of what took place, and why I came to believe that the conditions and results mirrored the triggers and symptoms of bipolar disorder. In order to coherently describe my own experience, it is necessary to combine the evidence of bipolar triggers and symptoms in a single, linear, narrative. To separate the two components would impact readability and I have, therefore, not attempted to do this. Because of the volume and complexity of information in the content analysis, the conditions (triggers) and results (symptoms) of LGAT participation are presented in distinct sections.

4.2 Autoethnographic account

“... those at the top of the hierarchy have the power to see that their directives are carried out. In other words, if your boss sends you to a seminar, you go” (Singer, 2003, p. 188).

In 2010 I joined a company which insisted that all head office employees participate in two training courses. While it was emphasised that completion of these courses was required, no specifics were provided about the nature of the trainings, and – having never heard of an LGAT, and with no reason to assume that they would be extraordinarily stressful – I said that I would gladly take part. Because no details were provided, I innocently asked around the office, but no one would provide me with any useful information. A few people stated that the courses were incredible, and that I had to just trust the process and I would find out for myself. I heard from other employees who were less enthusiastic, but who – in order to preserve their jobs – were not vocal about this within the company. I was told, for example, that a number of people abruptly divorced their spouses soon after the trainings. This is the same impulsive behaviour that Kay Jamison described in herself, and which is in line with hypomania/mania, but – without other information – it seemed peculiar, rather than suggestive of anything distasteful or potentially dangerous.

Because there was apprehension before the trainings, the company chairman called a meeting where employees who would be taking part could ask questions and he could set our minds at ease. No useful information was provided during this session either. We were told instead – as most LGATs claim – that there are things that we know that we know, things that we know that we don't know, and things that we don't know that we don't know. “This...” our chairman explained, while pointing to the largest slice of a pie chart he had drawn on a whiteboard “... is what these trainings are all about”. We were told that the trainings were incredible, and that people's lives were instantly transformed from taking them, yet no insight into how these transformations were achieved was provided, and no warning was given that the experience may be highly offensive to some. Instead, a string of euphemisms was used to describe the conditions and, even when asked directly if anyone did not enjoy the courses, the question was deflected and answered with a promise that seemed, at the time, excessively confident. “This may sound hard to believe...” our chairman began, “... but I guarantee that Sunday will be the best day of your lives”. As someone who had experienced mania in London, and hypomania with regularity since then, I felt that this was a particularly bold statement. Despite the fact that there were vague suggestions of euphoria and impulsivity, I did not – at that stage – draw any associations between the training and bipolar disorder.

The first training was to run over four days – from Thursday 8th July to Sunday 11th July. These dates are difficult to forget because the Soccer World Cup was taking place in South Africa at the time, and the final was on Sunday 11th July. For South Africans, this was a once in a lifetime experience, and the festivities around the country were a source of national bonding and great excitement for many people. It, therefore, speaks to the reverence with which these trainings were held that, when it was pointed out that we may miss watching the World Cup Final, we were told that the trainings were more important. Again, this seemed strange but I was acting under the assumption that a large organisation would not impose on its employees the peculiar fascinations of its founders and was still intrigued, rather than suspicious, about what we were to endure.

The training, which started on Thursday evening at 18:03⁶⁰, closely resembled the LGATs already described – it had an authoritarian trainer who mocked, harassed, and intimidated “assholes” who challenged his ideas, uncomfortable chairs, long hours, an obsessive focus on integrity, responsibility and rules, exercises that encouraged regression, exercises to generate uncertainty, guilt, and tension, guided relaxation to punctuate the tension, zombie-like volunteers who refused to smile and who monitored all proceedings, homework assignments, and a strong emphasis on “sharing”. Indiscriminate trust was presented by the trainer as a virtue, participants were repeatedly told that they were stupid, and critical thinking was both overtly and covertly discouraged. (E.g. One stress-inducing exercise, which required participants to solve a puzzle under pressure, paired participants with assistants who would shout, “The universe applauds action, not thought!” when participants paused to think about the solution.) As in other LGATs, the punishments for transgressing any of the all-important rules were severe – one elderly woman (I would estimate that she was in her late sixties or early seventies), for example, was screamed at by the trainer for sitting in the wrong chair after a break, something that a number of participants later admitted they found difficult to watch.

In addition to general features typical to LGATs, the training shamelessly incorporated est and Lifespring “technology” – from the entrance music used (Lifespring: *Also Sprach Zarathustra*), to the banner hanging across the front of the hall (Lifespring: “What are you pretending not to know?”), the use of dyads (Lifespring), the Red and Black game (Lifespring), the use of specific jargon (Lifespring: e.g. “grungies”), the Danger Process (est), to the lyrics of the song sung during a cross-dressing exercise (est). Singer (2003), in her depiction of LGAT processes, noted that some appeared to be designed with the express purpose of humiliating the participants. Consider this description of an est exercise, first expressed by Luke Rhinehart in 1976:

⁶⁰ Trainings started with a declaration of the exact time, possibly to suggest that the “technology” was precise.

“‘Okay, men, your turn...,’ and twenty-five men are soon on the platform reciting in high-pitched voices how they have ‘Ten little fingers, ten little toes, long wavy hair and a turned-up nose, big brown eyes and a cute little figure. Stay away boys, till I get bigger!’ In the second lineup of twenty-five men, a young man named Terry, who looks as though he might be a linebacker for the Pittsburgh Steelers, has trouble wiggling his hips when he talks about his ‘cute little figure,’ and Michael singles him out for assistance...” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 127).

In the description of my 2010 training, having not yet heard of est, or Lifespring, or LGATs, I described one of our exercises as follows:

“All of the guys were told to dress up as little girls – make-up and dresses were provided – and then we had to rehearse a song to be sung back to the girls. We had to mimic a three or four-year-old girl as closely as possible and try to be shy and cute, while singing and providing actions. The song went as follows:

‘Ten little fingers, ten little toes, long curly hair and a turned-up nose, big brown eyes and a cute little figure, watch out guys when I get bigger!’” (Field Notes, 2010, 622-627).

Similarly, the Red and Black game was described by Haaken and Adams (1983, pp. 277-278) as follows:

“One example involved a game called ‘Red and Black,’ which required the group to divide into two teams and develop strategies, based upon a set of rules, for achieving the greatest number of points. Neither team was able to recognize that the main contingency for getting the maximum number of points was that both teams succeed. Essentially, if one team lost, both lost. And both teams did lose. This exercise could have been an occasion for discussing the cultural context of competition and aspects of our society which make it difficult to identify cooperative contingencies. Instead, the trainer castigated participants, finally stating with disgust, ‘You all make me sick.’ Since the exercise was at the close of the evening, we were to go home and reflect upon what we had learned. Many participants were silent and tearful as we closed the evening session.”

Again, having never heard of est, Lifespring, or LGATs, I described the reaction of our trainer (“The Guru”) to our “failure” in the Red and Black game:

“Despite all the bullying and anger that had preceded this, ‘The Guru’ managed to take his venom and intimidation to a new level. He stamped his feet, he screamed, he swore, he smashed the board with his fist, he spat unbridled fury at us all and as a climax, he tore the score sheet down, crumpled it up and threw it on the floor. Our evening ended with him storming from the room and one of the all-whites⁶¹ telling us that the evening had come to an end. On the way out, we collected

⁶¹ The assistants to the trainer were dressed in white.

our homework assignments again and I noticed our scoreboard (which mirrored the one used to tally the scores). Although it was stuck up on the board from where we worked on it earlier, it was clear that at some stage it had been roughly crumpled before – I’ve no doubt that not a single group in the history of New Beginnings has achieved a positive score on the red and black game. It was 02:00 on Saturday morning by the time I got home” (Field Notes, 2010, 548-558).

These exercises were positioned as teaching noble principles – that “humiliation is self-inflicted” and that “people often try to win at the expense of others”. It was suggested, if not overtly stated, that the exercises were “tough love” – that the stress endured was a secondary consequence of a necessary, and altruistic, primary objective. My view, as I carefully listened, remained engaged, and thought about what was taking place, was that these explanations were a distraction, and that the primary objective was to generate uncertainty, self-consciousness, guilt, and humiliation. While the trainer presented himself as an authority – claiming a master’s degree and a PhD in psychological counselling and philosophy from a large American university – much of what he said, and how he said it, did not correspond with these claims. His take on depression and suicide, for example, was distinctly out of line with what is known, and taught in universities, about the illness (he claimed that people who were depressed could cure their depression by simply “lifting their heads” and that they “want the world to pity them”), and – because he did not possess the basic grasp of language and grammar that might be expected of someone with his professed qualifications – I became sceptical of the many nonsensical arguments that other participants increasingly came to accept without question.

I would argue that, once I realised that this person was not the authority he claimed to be, and that this training was likely not as well-constructed as it was presented to be, that my stress levels were affected more than most. It is one thing to endure humiliation, sleep disruption, uncertainty, and guilt when you believe in the competence and altruistic motives of the person inflicting this on you. When you believe in the leader, it also makes it easier to rationalise doing nothing as people are breaking down all around you, being screamed at for breaking rules, being made to relive childhood molestations, or being told that they made it possible for their rape to have taken place. When you believe, instead, that something more sinister is going on, and acknowledge that – by failing to take a stand – you are contributing to the torment of these people, the stress which results is more extreme. I believe that people in the room suffered, but that they framed their treatment as “tough love” rather than abuse. By framing the experience as something beneficial, participants could escape the realisation that they paid a person to mistreat them, and others, for days. Orwell comments on the benefits of ignorance during the process of indoctrination – a form of coping I could not access:

“By lack of understanding they remained sane. They simply swallowed everything, and what they swallowed did them no harm, because it left no residue behind, just as a grain of corn will pass undigested through the body of a bird” (Orwell, 1949, p. 163).

Because my life at that point revolved around avoiding mania, and since I had spent nearly seven years learning the specific conditions that were likely to destabilise my mood, I also became aware early on that the environment was precisely what I would ordinarily try to avoid. Aside from the shouting, harassment, and assertions that we were all stupid assholes, the training seemed to have been designed to overwhelm emotional defences and to exhaust and inhibit our ability to reflect. To manage my mood, I have become (perhaps too) aware of my emotions and, as a protective measure, have become blunted to extreme emotional responses. Reflection is an essential tool when managing mood, as it is crucial to engage logic to avoid emotion from taking over. During the training, we were overloaded with esoteric information (in sessions lasting up to three hours), questioning was extremely difficult, and no time was allowed for reflection. At times, we were made to engage in emotional exercises where we worked with a volunteer who played our mother or father and, at other times, guided visualisation exercises required participants to relive painful childhood experiences:

TRAINER: “Close your eyes... close your eyes. Good... great... relax. What you’re going to do is go back into your childhood. Look and see. Find an event that caused you pain... made you feel small or uncomfortable or molested in some way. Recreate that event here. Bring that event here” (Field Notes, 2010, 501-503).

Other exercises involved participants sitting in the “dyad position” (the same terminology was used in Lifespring), facing each other, knees touching and maintaining eye contact, while asking the same questions over and over again. One exercise required participants to repeatedly ask another participant the question “What do you want?” for what seemed like more than an hour:

“‘The Guru’ encouraged the person asking the question to do anything that it took to get answers from the responder. ‘Shout! Stamp your feet! Swear! Do whatever you have to, short of standing up from your chair or using physical violence!!!’” (Field Notes, 2010, 476-478).

While the purported purpose of the exercise was to get participants to be honest about what it was that they really wanted, the effect – I found – was that it destroyed the ability to reflect. Removing participants’ filters may have served a useful purpose, but it also immobilised defences, exhausted the ability to think rationally, and damaged the rational “handbrake” I would normally employ to keep my emotions under control. This exercise, like most, was distressing for many people and – in encouraging participants to be active perpetrators in this abuse – the psychological incentive to believe that the exercises served a noble purpose was unconsciously heightened.

When, on the first night, we left the training at 01:45 in the morning (with homework to complete by the next day), I grew more concerned about the effect that this could have on my mental health. Managing sleep is vital to preventing relapse in bipolar disorder and I was not only leaving the training late, having to drive home and complete homework, but it was difficult to fall asleep, having been through such an emotionally stimulating experience. Friday produced much of the same in terms of stress-inducing exercises; however, by Friday evening challenges to the trainer had disappeared. Participants had learned that he was proficient at putting them on the spot, of making their challenges seem foolish, or – if necessary – of escalating hostility and aggression to a far greater level than they were prepared to go to. It was simply not worth challenging him. Friday's training ended with the Red and Black game, after which we collected our homework and started to make our way home:

“It was 02:00 on Saturday morning by the time I got home” (Field Notes, 2010, 557-558).

As I left the training on Friday night I felt that I might be the only person deeply concerned about the validity, and safety, of what we were being put through. I also could not help but make associations between the training environment and what I knew about brainwashing – all of which (at that stage) came from George Orwell's *1984*. The use of jargon reminded me of The Party's insistence on Newspeak, and the way that the trainer and his assistants constantly monitored our behaviour and restricted our thinking bore a strong resemblance to telescreens and the thought police. Like citizens of Oceania we were made to sing songs together, and – as occurred in the novel – many participants seemed to find identity in the group and celebrate and perpetuate the restraints imposed upon us.

Towards the end of the third day (Saturday) the opportunity to move from being an “asshole”, to being accepted by the trainer was provided in an elaborate ceremony. Psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton (1961) explains that “the thought reform process is one means by which nonpeople are permitted, through a change in attitude and personal character, to make themselves over into people” (p. 433). The ceremony on Saturday night was an overt example of this process, and served as the beginning of participants' transitions from unsaved to saved (Field Notes, 2010, 603-705):

“On Saturday night, the strangest of all of the exercises took place. Much like the ‘I know you better than your mummy / evaluate you by how you're standing exercise’ each participant was asked to go and sit in a chair, alone at the front of the hall, while ‘The Guru’ – flanked by his all-whites – sat, as if in heavy concentration, and assigned each person a word. He imparted these words as though they were gracious gifts, benevolent offerings from a great and wise being. One person was given ‘mountain’, another was given ‘waterfall’, one was given ‘orchid’, and I was given ‘lightning’. After each person had been studied, deliberated on and enough summoning of his almighty powers had taken place, words were assigned to each of the twenty-four attendees. We were then told that we

had ten minutes to find ourselves a spot and to work out how to describe our words in a way that let him know something about ourselves. I should have learned to expect the unexpected, but I was confident. To me lightning was quick, spontaneous, it could cause devastation but also great beauty, it was misunderstood for a long time, it was bold and it was brilliant... I had some ideas. After ten minutes we were brought back into the hall and the exercise began.

I should probably describe the layout of the chairs for this exercise as it comes into play later on. As I mentioned, 'The Guru' had his chair at the back of the hall and his all-whites (eight to ten of them) sat on either side of him. In front of these chairs, at the front of the hall, was a single chair (for the person being evaluated) and all of the participants' chairs were placed down the sides of the hall facing inwards (twelve on each side). As we took our seats 'The Guru' invited someone to be first to share. He explained that if any of us felt that the person speaking was on the right track we should stand up and if he stood up then everyone should stand up. We were all quite uncertain about what was expected, but a couple of people gave it a go.

The first person to take the chair was mocked. He had been given the word 'mountain' and described how a mountain was big and... 'Do you think that is why I gave you the word mountain?' he asked, emphasising every syllable.

'Yes?' the person responded.

'You are mistaken', 'The Guru' replied, both knowingly and condescendingly.

One after the next people got up and tried varying approaches, but each time they were shut down. This carried on for a long time and it seemed that no breakthrough would be found until a girl got up (she'd been my partner in the 'What do you want?' exercise) and immediately broke down on the chair. 'An orchid is strong and complex and beautiful...' As she began she burst into tears and one of the all-whites stood up. Everyone watched and as she continued to bawl more of the all-whites stood up. As they did, we all followed suit. 'The Guru' – from a seated position – then addressed the girl in a soothing voice, 'Yes, yes I know. I'm already standing...' He stood up and walked robotically to the girl on the chair (like a bride walking down the aisle). No one knew what the hell was going on. 'You are all of those things' he murmured gently as he came to an arms-length distance from the girl. 'Tell me five things about the orchid', he tenderly beckoned and, through her sobs, she recounted five things about 'the orchid'.

'Can I give you something?' 'The Guru' ventured... and as the girl accepted he took her up in his arms and gave her a warm hug. The hug lasted for half a minute and it sickened me to see this monster playing saviour and protector to one of his most vulnerable victims. As he hugged her he continued to whisper encouragement in her ear and she drank it all in. Eyes locked, he took her by

the hands and stepped backwards (she walked forwards) until she was standing a couple of feet in front of his chair. Loud, powerful music began to blast from the back as each of the all-whites and 'The Guru' stepped backwards onto their chairs. We all watched in confusion as they all moved into the crucifix stance – arms outstretched, eyes to the heavens – as the song moved into its crescendo and the girl followed suit. (This was apparently her gift from 'The Guru' – her metaphorical rebirth and the entire process took about five minutes.)

Most people quickly cottoned onto how the process worked – they needed to cry and speak about their word as if it was them (and to only say very positive things). Before the next person had a chance to try this out, however, 'The Guru' unleashed fury on us all for failing to join in on supporting the girl who'd gone first. Of course, none of us knew what was appropriate or what was going on for that matter. We did know that on the next 'rebirth' we would all climb onto our chairs and adopt the crucifix position when 'The Guru' did. Over the next few hours every person went through the process, most getting it straight away, some genuinely moved and others who'd perhaps worked things out. There were definitely some people taken in - grown men crying their eyes out and girls and women hypnotised in gratitude for this precious gift from their 'saviour'.

I was having a physically ill reaction to what was happening. I saw this person as the ultimate predator, betraying the trust of people brutalised into needing his affirmation, but after two nights of very little sleep and three days of mental and emotional destruction, I just set myself the goal of making it through the course and making big decisions about my career later. One after the next people went up and broke down: 'A waterfall is powerful and beautiful...', 'A ruby is brilliant and intense...' etc. etc. and each time they were hugged – 'Can I give you something?' – and whispered to and led by the hands to stand in front of the chair, listen to the music, stand in the crucifix position and enjoy their metaphorical rebirth. If ever there was a situation where someone was trying to play God, then this was it. I was the last person to go and, knowing what was required and the consequences of failing to deliver, I shed a tear (which wasn't tricky at that level of exhaustion) and stammered how lightning was 'B-b-b-bold and b-b-brilliant and spontaneous and powerful...' Hugging the trainer was the single most nauseating experience of my life. I wasn't sure if anyone else was aware of it, but I knew that something truly malevolent was going on. On Saturday night we finished at 23:30 and – as always – collected our homework on the way out."

Sunday morning produced a particularly exhausting exercise, culminating in the (apparently profound) revelation that we needed "nothing" in order to be happy. Once participants had "got it", as Singer (2003) described in her chapter on LGATs, the final day was one of lightness and a vastly altered mood. As we moved towards completion of the course that evening, there was dancing, hugging, and exercises which affirmed the trainer's acceptance of us, and our acceptance of each other. By Sunday

the similarities between triggers for hypomania/mania and the course conditions started to seem plausible. I considered how participants had been made to feel ignorant, selfish, humiliated, uncertain, and guilty; of how most participants would have only got to sleep (after driving home and completing homework) at about 03:00am on Thursday and Friday night, and after midnight on Saturday night; of how the structures that one usually has in place to manage emotion were systematically undermined; of how exercises and lectures were packed one after another, seemingly attempting to generate strong emotional responses, but allowing no time to make sense of those responses; and of how – after three days of being made to feel inadequate – participants had that inadequacy removed, and replaced with affirmation. Like my job in London – because he became the sole source of validation in the training environment – the trainer’s acceptance was like a switch; when flicked, participants were instantly transformed from unenlightened assholes to enlightened graduates (goal-attainment).

If I had to have taken my seven years of research into, and personal experience of, bipolar disorder and tried to design an environment that would be more likely to trigger a manic episode, I could not have come up with a more perfect process than what I went through over those four days. Everything that would ordinarily concern me – and that I would normally try to avoid – was packed tightly, and aggressively, into a short, extraordinarily intense, and inescapably overwhelming experience. There was considerable stress, sleep disruption and, through Saturday night’s ceremony, goal-attainment. An even more overt sense of goal-attainment occurred later on Sunday night as previous graduates staged a surprise – a characteristic of LGATs also noted by Singer (2003) – and the trainer smiled and hugged all of the grateful participants, before they left the training room.

The *triggers* for hypomania/mania during the training would have not been compelling without noticing that the *effects* of the training mirrored the symptoms of hypomania/mania. In addition to hearing that graduates seemed to get divorced with a regularity that far exceeded normal (impulsivity), and that the final day of the training would be the best day of our lives (euphoria), on Sunday afternoon (before leaving) the trainer – presumably aware that the “experience” would typically take effect at this stage – grinned knowingly and asked how we were all feeling. It was at this point – while (most) participants beamed back at him – that he began to market the next training, and his comments reminded me of my own hypomanic and manic experiences:

“As the day came to a close we received the talk about the next course, Reflections. We were told that New Beginnings was merely a simple introductory course and that Reflections was the real thing. With all the smugness in the world, ‘The Guru’ declared ‘YOU AIN’T SEEN NOTHING YET!’ He told us that if we thought we felt great now in Reflections we would ‘fly’. He then went on to give us some warnings about what we’d feel when we left New Beginnings.

‘People are going to look at you differently. They’ll either be drawn to you or frightened by you, but people are going to want to engage with you. Expect people to deal with you differently.’ He also warned us about alcohol, saying that if we usually needed two glasses of wine, we should just have half a glass that evening – ‘It will affect you way more and you’ll probably feel that you don’t need it’. Lastly, he warned us about making any big decisions, cracking a joke about telling our wives to ‘fuck off!’ He said that for the next week we shouldn’t make any rash decisions as we would be feeling unusually empowered” (Field Notes, 2010, 831-843).

These are not things that the average participant, or even the average mental health professional, would pick up on, but the trainer clearly references euphoria (“you will fly”), confidence (“feeling unusually empowered”) and impulsivity (“don’t go home and tell your wife to fuck off”). More subtly he described the way that (it seems) people engage with you when you’re hypomanic or manic. There is no question that some people enjoyed my openness and friendliness (sociability) in London, but that extraordinary confidence, assertiveness, and intensity can be unnerving to others. While the similarities between triggers and symptoms of bipolar disorder, and the content and stated results of the training, were interesting, it was the elation of participants – which I had seen so often in myself and in others – and the distortion of their perspectives which I found most intriguing.

This trainer, who claimed to be a doctor, reminded me of Dr Johnson. What I had witnessed was a bully, manipulating and abusing people for days, but what everyone else had apparently seen was “tough love” from a man of unquestionable integrity. As I watched these participants lining up and tearfully embracing the trainer on Sunday evening, I was reminded of Winston Smith – the most famous victim of brainwashing in fiction – and how grateful he was to O’Brien for torturing him, breaking him, and helping him to see “the truth”:

“Two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose. But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother” (Orwell, 1949, p. 311).

4.2.1 Questioning the training

“Being in a minority, even a minority of one, did not make you mad” (Orwell, 1949, p. 226).

This is a treacherous mantra for anyone prone to delusion, but after the training I tried to think independently about the experience. Based on my interpretation, my company was putting employees through a manipulative and abusive process, and nearly everyone seemed to love it. If my version of events was valid then I had allowed someone to mistreat me, and others, for days and – by continuing to work for this company – I would be condoning this abuse. Having spent three months prior to this position jobless, and with a bond to pay on my home in Johannesburg, I would also – if I

was right – have to confront senior management about these courses, quite possibly resign, and likely spend another three months searching for another job. Because these consequences were unappealing, I believe that if I could have convinced myself that the trainings were innocuous I would have done so; however, in addition to my doubts about the trainer’s credentials, his stigmatising views on depression, and what I felt was blatantly abusive and manipulative treatment of my colleagues and other participants, I believed that the environment was perfectly designed to elicit hypomania/mania. When I considered how a stressful experience had triggered my own illness, and how that illness had disrupted my life, my sister’s life (she was diagnosed a few years after I was), and my parents’ lives, I was unable to say nothing. I was to find, however, that convincing anyone of what had taken place, and of my theory for the reactions of participants to the training, would be incredibly challenging.

My parents were the first people I told about what had happened and, quite reasonably, they asked what everyone else had thought. While attempting to explain that the others had been manipulated, I conceded that they seemed highly enthused about it and – given my history of delusion – my parents were, quite reasonably, uncertain about my interpretation of events. The following day I spoke with my colleagues and asked them what they had thought. Almost all of them were unmistakably euphoric – they smiled and laughed and joked and radiated joy and confidence – but they seemed to have very little recollection about the details of what had taken place. When asked if they found the training at all abusive, they said that they had not but, when pressed on specific incidents, I noted an uncomfortable sense of recollection. For example, when I reminded two girls about the elderly woman who was screamed at for sitting in the wrong chair, they reluctantly acknowledged that it was not pleasant. When asked about Steven, the trainer, they said that he had been amazing.

Not everyone had positive things to say about the trainings, however, and one woman (who had taken the trainings some time before I had arrived at the company) explained that she had divorced her husband a few weeks after taking the courses. She told me that she couldn’t understand why she had done it, but that they were remarried a few months later. I wondered, if the training triggered hypomanic/manic symptoms, how many people had made impulsive decisions – out of line with their personalities – and, because of the emphasis placed on responsibility, felt a heightened sense of guilt, shame, and regret as a result. Having subsequently spent a lot of time on discussion forums regarding LGATs, there appears to be a tendency in satisfied graduates to place blame on those who respond badly to the trainings. While the type of person who frequents the discussion boards of people sharing negative experiences of LGATs is unlikely to be representative of all LGAT proponents, there is evidence that those with a strong internal locus of control (who believe that they are entirely in control of their lives) are less likely to show empathy to those who are struggling (Cacioppo & Freburg, 2016). LGATs advocate a level of internal locus of control which borders on supernatural.

After attending work on the Monday and Tuesday following the course, I started to become manic – I was paranoid and frightened and, as a result, refused to attend the Tuesday evening graduation. By Tuesday night my mind was racing and, to calm me down, I was put on medication which kept me asleep for 20 hours a day for the next four or five days. Maccabe, et al. (2010, p. 114) state that “... people with hypomania have apparently enhanced access to vocabulary, memory and other cognitive resources...” and when my mind slowed somewhat I was able to recall a great deal about the experience. Because the training did not allow time for reflection, I thought that if I could look at the experience in my own time I could make sense of what had taken place. Over the space of a few days and nights I wrote down everything that I could remember - the result was a 30-page document (“Field Notes, 2010”⁶²) detailing the training, and my interpretation of the experience.

I was off work for nearly three weeks following the training, during which time I came up with what I believed was a reasonable explanation for the post-training experience. This explanation involved the relationship between stress and dopamine and, naively, I thought that I could explain it to the chairman, who would understand the risks the trainings posed to certain people, and reconsider supporting them. My argument – that the trainings were simply manipulating neurotransmitter levels, were potentially dangerous, and were run by a person who was not qualified to “mess with people’s heads” – was not, however, welcomed. When I told the chairman that the trainer seemed, to me, like “a fortune cookie masquerading as the Dalai Lama” (I was still, evidently, hypomanic so I was not as diplomatic as I should have been) and that he was clearly a bully, the chairman seemed surprised that anyone could have come to this conclusion, telling me that “Steven has the biggest heart in the world”. The disconnect between what I had witnessed and the depiction of the trainer by both my fellow employees and the chairman was bewildering. When it became clear that I would not be convinced that the training, and the trainer, were amazing, the tone of the meeting became decidedly hostile. Using tactics I later found are common to LGAT trainers, the chairman claimed that everyone in the marketing workshop (which had preceded the trainings) had found me to be conceited and belligerent, and that I simply could not see it in myself. I could not work for a company that put employees through these processes, and handed in my resignation the following day:

“Please accept my notice of resignation. While I am in no doubt that you see enormous benefit in the New Beginnings and Reflections courses, I do not share your view that the rewards outweigh the risks and cannot be in support – actively or tacitly – of courses that I believe can do significant harm to individuals with low stress tolerances...” (30/07/2010).

⁶² Which was subsequently supplemented with additional information.

4.2.2 Researching the training

“If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you...” – Rudyard Kipling⁶³

A frustration following the training was that no one *really* believed me about it. Their disbelief could be broken into two areas: (1) they did not entirely believe my description of what had taken place; and (2) they did not believe that my theory about what had taken place was plausible. Aesop’s fable of the boy who cried wolf is an appropriate metaphor, although my credibility was distinctly more damaged than that young boy’s. I had bipolar disorder and had previously been fairly certain that I was God, so it is reasonable that my version of events, when everyone else seemed to have a completely different version, was treated with scepticism. I was also arguing that something objectively unbelievable had taken place – that people had paid someone to mock, harass, and verbally abuse them; to deprive them of sleep, and that this had made them feel incredible and love him. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, and I was making an extraordinary claim, had little credibility, and practically no evidence.

After resigning I spent a great deal of time researching these trainings and found that many of my specific concerns were shared by people from around the world. At the site www.rickcross.com (now www.culteducation.com) there were over 23,000 posts by people who had experienced trainings very similar to what I had endured. I found, while reading through these posts, that participants unwittingly described hypomanic/manic thinking, feelings, and behaviour – sudden confidence, excessive spending, reckless driving, extra-marital affairs, abrupt divorces, energy, and euphoria. In addition, there were several accounts of psychosis, depression, and suicide, and numerous accounts by family members and friends who felt that the trainings had impacted their loved ones in negative ways. Through psychologist Margaret Singer, it was reiterated that euphoria, and other hypomanic symptoms (while not identified as hypomania) were common in LGAT graduates. She also argued that psychosis and other stress-related illnesses sometimes occurred in response to the training and, combining this information with a rudimentary understanding of stress, dopamine, the dopamine hypothesis of bipolar disorder, and bipolar disorder, I compiled a document outlining my “research”.

Gaining support for my theory was limited by a number of factors. Firstly, the people I attempted to engage with – neuropsychologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, and university professors – did not (like anyone else) seem to believe my description of what had taken place. Although respected academics like Irvin Yalom had conducted research on these trainings in the early 1980s, very few South African mental health professionals have heard of LGATs, and even fewer have taken part in one. In order to support my insight, it was also necessary to explain that I had bipolar disorder and – like the antithesis

⁶³ (The Kipling Society, 2017).

of a grey lab coat – that immediately destroyed my credibility. Add to this the fact that I had a degree in finance, rather than any formal training in psychology, psychiatry, or neuroscience, and it is understandable that I was not taken seriously. I was told by my own psychiatrist, family, and friends (some very directly, and some more subtly) that my interest in these trainings was aggravating and unhealthy, and that I should forget about them, but – since no one was willing to actually look at my research and point out the flaws – I was not willing to just forget about it. I was quite open to an explanation of why my theory made no sense, but was expected instead to just trust the “experts” who, without explanation, intimated that I was wrong (and probably just a little manic).

While I am receptive to informed arguments that my theory is flawed, and while I am acutely aware that a common symptom of mania is the belief that one has made a scientific breakthrough, I have now had this “delusion” for seven years. I went back to university in 2013 and completed my undergraduate and master’s degrees in psychology (graduating summa cum laude and cum laude), so my thinking is evidently not always distorted. While it may be a case of confirmation bias, the more I learned about bipolar disorder, stress, dopamine, and LGATs, the more sense the theory made and – if my version of events and this theory were to be dismissed (by others and myself) – I decided that this dismissal should be based on a thorough review of the evidence, rather than heuristics, like my bipolar diagnosis, my lack of training in psychology, or a suspicion that I exaggerated what takes place in these trainings. I admit that I see value in this research which others may not but, as commented on by Kahneman (2012), this delusional sense of importance (optimism) can be a powerful motivator:

“I have yet to meet a successful scientist who lacks the ability to exaggerate the importance of what he or she is doing, and I believe someone who lacks a delusional sense of significance will wilt in the face of repeated experiences of multiple small failures and rare successes, the fate of most researchers” (p. 264).

For seven years I had been trying to better manage my own illness and I believed that LGATs could offer insights into stress and bipolar disorder that were otherwise inaccessible. It remains to be seen whether my observations and theory are valid or not and, given the time and effort I have put into researching it, I am emotionally invested in much the same way as those members of the flying saucer cult were invested in their belief. It will be challenging for me to accept that I am mistaken, but the advice I gave at the start of this thesis applies equally to me. I hope that, if confronted with evidence which disconfirms my theory, I too can look unemotionally at the facts, concede that I am mistaken, and move – enlightened – onwards.

4.2.3 Researching the trainer

“Sometimes indeed, you could put your finger on a definite lie. It was not true, for example, as was claimed in the Party history books, that the Party had invented aeroplanes” (Orwell, 1949, p. 38).

If one accepts the central LGAT philosophy then all behaviour can be rationalised, and their constructionist thinking allows everything to be reduced to an interpretation. This makes engaging with LGAT proponents difficult; however, in the case of my training at least one factual claim was made. In attempting to boost his authority status, the trainer claimed – on his CV and his LinkedIn profile – that he had a master’s degree and PhD in “psychological counselling and philosophy” from the University of Arizona (UA). Considering this person spends his life lecturing (and screaming at) other people about integrity, it would be concerning if he did not – as I strongly suspected – have these qualifications. After completing the training, the University of Arizona was contacted and two administration staff members indicated that he had never been a student there. A number of years later, after seeing a newspaper article in which he was described as “one of South Africa’s most qualified trainers”, I contacted a number of senior academics in relevant departments, as well as the dean of education at UA, and they all confirmed that our trainer had never attended the university⁶⁴.

This information, like a flying saucer not arriving, is clear evidence that this person and this process (which supposedly elicits integrity) are flawed. It will be interesting to see how this company – whose *public commitment* to these trainings is immense – will respond. Will they choose to believe that the evidence provided against their esteemed trainer is some sort of elaborate conspiracy or misunderstanding, or will they rationalise, deflect, or defend it in some other way? Given the enormous focus in these trainings on “taking responsibility”, it will be revealing to note the degree to which this company accepts responsibility for exposing hundreds of their employees to this fraud.

It is also important to consider that – if this objective evidence of dishonesty is accepted by senior management and employees of this company – that anything less than irrefutable evidence would likely not have been. If the training was less overtly harsh and manipulative, but essentially employed the same methods of influence and mood manipulation, and irrefutable evidence of the trainer’s willingness to deceive participants was not produced, then it is unlikely that participants would explore the uncomfortable possibility that their wellbeing was not the trainer’s principal concern. If a person then took part in an LGAT where irrefutable evidence of dishonesty was not produced, how likely is it that this person would look seriously at other evidence and consider the possibility that their training was also designed with the primary purpose of attaining their money and free labour?

⁶⁴ See Appendix 3 for details.

4.2.4 Post-training guest evening

While I did not go to the post-training guest evening, someone that I knew attended the Tuesday night session following the second training (New Beginnings was the first training, while Reflections was the second training). Before he went, I explained what I thought was going on, and asked him to let me know how graduates were behaving – what they were doing, how they felt, and how they described their experiences. The following extracts were added to Field Notes (2010) and reveal symptoms which seem to resemble hypomania/mania. Before graduates spoke, the trainer described the power of the experience to potential recruits by saying, among other things:

“People compare it only to the birth of their children” (Field Notes, 2010, 946).

Graduates were, to the delight of the trainer, even more effusive in their praise. One graduate, when given the chance to testify, stated:

“After completing New Beginnings I was in a whole new life... experiencing things for the first time... using my eyes for the first time... actually seeing the world. My experience on Reflections was... the single most important event of my entire life. I literally am about two days old today... using my body for the first time, being aware of what is actually around me... and knowing how to see the world around me and interact with that world around me... and my life is absolutely amazing...” (Field Notes, 2010, 952-957).

Describing the behaviour of other people at the event, the person I knew revealed that one woman had admitted to having been so euphoric after the training that, while she was skipping around the house and singing, her housemate had asked if she had joined a cult. He spoke with two other women who told him that their cheeks were aching from having laughed and smiled so much since the training ended, while another woman – when directly asked if she had done anything impulsive – admitted that in the two days since the course ended she and her fiancé had decided to get married. Another woman testified that, because of the training, she realised that she was beautiful, full of life, and vibrant; a young man had composed a song about the training, which he sang to the crowd, and the person quoted above explained that – having barely slept from the previous Wednesday until the past Sunday – he was driving his wife to Johannesburg the next day (a five-and-a-half-hour drive) to do the training. Speaking excitedly, he claimed that waiting a few months for her to take the training in Durban was not acceptable. I was told that nearly everyone appeared to be in a similar state. To me, this seemed like euphoric, and impulsive behaviour, with evidence of graduates seeing themselves and the world in a more positive light. Because extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, however, it was necessary to collect more data. The following section summarises and consolidates an assortment of independent evidence of hypomanic/manic triggers and symptoms in LGATs.

4.3 Content analysis

The review of pre-existing evidence on LGAT conditions and results (“content analysis”) is broken into two sections:

1. *Hypomanic/manic triggers in LGATs* illustrates how LGATs generate stress, disrupt normal sleeping patterns, and create a sense of goal-attainment in participants.
2. *Hypomanic/manic symptoms as a result of LGATs* demonstrates the fact that most LGAT graduates experience transient hypomanic/manic symptoms.

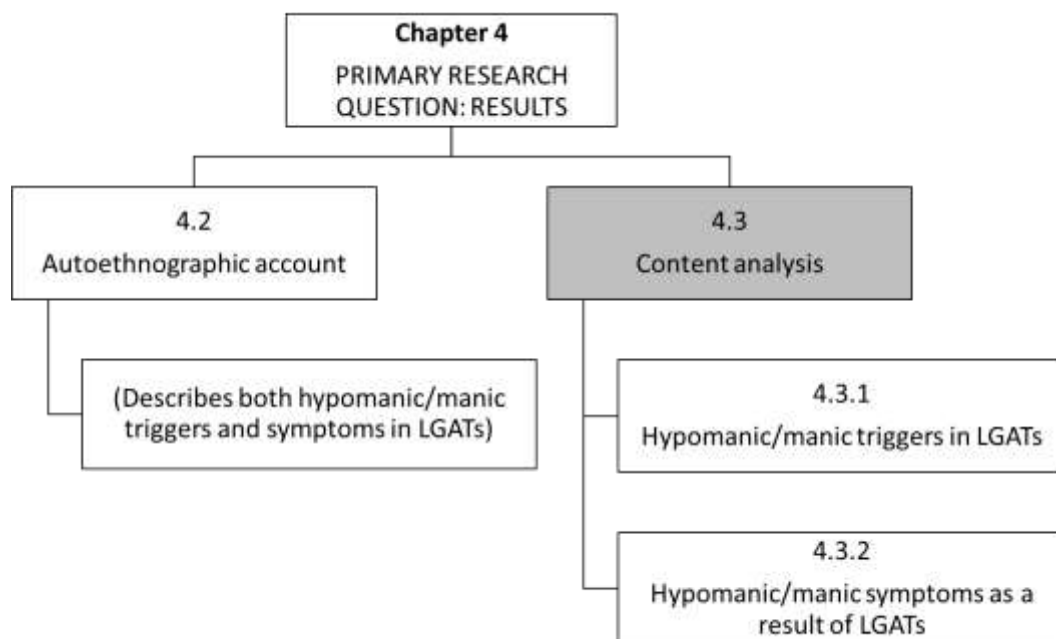


Figure 13: PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION: RESULTS_Content analysis

As indicated in Figure 13, the following section of PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION: RESULTS is *content analysis*. While my own account of LGAT participation may be dismissed as partial or not representative of (insert name of LGAT), the independent accounts of dozens of academics, former LGAT employees, current LGAT employees, journalists, bloggers, and other online contributors who describe the processes, conditions, and interactions with trainers with a startling level of consistency, are more difficult to contest. Before considering evidence for hypomanic/manic *symptoms* in LGATs, it will be demonstrated that hypomanic/manic *triggers* are a core feature of these trainings.

4.3.1 Hypomanic/manic triggers in LGATs

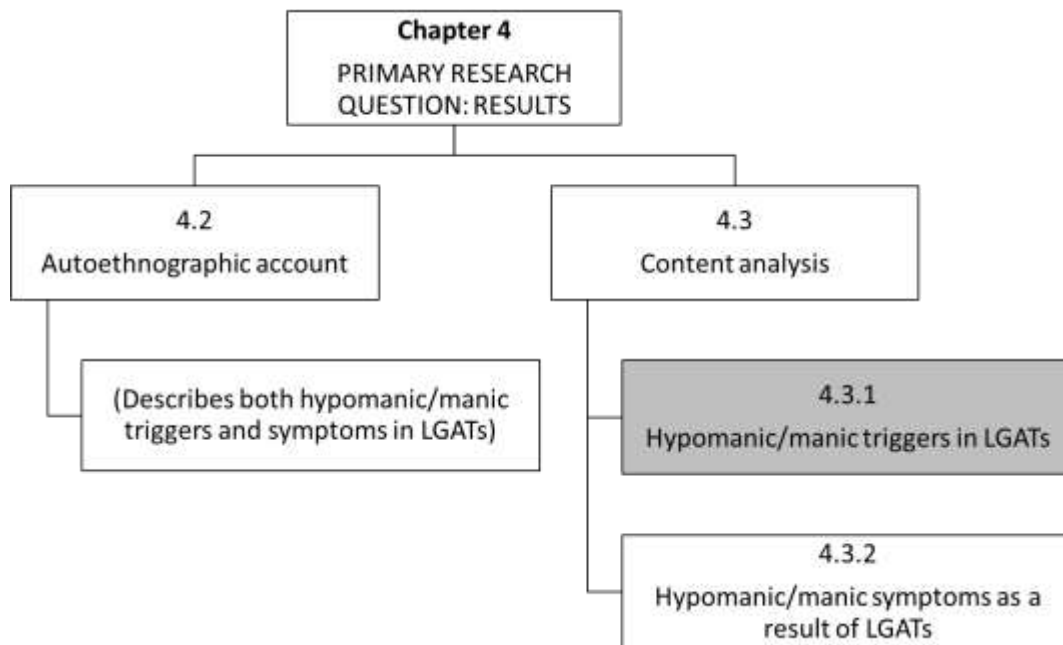


Figure 14: PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION: RESULTS_Content Analysis_Hypomanic/manic triggers in LGATs

As indicated in Figure 14, this section demonstrates how hypomanic/manic triggers occur in LGATs.

4.3.1.1 Stress in LGATs

“... a stressor can be defined as anything that throws your body out of allostatic balance and the stress response is your body’s attempt to restore allostasis” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 10).

It has been established that stressors are conditions/events/situations which challenge the dynamic equilibrium of an individual. It will be argued that LGATs generate stress in a number of ways – some overt and some more subtle – and that their conditions and processes not only cause stress, but restrict participants’ access to stress-mitigating measures. It will be contended that, while participants are told that these elements of the training serve a noble purpose, these justifications obscure a more clandestine primary goal – to cause psychological discomfort. An appropriate analogy for what takes place in an LGAT is what Singer (2003) describes as a “psychological con-game” – like skilled magicians, LGAT trainers convince participants that the secondary (ostensibly noble) purposes of their rules, exercises, homework, and other processes are, in fact, the primary purposes. As a result, participants generally fail to notice that these processes cause significant allostatic arousal (this, it is argued, is the primary purpose of the processes) or, when they do notice, they rationalise it as a necessary consequence of the LGAT’s claimed altruistic motives.

Because one stated advantage of this research is that it allows an assessment of the impact of stressors which exceed typical experimental conditions, it is necessary – as a point of comparison – to consider the types of stressors sanctioned by research ethics committees. Wallenstein (2003) offers insight into the magnitude of stress against which LGAT conditions should be benchmarked:

“Subjects are typically either asked to read a disturbing passage or view a film that has been prescreened to elicit a stress response in ‘normal’ individuals. Another favorite method is the ‘public speaking task’, in which subjects are given 10 minutes to prepare for (and anticipate) a subsequent 10-minute speech they must give in front of an audience. Yikes!” (p. 58).

It will be argued that LGATs generate stress which far exceeds that which is sanctioned by professional ethics committees. Some aspects of LGAT stress are conspicuous and others are less so, but it is asserted that a combination of these factors over a period of days, when interspersed with periods of relaxation, conditions participants into a state of allostatic hypervigilance. It is contended that stress is not an unfortunate by-product of the LGAT process, but rather that it is the “active ingredient” in the trainings – that, while there are cosmetic differences between the processes employed by different LGATs, the creation of an allostatically challenging environment, resulting ultimately in a euphoric “experience”, is the common feature which binds all LGATs to each other.

To argue that LGATs elicit abnormal stress in participants, a degree of structure is required. It is difficult to divide LGAT processes into discrete stress-inducing categories; however, the following seven assertions – when fully explored – reveal the allostatically challenging nature of LGAT participation:

1. LGAT conditions are misrepresented by paid experts and by LGATs themselves.
 - Conditions are described as innocuous – even pleasant – by experts.
 - LGATs describe the environment with euphemisms and produce videos which misrepresent the true atmosphere of the training.
 - As a result, participants are not fully prepared for the stressful nature of the training.
2. Painful memories, and distressing thoughts are focused on.
 - LGAT exercises urge participants to focus intently on upsetting events from the past, frightening fictional thoughts, and personal shortcomings.
3. Thought reform processes employed by LGATs cause stress.
 - 1) *Milieu Control* reveals how participants’ behaviour and communication is controlled.
 - 2) *Mystical Manipulation* reveals how participants are behaviourally and emotionally manipulated.
 - 3) *Demand for Purity* reveals how LGATs set arbitrary standards for purity, and then elicit guilt and shame by convincing participants that they fall short of these standards.

- 4) *Cult of Confession* reveals how LGATs encourage “sharing” and insist that participants accept responsibility for whatever traumatic experiences they have endured.
 - 5) *Sacred Science* reveals how participants are unable to challenge the trainer’s dubious assertions, and how critical thinking is met with hostility and derision.
 - 6) *Loading the Language* reveals how LGATs employ a unique, and restrictive, vocabulary which – while claiming to improve communication – limits expression and subtly shapes the way participants interpret their own manipulation.
 - 7) *Doctrine Over Person* reveals how participants’ experiences are processed through the group’s philosophy, so that the trainer is able to dictate reality to participants.
 - 8) *Dispensing of Existence* reveals how LGAT trainers, after days of hostility, confer love, praise, and acceptance on participants. This condition reveals how goal-attainment takes place, but will be included with the other thought reform processes.
4. Pressure to enrol and volunteer creates tension for many.
 5. Conditions are physically uncomfortable.
 6. Reported psychological casualties suggest that conditions may be extreme.
 7. Stress-reducing measures are curtailed, while stress-enhancing conditions are maximised.

The starting point for this discussion is the insistence by LGATs that their methods have been misrepresented by the media, former staff members, bloggers, and many others. Dr Raymond Fowler is frequently used by Landmark to dispel claims that the Landmark Forum is stressful, employs thought reform, incorporates psychotherapeutic techniques, and even to argue that it is not an LGAT. Here Fowler provides his opinion on the (un)stressful nature of the Landmark Forum.

4.3.1.1.1 LGAT conditions are misrepresented by paid experts and by LGATs themselves

CEO and executive vice president of the American Psychological Association (APA) between 1989 and 2003, Dr Raymond D. Fowler, conducted an independent review of the Landmark Forum in 1999 and, in addition to describing the training environment as “pleasant”, made the following statements about the demeanour of the trainer, and the level of stress experienced by participants⁶⁵:

“The Leader was pleasant and professional in his interactions with participants. At no time was he judgmental or hostile to any participant. On the contrary, he was sensitive and adept in handling the reactions of the participants to topics under discussion” (Fowler, 1999).

“My informal observations of participants during the sessions and in informal conversations during breaks suggested to me that people felt interested and relaxed...” (Fowler, 1999).

⁶⁵ See Appendix 3 for Dr Raymond D. Fowler’s full report.

The reader is urged to keep Fowler's depiction of a "pleasant" training environment, "pleasant" trainers, their "sensitive" handling of participants, and "relaxed" participants in mind during this section, as it does not reflect the portrayal of a Landmark Forum as per dozens of former staff members, journalists, bloggers, and online contributors from around the world (who describe the stressful nature of the Forum experience with a remarkable degree of consistency). Since Fowler was aware of the controversy surrounding LGATs at the time of his independent report (CESNUR, n.d.) and, presumably, of the *Hawthorne Effect*⁶⁶, it is concerning that he provided this endorsement without offering caveats about the negative experiences, and professional opinions, of others (e.g. CESNUR, n.d.; Clancy, 1992; Hukill, 1998; Mahoney, 1998; Martin, 1998). It is also important to note that, if this Landmark-provided endorsement by a leading psychologist does not match the reality of the training, then participants who sign a disclaimer stating they will be able to handle the conditions are making this decision based upon inaccurate information. This surely renders informed consent void.

Given Fowler's depiction of the Forum, and the way that LGATs describe their courses to potential participants, it is unsurprising that many are ill-prepared for what takes place. On its website, Landmark acknowledges that its trainings may be "interpreted as stressful" and warns those with mental health issues not to participate, but it does not acknowledge that its "technology" involves precisely the conditions that most would find stressful. The interactions between trainers and participants are described as "philosophically rigorous and open discussions" (Landmark, 2016f); however, one must ask if "philosophically rigorous" best captures the spirit of these interactions, and whether the environment is conducive to openness, or whether trainers seem more intent on imposing their own perspectives under conditions of extraordinary control.

Singer (2003) argues that LGAT participants are not informed about "the intensity of the psychological attacks that would be made upon them" (p. 186), that the "highly confrontational and psychological aspects are generally not mentioned beforehand" (p. 192), and that participants are frequently surprised by "... how psychologically, socially, and sometimes physically stressing the event can be" (p. 193). Of those requested to take trainings by employers, she argues that participants anticipate training that is related to their jobs, but instead "they find themselves in high-confrontation, psychologically intense programs that are supposedly going to transform them" (p. 190). Singer says of other participants, "If they had known the intensity and psychological depth of some of these exercises, many have told me, they never would have bought or gone to the training" (p. 195), that they "... had no true idea of the intensity of the situation, the effects of group pressure, or the personal

⁶⁶ The *Hawthorne Effect* refers to the way that subjects change their behaviour when observed (Neuman, 2011).

fatigue that comes from LGAT sessions...” (p. 195), and that “... in these four or five intense, exhausting days, they become flooded with more emotion and conflict than they can handle all at once” (p. 195). While Singer (after being sued by Landmark) made it clear that her book (the comments above) was not describing Landmark, and that she had no personal experience of their processes, there is nothing on the Landmark website, or in any of its videos of smiling trainers and nodding, laughing participants (Landmark, 2009; ishwar67, 2012a; ishwar67, 2012b; ishwar67, 2012c), which hints at the treatment of participants, as described by Amelia Hill of The Guardian, James O’Brien of GQ Magazine, Roland Howard of the Daily Mail, and many others:

“We’re still taking our seats when Jerry begins shouting: We’re ugly people. Disgusting. Our behaviour is entirely governed by a need to look good which makes us liars, fakes and frauds. ‘You’re disgusting,’ he shouts. ‘You just don’t realise quite how disgusting you are yet.’ He pauses. ‘But you’re just about to find out.’ His timing is impeccable; we’ve hardly woken up and we’re already hanging on his every word. This morning, he says, he is going to force our resistant minds to recognise how fetid and mean our personalities are. He shouts, he mocks, he refuses to let us ask questions. He tells us we’re liars and ridicules the stories we tell about our own lives” (Hill, 2003).

“I sit in anxious silence with a hundred other hopeful souls as the leader berates us for an impressive two hours straight” (O’Brien, 2012).

“A rape victim is sneered at. A senior surgeon breaks down. It’s an extraordinary scene of humiliation and control” (Howard, 2001).

“I will admit that it has been a couple of years since I have taken a psychology course at the University level, but I don’t ever recall reading about the benefits of public humiliation as a tool in behaviour change” (growthguided, 2014).

4.3.1.1.2 Painful memories and distressing thoughts are focused on

Singer (2003) says of specific LGAT processes: “Exercises about your mother and father, the promises you’ve broken, and the promises to you that others have broken – all the sad memories of your life up to now are brought forth” (p. 194). Like other LGATs, Landmark encourages participants to focus on painful memories and upsetting thoughts. While these exercises may sound innocuous, the described reactions indicate that, for many, they cause significant distress:

“Next day, the leader asked us to sit with our eyes closed and conjure up a painful memory. He then asked us to imagine that we were in a packed London Tube and everyone was looking at us and was out to get us. I can remember feeling terrified. All around the room I could hear these terrible screaming sobs; I realised that I was crying too” (Braid, 2003).

“To transform, to live your life powerfully, you must move into a realm without fear, and so we talk a lot about what frightens us” (O'Brien, 2012).

This is similar to what was described by Finkelstein, et al. (1982). Citing the perspectives of Baer and Stolz; they explain that “... some of the exercises confront the trainee with memories, thoughts, and feelings that the trainee would otherwise avoid...” (p. 532). Pressman (1993) describes how exercises similar to those described in Landmark had taken place in est:

“Over the next several hours, the est trainer – after leading everyone through another round of directed meditation – coached the lying bodies on how to search through their memories for all of the emotions, reactions, and consequences of the problem each person was trying to resolve. For many lying on the ballroom floors, the intensely introspective nature of the est Truth Process wreaked havoc on their emotional systems. People writhed and thrashed about with their bodies, the sounds of crying and screaming and groaning echoing around the ballroom. Erhard and his trainers were ready for every reaction, even stocking a supply of silver-colored ‘barf bags’ for the poor retching souls who sometimes lost the contents of their stomachs during the process of resolving their long-festering problem” (p. 74).

Marc Fisher of the Washington Post describes a similar exercise in Lifespring. (As described in the autoethnographic account, the same exercise was used in New Beginnings):

“There are guided fantasies, in which the lights are turned down, trainees sit on the floor and Jim tells a story over a sentimental pop song, asking everyone to conjure up troubling childhood memories” (Fisher M., 1987).

Psychology Today journalist Mark Brewer (1975) reveals another disturbing exercise (the “danger process”) used during est. (Again, a similar exercise was used in New Beginnings):

“Row by row, we were commanded to line up on the stage, standing straight with our toes flush against a long white line, to be searchingly examined by our peers in the training, and it would be difficult for you to imagine the tension and fear that Tony and his assistants were able to whip up over this objectively ridiculous exercise [...] The tension and harassment, along with the trauma many of them suffered at standing openly before a large crowd, produced a number of breakdowns. In each row of 30 or 40 persons who took the stage, there were usually four or five who sobbed piteously or even swooned, completely overcome. Tony usually snapped, ‘That’s just another act.’ One man hung his head and bawled like a soul in hell. Another vomited.”

Pressman (1993, p. 75) describes the same process (supposedly adapted from Scientology):

“In est, Erhard adopted the strange exercise for a large group and called it the ‘danger process.’ Row by row, est participants were ordered to stand ramrod straight, leaving others in the room to stare back at them. On cue, a special team of est volunteers serving as ‘confronters’ marched to the stage where they stood toe to toe and nose to nose in front of the trainees, not saying anything but only staring with blazing eyes at the nervous person standing only inches away. At the same time, the est trainer paced back and forth, playing the role of the ‘bullbaiter,’ shouting insults and epithets at those standing on the stage. Usually at least a few people broke down into sobbing fits or had their legs give way beneath them, traumatized by the fear of standing in front of a large crowd or being stared at by a menacing-looking est volunteer.”

One Landmark exercise reveals, on a shorter time-scale, the process of stress and stress removal which, it is argued, occurs on a macro level over the three days of the training. This exercise uses guided visualisation not to relax, but to generate distress. This distress is built up to a climax, before it is suddenly removed. Regardless of the wisdom this exercise is supposed to impart (I am certain that a plausible rationale for doing it exists), it cannot be argued that for many it does not *also* elicit a strong allostatic defence. James O’Brien of GQ Magazine, while providing an engaging account of this exercise, likely does not fully capture the emotional impact on many participants:

“Near the end of an endless day, Barry leads us in a visualization exercise about fear that goes something like this: We are told to close our eyes as he reads to us from what sounds like a bizarre relaxation script. ‘Imagine that you are afraid of the person next to you,’ he says. ‘Very afraid.’ He’s quiet a minute, lets the anxiety he’s inspired percolate. I start to hear uneasy, emotion-suppressing sighs. ‘Now... imagine that you are afraid of everyone in the room. Imagine that you are afraid of every single person in the city of Oakland, hundreds of thousands of people.’ I’m sitting near the front of the room, and behind me, off to the left, I hear whimpering. ‘Imagine you are afraid of every person in the United States.’ The whimpering intensifies. ‘Imagine you are afraid of every single person, all 6 billion people in the world.’ The whimpering becomes sobbing: further behind me someone might be hyperventilating. ‘Don’t go unconscious!’ he yells. ‘That’s just your way of checking out!’ The sobbing becomes wailing. And then, from right behind me, someone lets rip a wild, primal, angst-ridden, high-decibel growl, like I once heard from my dog when she having a wild dream. Then Barry says, ‘Just wait! There’s a surprise on the other side of this. Something absurd!’ Sobbing, growling, and whimpering fill the air. ‘Now, are you ready for the surprise? Imagine the person next to you is— guess what? — afraid of you.’ Barry breaks into a giggle just this side of maniacal. ‘Now imagine everyone in the room, in Oakland, in America, in the world, is afraid of you!’ The sobbing begins to turn to laughter. We open our eyes onto a world in which we are powerful because we don’t feel fear, we instill it. I guess. I’m not particularly moved by the

exercise. But Barry's performance has provoked in the group a hasty swing of the emotional pendulum that reveals an ever-growing willingness to be led" (O'Brien, 2012).

Roland Howard, likewise, indicates that the process did not have too great an impact on him, but that for many London participants this exercise proved immensely upsetting:

"We were to imagine that everyone in the room, then the country, then the world, hated us. I'm sure I've got some fears but this seemed too silly to take seriously and, by that stage, I was resisting the idea of giving my mind to the Forum. Others had no such misgivings. Within ten minutes the room was full of strangled whimpers and cries which soon became piercing banshee wails, screams and full-throated sobbing" (Howard, 2001).

Marie Lemmonier reveals the reaction of participants to this exercise in a Landmark Forum in Paris:

"The next exercise will get to me. Alain Roth asks us to close the eyes and imagine the two people on either side as being potentially dangerous. 'Let the fear enter your body, your breathing, your gut,' he orders. 'You are trying to escape, but there is nowhere to go.' Some people break. I hear tears and tremors around me" (Lemmonier, 2005).

Rosemary Mahoney describes a similar experience in New York:

"She encourages us to experience our individual fear collectively, careful to alert us that some will find this exercise upsetting ('There might be some crying in the room'). Be with our fear, Handel tells us, locate it in our bodies, notice whether it moves. 'Eyes closed! No talking!' Next we're instructed to be afraid of the two people next to us, then to be afraid of the entire room, then the seven million people in New York, until finally we should be afraid of the entire universe. On cue, the good students in the room begin crying and moaning. Slumped low in my seat, my head against the back of my chair, I can't help opening one eye to see what's going on around me. A pale-faced woman at the end of my row who had earlier said to me out on the sidewalk, 'You single? Forum's a great way to meet people. I've done it twice,' is rocking back and forth in her seat, crying and rubbing her thighs. Two rows behind me another woman has her face in her hands, her shoulders trembling" (Mahoney, 1998).

Amanda Scioscia describes the reactions of Phoenix participants to the exercise, and the sudden removal of stress as it comes to an end:

"Someone in the room lets out a primal wail. A woman two rows in front of me has covered her head with her jacket, another is shaking her head furiously. Others are writhing around and stamping their feet. The moaning gets louder, and more join in. Someone screams, 'I want my mommy'; another hollers, 'Leave me alone.' Richard's voice gets louder and more frantic as he

describes the quality of the fear we're supposed to be feeling. Then Richard lets us in on the joke: "People are just as afraid of us as we are of them" (Scioscia, 2000).

As Damasio (2006), Sapolsky (2004), and Wallenstein (2003) have explained, thoughts have physiological consequences. Urging individuals to access painful memories, or using a process to elicit fear, causes a biological reaction and, based on the descriptions provided, the psychological (and therefore physiological) effects for those who engage earnestly in these processes are greater than one would encounter in everyday life. The dramatic shift from fear to fear removal facilitated by this exercise is also a perfect example of "assault and leniency", described by Lifton (1961, p. 66) as a key characteristic of a thought reform environment. LGATs have, since their inception, been accused of employing deceptive and indirect techniques of persuasion and control ("thought reform" would fall under this category). A report, produced by an APA-appointed task force led by Dr Margaret Singer, was rejected by the Board of Social and Ethical Responsibility for Psychology (BSERP) of the APA on 11 May 1987 (CESNUR, n.d.). Fowler, and other professionals, later provided their opinions – that the Landmark Forum does not involve thought reform. The following section critiques claims of thought reform, while revealing many stress-inducing processes common to LGATs.

4.3.1.1.3 Thought reform processes employed by LGATs cause stress

"For those who stubbornly seek freedom, there can be no more urgent task than to come to understand the mechanisms and practices of indoctrination" (Chomsky, 2003, p. 212).

People do not like to believe that they are susceptible to manipulation, yet – with few exceptions – they have little to no understanding of how sophisticated persuasion occurs (Cialdini, 2007; Gilovich & Ross, 2016; Kahneman, 2012). As well as a lack of understanding of the processes, many lack the humility to acknowledge this deficit, which makes them all the more vulnerable. It has been suggested that Landmark employs *Milieu Control*, the first of eight conditions of thought reform, and it is worth addressing claims that other thought reform processes are employed during the Landmark Forum (and other LGATs), as considering these processes reveals insights into the way that LGATs generate stress, disrupt sleep, and create a sense of goal-attainment in participants. Not only do the conditions of thought reform provide a useful structure through which to examine processes common to LGATs, but it might be argued that the utilisation of thought reform is a defining feature of these programs.

When considering whether Landmark (and other LGATs) suppresses the discussion of valid concerns about *thought reform* (brainwashing), or whether they are the victims of meritless attacks, it is necessary to carefully consider what thought reform is, and whether it is reasonable to suggest that Landmark and other LGATs employ it. As evidenced in the letter from Art Schreiber to www.stelling.nl/simpos/est.htm, Landmark strenuously denies that it does so:

“C. Brainwashing – the facts are clear that the Landmark Forum and Landmark Education’s other programs do not involve brainwashing, mind control, thought reform or anything that remotely resembles such techniques. As evidence of this, I refer to the letter from Edward Lowell, M.D., included in the material enclosed in B, above. Dr. Lowell, a medical doctor specializing in psychiatry and licenced to practice medicine since 1955 in New Jersey, New York and California, in a letter dated November 14, 1996, stated the following:

‘I am certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology since 1962 and have spent 39 years practicing general psychiatry and psychotherapy... My psychiatric training included a residency in a U.S. army hospital in 1955 during which time, in order to deal with American military men who were mentally manipulated by their Chinese captors, I was trained specifically about the technology and techniques of ‘brainwashing’, ‘mind-control’, and ‘thought reform’.

I am familiar with The Landmark Forum and have personally examined closely the work and programs of Landmark Education. Furthermore, I have spoken professionally and personally to over two thousand people of all sorts: patients, neighbours, friends, relatives and medical and psychiatric colleagues about their actual experience with the Landmark Forum... After my careful observation, I have seen nothing at all that would lead me to the conclusion that The Landmark Forum or any other Landmark Education program or Landmark itself does or even attempts to engage in any sort of brainwashing, thought reform, hypnosis or thought modification whatsoever” (Schreiber, 1999).

In addressing the claim that participants are exposed to “thought reform” or “any other forms of manipulation” Dr Raymond D. Fowler similarly states:

“In my opinion, the Landmark Forum does not place individuals at risk of any form of ‘mind control’ ‘brainwashing’ or ‘thought control’” (Fowler, 1999).

When considering thought reform, psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton is the authority. He is not merely an influential researcher, but – based on studies of Chinese-held prisoners during the Korean War – he deconstructed the process and formally defined the components of “thought reform”. It can, therefore, be assumed that when Dr Lowell states that he is familiar with thought reform, and when Landmark states that it does not use techniques which remotely resemble it, this is based on a sound grasp of Lifton’s research, as explicated in his seminal 1961 book, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*. To assess the validity of Landmark’s assertions, it seems prudent to examine Lifton’s research (which predates est by a decade) and consider Landmark’s processes in light of the criteria he describes. While it is clear that Landmark does not make use of physical restraints and beatings (which formed a *peripheral* component of Lifton’s theory on thought reform) – it clearly does not – it

is being asserted that there are, at the very least, “remote similarities” between the psychological processes described by Lifton in 1961, and the processes employed by Landmark and other LGATs.

According to Lifton (1961), the thought reform process revolves around two extremes of treatment and two demands – the alternation between assault⁶⁷ and leniency (extremes of treatment), and the requirements of confession and re-education (demands). Physical and psychological assault is designed to bring about ego death, and leniency and confession are the means by which “rebirth” occurs. This process of death and rebirth is said to have profound effects on the person in question’s loyalties and beliefs, as well as his sense of being an individual and being part of a group. More specifically, the process of death and rebirth has a profound effect on a person’s inner identity – “In the broadest terms, everything that happened to these prisoners is related to this matter” (p. 66). A substantial portion of the Forum involves what Landmark describes as “philosophically rigorous and open discussions” (Landmark, 2016f) between the trainer and individual participants. Typically, participants will be engaged with, using confrontational tactics (*assault*), until they acquiesce, acknowledge the fault in their own thinking, and receive approval from the trainer, and applause from other participants (*leniency*). The milieu thus switches constantly between stress and stress removal.

Assault (which occurs until participants accept “responsibility”):

“Landmark practices something called Attack Therapy. It involves attacking someone verbally, ridiculing and belittling them, calling them names, to try and break down their defences and help them break through to the leader or therapist’s way of seeing things” (Evans, 2010).

“There were first-time revelations of childhood molestations, my-father-murdered-my-mother divulgements, I-think-I’m-gay moments [...] It went on like this as I watched others get worked over. It was abusive, demeaning. Yet people kept coming back for more!” (Fazeli, 2012).

Leniency (which comes from the trainer and the group when participants accept “responsibility”):

“Richard then informs us that we are living lies, and we’re supposed to introduce ourselves to others and confess the lies we tell. After several hours, something finally seems to be happening. People start taking to the mikes. ‘I’m dead inside, but pretend to love my life,’ says one man. ‘My marriage is loveless and I pretend it’s great,’ a woman says. Richard praises them” (Scioscia, 2000).

⁶⁷ Contemporary critics of brainwashing theory, such as James T. Richardson and Dick Anthony argue that brainwashing is not possible unless there is overt physical coercion and suggest that Lifton (1961) supported this perspective. While Lifton (1961) refers to “physical and emotional assaults” (p. 66), a full reading of his work reveals that emotional assaults were the primary tool of influence. Lifton’s contemporary, psychologist Edgar Schein (1961), similarly emphasises emotional manipulation, explaining that a physically coerced confession would be retracted immediately afterwards unless “refreezing” had caused that confession to “stick”.

“I’ve always considered myself a very honest person, but now I realize I’ve been a complete liar,’ she says. We clap to acknowledge her ‘commitment’” (Di Matteo, 2000).

At other times the general tension (*assault*) is punctuated by relaxation exercises, which temporarily reduce stress (*leniency*). There is also considerable pressure, after publicly “sharing” about strained relationships, to call the person in question, accept responsibility, and reconcile. While this is an ostensibly noble exercise, engaging with someone who clearly triggers tension is a stressful experience. Because many of these phone calls end well, this process creates stress (*assault*) and then stress release (*leniency*). Karin Badt, of The Huffington Post and Amelia Hill of The Guardian, provide insight into the stressful, but often reconciliatory, nature of this aspect of the training:

“The main activity of Landmark is to make – not urge – participants apologize to the people around them for the ‘rackets’ they have dumped on them. A racket is a state of being, Sophie explained, a story one tells oneself where one is a victim in a permanent state of complaint” (Badt, 2011).

“By midday, the pressure to make the phone call is so intense that people are dialling as they walk down the stairs. Tearful heart-to-hearts are taking place in public corridors as once-implacable feelings of hurt and recrimination turn to reconciliation in a few short sentences” (Hill, 2003).

Various other exercises, such as the *fear exercise*, involve the generation of tension (*assault*), followed by a release from that tension (*leniency*), while the more general structure of the training is days of stress (*assault*), followed by graduation and acceptance (*leniency*). In this regard, both exercises within the Landmark Forum and the training as a whole, employ alternations between assault and leniency:

“A woman objected to what I considered the most objectionable exercise: the participants had been asked to close their eyes and imagine being afraid of their neighboring participants, then the entire group of 150, then all 7 million of London and finally the 6 billion fellow creatures on the planet, an exercise that had turned into mass hysteria of crying, sobbing, calling out ‘mommy mommy!’ in regressed childhood voices, this until Sophie invited them to laugh, to reach the conclusion that while these 6 billion were frightening, imagine how afraid people were of you! Think of the bombed people in Iraq—aren’t they afraid of us? The crowd, on command, burst into hysterical howls of laughter, aching belly howls that went on and on and on, an event which frightened me far more than my 6 billion co-inhabitants, as a demonstration of how easily mass emotion can be created, just by urging one to recall primordial fears” (Badt, 2011).

Landmark Forum participants also note how, between periods of *assault*, the trainer lightens the atmosphere with humour (*leniency*):

“My leader was offensive, abusive, and such an actor, turning on the tears on cue, that I couldn’t take much of what he said seriously. He could also be quite funny, especially after being particularly abusive...” (Hope, 2002).

“One by one, participants who had been complaining about their husbands, mothers, employers, children, began to realize how unfairly they were dumping their resentments from childhood onto everyone around them. Without exception, each participant would burst into tears and realize what a ‘worm’ she or he was. Sophie teased them humorously...” (Badt, 2011).

“The leader in our case also cut some good jokes in between his yelling and shouts during delivery. I must really admit that he possessed a very good sense of humor when talking about life situations” (Prasad, 2012).

Researchers Haaken and Adams (1983) noted that the shifting between assault and leniency also occurred throughout the Lifespring Basic Training:

“Exercises which mobilized narcissistic defences, i.e., feelings of inflated wellbeing and exaggerated personal power, were alternated with attacking exercises, which were narcissistically injurious. The latter evoked feelings of shame and worthlessness and made the group vulnerable to the judgements of the leader” (Haaken & Adams, 1983, p. 277).

Haaken and Adams (1983) also explain how there was a general shift in atmosphere from *assault* to *leniency* in days four and five of the Lifespring Basic Training:

“During the final two days of the training, there was a great deal of hugging and other indications of affection among participants” (p. 278).

Singer similarly noted this general pattern of sustained stress induction (*assault*), followed by relatively sudden stress removal (*leniency*) in her review of numerous LGATs:

“After several days of being dragged down into the pits the final day of exercises is usually designed to pump you up” (Singer, as cited in Mathison, 1993).

“Day four is one in which much group sharing occurs, and the leader begins to change from the stern, domineering taskmaster into a seductive, charming, loving daddy or mommy who wants you to buy the next courses” (Singer, 2003, p. 195).

Describing how this general shift took place in est, Mark Brewer says:

“He goes for the throat. They were present, he roared in command voice, because their lives did not work. Their lives were shit. Hopeless. They did not know what they were doing, did not know how to experience life, were struggling, desperate, confused. They were ASSHOLES! Tony savoured

the word a moment, used it again, and thenceforth, as is a matter of course in the training, the recruits were always referred to as assholes [...] until they 'got it'" (Brewer, 1975).

According to Woodhouse and Vanderberg (2000), of Contact Magazine, New Zealand, the alternating between assault and leniency occurs in the advanced Landmark courses as well:

"Mr Ralph participated in a number of courses and his partner became a trainer. He thought the Forum was so good he paid for his three sons to go on it. But as he carried on with the courses he disliked the pressure being put on people and the mix of 'praise and put down'."

Confession and re-education is also an overt element of LGATs. Lifton (1961) describes how, to prisoners of war, confession was essential to minimise abuse; that they accepted responsibility for crimes they had not committed, and that many felt guilt as a result of these imposed confessions:

"In such a climate, the two men had no choice but to join in the universal compulsion to confess. Their first expression of this compulsion was the early elaboration of false 'crimes.' Even when a prisoner was aware that his confession was 'wild' – as was Dr. Vincent – he had begun to submit to the confession requirement, and to behave *as if* he were a criminal. This was even more true, and the guilt more profound, for those who, like Father Luca, came to believe in their own falsehoods" (p. 74).

When one considers this key aspect of the Chinese thought reform environment, it is difficult not to see a resemblance between Lifton's description of "confession and education" and the LGAT processes of "sharing" and "taking responsibility". Describing the sorts of things shared (confessed) during the Forum, Amanda Scioscia of the Phoenix New Times and Emma Reynolds of news.com.au state:

"They will sob and wail, confess their feelings and reveal the deepest secrets of incest, infidelity and shame in their lives" (Scioscia, 2000).

"But on day two, after watching a woman break down crying while revealing that she had been raped by her brother, Kevin decided he couldn't take any more" (Reynolds, 2016).

Because *Cult of Confession* is one of the eight core conditions of thought reform, it will be reviewed in detail when considering this theme. For the purposes of this point these confessions might be considered *assaults* not only to the person "sharing", but also to the participants who must watch. *Leniency* is provided as soon as the participant has a "breakthrough", a euphemism for *accepting the trainer's extreme application of the group's constructionist philosophy* ("re-education"). When the participant submits, sometimes after more than an hour of emotional public engagement, the trainer provides his/her approval and the other participants applaud. This switch from hostility to acceptance is at least remotely similar to the alternation between assault and leniency described by Lifton (1961).

In addition to these elements, Lifton (1961) identifies eight *psychological* themes present in thought reform environments. Of these conditions, Lifton (1961) says, “I wish to suggest a set of criteria against which any environment may be judged – a basis for answering the ever-recurring question: ‘Isn’t this just like brainwashing?’” (p. 420). He later explains that, “The more clearly an environment expresses these eight psychological themes, the greater its resemblance to ideological totalism” (p. 435). Notably (considering the symptoms of hypomania/mania and the impact of LGATs), Lifton states that, in combination, these themes “create an atmosphere which may temporarily energize or exhilarate, but which at the same time poses the gravest of human threats” (p. 420). The eight psychological themes/conditions present in thought reform environments, as described by Lifton, are:

1. Milieu Control
2. Mystical Manipulation
3. Demand for Purity
4. Cult of Confession
5. Sacred Science
6. Loading the Language
7. Doctrine over Person
8. Dispensing of Existence

Six of the eight conditions listed reveal important insights into stress-generation in LGATs. “2. Mystical Manipulation” and “8. Dispensing of Existence” do not relate specifically to stress-generation, but in reviewing Landmark’s claim – that they do not employ techniques which *remotely resemble* thought reform – it is useful to address all eight conditions.

Thought reform condition 1 of 8: Milieu Control

Milieu Control (or “environment control”) involves the absolute control of the prisoner’s environment and will be divided into control of communication and control of behaviour.

Control of communication

“... the freedom of speech may be taken away - and, dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep, to the slaughter” – George Washington⁶⁸

Lifton (1961) describes the control of human communication as the most crucial of all of the conditions of thought reform – “the psychological current upon which all else depends” (p. 420). It directly

⁶⁸ (Washington, 1783).

impacts all external communication but it also impacts internal communication – the way that the prisoner communicates with himself. Finkelstein, et al. (1982) say of LGAT trainers:

“He maintains complete control of the floor; trainees, who may only address the trainer, must raise their hands to stand and speak. Once recognized, they are expected to remain standing until their interaction with the trainer is terminated by his saying ‘thank you.’ The audience then applauds and the trainee resumes his or her seat” (p. 519).

“According to Baer and Stolz, the trainer employs his power to prolong or terminate interactions with individual trainees to shape the verbal behaviour of trainees in direction of increased self-revelation, self-exploration, and vulnerability. Until the trainee has moved in the direction desired, the trainer will withhold the words ‘thank you’ or ‘I got it’ by which he signals the trainee to resume his seat. The applause following these words then serves as a powerful social reinforcement for whatever behaviour the trainer has chosen to reward” (p. 531).

Est proponent Luke Rhinehart (2010, p. 6) confirms this perspective, revealing instructions from est:

“There will be no talking. If you wish to communicate with the trainer or share something with the other trainees, raise your hand. If the trainer acknowledges you, you will stand up and wait until a microphone is brought to you by an assistant. You will take the microphone, hold it three inches from your mouth, and then communicate what you wish to communicate. Except when you have been acknowledged and are standing with a microphone, you will not talk. Is that understood?”

“Now I will tell you what to do after someone has finished communicating. You do this. [He claps his hands together several times.] It’s called applauding. You will acknowledge each trainee who has finished speaking by applauding. Do you understand? Good” (p. 11).

Haaken and Adams (1983) similarly describe how communication was controlled in Lifespring:

“Audience responses were managed in a way which reduced the ability of participants to think critically and simultaneously inflated their self-esteem. In order to speak, participants had to stand, be acknowledged by the leader and speak into a microphone. The audience was to applaud after the person finished speaking, presumably indicating support for the ‘risk of sharing’” (p. 274).

“The trainer acknowledged as valid only those responses which confirmed or illustrated a point being made. Over the five days, responses came increasingly to mirror the idiom of the trainer, and the applause became increasingly enthusiastic” (p. 274).

“What was rewarded by the trainer was compliance or pseudocompliance. Participants who offered critical comments or who suggested a different way of conceptualizing a problem had their statements dismissed, were subjected to ridicule or were confused with paradoxical logic. The

‘dissenter’ was generally manoeuvred into some form of compliance before being permitted to sit down and receive the applause” (p. 274).

“The trainer used a variety of techniques to neutralize comments which challenged or qualified the point being made and maintained sufficient control over audience responses to assure that defiance and critical thinking were not publicly rewarded” (p. 275).

“The suggestion that the participant was disturbed, confused, ‘avoiding,’ or ‘game-playing’ were other tactics used to discredit objecting participants” (p. 275).

Landmark employs the same rules for talking – participants must raise their hands and be acknowledged by the trainer before they may speak. While this appears practical, the consequences for not following these rules are extreme in an LGAT setting. As in earlier LGATs, Landmark leaders are particularly skilled at gaining compliance from participants and controlling what is “shared”. Describing the way that those who challenge the leader are castigated, Badt (2011) states:

“I had noticed that all questions objecting to the Forum were turned into problems of the self: the ad hominem argumentative strategy seemingly working on all 150 participants, who cheered as any person with an objection was pushed to confront the fact that their own lives were a wreck, from whence came their question.”

Describing what happened to a woman who queried the fear exercise, Badt (2011) continues:

“The woman who objected to the hysteria was asked if there was ‘something behind her question’: perhaps a further disagreement with her estranged husband? Perhaps her own inability to stand up to her beliefs, or honor her breakthrough in the previous session about how she was being a worm in her marriage. The woman burst into tears and thankfully agreed: a new breakthrough!”

Explaining her own handling by the trainer for questioning aspects of the training, and the intense social pressure to acknowledge valid, or invalid, faults pointed out by the trainer, Badt (2011) relates her interaction with trainer, Sophie McLean:

“‘Are you always so arrogant? Are you always such a know-it-all?’ Sophie moved close, circled to me next to the mike, and looked deeply into my eyes. ‘Tell me Karin, do your friends run away from you? Do you know how self-righteous you seem to them?’

... I quickly ran through my appallingly brief list of friends and wondered if she was right. Was I self-righteous? Had people run? If they had, I concluded, I would not even know: they were long gone and down the jogging trail.

‘No,’ I said. The crowd snickered. I was not breaking. What an ass I was not to admit my faults. I felt like offering up some other defects – of which there were plenty I already knew about before

this moment of enlightenment – to win people to my side, to have their looks of empathy after the session, as everyone else who had sobbed about their faults had as well. What is worse than a know-it-all who could not admit she was a know-it-all?

Sophie seemed exhausted as I just repeated my question, and repeated again that behind my question was just intellectual curiosity about how the Forum worked. Not my break-up with my boyfriend, my miscarriages, my mother speaking with an accent when I was five years old in a New Jersey kindergarten.

‘Okay you win,’ Sophie said. ‘You win but you have won nothing. This is why your life is a wreck. This is why nothing works for you. Go on, continue. But I urge you to spend the weekend questioning your integrity’.

Badt’s account suggests that the trainer did not dominate the encounter, but she cast herself as an outsider by taking a stand. To maintain control of the room, the trainer resorts to “outing” her:

“She pointed her finger at me and said: ‘Karin is a journalist’. The crowd nodded. She could have substituted ‘communist’ or ‘non-patriot’. The effect would have been the same” (Badt, 2011).

Another online contributor was less capable of standing her ground, as she explains here:

“When I challenged the leader on a point, she annihilated me by calling me arrogant, a bitch and then telling me that there was poison in my family. I was utterly ruined and devastated” (Lil, 2003).

One of the key rules in LGATs is that participants do not tell anyone else about what goes on in the training, which limits communication with the “outside world”. This rule is important because the less prepared new participants are, and the more uncertainty there is during the training, the more stressful it will be (Sapolsky, 2004). Singer (2003), who had no personal experience of Landmark when she wrote this, describes how leaders get participants to agree to this rule:

“The program trainers and leaders typically get agreement from participants that they will not tell anyone about the processes that occur. To do so ‘will spoil it’ for your friends, family, co-workers when they take the course. ‘Tell them what you got out of it,’ trainers advise. This means be vague about the actual content and provide glowing endorsements telling others that the training turned your life around, but do not tell them how emotional, dramatic, confrontational, and unnerving the sessions can be for some people. Because of this promise, consumers who buy and attend these seminars do so without information about how psychologically, socially and sometimes physically stressing the event can be” (p. 193).

While the above description does not officially apply to est or Landmark, Pressman and Rhinehart indicate that est had a similar rule about sharing specifics of the training:

“Est graduates for years were admonished never to tell others about what occurred inside est training sessions. It was okay to ‘share’ their ‘experience’ without explaining any of the details of the training” (Pressman, 1993, p. 20).

“So when someone outside *est* asks you about what *est* is all about, don’t try to explain it. Explaining a joke is a sure way to bore people and make them think you’re nuts” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 176).

Psychology Today’s Mark Brewer (1975) reinforces this perspective, offering the justification provided by est (It cannot be explained and trying to explain it will ruin the experience):

“Moreover, it is a crucial and well-respected tenet of est that graduates will not discuss the content of the training with the uninitiated. This rule stems from the est maxim that the training cannot be explained or understood, but only experienced.”

“Still, regardless of their reactions to the course, virtually all of the ‘assholes’ remained true to the instruction not to try to figure out what was happening to them. Indeed, they seemed content to be told it was all done ‘because Werner found that it works’.”

Potential participants are told how the training will make them feel (“Amazing!”), they have been given documents which describe the training with vagaries and euphemisms, and then they are asked to make an informed decision about participation. Brewer (1975) reveals how graduates are convinced that it is in the best interests of potential recruits to not know what actually takes place:

“But, she warned, they had to be careful, they certainly didn’t want to describe everything and ruin their friends’ chances to have their own experience, now did they? Of course not.”

“Then she coached them for a few minutes more on how not to say too much, but just enough to indicate that this is something really far out.”

Brewer (1975) argues that the testimonials used to bring potential recruits to guest seminars were “glowing but suitably vague” and that – as a result of these vague testimonials – “almost none of the trainees know what they’re getting in for when they arrive for the first day of the training”.

Haaken and Adams (1983) explain how Lifespring’s promise was equally grandiose and similarly vague:

“The promise of ‘personal growth’ held out by the organizations and zealous graduates was both nonspecific and unlimited” (p. 273).

Marc Fisher (1987) of the Washington Post confirms that Lifespring’s tactics for minimising communication between participants and the uninitiated was identical to that of est:

“PEOPLE WILL ASK YOU, ‘WHAT IS IT?’ AND YOU CAN’T EXPLAIN IT. SO YOU’LL SAY, ‘JUST DO IT, DO THE TRAINING’.” – JIM COOK, Lifespring trainer.

“What they really want, Lifespring believes, is the one thing that the company offers: breakthrough. No one from Lifespring has said what that means, only that it will happen sometime in the next five days...”

There is, however, validity to the claim that the experience is difficult to convey:

“What happened to Chuck Rossler is called a breakthrough. It happened in a course called Lifespring, which Rossler and 220 other people paid \$400 each to take in a hotel ballroom on Capitol Hill. To this day, Chuck Rossler isn’t sure how he got his breakthrough...

... What Rossler does know – and for him it is enough – is that after all the hours of crying, after being pushed to do the one thing that would most humiliate him, after 56 people who had been complete strangers just days before lifted his 300-pound body into the air and rocked him like a baby, he had his breakthrough. ‘I wasn’t at peace with myself until that moment, when I closed my eyes and hugged myself and felt my arms on my body. I realised I was somebody. I cried enough to fill a glass’” (Fisher M., 1987).

The same control of communication is employed by Landmark; while most rules are agreed to through *public* acknowledgement, the most crucial rule – that details of the training should not be shared – is enforced through a signed non-disclosure agreement and the repeated assertion that Landmark could never be understood, only experienced⁶⁹:

“We have all signed a confidentiality agreement as well as an agreement not to violate Landmark’s copyright claims” (Mahoney, 1998).

“It was, therefore, as I sat in the room, somewhat of a ‘shock’ to hear the organization swear attendees to secrecy – except of course for chiding us to call friends and relatives up during breaks to tell them how great it was, and how they could fork out their money to have their life changed too...” (Sagan, n.d.).

“After having taken the Forum, my best guess for the perceived lack of researchable content: partly caused by people scared silent due to the legalese in the paperwork you have to sign before taking the workshop, and partly there being very little to actually describe” (Drew, 2010).

“In this article, I can’t tell you exactly what Landmark actually teaches. I can’t tell you, not because it couldn’t be told – don’t believe the fiction that what the Forum teaches can’t be explained – but

⁶⁹ The belief that the Landmark Forum is beyond understanding is deeply entrenched in many graduates. Crucially, the idea that the Forum cannot be understood brings with it the idea that it cannot be questioned.

because it would be a violation of their copyrights, to which Landmark is entitled, and which I promised not to disclose. When I signed up, like everyone who signs up, I gave them my word that I would keep their ‘technology’ confidential” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

While these agreements prevent participants from revealing information about other people who have “shared”, LGATs also discourage discussion of what takes place in the trainings. As Singer (2003) described with reference to other LGATs, Landmark participants are told that the course is impossible to explain and that trying to do so will “ruin the experience” for new participants. The result is that graduates provide only vague descriptions of what the training entails, focusing instead on how they feel (which, at least for a short time after the course, is “Amazing”):

“She warns to be careful about how we spread the word, likening those who haven’t been enlightened to shipwrecked people laboriously rowing a floundering boat” (Mahoney, 1998).

“Steeped in vagaries, they introduced Landmark Education’s language, praising The Forum’s ‘technology’ and promising ‘breakthroughs’ that would make us happier” (Hukill, 1998).

“Soon after starting to research this story I was invited to a Landmark guest night. The person who invited me said it was difficult to explain Landmark: I should see for myself [...] No specifics about the training were given because it was a ‘technology’ that was hard to describe” (Vandenberg, 2000).

“But Wilmore⁷⁰ and others involved in Landmark say it’s difficult to fully explain the Forum to people who haven’t taken the course” (Libaw, 2002).

“Troy Beyer, an actress and director in Los Angeles, took the Forum three months ago [...] ‘It’s so hard to explain,’ she says” (Libaw, 2002).

“Questioning former students on what the course taught them got me nowhere: happy to talk, they spoke winningly of transformations and breakthroughs, insights and possibilities while remaining vague as to how such magic was achieved” (Hill, 2003).

“Why would I want to take this workshop? What would I get out of it? What should I expect it to be like? All I got from him (and a couple of other people) were frankly crap answers: it would ‘open up new possibilities in my life,’ it would ‘help me be present,’ it would ‘enable breakthroughs.’ (What does any of that mean, when you don’t have a context to interpret it from?) The Landmark website was of about the same use: lots of jargon, nothing concrete, and nothing descriptive” (Drew, 2010).

⁷⁰ Landmark Forum course leader, Jeff Wilmore (Libaw, 2002).

“She was not a true believer, but like others I’d met, she could talk about the experience at length while revealing little” (O’Brien, 2012).

“I asked her what it was about and she couldn’t even put two sentences together to explain it to me ... She kept saying it was ‘wonderful’ and ‘amazing’ and ‘life-changing’ and that I HAD to attend to see what it was all about” (Anonymous2, 2012).

“Landmark seems to be the type of thing that everyone has a million questions about and nobody really knows what goes on until they experience it” (Sansouci, 2014).

The control of communication during the training and with potential participants has been shown to be a key feature of LGATs; however, Landmark has similarly been accused of using harassment and intimidation to silence the media, academics, and others who publicly question its methods (Skolnik & Norwick, 2006). In addition to establishing a theme of communication control, the lawsuits filed against Dr Margaret Singer (1996), and Steven Pressman (1998) discussed in the following pages are relevant to an understanding of hypomania, creativity, and delusion. While their relevance to hypomania, creativity, and delusion will only be revealed later, their bearing on the curtailment of free speech, along with other examples of information control, demands immediate review.

The web site www.rickross.com⁷¹, operated by Rick Ross and his non-profit foundation, provided a database containing thousands of documents about hundreds of groups, as well as discussion forums where individuals could anonymously post their experiences without fear of reprisal. According to Skolnick and Norwick (2006), Google, which organises search results by popularity of the site in relation to the searched term, ranked www.rickross.com as the #2 result when searching for “Landmark Education” in 2006⁷² (the Landmark website was #1). Because much of the information on www.rickross.com revealed negative information about Landmark and the Landmark Forum, on June 25, 2004, Landmark sued Ross. One component of the litigation was an attempt by Landmark to gain access to the names of all of the people who had posted negative comments about their Landmark experiences on the anonymous discussion forums:

“On January 7, 2005, Landmark wrote a letter to the federal Magistrate Judge, assigned to the case, the Hon. Mark Falk, U.S.M.J., to seek permission to file a motion to uncover the identities of the users who wrote disparaging comments about Landmark [...] If Landmark had succeeded and word had spread that anyone posting a negative message about Landmark on this site might subsequently be served with a subpoena, the vigorous free speech engaged in here would have

⁷¹ Now www.culteducation.com.

⁷² This is no longer the case since Landmark Education changed its name to Landmark Worldwide in 2013.

been effectively halted – and Landmark’s litigation goals would have been largely achieved” (Skolnik & Norwick, 2006).

New York legal firm *Lowenstein Sandler* provided legal representation to Ross, and subsequently compiled a database of documents to assist any other person, or organisation, who is sued by Landmark. In the Introduction to the Landmark Education litigation archive attorneys Peter Skolnik and Michael Norwick (Skolnik & Norwick, 2006) make the following statement:

“In an effort to suppress this unfavourable dialogue about the company, Landmark, like Erhard before it, has repeatedly used litigation and threats of litigation as an improper tool to silence its vocal public critics. This type of lawsuit – typically accusing the defendant of defamation and related torts – is known in various American jurisdictions as a SLAPP suit: i.e., a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation; a lawsuit not brought for its merits, but for the specific purpose of silencing a vocal critic, often one who is unlikely to have the financial resources to defend himself.”

Skolnik and Norwick (2006) also make specific mention of Singer and Pressman, stating that Singer was sued in 1996 for \$5 to \$10 million with allegations similar to those attached to Ross, concerning:

- “(1) Landmark’s use of bullying and humiliation techniques;
- (2) Landmark’s subjecting participants to authoritarian control;
- (3) Landmark’s discouragement of bathroom breaks during the Forum;
- (4) Landmark’s verbal and emotional abuse of participants; the fact that Landmark’s programs are physically, mentally and emotionally stressful, are potentially very dangerous, and can result in mental problems.”

Singer was considered a threat to Landmark because of her credentials as an academic and cult expert. According to documentation from the 1996 lawsuit, Singer was “a licensed clinical psychologist, an emeritus adjunct professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, and in the private practice of psychology...” and “... had written more than one hundred journal articles published in professional journals throughout her career” (DECLARATION OF MARGARET THALER SINGER IN SUPPORT OF DEFENDENT'S SPECIAL MOTION TO STRIKE COMPLAINT, 1996). What concerned Landmark was the association of Landmark with cults and, because Singer was the most visible cult expert in the United States, any mention of Landmark in a book written about cults was considered a threat to their reputation. Notably, although Singer did not identify est, the Forum, or Landmark as cults, Landmark argued that its inclusion would result in a damaging association. Because of the lawsuit, Singer was required to remove references to Landmark and, as a result, Landmark did not pursue its multimillion dollar suits:

“In a sworn statement she signed in connection with her lawsuit, Dr. Singer confirmed that she had ‘not characterized est or the Forum as a cult in any of [her] writings, public talks, or judicial testimony’” (Skolnik & Norwick, 2006).

According to Skolnik and Norwick (2006), Singer confided to close friends that the lawsuit had put financial strain on her family, but according to Amanda Scioscia (2000), who interviewed Singer before her death in 2003, Singer made it clear that she never endorsed Landmark in any way:

“In resolution of the suit, Singer gave a sworn statement that the organization is not a cult or sect. She says this doesn't mean she supports Landmark. ‘I do not endorse them - never have,’ she says. Singer, who is in her 70s, says she can't comment on whether Landmark uses coercive persuasion because ‘the SOBs have already sued me once.’ ‘I'm afraid to tell you what I really think about them because I'm not covered by any lawyers like I was when I wrote my book.’ Singer will say, however, that she would not recommend the group to anyone.”

While it is clear to anyone who has given it consideration that Singer did not endorse Landmark, her statement is still used – apparently with great effect – to add credibility to Landmark's claims of not exploiting participants. Social psychologist Robert Cialdini (2007) explains that people tend to believe that statements reflect a person's opinions, even when these statements are made under duress:

“People have a natural tendency to think a statement reflects the true attitude of the person who made it. What is surprising is that they continue to think so even when they know that the person did not freely choose to make the statement [...] Unless there is strong evidence to the contrary, observers automatically assume that someone who makes such a statement means it” (pp. 76-77).

Another person sued by Landmark was journalist Steven Pressman (Skolnik & Norwick, 2006):

“In still another action, brought in 1998 against Werner Erhard biographer, Steven Pressman, Landmark spent months attempting to compel Pressman to respond to deposition questions aimed at obtaining the confidential sources he used for research on his book, *Outrageous Betrayal* [...] The action against Pressman was dropped after the Cult Awareness Network litigation was settled.”

According to Skolnik and Norwick (2006), when the press modifies their stories, “presumably to avoid litigation”, Landmark adds the publication to its list of organisations which “agree” that it is not a cult. Correspondence between Landmark general counsel, Art Schreiber, and the website www.stelling.nl (Schreiber, 1999) supports this assertion:

“As the General Counsel of Landmark Education Corporation, I am writing to advise you that the information on your Website (stelling.nl/simpos/est.htm) includes links to Sites that contain a number of false and libellous statements regarding Landmark Education and its program The

Landmark Forum. I am therefore providing you with information and enclosing materials which set forth the accurate facts so that you have the accurate facts on your Website” (Schreiber, 1999).

Schreiber explains in this (apparently standard) notification that “Anti-cult organisations and their experts, after having reviewed the facts, changed their previous position and concluded that Landmark Education and the Landmark Forum are not a cult”. Specific mention is made of Singer:

“(b) Dr. Margaret Singer, a well-known cult expert in the United States and author of the book ‘Cults in Our Midst’, stated in writing in May, 1997 that ‘I do not believe that either Landmark Education or the Landmark Forum is a cult or sect or meets the definition of a cult or sect.’”

Schreiber also lists retractions from major publications who had “erroneously referred to Landmark Education or the Landmark Forum as a cult”:

- a) Panorama Magazine, a major magazine in the Netherlands
- b) Hervomd Nederland, a major magazine in the Netherlands
- c) FACTS Magazine, a major magazine in Switzerland
- d) Self Magazine, a major magazine for women in the United States
- e) Redbook Magazine, a major magazine for women in the United States
- f) Guidepost, the publication of the American Counseling Association

Traci Hukill (1998) of Metro News San Francisco reported a similar experience:

“Once word about my story got around, popping up in an online Landmark newsgroup, it somehow made its way to the office of Art Schreiber, general counsel of Landmark Education Corporation. Schreiber responded swiftly with a 10-page letter advising me of his ‘serious concern’ that I might defame Landmark. What followed were six pages explaining why Landmark is not a cult, a page of why Landmark cannot be said to brainwash its enrollees, a page and a half of why I must not defame Werner Erhard or est, and a tedious summary explaining that should I ‘leave Landmark and its programs depicted in a false light... Landmark is fully prepared to take the appropriate legal action’.”

Noting how Landmark frames its ability to silence critics, she continues:

“CEO Harry Rosenberg recently noted that ‘in the United States, we have altered the public conversation about our work and our enterprise. For example, it is no longer possible for informed people or publications in the United States to pin pejorative labels on us’” (Hukill, 1998).

Journalist Rachel Jones reveals the intimidation tactics used by Landmark to limit her free expression:

“I approached Landmark head-quarters in California (no Landmark people in South Africa would talk to me), asking in a brief email for a summary of the company's audited financial statements

and a budget for the upcoming Cape Town seminar. I said I needed this information to understand the apparent wide gap between expenses and fees. The email caused big excitement. On the phone, Sandy Bernasek, a spokesperson (and also a seminar leader) tried a number of moves to avoid giving me information. She swept through emotional appeal (why wouldn't I trust her?) to 'begging the question' of my bias (insisting it was a fact we must both accept) to 'poisoning the well' (how terrible a person I must be to attack such a useful and beloved company). When I wouldn't cave in, she began aggressively interrupting and changing the subject. She finally threatened that Landmark would 'take it very seriously' if I didn't include in my article the 'information' they sent me, which turned out to be a hefty bundle of promotional material. She also set me up for the 'compliance tactic' of 'social proof': I was told there had been a 'witness' to the conversation who agreed with Bernasek that I was being awful. A day or two later a letter and half a kilo of documents arrived by courier from attorney Art Schreiber in San Francisco. 'I am providing you with all of the information set forth above [there was an itemised list] so you can ensure that your proposed article reflects the accurate facts regarding Landmark Education and the Landmark Forum', he wrote. The rest of the letter, with much emphasis and repetition, put me 'on notice' of a possible lawsuit, with a judgment against my future wages if I thought (as I had said) I was too poor to worry about being sued" (Jones, 2003).

Commenting on the volume of information sent to her by Landmark, and the apparent commonness of this response, Jones (2003) continues:

"All in all, the nature of our exchange told me more than did the information I was allowed to have [...] Schreiber, Landmark's 'General Counsel', must be one busy attorney. At first I was flattered by his rapt fear of an article I hadn't even thought out yet. But, the more I looked, the more I saw myself as a mere part of his routine, perhaps like golf or flossing."

More recently, McClure (2009) reported similar tactics from the Landmark head of public relations:

"The company also vigorously guards its reputation from critics. After I told Beroset I'd be writing an article on my mixed feelings about the Forum, she called several times and sent me an email that might be described as threatening – but in the most benign, centered kind of way."

Like the Singer "endorsement" provided by Schreiber, the misrepresentation of the opinions of authority figures can also be seen in a 2004 investigative journalism program, broadcast on France 3, entitled *Voyage Au Pays Des Nouveaux Gourous (Voyage to the Land of the New Gurus)* (Cult

Awareness + Information Centre⁷³; dialogueireland, 2012⁷⁴). After footage was shown of a woman being referred to as an “asshole”, and publicly harassed and humiliated, Landmark spokesperson Sophie Mclean (a Landmark Forum instructor herself) is interviewed. Mclean lists a number of people who can verify the fact that Landmark is not a cult and provides the name of a French expert:

“The expert on cults in France is Jean-Marie Abgrall...”

Rather than taking her at her word, the journalist interviews Dr Abgrall, who says the following:

“It’s not true that I said it’s not a cult! I neither wrote that it is a cult nor that it’s not a cult. I haven’t taken a stance” (Cult Awareness + Information Centre, 2017).

While Dr Abgrall takes no stance on whether it is a cult or not, it can be inferred that he (like Margaret Singer) was concerned by Landmark’s courses:

“These guys aren’t trained, as if tomorrow you set up shop as a psychotherapist. I mean, that’s what’s shocking” (Cult Awareness + Information Centre, 2017).

It is worth noting that it is difficult to find the France 3 documentary for review. According to the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), a non-profit dedicated to the protection of free speech:

“The documentary is critical of the Landmark program and includes hidden camera footage from inside a Landmark Forum event in France as well as within the Landmark offices in France. It also includes a panel discussion with the host and interviews with a variety of people regarding whether or not Landmark is a cult. According to Landmark the ‘broadcasting of this program had disastrous consequences and resulted in considerable damage to Landmark Education’s subsidiary operating in France’” (Electronic Freedom Foundation, 2016).

They go on to state:

“The video was posted on several websites including the Internet Archive YouTube and Google. In October 2006 Landmark started to send threatening cease and desist letters to online service providers who hosted the material...” (Electronic Freedom Foundation, 2016).

According to the EFF, Landmark claimed the program revealed copyrighted material and “then issued subpoenas pursuant to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act which allows users to identify alleged infringers even without filing a lawsuit. Subpoenas were sent to Google Video YouTube and the

⁷³ As at 8 August 2017, the full video can be accessed at http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1243&Itemid=12.

⁷⁴ The video was, notably, removed from this site on 27 March 2014.

Internet Archive demanding to know the identity of the uploader (s)". These subpoenas, according to the EFF, were intended to harass, as they held no legal merit:

"A review of the video makes it clear that the documentary does not contain a copy of the leader manual referenced in Landmark's letters. Rather it is a news documentary critical of the Landmark organization in France. Moreover even if Landmark's copyrighted works were visible in the documentary any such limited and transformative use of a copyrighted work for purpose of criticism commentary and news reporting is self-evidently fair use and therefore non-infringing. Landmark is not seeking to identify those who originally made the documentary since it already knows who made it. Nor are the subpoenas based upon the defamation claims Landmark's letter asserts – DMCA subpoenas are only authorized to identify alleged infringers of the sender's copyright. They are not however designed to allow content users to identify their critics as Landmark is attempting to do here" (Electronic Freedom Foundation, 2016).

According to a 2009 report by journalist Hagar Cohen, Landmark responded to the documentary on their own website, stating that the France 3 program had:

"... used tactics, including lying, manipulating, using usually illegally obtained material and intentionally presented material out of context" (Cohen, 2009).

Numerous websites have been "asked" by Landmark to remove it because it reveals their copyrighted "technology" and because it is claimed that the footage is presented out of context (Electronic Freedom Foundation, 2016). The following is an extract of the footage from the documentary (which included English subtitles). A woman, Daniele, is standing at the microphone in front of a roomful of strangers, trying to work through a problematic relationship with her daughter. It is difficult to imagine the context in which this would be appropriate:

TRAINER: You have destroyed what is possible in her life! You! And you have the indecency to say that you love her.

DANIELE (crying): I admit it, yes, I admit it. But what do I do about it?

TRAINER: Stop feeling guilty, to begin with!

NARRATOR: 50 minutes later Daniele is worn out. It doesn't matter, he pushes even harder.

TRAINER: Guilt is even more disgusting. You spend your life kicking yourself to make yourself feel better, by letting those you've destroyed die off. If you want to do something for her, I don't know – you could kill yourself. No, that's not

good enough. No, kick yourself. Find something that makes you suffer. Get cancer. Make it last for twenty-nine years so you suffer and die. That way you feel better about your daughter croaking.

In an update the EFF provided the following conclusion (Electronic Freedom Foundation, 2016):

“Update 2: In a settlement reached November 29 2006 Landmark agreed to withdraw the subpoena to Google and end its quest to pierce the anonymity of the video’s poster. Landmark has also withdrawn its subpoena to the Internet Archive. See our [Press Release](#) for details.”

The anonymous poster, like Singer and others, acknowledged the stress caused by the legal action:

“‘Landmark’s legal threats took an emotional toll,’ said the anonymous poster, known as ‘John Doe’ in the settlement. ‘When I found out that my identity might be revealed based on a bogus copyright claim, I was really worried that Landmark might try to retaliate against me’” (Electronic Freedom Foundation, 2016).

Milieu control, described by Lifton (1961) as “the psychological current upon which all else depends” (p. 420), is primarily “the control of human communication” (p. 420), during which the totalist environment seeks to control everything the individual sees, hears, writes, experiences, and expresses. Milieu control is, therefore, not only a fair description of the Landmark Forum experience, but it is also a fair description of Landmark’s attempt to limit communication with potential participants, and of its approach to those who question its processes from outside of the training environment. If the control of human communication is “the psychological current upon which all else depends” then, based solely on this element, Landmark is well-positioned to employ thought reform.

Control of behaviour

“Each day we will be released exactly three times. We will be asked to have dinner with Forum ‘friends’ and to spend our scant hours at home calling family members and pals and telling them about our ‘breakthroughs’” (Hukill, 1998).

Environment control is not limited to the control of information, and LGATs employ strict rules to control behaviour during the training. Different LGATs’ rules are comparable in content, but are chiefly similar in that participants must submit to them completely, that they establish an unequal power dynamic between participants and the trainer, that the reasons for their existence are not adequately explained, and because they are used as evidence of participants’ lack of integrity, and justification for their harassment, throughout the training. These rules are, therefore, not only evidence of *Milieu Control*, but help to explain the stress endured by participants.

The rules might also be seen as a “foot-in-the-door” technique, by which small acts of compliance overcome initial resistance, and clear the way for more extreme actions – some of which may not be agreed to if asked for up front (Cialdini, 2007; Gilovich & Ross, 2016). Other, more subtle, reasons for these rules will be discussed in later sections. Professor of social psychology and marketing at Arizona State University, Robert Cialdini, points out that the foot-in-the-door technique was used by the Chinese on POWs during the Korean War, and that it is widely used in sales and other areas today:

“If the Chinese knew about the subtle power of this approach, it should not be surprising that another group of people interested in compliance is also aware of its usefulness. Many business organizations employ it regularly. For the salesperson, the strategy is to obtain a large purchase by starting with a small one” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 71).

If salespersons are aware of these techniques, then LGATs (for whom sales are crucial) will also be. This is particularly true if Erhard was well-read on sales techniques (which is likely, since he was a resourceful salesman during the 1960s) (Pressman, 1993), and since, according to Cialdini (2007), “scientists first became aware of its [the foot-in-the-door technique] effectiveness in the mid-1960s when psychologists Jonathan Freedman and Scott Frazer published an astonishing set of data” (p. 72). Cialdini summarises the findings of these studies:

“What the Freedman and Frazer findings tell us, then, is to be very careful about agreeing to trivial requests. Such an agreement can not only increase our compliance with similar, much larger requests, it can also make us more willing to perform a variety of larger favors that are only remotely connected to the little one we did earlier. It’s this second, general kind of influence concealed within small commitments that scares me” (pp. 73-74).

If LGATs are able to get participants to comply with seemingly reasonable rules, then – according to extensive research – this lays the foundation for the automatic compliance to larger, and more objectionable, requests later on. With regards to an introductory est session which takes place on the Monday before the core training, Finkelstein, et al. (1982), state:

“There the ground rules of est training are read: trainees agree to forego alcohol, marijuana, and other non-prescription drugs for the period of training; to bring no timepiece into the training room; to use the bathroom, eat, and smoke only during breaks set aside for that purpose; to stay seated and silent unless called upon by the trainer; to wear name tags; to not sit in proximity to any familiar person” (p. 519).

Referring to the core of the training, which started at 08:30 on a Saturday, Finkelstein, et al. (1982) state:

“The session begins with a re-reading of the ground rules by an assistant trainer, who stresses the *voluntary nature* of these agreements” (p. 519).

Rhinehart (2010) also emphasises the *voluntary* nature of the rules (the rules are voluntary, but participants do not know, at this stage, what the training entails, and they cannot continue with the training if they do not agree to the rules). The precedent for making decisions without evidence is, therefore, also established in the ground rules:

“Werner has developed certain ground rules for the training which you have agreed to follow. These ground rules exist for one reason: because they work. Following them will permit you to get the most results from the training. We want you to *choose* to follow these ground rules” (p. 5).

“You will remain in your chairs at all times except when instructed to move...” (p. 6).

“During the course of this training, the next ten days, you will not drink alcohol, or use any drug, hallucinogen, or other artificial stimulant or depressant...” (p. 7).

Rhinehart (2010, p. 16) also provides an example of how the rules are used against participants to establish control and generate stress. In this example, a girl feels she is going to be sick and the trainer mocks her for seeking attention. Another participant, distressed by what he is seeing, attempts to provide support:

“That girl’s sick!” a voice shouts from the back of the room.

“SHUTTUP!” the trainer shouts back, and he stands up and moves to the front of the platform. “If you want to speak in this room you raise your hand and you don’t speak until I call on you and the assistant has brought you a mike. You may then stand and speak anything you want. Get that, assholes?”

Another participant becomes frustrated the next day, stating “You’ve already wasted one and a half days of my time insulting us, lecturing at us with trivial jargon, and making us put up with your not dealing intellectually with our rational objections...” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 75), and decides that he is leaving. The trainer tells him to sit down and uses the agreement, and the trainee’s sense of integrity (since he “chose” to agree to the rules), to induce compliance (p. 75):

“Remember you agreed to keep your sole in the room and follow instructions.”

“I’m done with your stupid agreements.”

“They’re not mine, Hank, they’re yours. You had a chance to leave yesterday morning and *you* chose to stay, and you entered into the agreements when you chose to stay.”

Haaken and Adams (1983) and Marc Fisher explain that Lifespring was equally zealous about rules:

“While all groups are guided by implicit or explicit rules, the Lifespring rules were notable for their emphasis upon obedience to the instructions of the trainer and their arbitrariness or lack of an apparent rationale” (Haaken & Adams, 1983, p. 274).

“But first everyone must agree to nine simple ground rules. Anyone who balks at even one rule must leave. Jim will go over each rule, take as long as we wish to answer questions. He will not discuss reasons for any rules. It’s like getting a traffic ticket, he says. You don’t ask the cop why, he doesn’t ask you how you feel about the rules. They just are” (Fisher M. , 1987).

The imagery used – of a policeman and a civilian – also unconsciously suggests the power dynamic between the trainer and participants. Fisher M. (1987) then explains some of Lifespring’s rules:

“The rules are indeed simple. For example, attend the entire training. Be on time. Be seated before the music ends. Don’t eat, smoke or chew gum in the training room. No drugs or alcohol during the next five days. No side talking. Follow the trainer’s instructions...”

In a statement eerily reminiscent of the Party’s slogans in Orwell’s *1984*, Hanley explains that people require control to be free:

“Trainees are still expected, as Hanley puts it, to surrender to the coach. It seems inconsistent, but the only way there is freedom, is with control” (Fisher M. , 1987).

Haaken and Adams (1983) mention how no notes could be taken during the Lifespring Basic Training (a rule that is common to LGATs), and how certain rules created stress in participants:

“Although notes and taping were not allowed during training sessions, we made extensive notes during breaks and at the close of each day’s sessions” (p. 272).

“The theme song from *Star Wars*⁷⁵ was played ceremoniously at the beginning of each session, and participants were to be seated in their chairs by the conclusion of the music. Frantic compliance to this rule was remarkable even though its purpose and the consequences of noncompliance were unclear” (p. 273).

Time Magazine’s Nathan Thornburgh (2011), provides initial insight into Landmark’s rules:

“He started our group of 127 students off with some nonnegotiable ground rules: No food, no drink except water. No texting, no note taking, no talking except at one of the three microphones set up around the room. No narcotics, alcohol or aspirin until the entire course is over. Commit to being there from 9 a.m. until 10 p.m. or later each of the three days, with just two 30-minute breaks and one longer break for dinner. There were assignments – usually attempts to make ‘breakthroughs’

⁷⁵ Based on other sources, it is likely that it was the theme song from *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

with people in your life, on the phone or in writing – to be completed during those breaks or at night. The rules felt harsh, almost punitive, and yet nobody left, least of all me. In the first hour, Smith had effectively convinced us all that if we walked out on him, we'd only be walking out on ourselves."

Numerous other sources confirm that rules are a much-emphasised part of the Landmark Forum:

"Angelo set out the rules. We must not talk to each other during the Forum. We could leave the room only during the breaks, every three hours. He advised us not to eat except at the meal break at 6pm" (Clancy, *Victims Lured Into Baring Their Souls By Mind Games*, 1992).

"After Regnier's friendly presence, Benson's sadistic air and flaring nostrils as she reels off a list of rules set the crowd on edge. Not to mention the rules themselves, which include things like raising our hands to talk and making sure our name tags always show" (Hukill, 1998).

"'Getting it' requires following the rules, and those who break them will be humiliated. These rules are not just practical, they are a moral imperative. Breaking them means disappointing the group and demonstrating your weakness as a person" (Scioscia, 2000).

"To stay, we must agree to the rules. Jack gives us a pep talk about integrity. He tells us we have none. Following the rules is our first opportunity to redeem our pathetic selves. We must promise to show up on time, not use drugs or alcohol, be coachable, wear our name tags in a visible location and bring no food or drink into the room. We cannot take notes, talk or sit next to someone we know. Though no one will physically stop us from leaving to use the bathroom, if we do, we have no right to expect the loosely defined 'transformation' we have come for" (Scioscia, 2000).

"About 25 minutes later as I passed Euston station at 8:55am I had a shock. The whole street was jogging with me. About 20 adults were scuttling along beside me. Then I realised these were adults, frightened of the confrontation that would occur if they were late for the Forum" (Howard, 2001).

"The doors are closed on the minute at the end of 40-minute breaks and to re-enter the room we have to apologise for breaking our word" (Howard, 2001).

"We are not to take notes, eat or talk (unless instructed to)" (Howard, 2001).

"At the beginning of the Forum on Friday morning, we all agree to be on time with a show of hands. We agree to raise our hands before speaking, which we also agree to with a show of hands. We agree to wear our name tags; not whisper; not use drugs, alcohol, or aspirin over the course of the weekend; and not bring in any food or drink" (Grigoriadis, 2001).

"There are rules. Timekeeping is essential, toilet breaks are discouraged: missing even a minute will jeopardise our chance of achieving transformation. We will work for three to four hours at a

time. During short breaks, we will have homework. There is one meal break in the early evening and more homework after the day is done. Notetaking, unprescribed medicines and alcohol are forbidden and we must open our minds to all suggestions” (Hill, 2003).

“Nametags: They were very strict about them. I mean hardcore. You had to have your nametag on and in view at all times. They were collected any time you left the room. Presumably to keep tabs on who had returned (or were late returning) and who had not. It was weird” (Fazeli, 2012).

“At the end of each break we were required to sit in a different location and next to someone different” (jman76, 2009).

“I couldn’t be late for class: Roger continually cited promptness as an essential ‘commitment.’ Indeed, one night, four classmates and I ran three blocks back from dinner lest we be castigated; at another point, a former E.M.T. named Sonia received a standing ovation when she told the group she had asked the driver of her stalled bus to write Roger an excuse on letterhead” (Alford, 2010).

“This is further enforced after the break, as the group is reprimanded for straggling in late. We all have fractured integrity, breaking promises left and right, then cloaking them in reasons and excuses” (Odasso, 2011).

“The leader starts with welcoming you by explaining the rules of the forum – those who are not willing to abide by the rule can leave in the first half hour with their money refunded” (Prasad, 2012).

An important rule in all LGATs is that participants must applaud when someone “shares”. This applause comes only when the participant says something which supports the trainer’s perspective:

“The leader trains the group to clap after every sharing, no matter how inane, off target, or incoherent it is. For many, it is heady stuff to have a couple of hundred people clap when they speak a bit to the group. At the same time, new customers also see how the trainer berates and decimates opponents” (Singer, 2003, p. 194).

Singer (2003), like Finkelstein, et al. (1982), asserts that operant conditioning is used to shape the behaviour of participants. Applause and approval (reinforcement) are given to those who comply, while hostility and humiliation (punishment) are inflicted on those who openly challenge the trainer. The emphasis on applause (the reason for which is, conspicuously, not explained) could be seen in earlier trainings like Lifespring, and – as revealed below – in est:

PARTICIPANT: “I don’t understand why there’s all this fuss about applauding everyone who speaks. Couldn’t we do without it?”

EST TRAINER: “No, we can’t do without it.”

PARTICIPANT: “But why do we have to do it?”

EST TRAINER: “You have to do it because it’s one of the ground rules” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 15).

This rule remains an integral component of the Landmark Forum:

“Then we applaud. We always applaud after someone shares” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

As with est, Landmark participants must acknowledge that they have *chosen* to agree to the rules:

“Once all the agreements are made – and we’ve all agreed that *we made them...*” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

While rules might be used to establish control and justify harassment, there are practical reasons for the rules as well. Est, the Forum, Lifespring, Landmark, and other LGATs insist that no drugs or alcohol are used for the duration of the training. It is argued in this thesis that the LGAT “experience” involves the same neurotransmitters that are impacted by stimulants such as cocaine, amphetamines and, to a lesser degree, alcohol. While it is unlikely that the originators of the trainings understood the neuroscience behind this rule, they likely observed that the training was less effective on those who artificially interfered with their central nervous systems during the course. Various sources explain that full benefits could not be expected if a person took any drugs or medications:

“During the course of this training, the next ten days, you will not drink alcohol, or use any drug, hallucinogen, or other artificial stimulant or depressant unless you have a medical prescription and the drug is absolutely necessary for your health” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 7, RE est).

“We are instructed not to drink alcohol, use drugs, tobacco, even aspirin during the course of the weekend, including when we go home at night, for if we do, the Forum cannot guarantee the ‘result’” (Mahoney, 1998).

“No drugs, not even aspirin, or alcohol for the duration. That doesn’t mean you can’t take prescription drugs, but Forum organizers prefer you don’t, because ‘drugs and medications interfere with fully participating in and receiving all the value available to you’” (Di Matteo, 2000).

Another major form of behaviour control takes the form of getting participants to stay in the training environment for every second of the training. If the effects of the trainings are due to the allostatic challenge (stress) of the environment, rather than the content of what is being taught, then briefly leaving the room (a behavioural allostatic defence) would alleviate that stress. If the post-course “experience” is the result of stress-induced hypervigilance, followed by an abrupt sense of “goal-attainment”, then the LGAT “technology” will be less effective on those who leave midway through the training (and do not experience the goal-attainment). It is noteworthy then that participants may leave with relatively little resistance at the start of the training, but that there is a strong emphasis on

remaining in the room and, for those who choose to stay, completing the training. During est participants were told that all they had to do in order to get the result was stay in the room:

“And if you choose to stay and keep your sole in the room [He gestures toward his feet.] and follow instructions and take what you get, then I guarantee that on next Sunday you’ll get it. You may sleep half the time and be angry the other half, but if you just keep your sole here in the room and follow instructions you’ll get it. It will blow your minds...” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 10).

In Landmark, the emphasis on not taking a break from the stressful training environment is similarly highlighted and, while more subtly than occurred during est, enforced:

“You can leave the room. But if you do, the promised ‘result’ cannot be guaranteed” (Di Matteo, 2000).

“Another cautions that if participants leave the room during the Forum, even for a few minutes, they ‘forfeit their right to expect the result’. What is this sensitive mechanism that vaporizes the moment one leaves to pee?” (Hukill, 1998).

“Mr Cohen says he became so disillusioned with Landmark Education that he failed to turn up to the third course for which he had paid a deposit. He says the course put participants into a vulnerable state by allowing them little time to eat, drink or even go for toilet breaks. ‘We were made to feel very uncomfortable if we even left the room to go to the bathroom’” (Woodhouse & Vandenberg, 2000).

“Leaving during the three fifteen-hour days is discouraged – a posterboard sign warns, IF YOU LEAVE THE ROOM FOR ANY REASON, EVEN FOR A FEW MINUTES, YOU MAY GET THE RESULT BUT HAVE NO RIGHT TO EXPECT IT” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

“We are discouraged from going to the toilet during the three-hour sessions in case we lose the ‘narrative’” (Howard, 2001).

“Course leaders warn participants that even a few minutes’ absence from the room – where the group discusses their personal ‘rackets’ (Forum-speak for the complaints human beings nurse that prevent them from achieving joy) – carries the terrible risk of missing their personal ‘breakthrough’ (ie a new vision of relationships and life that leads to happiness)” (Braid, 2003).

“If you absolutely must leave, well, go ahead, but you thereby forfeit your right to achieve transformation” (O'Brien, 2012).

“One person got up after about an hour, presumably for the bathroom, and Chris made quick work of explaining all the reasons this was not okay. The tone was set: You followed the schedule; you did not veer from the group” (Fazeli, 2012).

The emphasis on staying for the entire training (until a sense of “goal-attainment” can be facilitated) is revealed by the following commentators:

“The Forum’s commitment to produce a ‘result’ over the weekend is based on ‘an understanding that you will be present in the room throughout the entire event. Being present includes being seated at the exact starting times each morning and after each break. If you are out of the room for any portion of any session, even for a few minutes, you may get the ‘result,’ but you have no right to expect it” (Mahoney, 1998).

“If we stay on the ride, Brian promises (as if he senses my doubts), we’ll experience a ‘breakthrough’ - an unpredictable, amazing moment in which we’re projected right into a future of fulfilment and power” (Martin, 1998).

“Yet, they all stayed. Why? Like a crowd around a wagon back medicine show, they were desperate to see this ‘transformation’ they had been promised (over and over again) all weekend. (‘Don’t leave! You are *this* close to ‘getting it’”) (Fazeli, 2012).

A television program entitled *Landmark’s controversial training programs*, which investigated Landmark in Australia, reported the experience of one participant, Alex Hayter, who wanted to leave, but was convinced by Landmark staff to stay:

“And, you know, it was quite threatening. There was two women sitting at our table and there’s about five people watching us and they would keep saying, ‘Well, you know, the first day of the Landmark forum’s really hard and it makes everyone really upset, but you just need to stick through it, and then at the end you’ll be - you know, everything will be fine’” (ABC, 2011).

Blogger Ajith Prasad (2012) of India similarly explains that participants were required to give their:

“... commitment and ‘word’ to complete the forum as per its design.”

Online contributors ‘jman76’, ‘rinso17’, and ‘Lil’ state:

“All this was done under the guise that we had to stay till the end to receive a breakthrough. A breakthrough only Landmark could provide” (jman76, 2009).

“I withstood this scam for 2 days and did not go back for the 3rd. On the morning of the 3rd day they rang me at home and were screaming at me as to what a failure I must be and how I was breaking a ‘commitment’” (rinso17, 2012).

“... they were each very shocked at what I was telling them was happening to me on day 2 of the course. They were desperate for me to walk away but I was too afraid of getting off the ‘roller-coaster’. I really felt that I would be even more damaged if I got off too soon” (Lil, 2003).

Given the evidence provided, it is clear that communication and behaviour are carefully controlled during LGATs. Much of this control is exercised by appealing to the morality of participants, with an extreme emphasis on “agreements” and “integrity”, as explained below.

Agreements, integrity, and “being your word”

“... so we’re also asked to consider that who we are... the only true self there is... is our word [...] So, if I honour my word, and I take action through my word, then I can begin to create the world that I’ve always dreamed of...” – recent Landmark Forum graduate⁷⁶

The ability to control communication and behaviour is dependent on the degree to which participants feel bound by the rules. In addition to convincing participants that they are in control (by emphasising that they have *chosen* to agree to the rules), a significant amount of time is spent on the concept of integrity (“being your word”) – a positive trait that most people aspire to be associated with. The emphasis on integrity and the acceptance of seemingly benign rules are, however, used by the trainer to demonstrate that participants lack integrity, to shame them for this lack of integrity, and to make participants work hard to display (to the trainer, the group, and themselves) that they do, in fact, have integrity. Once participants are convinced that keeping agreements is critical, trainers put pressure on them to commit to taking further trainings and to enrol family, friends, and colleagues. Once these public commitments have been made, LGATs will hold participants to their words while linking a failure to follow through to a lack of integrity. Of course, integrity and honouring agreements are important, but LGATs arguably take the noble desire to be a better person and use it to turn participants into unpaid salespeople or “employees”. This does not demonstrate integrity on the part of LGATs.

Rhinehart (2010) reveals how agreements and integrity were emphasised during est:

“Richard has just reminded you of the agreements you’ve made to participate in the training, and I can tell you from experience that we know that you all, ALL, are going to break some of them. Most of you already have [...] It’s quite simple. You all break agreements. That’s one reason your lives don’t work” (p. 9).

Referring to LGATs in general, but more specifically to est, Finkelstein, et al. (1982), similarly state:

“An individual standing to leave the training room will be called to account by the trainer, who will emphasise his inability to abide by agreements” (p. 531).

The focus on integrity – sometimes referred to as “being your word” – is equally intense in the Landmark Forum. It is firstly argued that integrity is important (standards for “purity” are established):

⁷⁶ (Sky Lark, 2013).

“The Forum is a little bit obsessive about making sure that everyone is keeping their word” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

“The idea reiterated by Sophie throughout the program, that one must have integrity and honor one’s word, cannot help but make anyone feel like a better person [...] I began to clench my fists in the back as I heard the conflation of Martin Luther King, integrity and the Landmark Forum” (Badt, 2011).

It is then argued that participants have no integrity (standards for “purity” are not met):

“‘You are living lives of sham and illusion,’ Condon assures us from his director’s chair. ‘Everything you do in life is meant to make you look good or to avoid looking bad. Everything. You are inauthentic. You have no integrity. Your word is worthless’” (O'Brien, 2012).

When participants fail to perfectly follow any of the arbitrary rules, the trainer uses this as proof that they lack integrity and this allows the trainer to castigate the participants and convince them that they are inauthentic or flawed. The vulnerability of most people to feel guilt and shame is used against them by the trainer. Explaining how Landmark trainers do this, online contributor ‘\$375lighter’ states:

“Create a situation on day 3 whereby you will be justified in telling customers they have no integrity and instill in them the need to redouble their commitment to being ‘open’ and ‘coachable’ lest they remain terrible and dishonest people” (\$375lighter, 2002).

James O’Brien of GQ Magazine reveals how stress-inducing this tactic may be:

“The leader’s pale face has gone paler. His voice is taut with urgency. I think I see spit flying. He is a master of dispersed eye contact, and it is as if he is speaking to everyone and no one. Throughout this harangue, he repeatedly insists that none of us, not a single one of us, has even a shred of integrity. Our word is worthless. We are dishonest. His voice rising, he says, again, ‘You have no integrity!’” (O'Brien, 2012).

Once participants believe that they lack integrity, they will be eager to demonstrate that they possess it. If then they commit to enrolling new participants, they will be particularly likely to follow through on these commitments. Participants are not told up front, however, that some of the rules they have agreed to follow (in order to “get the most from the training”) require them to contact people they have an issue to resolve with, and then invite those people to the graduation. Participants, therefore, must recruit others (before seeing whether the training produces lasting results), lest they be called out for failing to follow through on their own agreements. At the end of the training, when participants are on a high, they are again asked to commit to bringing new recruits. Describing the commitments made by (euphoric) Landmark participants, Grigoriadis (2001) says:

“By the last night, people are pledging to invite everyone they know.”

According to Hukill (1998), participants do not realise that arguably coerced commitments (such as “I will take a stand for the Landmark Forum”) will later be used to generate sales for Landmark:

“So devotees keep enrolling in courses, keep volunteering to prove their ‘commitment’.”

Explaining how commitments and integrity are used to compel graduates into volunteering their time for Landmark, one former volunteer states:

“... I’m having to make calls to strangers and read them the riot act about commitments that they’d made, because it’s a contractual thing, no money changes hands in an assisting agreement, but you’re saying you’re going to do this. It’s only open to people who’ve completed the forum, so they are already well versed in the teachings of Landmark, the importance of integrity, the absolute importance of being your word, and they’ve made these commitments and you had to call them on it. And there was nothing they could say that would be an excuse” (Cohen, 2009).

Another former volunteer admits using the integrities of participants against them to get them to follow through on (arguably coerced) commitments:

“I am often ashamed at the manipulating I did on staff. The times I used the lines like ‘you are not being your word’ and lets look at your integrity” (sonnie_dee, 2006).

Quoting a former participant and volunteer, Grigoriadis (2001) reveals the frightening prominence placed on integrity, and how it is used by Landmark leaders to shame and control:

“Then I had a miscarriage. I missed a seminar because I was grieving for my baby. When I showed up the next week, the leader said, ‘The good news is the loss of your baby doesn’t mean shit. What does mean shit is that you have gone outside your integrity because you missed your seminar’.”

In addition to restricting communication and behaviour through heavily enforced rules, another former volunteer explains that other aspects of the environment are also carefully controlled:

““We controlled even subtle things like the quality of the light and the sound that came out of the microphones,’ says White. ‘The style of the lettering on all the signs had to be exactly the same or it was a really big deal. We covered the mirrors. We had to put the chairs in a specific order’” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

Lifton (1961) states, “It is probably fair to say that the Chinese Communist prison and revolutionary university produce about as thoroughly controlled a group environment as has ever existed” (p. 420), and while this is true, it seems that LGATs, including Landmark, create tightly controlled group environments, and employ techniques which at least remotely resemble *Milieu Control*.

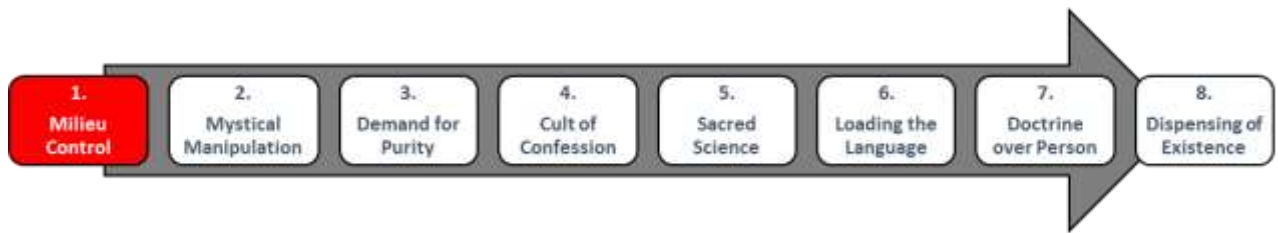


Figure 15: Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform in LGATs (1 of 8 conditions met).

As indicated in Figure 15, the first of Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform is present in LGATs. Having established that *Milieu Control* is used by LGATs, the following section assesses the degree to which Lifton’s (1961) second condition for thought reform, *Mystical Manipulation*, is present in LGATs.

Thought reform condition 2 of 8: Mystical Manipulation

“You cannot know this from conscious experience, of course, but you must accept the alien idea that your actions and emotions can be primed by events of which you are not even aware” (Kahneman, 2012, p. 53).

Mystical Manipulation refers to events which take place in the environment that may seem spontaneous, but are actually orchestrated by the group (Lifton, 1961). Lifton states that those controlling the environment seek to “provoke specific patterns of behaviour and emotion in such a way that these will appear to have arisen spontaneously from within the environment” (p. 422). Processes employed by LGATs which misleadingly create the impression of spontaneous behaviour or spontaneous emotion can, therefore, be considered *Mystical Manipulation*.

Behavioural manipulation

Social psychologist and Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman uses the term “priming” to describe the way that specific patterns of emotion and behaviour can be clandestinely triggered, and numerous experiments demonstrate that LGATs could use priming (a form of *Mystical Manipulation*) to shape the thinking, behaviour, and emotions of participants without their awareness.

An example of priming is the *Florida Effect*, illustrated by psychologist John Bargh at New York University (Kahneman, 2012). In one experiment two groups of students were asked to reassemble sentences; one of the group’s scrambled sentences contained words like “Florida”, “bald”, “gray”, and “forgetful”, while the other group’s sentences contained no words associated with being old. The two groups were then sent to another office down the hall and the time taken for each person to walk to the next office was discreetly measured. It was found that the “elderly theme” group walked significantly more slowly than the control group. This is noteworthy as the “elderly theme” group was not aware that they had been exposed to these trigger words:

“All this happens without any awareness. When they were questioned afterward, none of the students reported noticing that the words had a common theme, and they all insisted that nothing they did after the first experiment could have been influenced by the words they had encountered. The idea of old age had not come to their conscious awareness, but their actions had changed nevertheless” (p. 53).

Landmark uses a number of words in ways that are different to how they are normally used. A good example of this is the word “enrol”, which typically means to register, join, or recruit. In Landmark, this word is used frequently, but in a way that is not openly associated with taking further courses or recruiting others. According to Kahneman (2012), this sort of technique is likely to trigger behaviour associated with the normal use of the word, which will result in a greater likelihood of participants enrolling in future classes, and enrolling others in the Forum. Ajith Prasad (2012) of India reveals how the word is repeatedly used, how its use in the Forum bears little resemblance to its use outside of the Forum, and how participants are told that they are not being subtly persuaded to recruit others:

“The second day’s assignment will again include convincing people about enrolling your ideas. This part, at this point, will go to the nasty level of influencing people to join the Landmark Forum where as they try their best to explain that ‘Enrollment of ideas’ is different from ‘Registration’.”

Rosemary Mahoney of Elle Magazine and Amanda Scioscia of Phoenix New Times also reveal the ubiquity of this word in the Landmark vernacular:

“Our key to the Forum will be to maintain an openness to what she has to tell us, a phenomenon called ‘enrollment.’ ‘You’ll access the extraordinary if you are willing to participate. This is the most powerful technology in the world, but you need to have enrollment. Enrollment is a distinction that’s a breakthrough paradigm” (Mahoney, 1998).

“‘Anything you want in life is possible that you invent as a possibility and enroll others in your having gotten,’ reads one of the blackboards at the front of the room” (Scioscia, 2000).

According to journalist Rachel Jones (2003), the following framing of enrolment was provided as part of the Harvard case study (which she was given to incorporate in her article):

“Enrollment is a conversation or series of conversations which create new possibilities and result in a commitment to take action to make those possibilities a reality. Landmark Education Corporation's leaders put it as follows: ‘Enrollment is generating a possibility in another's listening, such that they step into that possibility committedly and act.’ It is not, for example, persuading or coercing someone.”

Blogger Rachel Rofo, attempting to defend Landmark, demonstrates how a person unfamiliar with priming (most people) might be blind to this psychological sleight of hand:

“On Day 2, I didn’t outright see anything mind control-y either. I mean, there is some talk about ‘enrollment’ which is getting people on board with the possibilities you create, but anyone’s going to tell you to have people in your life that support your goals. It’s common sense” (Rofo, 2010).

This effect, known as the *ideomotor effect*, works in reverse as well. Just as “elderly theme” words lead to elderly behaviour, so walking slowly leads to a greater tendency to recognise words related to old age, “such as forgetful, old, and lonely” (Kahneman, 2012, p. 54). Reciprocal links are common in the associative network and a number of experiments have demonstrated this. In one experiment participants were made to “smile” (by holding a pencil in their mouths sideways) while viewing Gary Larson’s *Far Side* cartoons, while another group was made to “frown” (by holding a pencil in their mouths aimed straight in front of them), while viewing the same cartoons:

“Those who were ‘smiling’ (without any awareness of doing so) found the cartoons funnier than did those who were ‘frowning’” (p. 54).

In an example relevant to LGATs, Kahneman (2012) explains that common gestures have an unconscious impact on our thoughts and feelings. The experiment required participants to listen to radio editorials, having been told they were testing the quality of the audio equipment. In order to elicit distortions, half of the participants were told to nod their heads up and down, while the other half were told to shake their heads from side to side. It was found that an unconscious association was made between nodding (an act of agreement) and accepting the message in the radio editorial:

“Those who nodded (a yes gesture) tended to accept the message they heard, but those who shook their heads tended to reject it. Again, there was no awareness, just a habitual connection between an attitude of rejection or acceptance and its common physical expression” (p. 54).

Gilovich and Ross (2016) explain that it is not only the message which can be subliminally influenced, but also the evaluation of the person presenting the message. Describing another experiment, in which participants were told their ability to multitask was being assessed, they state:

“The participants were asked to read about a character named Donald, and while doing so, to simultaneously move their hands through a detector - some by extending their middle finger upward, others by extending their thumb. As predicted, those with middle fingers extended judged Donald to be rather hostile; those with their thumbs pointed upward judged him to be likable and smart” (p. 106).

LGATs insist that participants applaud (an action associated with strong approval) at strategic points during the training. According to Kahneman (2012), this ovation will result in a positive association with the perspectives presented by the trainer and, according to Gilovich and Ross (2016), it will result in a positive association with the trainer himself. As mentioned earlier, LGATs also involve exercises which require participants to regress to their childhoods, and the LGAT environment has been described by academics as regressive (Haaken & Adams, 1983; Lieberman, 1987). Because children are less likely to question (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), priming suggests that a regressive environment will make participants more vulnerable to accepting ideas without analysing them.

Another example of Mystical Manipulation relevant to the LGAT environment is the use of certain images, or symbols to create the sense of being watched and deter autonomous behaviour. LGATs involve a trainer, positioned as an all-knowing, all-seeing authority figure, as well as a dozen or so assistants who constantly monitor the behaviour of participants. Kahneman (2012) alludes to the impact of this kind of priming with reference to Orwell's *1984*:

“Can there be any doubt that the ubiquitous portraits of the national leader in dictatorial societies not only convey the feeling that ‘Big Brother Is Watching’ but also lead to an actual reduction in spontaneous thought and independent action?” (p. 56).

Numerous commentators note the feeling of being constantly observed during LGATs. Haaken and Adams (1983) reflect on this experience during Lifespring:

“We found that the experience of having our movements monitored throughout the five days (while being told to be spontaneous) was particularly unsettling, evoking feelings of powerlessness and dependency” (p. 275).

Amanda Scioscia of the Phoenix New Times, Marita Vandenberg of Contact Magazine, Rosemary Mahoney of Elle Magazine, Marie Lemonnier of Le Nouvel Observateur, and Charles Rusnell and Jennie Russell of CBC News, make similar comments about the Landmark Forum:

“An ever-revolving cast of Landmark volunteers lines the tables at the back of the room. They stare blankly, smile incessantly and cover their mouths with their hands when they whisper to each other. They pass notes to Richard and bustle around in a hyperefficient flurry” (Scioscia, 2000).

“I also found it unsettling to have quite a number of Landmark volunteers – participants often remain in training as volunteers – at the back of the room scrutinising proceedings” (Vandenberg, 2000).

“While Handel works, volunteers at the back of the room wearing pumpkin-orange nametags are busily checking our applications and surveying the room like exam proctors” (Mahoney, 1998).

“Inside, ten volunteer assistants play the role of security guards, ready to jump if you try to take notes, or a picture, or talk in English” (Lemonnier, 2005).

“The complainant said Landmark volunteers, called ‘minders,’ were inside the conference room watching the participants and controlling the doors” (Rusnell & Russell, 2014).

Another example of Mystical Manipulation in an LGATs, according to Singer (2003), is the use of plants who eagerly follow the leader’s instructions, use the jargon, and model the correct behaviour:

“New customers are unaware that most LGATs allow or even encourage those who have taken the training before to reattend. These people serve as a clique or modeling section. They clap, speak the same jargon as the leader, make endorsing statements, and are models for the new customers to pattern themselves after. Because the returners talk the talk and walk the walk, they get good responses from the trainer when they make comments. New customers begin to pattern their language and demeanor after the behavior of these others who, they notice, receive praise for using certain language or revealing personal material” (pp. 193-194).

Because Singer had no personal experience of Landmark, it is important to comment on this practice within Landmark separately. Former Landmark participant and volunteer, Robert Black, explains that plants were used by Landmark to create a more convincing experience during its courses:

“What I did not know until later was that some of the testimonials were coming from volunteer assistants at the center who had already been through the Forum and other Landmark courses and were participating as a free refresher and to help the participants ‘get it’ and fully appreciate the life altering experience” (Black, 1997).

Another online commentator says that he was warned by a graduate about sitting next to people who were retaking the Forum, and who would likely be extremely enthusiastic about the training:

“He also said to avoid sitting next to the people with black bars on their badges, since they were graduates retaking the Forum, and were apt to be overly earnest in a way that would undoubtedly annoy me” (Drew, 2010).

Emotional manipulation

In addition to describing *behavioural* manipulation, Mystical Manipulation refers to the triggering of specific patterns of *emotion*. The clearest form of Mystical Manipulation regarding emotion is the “transformation”, “breakthroughs”, or “hypomania”, which occurs to some extent during the training, but more reliably – and typically more powerfully – at the end of the training. This “experience” is the major focus of this thesis and will be covered comprehensively in section 4.3.2.

The power of covert influence processes lies in what Singer (2003, p. 15) refers to as “The ‘Not Me’ Myth” - most people believe that they are logical and immune to manipulation. When told by one group (who stands to benefit from their uncritical trust) that they are invulnerable to covert persuasion, and then by a Nobel laureate and other independent academics (who have nothing to gain) that research demonstrates that we are all vulnerable to these processes, most choose to believe the group who will profit from their credulity. This in itself is an emotional, rather than rational, decision and Kahneman (2012) addresses those resistant to the findings on priming as follows:

“You do not believe that these results apply to you because they correspond to nothing in your subjective experience [...] The idea that you should focus on, however, is that disbelief is not an option. The results are not made up, nor are they statistical flukes. You have no choice but to accept that the major conclusions of these studies are true. More important, you must accept that they are true about *you*” (p. 57).

If LGATs (like Landmark) do use past participants to model *behaviour*, employ other forms of priming to provoke specific thoughts and *behaviours*, and do generate a powerful *emotional* experience that is only loosely connected to the principles of the training, then they do employ techniques which, at a minimum, remotely resemble Lifton’s second condition of thought reform, *Mystical Manipulation*.

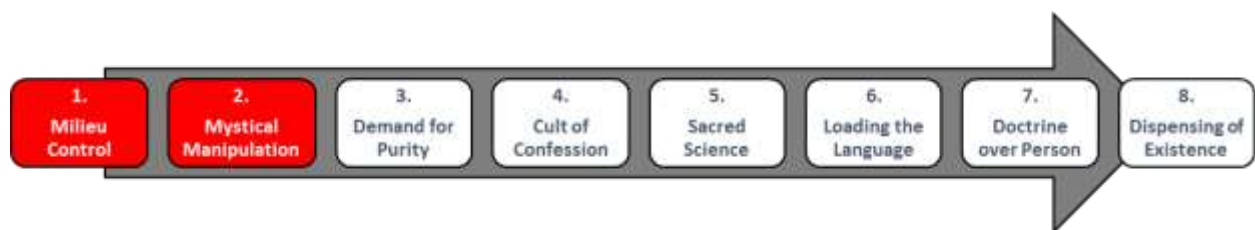


Figure 16: Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform in LGATs (2 of 8 conditions met).

As indicated in Figure 16, the second of Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform is present in LGATs. Lifton’s third condition, *Demand for Purity*, will now be considered.

Thought reform condition 3 of 8: Demand for Purity

Demand for Purity describes the way that Chinese interrogators divided people and thinking patterns into “pure and impure, into the absolutely good and the absolutely evil” (Lifton, 1961, p. 423). Prisoners were either western spies or reformed Communists. Subjects were judged in black and white terms, and Communist interrogators argued that all “‘taints’ and ‘poisons’ which contribute to the existing state of impurity must be searched out and eliminated” (p. 423). Because those controlling the thought reform environment set the arbitrary standards for purity, *Demand for Purity* was a powerful tool for eliciting feelings of guilt and shame in prisoners. Those running the environment

could convince prisoners that they were falling short of the (arbitrary) standards of purity, and use the guilt generated as a tool for influence:

“... by defining and manipulating the criteria of purity, and then by conducting an all-out war upon impurity, the ideological totalists create a narrow world of guilt and shame” (p. 424).

With reference to black and white thinking in est, Rhinehart (2010) quotes a trainer:

“I want you to *get this*: something is either experience or nonexperience; it’s either plus or it’s minus. The light bulb is on or it’s off. And to get from nonexperience to experience you have to go through *nothing*” (p. 27).

Researchers Haaken and Adams (1983) reflect on how, during Lifespring, extreme categorisation was similarly used to elicit black and white thinking:

“Within the narcissistic framework constructed by the training, the use of infantile splitting – dividing the relational world into ‘all good’ and ‘all bad’ objects emerged as a dominant defence against anxiety in the group” (p. 279).

Explaining how prisoners who failed to meet the standards for purity were treated, how prisoners began to value the guilt and shame, and how this process paradoxically led to closeness with the interrogators, Lifton (1961) states:

“Similarly, when he fails to meet the prevailing standards in casting out such impurities, he is expected to expect humiliation and ostracism – thus establishing a relationship of shame with his milieu. Moreover, the sense of guilt and the sense of shame become highly valued: they are preferred forms of communication, objects of public competition, and the bases for eventual bonds between the individual and his totalist accusers” (p. 424).

Notably, when referring to the *Demand for Purity*, Lifton (1961) states that the interrogators believed that any tactics used to convert prisoners were acceptable:

“The philosophical assumption underlying this demand is that absolute purity (the ‘good Communist’ or the ideal Communist State) is attainable, and that anything done in the name of this purity is ultimately moral” (p. 423).

Commenting on this attitude in est trainers, psychologist Carl Rogers pertinently stated:

“I’ve never been through est, and I don’t think I want to [...] Their goals are not too bad actually, but their means are horrendously authoritarian. I feel that they have completely lost the distinction between means and ends” (Pressman, 1993, p. 15).

The standards for purity in different LGATs may vary, but in est, Lifespring, and Landmark a major component is *accepting responsibility*. The “taints and poisons” which must be searched out and eliminated are resistances to this philosophy – those who challenge the trainer’s (extreme) stance on this subject are treated with hostility and derision, and a significant portion of the training is spent dealing with participants who refuse to fall in line with the “responsibility” doctrine. Those who do not submit (the “impure”) are labelled “closed-minded”, “uncoachable”, “obstinate”, “stubborn”, or “assholes”, while those who take on the LGAT philosophy (the “pure”) are accepted.

While on a micro level the numerous interactions between the trainer and the participants reflect a demand for purity, there is also a macro shift in the attitude towards participants from when they arrive to when they graduate. When the training begins, participants are treated with condescension, derision, and hostility. They are told that they do not even know what they do not know, that they lack integrity, that they all break agreements, that they are assholes, and that their lives do not work. Participants begin the training in an implicit state of “impurity”. When participants graduate, however, they are accepted as new and complete and perfect. From being subordinates to the all-knowing trainer, they become equals with the trainer (and attain “purity”).

In much the same way that LGAT trainers generate guilt and then provide acceptance, Lifton (1961, p. 424) comments on how those running thought reform environments were able to both elicit guilt, and then provide acceptance and “forgiveness” to those who converted to the new ideology:

“People vary greatly in their susceptibilities to guilt and shame (as my subjects illustrated), depending upon patterns developed early in life. But since guilt and shame are basic to human existence, this variation can be no more than a matter of degree. Each person is made vulnerable through his profound inner sensitivities to his own limitations and to his unfulfilled potential; in other words, each is made vulnerable through his existential guilt. Since ideological totalists become the ultimate judges of good and evil within their world, they are able to use these universal tendencies toward guilt and shame as emotional levers for their controlling and manipulative influences. They become the arbiters of existential guilt, authorities without limit in dealing with others’ limitations. And their power is nowhere more evident than in their capacity to ‘forgive’.”

The move from impure to pure (“forgiveness”) can be seen in all LGATs. Mark Brewer indicates that this switch occurred in est:

“... the recruits were always referred to as assholes [...] until they ‘got it’” (Brewer, 1975).

Laura McClure of Mother Jones Magazine explains how their Forum leader – who had spent days castigating participants for their shortcomings – treated them at the Tuesday graduation:

“David tears up for the third time in two hours. ‘I love you forever,’ he tells us. ‘If you ever wonder if someone loves you, the answer is yes. David loves you’” (McClure, 2009).

Demand for Purity is best observed in the interactions between the trainer and participants, described in some detail in the following section. In addition to the section just covered, the following section shows that Landmark’s processes, at a minimum, remotely resemble *Demand for Purity*.

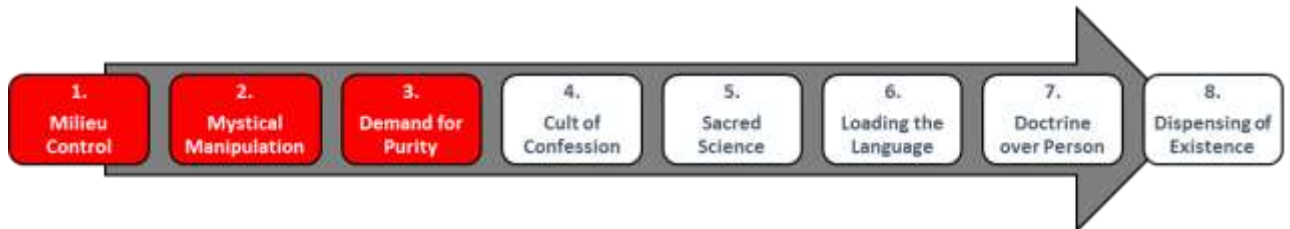


Figure 17: Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform in LGATs (3 of 8 conditions met).

As indicated in Figure 17, the third of Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform is present in LGATs.

Thought reform condition 4 of 8: Cult of Confession

“Once arrested, the prisoner must come to understand the following version of his predicament: he is in prison because the government considers him a criminal; his crime is obvious to everyone but him; his first task is to understand the nature of his crime, and in this task the government will do its best to help him [...] If he is honest with himself he will discover his guilt more rapidly and proceed easily to what is expected of the criminal: admission of guilt by confession, subsequent repentance, and reform of the undesirable thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and actions” (Schein, 1961, p. 140)⁷⁷.

Cult of Confession follows *Demand for Purity*, as the guilt created by failing to attain the arbitrary standards of purity can only be purged through “cleansing” confessions. The primary role of confession, according to Lifton (1961), is to cause prisoners guilt, and the role of the interrogator is to convince the prisoner that he has committed “crimes”. Lifton explains that “the demand that one confess to crimes one has not committed, to sinfulness that is artificially induced...” (p. 425) is a core feature of *Cult of Confession*. Referring to the work of psychologist Edgar Schein on American prisoners of war, Cialdini (2007) adds that seemingly benign acts of confession and self-criticism were used by the Chinese to achieve greater control of prisoners:

“Thus, while ‘only a few men were able to avoid collaboration altogether,’ according to Dr. Schein, ‘the majority collaborated at one time or another by doing things which seemed to them trivial but

⁷⁷ Psychologist Edgar Schein, like psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton, studied prisoners subjected to thought reform (which Schein called “coercive persuasion”) during the Korean War. In addition to Lifton’s 1961 book *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, Schein’s 1961 book *Coercive Persuasion* is considered the authoritative early text on brainwashing during the Korean War.

which the Chinese were able to turn to their own advantage... This was particularly effective in eliciting confessions, self-criticism, and information during interrogation” (p. 71).

Sharing

As described earlier, confession in LGATs begins through what is framed “sharing”. Participants are invited to stand and relate problems they are experiencing to the group (which may be dozens to hundreds of people), they are then encouraged to publicly “take responsibility”, after which they receive acceptance from the trainer and applause from the group. While LGAT trainers call this “sharing”, publicly acknowledging responsibility for causing pain to others (or yourself) is confession. This process may cause stress for both the person sharing and other participants who, bound by agreements to remain silent, must sit and watch while painful experiences are revealed:

“A core part of Landmark technology is the grand moment of confession on a microphone. It’s a public unloading that can suddenly turn into psychological rape if the coach decides to exert his authority by challenging someone. Today, the victim will be Danielle⁷⁸, a mother who talks about her problems with her daughter. The scene is chilling...” (Lemonnier, 2005).

Mary Braid of *The Independent* similarly suggests that “sharing” is effectively a public confession, while Nathan Thornburgh of *Time Magazine* provides insight into the sorts of problems shared:

“Jane, a 40-year-old manager, says that she seemed to be the only participant on one weekend to find the ‘school’ rules, didactic platform tone and Jerry-Springer-style public confessions, pretty unbearable” (Braid, 2003).

“These opaque missives came to life, though, through ‘sharing,’ the testimonials that participants gave at the microphones. In our course, at least, this became a speed-walk through the awful things that people do to themselves and to each other – infidelity, incest, anorexia, abuse. Weeping at the mike was so common that one dry-eyed grandmother seemed compelled to explain, ‘If I wasn’t taking antidepressant pills, I’d be crying right now’” (Thornburgh, 2011).

Vanessa Grigoriadis of *New York Magazine* and blogger Jim Drew provide further insight:

“An Indian woman admits she doesn’t really love her husband. A 28-year-old attorney tells her deepest secret. ‘I moved from Somalia to London when I was 6, and my English was quite bad,’ she says, a tremulous murmur in her voice. ‘The nuns at the school told me to bring in money for lunch or to bring in a lunch from home. I didn’t understand, so I brought both, every day. The nun kept asking, ‘Why aren’t you eating the lunch you paid for?’ This went on for a month or so. One

⁷⁸ This is the woman who was filmed in the France 3 documentary. As at 8 August 2017, the full video can be accessed at http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1243&Itemid=12

day, she made me stay after the other kids left. She put the school lunch in front of me, and even though I'd already eaten my lunch from home, she made me eat it. I got so sick to my stomach that I threw up in the plate. And she made me eat that, too" (Grigoriadis, 2001).

"What was most amazing/appalling about these on-mike cases was the issues they brought up. Marital separation and divorce showed up almost every time, along with references to childhood abuse, sexual abuse on a family member, and so on" (Drew, 2010).

Sharing is a major focus in LGATs and, while it is stressful in itself, it is the way that those sharing are treated by trainers which is central to the generation of stress. Not satisfied with having participants describe their traumatic experiences, trainers insist that participants accept responsibility for them.

From "sharing" to confession

Sharing traumatic information cannot be considered confession until the sharer acknowledges responsibility for that trauma. LGATs encourage sharing, but pressure participants to accept liability, converting the process to confession, and eliciting frustration, humiliation, shame, uncertainty and guilt - all under the guise of empowerment. While taking responsibility is noble, and while it is important to understand that there is more than one perspective, LGATs stretch the concepts of responsibility and social constructionism beyond reasonable limits, creating a mechanism which results in guilt and shame. The Landmark philosophy regarding responsibility and constructionism is essentially that there are events ("facts"), that there are interpretations of those events ("stories"), and that individuals frequently conflate the "facts" of what happened with the "story" of what happened. Trainers argue that individuals can *choose* to interpret the facts in a less distressing way and that *choosing* to interpret them in a way that is distressing is no one's fault but their own.

The danger of this philosophy is that there is some validity to it. As discussed earlier, Landmark trainers advocate a form of cognitive restructuring that is almost identical to the A-B-C framework of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy. The idea that our interpretation of events, rather than the events themselves, plays the key role in the psychological consequences of those events was acknowledged by Albert Ellis as a major influence on the most common form of contemporary psychotherapy:

"Ellis acknowledged his debt to the ancient Greeks, especially the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, who said around 2,000 years ago: 'People are disturbed not by events, but by the views they take of them'" (Corey, 2013, p. 267).

While cognitive restructuring is a legitimate therapeutic process, there is no reason to suppose that it would be more effective in an environment of public humiliation. Typically, in therapy there is a period during which the client transitions towards seeing the experience in the desired way. A trained

therapist guides clients through this process, achieving in them a sense of responsibility and control while minimising feelings of guilt. LGATs, however, ask participants to stand in front of strangers, urge them to reveal traumatic experiences, and then harass them until they embrace the new cognitive framework. If the goal of sharing is cognitive restructuring, then the humiliation is unnecessary. If, however, the goal is to generate stress, then the LGAT process is working as designed.

Responsibility

“There's no problem so awful that you can't add some guilt to it and make it even worse” - Calvin⁷⁹

LGATs take the idea of accepting responsibility and stretch it from a virtue to a device for eliciting stress and guilt from individuals who often have no reason to feel stressed or guilty. The way that participants are admonished to take responsibility for illegitimate crimes mirrors what Lifton (1961) described as “sinfulness that is artificially induced” (p. 425) - a key feature of Cult of Confession. Singer (2003, p. 194) explains how LGATs achieve this:

“The well-known LGATs claim that you have caused everything that ever happened to you, from choosing your parents to breaking your leg, from getting yourself jilted to having been molested by your stepfather as a child. Trainers use the terms accountable and responsible, but not with their ordinary meaning. Trainers mean that you will, if you ‘get it’ start to make choices patterned after the way the organization advocates. They create guilt and fear in you that you have created all the bad things that have ever happened in your life.”

Three interconnected arguments are put forward by trainers during sharing: the first is that participants’ interpretations of traumatic experiences are invalid (and, implicitly, that the trainer is the only one who can interpret reality); the second is that participants choose how they interpret any event and are, therefore, responsible for any suffering relating to it; and the third is that failing to acknowledge responsibility for a traumatic experience reveals (to the trainer and all of the other participants) character flaws such as self-pity, dishonesty, and the need for attention. Participants must therefore (1) relive traumatic experiences (both their own and those of fellow participants); (2) accept that these experiences were their own fault (“responsibility”); and (3) (until they acknowledge responsibility) be taunted for being self-pitying, dishonest, and self-serving. This elicits stress.

Even when participants accept the logic provided by the trainer (which occurs with disquieting regularity), this typically only takes place after a “battle” with the trainer. Participants stand up and share their experiences, after which the trainer publicly engages with them. For many, these confrontations are difficult to experience, or observe, and – because participants can be distracted by

⁷⁹ (Watterson, 1995, p. 33).

the philosophical content – they may be oblivious to the multitude of regulatory defences triggered in their bodies and brains. Like skilled magicians, LGAT leaders divert attention away from the source of the magic – the allostatic defence against a hostile environment – and when “breakthroughs” occur participants place undeserved significance on the LGAT philosophy and its attached obligations.

Because confession is central to the generation of stress in LGATs, it is important to thoroughly review evidence for this assertion and, since Singer’s (2003) earlier description did not incorporate est and Landmark, it is necessary to consider them separately. Referring to sharing in est, Finkelstein, et al. (1982) state, “But while the trainer punishes self-assertion, he also rewards undefended self-disclosure” (p. 531). These authors also comment on est’s emphasis on responsibility:

“Est testimonials about responsibility are numerous, and describe dramatic changes in assumption of responsibility. Bry, for example, writes: ‘est goes far beyond providing people with ways to deal with their personal problems. Its most far-reaching effect will undoubtedly come from the issue of responsibility, specifically the notions of self-responsibility and being at the cause of our lives’ (Bry 1976, p. 219)” (p. 536).

Psychology Today journalist Mark Brewer also describes est’s approach to sharing and responsibility:

“It’s your own fault. Gradually, Tony moved on to another mainstay in the est body of knowledge, the idea of ‘taking responsibility for your life.’ It is basically the perception that your problems aren’t caused by sickness or fate or other people, they are caused by you, and until you accept that, you’ll never solve any of them. Not surprisingly, almost everyone in the room had an example of some exception in his own case, but Tony would have none of it. He wouldn’t have cared if you’d been gang-raped or born with a brain defect, it was no goddamn excuse” (Brewer, 1975).

Pressman (1993) reveals the extremes to which these philosophies are taken. No exceptions are entertained because the philosophy is considered beyond questioning (see *Sacred Science*):

“During est’s early years, Erhard sometimes went so far as to assert that 6 million Jews had been ‘responsible’ for their own deaths during the Holocaust of World War II” (p. 72)⁸⁰.

Since Brewer and Pressman were generally critical of est, the description by est advocate Luke Rhinehart of an (apparently typical) event is useful. In the following exchange a participant, “Diane”, is told that her perspective – that being molested was “dirty” – is just an interpretation; she is taunted by the trainer who suggests that she is responsible for *choosing* to experience it that way:

⁸⁰ While Landmark told news.com.au that there is “absolutely no similarity” between Landmark and Scientology (Reynolds, 2016), former senior church executive, Mike Rinder, explains that this extreme philosophy – which is a central, rather than peripheral, feature of est and Landmark’s “technology” – is also central to Scientology’s “technology”. In season 2, episode 11, of the television series *Scientology and the Aftermath*, he states, “In Scientology there is a concept that you are fully responsible for everything that happens to you” (Remini, 2017).

“When Don asked us to contact an image from the past I got the time when I was ten years old and my uncle molested me. I’ve remembered this incident ever since it occurred – it wasn’t something I had repressed. I was playing on my uncle’s lap when my parents were out and he began doing dirty things with his hands and then making me do dirty things with mine. When I – ’

‘Hold it, Diane,’ Don interrupts. “Dirty things’ is your belief system, your concept, it’s something you just added then and are adding now to what actually occurred.’

Diane stares at Don at first without replying.

‘I was only ten years old!’ she says.

‘I got that’, says Don. ‘And your uncle touched your right elbow, is that right?’

‘No! He touched me... between the legs.’

‘Good. I got it. Go on.’

‘Well,’ says Diane, now a little flushed. ‘He molested me and later I realized what I had done wrong. My mother – ’

‘I’m sorry, Diane,’ interrupts Don again. ‘This coming weekend when we talk about reality and ‘Who did it?’ you’ll understand why I want you to look now at *who* is making what you and your uncle did ‘dirty’ or ‘wrong.’”

‘Everybody does. It was *dirty*,’ says Diane.

‘You choose to experience it as dirty,’ says Don, standing on the platform opposite Diane. ‘Look, in a graduate seminar a woman shared that for four years she had committed incest with her father and she felt terrible about it. There was incest and there was her feeling terrible about it. Immediately after that woman finished sharing another woman stood up and said, ‘I just realized listening to this woman how much I loved my father and part of me wished my father had committed incest with me. It almost seems like it would have been wonderful.’ Now it’s not that one woman is right and the other one wrong. What I want you to get is that the same physical event can be *experienced* as dirty or wonderful’” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 95).

The theme of responsibility emerges repeatedly throughout *est*, and other LGATs. When one shifts from accepting that it serves an altruistic purpose, and considers the possibility that its primary function is to generate tension, humiliation, and guilt, the tactic becomes quite evident:

“Next Saturday you’ll find out who *really* did Linda dirt, and it wasn’t daddy. You’ll find out who really screwed up Zania and it wasn’t *her* daddy. You’ll find out who *really* screwed up *your* life and it wasn’t *your* daddy... So just don’t draw any brilliant conclusions. Whenever you have a thought,

try to remember that you're an asshole and that any thought making an appearance in your mind is probably just another turd" (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 77).

Finkelstein, et al. (1982) provide further insight into sharing, and est's philosophy of responsibility, while revealing the stressful nature of the experience and, crucially, the "goal-attainment" of completing the exercises and training:

"The socially anxious trainee, looking for approval and validation from others rather than from himself, comes face to face in the training with a punitive, authoritarian, invulnerable trainer who ridicules, abuses, and shouts at him in front of 250 people, demolishing his feeble counterattacks and reducing him to a state of apparent foolishness. Yet he survives! In fact, the trainer repeatedly reminds the trainee that he constitutes his own world, is the agent of his own distress, and cannot be touched by others unless he decides to be touched. Thus, even while stripping the trainee of his usual defences, the trainer provides a new cognitive framework which explains to the trainee how he has come unscathed through public humiliation ordinarily perceived as devastating⁸¹" (p. 532).

The same "responsibility logic" is, ironically, used by est and other LGATs to escape responsibility for, and invalidate resistance to, verbally abusive comments made by the trainer:

"And I don't put people down. I just make statements. If some of these statements make you feel down that's your contribution, not mine" (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 14).

"I've been calling you assholes. Fine! Get it and note what you add to it: resentment, anger, bewilderment, depression, amusement, hatred, shame – whatever it is you add to being called an asshole. Whatever you add: that's part of your assholiness. Your mechanicalness. Just look at it. You resent me. No big deal. Happens in the best of families. Just observe it and note it's yours; not mine. I give you the words, 'You're an asshole.' The rest is all your creation..." (p. 23).

According to Fisher M. (1987), Lifespring also advocated "sharing" and participants quickly bought into the idea that they were responsible:

"It's sharing time. Egged on by the trainer, people stand and tell the group that they have suddenly realised that all those times they thought they were victims, they were really responsible for what happened."

A newsletter distributed by The Skeptic (1989, p. 1) made similar statements about Lifespring's constructionist thinking – that reality is subjective and may be interpreted in a variety of ways:

⁸¹ It will be argued that participants endure this cruelty through a primarily biological, as opposed to cognitive, adaptation (the allostatic manic-defence).

“The idea seems to be to use emotional stress to break down the participant’s resistance to conformity with Lifespring concepts, the foremost being that the only reality is subjective – everything that happens to a person occurs as a result of his own intentions.”

Psychologist Janice Haaken and sociologist Richard Adams participated in the Lifespring Basic training, and published their work in *Psychiatry* in August 1983:

“Shifting from the emphasis upon submission and trust, the trainer suggested that we were totally responsible for all events, in our lives – ‘100 per cent accountable’ – including the selection of our parents. An exercise designed to illustrate the theme of ‘taking full responsibility’ involved the use of pairs [...] Several people told stories about having been beaten by a parent as a child. We were then instructed to retell the story from a position of 100 per cent accountability - in other words, how we ‘set things up to be that way’” (Haaken & Adams, 1983, p. 276).

Marc Fisher of the Washington Post describes the same process:

“There are ‘dyads,’ in which participants sit across from a partner, stare into each other’s eyes and speak. Each trainee tells of being a victim – in a fight, in business, in a relationship. Next you retell the story as if what happened was your own fault. This is taking responsibility” (Fisher M., 1987).

It should be noted that, while reinterpretation (framing negative events as positive) can be an empowering tool for those who have experienced something painful, it can also be used to justify or downplay unethical behaviour⁸². One has to question the validity of LGAT assurances that they are not stressful when, based on their core philosophy, the Holocaust and child molestation are not stressful either. According to the extreme LGAT interpretations of constructionism and responsibility, death camps and molestation are not inherently negative, but may simply be interpreted as such by those who *choose* to experience them in this way. Mother Jones journalist, Laura McClure (2009), describes how this philosophy is used by Forum leaders to inflict shame on those sharing:

“‘You know the mood of celebration after the last share?’ She nods. ‘What’s in the room now?’ David shakes his head ruefully. ‘You were ‘screamed at’ by your sister? There’s no such thing as screaming.’ People start fidgeting and making for the door; there hasn’t been a bathroom break in three hours. ‘You see, people are leaving,’ David says. ‘This is why people don’t want to be around you, why your siblings don’t want to be around you. You’re too *dead* to feel,’ he says.”

⁸² Referring to the process of “attribution”, and the importance of being able to independently make sense of interactions and situations, Branscombe and Baron (2017, p. 105) explain, “... only if we understand the causes behind others’ actions or events can we hope to make sense of the social world (and potentially prevent bad outcomes from happening in the future)”. While claiming to enhance independence and freedom (by asserting that participants can assign any meaning to any event), LGATs undermine autonomy by obliterating participants’ confidence in making sense of experiences and, concurrently, imposing their own attributional framework.

Many journalists, bloggers, and members of the public have described their experiences of sharing, and how those who share are treated. While LGAT proponents often portray these interactions as “tough love”, this chillingly distorted sense of justifiable behaviour is likely a consequence of the very processes which are being rationalised, rather than an objective reflection of these processes:

“We’re encouraged to share and, schooled by Oprah in what to do with a platform and a neurosis, people rush to the microphone to have Jerry lay waste to their tales of parental neglect, social deprivation and emotional hardship [...] One after another Jerry lambasts those who take the microphone to complain about how hard, harsh and unfair their lives have been. He pushes them through stages of anger, tears and denial until they stand face to face with their own delusions, deceptions and contrivances” (Hill, 2003).

“And, throughout the three days, various people stood up, shaking with rage, and revealed all the terrible things that had happened to them that meant they couldn’t do whatever they wanted to – people had been raped, or abused, or one person had killed their father by mistake. And the leader would shout back at them, and ridicule them for their self-pity or hypocrisy or whatever, until eventually they accepted the leader’s point of view, had a ‘breakthrough’, and converted to a new way of seeing reality” (Evans, 2010).

Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine, Rosemary Mahoney of Elle Magazine, Traci Hukill of Metro News San Francisco, Woodhouse and Vandenberg of Contact Magazine, and Jana Martin of Swing Generation Magazine all describe the Landmark concept of “stories”. While positioned as an empowering philosophy, this extreme constructionist perspective allows the trainer to reinterpret any event or experience and this, furtively, allows the trainer to dictate reality to participants:

“Willmore introduces the idea of separating ‘what happened’ from ‘the story about what happened’” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

“Stabbing at the blackboard with a rivet-thick piece of chalk, she posits one of the central rungs in the Forum’s ideological ladder: The way we live is based on an unreality we ourselves concoct. With our interpretations, speculations, and opinions we invest ‘what happened’ with our emotions and come up with a story that has nothing to do with reality” (Mahoney, 1998).

“To show how stories work, Regnier draws a diagram of two overlapping circles on the board. One represents the facts of something that happened and the other our interpretation. We can change misery-inducing stories, he explains, by changing our interpretation of events. ‘This really works for people,’ Regnier says, tapping the ‘interpretation’ side of the diagram with a sage nod. ‘Even Auschwitz,’ he says cryptically, leaving us to wonder how that particular revision would go” (Hukill, 1998).

“What you learn in the end is that the only meaning in life is the meaning that you give to it, she said” (Woodhouse & Vandenberg, 2000).

“So this is the lesson on stories. ‘This is important,’ he cautions. ‘You need to find out where what happened became your interpretation, which took over to become your story of what happened’” (Martin, 1998).

Ray Clancy of the London Times explains how one participant (whose wife had done the Forum, told him he had to take the training, and let him know that, if he did not, it would cause problems at home) explained that he had been pressured by his wife to attend. LGAT trainers, for reasons that will be discussed later, convince participants that they have *freely chosen* to participate. The “story” concept is used by the trainer in this instance to achieve this result:

“He again asked what had happened and persuaded the man that his ‘story’ was ‘an interpretation of the facts’ and that the facts were that his wife had asked him to go, he had agreed and he had turned up: therefore there was no pressure. The man sat down” (Clancy, *Victims Lured Into Baring Their Souls By Mind Games*, 1992).

With reference to the subjective nature of experience, Charlotte Faltmermayer (2001) of Time Magazine says the following of her Landmark Forum leader:

“Handel, 39, then drew diagrams on a blackboard as she held forth a series of concepts: facts have no meaning; it is the stories we concoct out of those facts that give them meaning.”

Karin Badt of the Huffington Post and Amanda Scioscia of the Phoenix New Times explain how Landmark Forum leaders convince participants that their interpretation of the event is what is causing them pain and, crucially, that holding onto these stories reveals some negative trait:

“We are constantly affixing ‘stories’ to events rather than seeing the separation between ‘event’ and ‘interpretation,’ and these stories are usually based in our self-righteous feeling of being wronged” (Badt, 2011).

“Richard explains that what happens to us has no effect on our lives. It’s all about our interpretation of what happened. A young woman named Kim takes the microphone and talks about her abusive, alcoholic father. Richard tells her she’s suffering now from her interpretation of her father’s actions. She breaks down and sobs. Richard tells her it’s a racket” (Scioscia, 2000).

In addition to numerous journalists, who have described the Landmark philosophy and the way that it is used, many bloggers and online contributors have depicted similar experiences:

“There was a woman at LF who was raped and afraid of life. The LF people said that was an event and her life was the ‘story’ about the event – in other words – get over it” (Hope, 2002).

Describing the philosophy witnessed while participating in the Forum, '\$375lighter' states:

"Convince customers that all the crummy things that have happened in their lives are only fantasies or lies they made up to support their negative feelings about those events ('rackets'). For example, if a customer's father used to beat him, you must make the customer accept that his feeling that 'my father is a bad guy who beats his kids' is a total fabrication (a 'story') and all such fantasies must be banished. Convince him that his father really did love him but had an odd way of showing it" (\$375lighter, 2002).

The concept of responsibility is implicit in many statements made during these one-on-one confrontations; however, trainers also explicitly state that participants are responsible for whatever traumatic experience they are sharing. While LGATs argue that they advocate *responsibility* and not *blame*, it is clear that they have not been able to avoid this "misunderstanding". Either LGATs intentionally convey a sense of blame to participants, or they do so unwittingly because of an inability to communicate effectively. Since LGAT leaders are self-professed communication experts, they are, therefore, either intentionally generating guilt, or incompetent. Rosemary Mahoney of Elle Magazine and Mary Braid of The Independent reveal how participants are urged to take responsibility, and the impact of this process:

"We're given an opportunity to 'share.' One man steps to the microphone and says that his wife is having an affair and he's in a lot of pain. Handel suggests this pain is not his wife's responsibility; his, and it's for him to handle it. He has to forgive her. Making her wrong will get him nowhere. A woman tells us she has problems with her sister, a man has been scarred by his father's violent treatment of him. The suffering contained in this ugly room is palpable" (Mahoney, 1998).

"During the first day, we were asked to talk about our most painful experiences,' says Julie. 'One girl said she had been raped by her father. She was told to ask herself why her father had done that. The Forum tries to get you to put a different interpretation on things. I went home so sad and so drained'" (Braid, 2003).

Diana Odasso of the Huffington Post explains, with a comment intended to display the insight of Forum leaders, how the reinterpretation of events is used to convince participants that they are responsible for the problems in their lives:

"A typical story: My rotten father left when I was eight, he ruined our lives and now I cannot trust men. I am middle-aged and single. (Good God, who *are* these people?) After a bit of fact-checking, our coach tears apart their logic in a trenchant French accent. 'He left because your mother was unfaithful. Since you are an ungrateful brat, you never returned his calls. Too bad you are single, it is your fault'" (Odasso, 2011).

James O'Brien of GQ Magazine describes a similar situation – a woman relates a painful childhood experience and is told that she brought the pain upon herself and that she is being dishonest by blaming others for her problems:

“He grabs some chalk and draws two circles on the board. One represents the day her father failed to show; the other represents her interpretation of it. ‘They have nothing to do with each other,’ he says. ‘His failing to show did not hurt you’, he tells her. ‘How you perceived it hurt you. You go around blaming your father for your problems when really it’s your view that has created a barrier. You need to stop running this racket’” (O'Brien, 2012).

Online contributor, ‘Hope’, summarises the Landmark approach as follows:

“A participant gets in and is asked to tell about a horrible experience. LE then takes this description and applies their agenda to the situation and takes any human failing as proof that they’ve been living a life that’s a story, chock full of rackets, because they didn’t take responsibility” (Hope, 2003).

Blogger Sarah Fazeli explains how, after “sharing” about her rape and other deeply personal issues, she was made to feel that it was all her fault:

“I might have stayed even longer, but then I heard this: Everything in your life is your fault, including your rape. They were such assholes to me onstage after I’d bared my soul, and talked about everything from being raped to my husband never wanting to have sex with me. The upshot was essentially, *Guess what, bitch? It’s all your fault!*”⁸³ (Fazeli, 2012).

Blogger Ajith Prasad (2012) notes that, while some participants confess to crime, infidelity, sexual deviance, dangerous obsessions, and drug abuse, even the most innocuous “confessions” are turned into evidence of dysfunction, and the need for transformation:

“The leader was trying his best to prove that such people’s life (those sexagenarians and happy senior citizens) is sham, disgusting and they need a transformation in life.”

Another blogger reveals how some participants are not only convinced that their traumatic experience was their own fault, but that they are the source of pain for many people around them. Presumably, if everyone is responsible for their own experience, then asserting that participants are responsible for other peoples’ pain is contradictory. If, however, you consider that the primary goal of these interactions might be to generate guilt, then this argument makes sense:

⁸³ It is useful to continually reflect on Dr Raymond Fowler’s description of “pleasant” and “sensitive” Landmark Forum leaders, and to ask how so many independent descriptions could be in stark contrast to his endorsement.

“In these public sessions there were a few people who came to realize that not only were they not necessarily victimized by the other people in their lives, but they themselves had been the cause of a small trail of destruction in which they had left several people devastated in their wake” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

In addition to urging participants to take responsibility for painful events, LGATs frequently assert that participants obstinately hold onto painful experiences because it provides them with a pay-off. Again, this may be true in certain cases, but LGATs assert that this philosophy is valid in every circumstance, for every participant (see *Thought reform condition 5 of 8: Sacred Science*). This generalisation, while not logically defensible, allows trainers to mock and harass participants for not simply letting go of their painful experiences. Rhinehart (2010) relates what happened when a participant challenged an est trainer for the way he treated a sick girl:

(PARTICIPANT): “I’m upset,” he says in an emotional voice. “I see no reason whatever for you to be so rude to people. You could have told that girl how to use that bag without insulting her and making fun of her every step of the way...”

“... You could be polite. You could have helped her.”

TRAINER: “Sure. That’s the game Marie’s probably used to having people play when she creates a sickness: ‘Poor Marie! Has to puke. Poor baby!’” (p. 17).

Landmark, while claiming to instil responsibility, similarly attempts to make participants feel bad about their experiences, and then hides behind the “You are responsible for how you feel” concept. Martin (1998) reveals how trainers insist that participants simply enjoy feeling sorry for themselves:

“We spin single events into epic stories that we cling to, he continues, ‘because being damaged is a great excuse.’ He acts out, dangling one arm. ‘See?’ he says. ‘I’m damaged. Ten years ago I broke my arm. It was so traumatic!’”

Roland Howard (2001) of the Daily Mail reveals the stress that this belief system causes when addressing more sensitive topics:

“But it is only on the second day when a young man comes to the microphone that my misgivings turn to anger. He tells us with tears streaming down his face that he had been raped by his brother for most of his childhood. He had taken David’s advice the day before and phoned his brother to create a breakthrough. ‘I was willing to give up the pain for a good relationship,’ he says. His brother had put down the phone. David urges him to phone again. ‘Rape is interpretation. Brutality is interpretation,’ he says. He had to forgive him. ‘Get off your guilt and grow up,’ he snaps.”

An important point about LGATs is that, while they strongly urge participants to share, it is not possible for every person to personally experience a public engagement with the trainer. However, because people generally have empathy and are social by nature, the psychologically charged and often deeply personal public revelations of subjects such as incest, rape, abuse, neglect, and damaged relationships, coupled with the trainer's treatment of these individuals, is traumatic to watch. For this reason it is not necessary for every participant to engage with the trainer. Landmark Director of Public Relations, Deborah Beronet Miller, explains that (as with est) a person need only remain in the room in order to get the benefits of the Forum:

“No one has to say or do anything; it's strictly a matter of personal choice and you will still get the benefits of the course even if you choose to just very quietly sit there and listen to everything going on” (ABC, 2011).

““There is absolutely no pressure for anyone to speak publicly,’ Beronet said in a telephone interview from Chicago... ‘The course leaders always makes it clear that there is no obligation to speak publicly, let alone share things about yourself or your life you are not comfortable sharing, but you can also completely get all the benefits of the course without ever getting up and saying anything to the group’” (Rusnell & Russell, 2014).

While empathetic participants – who experience the training as stressful – will likely get the “benefits” by simply staying in the room, it is necessary for some participants to be publicly humiliated. Henry Alford of The New York Times, Rusnell and Russell of CBC News, Canada, and Emma Reynolds of news.com, Australia, suggest that Beronet Miller understates, or misrepresents, the pressure to share:

“Attendees are constantly encouraged – no, badgered – to get up to the mic and share. (‘If your hand isn't raised,’ Roger said to my group repeatedly, ‘then you're not in the Forum!’)” (Alford, 2010).

“The complainant felt pressured to share personal information. ‘The [leader] said, ‘If you are still sitting there and you haven't shared, you are obviously leading a mediocre life and there is nothing I can do for you’” (Rusnell & Russell, 2014).

“They don't dictate that you have to share but they create an environment where you don't feel you have a choice” (Reynolds, 2016).

Simply watching a person being publicly shamed is stressful for any person who possesses empathy, and – because participants have agreed to sit quietly – the sense of guilt and helplessness is heightened as participants are unable to offer support or intervene. Blogger Sarah Fazeli (2012) reveals how she was treated by a trainer and how, initially, this elicited concern from participants:

“Streams of people came up to me after I got up to do ‘the work’ (translation: get emotionally eviscerated/abused in public).

‘The way she talked to you up there made me sick.’

‘After witnessing that, I don’t think I can come back for another day.’

‘That was unconscionable’.”

Laura McClure of Mother Jones Magazine hints at the emotional impact of the sharing. It is difficult to witness these sorts of reactions without reacting emotionally yourself:

“In the scribbled shorthand of my furtive notes, PW stands for ‘incidents of public weeping.’ I lose track after the PW count hits 65” (McClure, 2009).

While eliciting guilt, humiliation, and tears from participants, trainers prevent participants from helping, or encouraging, the person while he/she shares, and chastise those who use the breaks to offer comfort to these individuals. Minimising social support is a useful way to heighten stress (Sapolsky, 2004), and it will be argued that, in the absence of social support, other stress-mitigating mechanisms must compensate:

“Basically, the leader had people stand up and share stories, which were heart breaking. One woman’s kid was run over by a car and as she sobbed people weren’t allowed to comfort her. This guy wasn’t a shrink and kept telling her that she was responsible for her pain due to the meaning she placed on the incident” (jman76, 2009).

“After she stood up a break was called. We then reconvened. The leader announced that everyone who had gone up to her and consoled her were her enemies, and went to her because of ‘the clearing that she was creating’” (toadhall, 2010).

The “story” philosophy on responsibility employed by Landmark, while offensive if employed tactlessly and in its extreme form, is intellectually defensible; however, a number of sources reveal that Landmark also uses a form of guilt-induction that is more esoteric in nature. Roland Howard of the Daily Mail and Marie Lemonnier of Le Nouvel Observateur relate how participants are made to feel that not only was their painful interpretation their choice, but that something they did *caused* the traumatic incident in the first place:

“Others were told that they were ‘disgusting’, that they had hidden agendas in the most innocent of transactions and that they had clearings for abuse (Forumspeak for an openness to things, which somehow means it will happen). In Forum psychobabble, women were deserted by their husbands because they had a clearing, even a desire, for this. One woman was told that she was attacked in

a six-hour attempted rape ordeal because she had a clearing in her psyche for men not to be trustworthy” (Howard, 2001).

“One day Françoise, 60 years old, dared to talk about having been sexually abused as a child. Martha, the trainer that day, retorted that ‘not all children get themselves abused’. Faced with an argument, Martha persisted: ‘Identity is formed at the age of two. We bring these things into our lives. It’s the way of being you adopt that determines whether things happen to you or not’” (Lemonnier, 2005)⁸⁴.

Online contributor ‘toadhall’ recounts a similar incident from his Forum participation:

“At one point I remember a girl standing up who had ‘popped’ and was basically saying to him ‘there are terrible things to happen to you which aren’t your fault, despite what you our leader are saying’. Her example was that she was raped. The leader then had to handle this delicately you might think, and he did, but he refused not to blame her for some part in the rape and said to her ‘you created a clearing for this to happen’” (toadhall, 2010).

After accepting responsibility, participants must call the person they have wronged to make amends (and to recruit them for the “graduation evening”). This is insisted upon regardless of whether you mistreated someone else, or whether you were mistreated by that person. Many of these phone calls are reconciliatory, but it should not be forgotten that they are *also* stressful:

“These insights led to the phone calls for which Landmark attendees are rightly famous, where they call some unsuspecting friend, relative or ex-lover to apologize for the ‘racket’ they have been running on them and to take ownership of whatever story they had created about their history together” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

Roland Howard of the Daily Mail relates how participants are urged to take responsibility for things they may have done wrong, and confess their role in these things to the person/people in question:

“A senior surgeon tearfully told of how he bullied a junior doctor because of her inefficiencies. He promised to write to her and ‘complete’ (apologise and resolve the issue) [...] A chief executive had written a ‘breakthrough letter’ to a colleague to apologise for sidelining and marginalising him within the company. He promised him a new beginning” (Howard, 2001).

While responsibility is presented as an important outcome of LGATs, Irvin Yalom argues that the subservient nature of LGAT volunteers suggests not autonomy, but rather a need to be controlled:

⁸⁴ “Doctor” Joe Vitale of *The Secret* fame writes an introduction to *The Book of est* (Rhinehart, 2010).

“Calling attention to the hierarchical structures and sometimes submissive behavior of volunteers, he argues that internal consistencies may belie a paradoxical attitude. At a superficial level est encourages responsibility, but at a deeper level est structures may actually oppose personal choice and reveal a longing for external restraints which runs counter to the authentic assumption of responsibility” (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, pp. 536-537).

In urging participants to take responsibility, trainers provide a new – and often counterintuitive – way of interpreting their experiences. Because trainers portray themselves as experts in this philosophy, participants come to depend on their interpretations and so, while billed as “taking responsibility”, this process may – ironically – undermine the autonomy of participants. While the impact of “sharing” and “taking responsibility” on autonomy and stress may be debated, it appears clear that these processes are a form of confession. Landmark’s (and other LGATs’) processes at a minimum, therefore, remotely resemble Lifton’s theme of *Cult of Confession*.



Figure 18: Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform in LGATs (4 of 8 conditions met).

As indicated in Figure 18, the fourth of Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform is present in LGATs.

Thought reform condition 5 of 8: Sacred Science

Sacred Science describes how the philosophy espoused in the environment is beyond question. Lifton (1961) explains how the environment’s doctrine transcends ordinary reason, claiming “airtight logic, of absolute ‘scientific’ precision” (p. 428). Whatever else *Sacred Science* achieves, its main function is to restrict individuality. Describing the veneration that the doctrine in a thought reform environment is treated with, and how it is expected to be accepted without questioning, Lifton says of this theme:

“This sacredness is evident in the prohibition (whether or not explicit) against the questioning of basic assumptions, and in the reverence which is demanded for the originators of the Word, the bearers of the Word, and the Word itself” (p. 427).

Consider, in light of Lifton’s description, how the est process was beyond question, the reverence demanded of trainers and, more specifically, the reverence demanded for the “originator of the Word”. Est proponent Rhinehart (2010) reveals how Erhard and his “science” were beyond question:

“You won’t get it because you’ve *tried* to get it, you won’t get it because you’re intelligent and bright and reasonable, you won’t get it because you’re a *good* person. You’ll get it for one simple reason: Werner has created the training so that you’ll get it” (p. 11).

LGAT leaders harass participants who question, tell participants that the training is beyond question, and assert that analysing, or trying to understand it, will prevent them from attaining the desired results. In this way, that the LGAT “technology” is presented as a Sacred Science. LGATs are also aware that the way a concept is framed affects the way that it is perceived and this understanding is evident in the description of their processes. The combination of lecturing, stress induction, sleep disruption, guided imagery, and other exercises employed by LGATs is grandiosely described as “technology”, suggesting a level of scientific precision that is, ironically, not supported by scientific evidence. Convincing participants that a philosophy, or “technology”, should not be questioned is an extension of the information control already discussed. In the case of participants, this restriction of thinking becomes self-imposed, however, and by undermining analytical thinking, LGATs subtly dismantle the ability of participants to question the processes, even after the training ends.

The four-step process of persuasion

“If someone doesn’t value evidence, what evidence are you going to provide to prove that they should value it? If someone doesn’t value logic, what logical argument could you provide to show the importance of logic?” (Harris, 2011).

The power of LGATs to change participants’ attitudes is tied to four key steps. Implicit in these steps is the assertion that their “technology” is a sacred science. The first step is to convince participants that analysing is a bad idea and that the “technology” is beyond questioning; the second step is to mentally exhaust participants; the third step is to convince participants that personal experience is the only dependable way of knowing anything; and the final step involves triggering an emotional “experience”. If participants believe that critical thinking will stand in the way of transformation, are mentally exhausted, less likely to examine assertions critically, convinced that experience (or intuition) is the only valid way to judge the training, and have a profound experience at the end of the training, they will be more likely to form an uncritical positive association between the experience and the LGAT principles. Additionally, it is asserted that beliefs which are formed without evidence (which are “beyond evidence”) are difficult to challenge using evidence. While research shows that intuition and emotion (“experience”) may be misleading (Kahneman, 2012), if LGATs can convince participants that logic should not be trusted they will be reluctant to consider logic which invalidates their experience. While the distortions in judgement associated with intuition will be covered later, psychologists Thomas Gilovich of Cornell and Lee Ross of Stanford précis the risks of “trusting your gut”:

“The field of judgment and decision making, meanwhile, has illuminated how and why people are quick to draw conclusions when they would be better served by stepping back and looking at things from a broader perspective. This field has undergone a revolution over the past forty years, a revolution that has made it clear that judgement and decision making have a lot in common with perception. Like perception, they are subject to illusions. Anyone aspiring to greater wisdom needs to know when to be on the lookout for these illusions and how to steer clear of them” (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 5).

Convincing people not to think is such an overt feature of brainwashing that it was parodied in the British comedy series, *Peep Show* (season 5, episode 6). In this exchange, Jez starts to question some of the cult’s message and fellow cult member, Super Hans, cautions him of the dangers of thinking:

SUPER HANS: You’re right on schedule... according to the book. Hard-backed book, based on tablets brought by an asteroid... something you can rely on...

JEZ (uncertain): Yeah... what do you think about the... asteroids stuff?

SUPER HANS: What, are you having a few doubts?

JEZ: No... God no... more, sort of... thoughts...

SUPER HANS: Thoughts? You wanna give that shit a rest. You been going around thinking thoughts your whole life and look where that’s got yer... ay?

JEZ: True enough.

While telling participants not to think might seem like a transparent indicator that manipulation is imminent, LGAT trainers do exactly this, framing the message “stop thinking” in a more intuitively appealing format. Participants are encouraged, with a range of positive-sounding phrases, to not question and to just “participate”. They are urged to be “open to the possibilities” (Fisher M., 1987); to be “coachable” (Hill, 2003; Mahoney, 1998; Prasad, 2012; Scioscia, 2000); to come from their hearts, not their heads (Haaken & Adams, 1983); and told that “understanding is the booby prize” (Brewer, 1975; Finkelstein, et al., 1982; Rhinehart, 2010). In est a rational person was said to be operating in the “Mind State” - the goal was to come from The Self:

“All this is meant to help trainees recognize the difference between ‘coming from the Mind State’ and ‘coming from The Self’. In the Mind State one is protected but deadened; in the state governed by Self one is spontaneous, alive, and creative (Emery 1973)” (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, pp. 535-536).

More directly, est trainers undermined rational thought, elevated experience as the sovereign way of knowing, and told participants that they were wasting their time if they were trying to figure the process out:

“Est also reminds trainees that they live in a world characterized by scientific abstraction; they ‘understand’ life but distrust subjective experience. The presentation ‘Anatomy of Experience’ emphasizes that ‘understanding is the booby prize,’ that understanding is far removed from the authentic experience of living” (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, p. 536).

“If you assholes think you understand what’s going on, you’re living your assholiness to its fullest. And you, Tom, have come into this training with a beautiful theory about what *est* is – namely, a Zenlike enlightenment program – and you’ve decided to pay no attention to anything that doesn’t fit your beautiful theory. Guess how much you’re going to get out of it, going through life that way?” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 13).

Referring to Maxwell Maltz, an influence on Erhard, Pressman (1993) states:

“The key, he said, was to focus on ‘experience’ rather than on those things people have learned intellectually. Again, those same terms would later be mirrored in Erhard’s programs, in which trainers and later Forum leaders would harshly ridicule participants for using words such as ‘I think’ or ‘I feel’. Paramount to the est philosophy was the idea of direct experience” (p. 20).

Finkelstein, et al. (1982) confirm that this perspective applies to est:

“Large Group Awareness Trainings rest upon vitalistic or antipositivistic assumptions: a central place is accorded to subjective experience...” (p. 517).

“During the first training day, which will last – with only one meal break and two or three shorter toilet breaks – until the early hours of Sunday morning, several themes are emphasized: choice, agreements, beliefs, and resistance to experience” (p. 519).

“The trainees are told that they fail to truly experience events because of their beliefs, to which they cling obstinately and which are the enemies of direct experience. The trainer argues that belief systems, understanding, and reasonableness isolate the trainees from the direct experience of reality which alone could make their lives work” (p. 520).

“In lectures and dialogues lasting nearly half a day, the trainer argues that trainees’ belief in the reality of the material, consensual world causes them to depreciate as unreal the world of subjective experience. Yet, he argues, subjective experience, the reality of which does not rest on consensual agreement but on the individual’s act of witness, is the most real thing known to the trainees” (p. 521).

Psychology Today journalist, Mark Brewer (1975), who attended est in the early 1970s confirms this devaluing of critical thinking:

“Belief, reason, logic and understanding were shown to be nonexperiential, and these second-hand mental exercises had to be abandoned to get at the meat of life.”

“This rule stems from the est maxim that the training cannot be explained or understood, but only experienced.”

“... while Tony bombarded them hour after hour about how their lives and their thinking were all fucked up, the training would shake, confuse and finally, in a great majority of cases, dislodge the old ideas and behavior patterns. And then in would go the desired est perceptions, and ultimately the notion that you are perfect the way you are.”

“For hours on end, however, out of boredom or real doubt, the trainees poured their resistance to this *unthink* into the microphones, and each time Tony was on them like a SEAL commando.

‘But don't you have to believe in something to....’

‘Don't give me your goddamn belief system, you dumb motherfucker!’ he roared at one guy, charging off the dais. ‘That doesn't work! That's why your whole life doesn't work. Get rid of all that shit!’”

“And after each ‘sharing’ Tony thanked the offerer and the other 249 ‘assholes’ applauded briskly, as previously instructed, and the sharer generally sat down in confusion. Which was all right, Tony assured them all, because confusion was the first step toward ‘natural knowing,’ the very pinnacle of est-think.”

Pressman (1993) provides further evidence that est denigrated critical thinking:

“For the first several hours of the training, Erhard and his other trainers kept up a non-stop barrage of verbal insults, taunting the participants in the straight-backed chairs, insisting they were all useless human beings who clung to beliefs about themselves and their own lives that were rooted in ridiculous notions about reason, logic, and understanding” (p. 71).

Est advocate Rhinehart (2010) similarly states:

“‘Understanding’ and ‘beliefs,’ I had effectively learned from both Zen and *est*, are barriers to liberation. ‘Knowledge’ about *est* would in many cases prove to be a barrier to people’s choosing to *experience* the *est* training [...] But understanding and information have nothing to do with the essence of *est*. One can read *about* the training, just as one can read about LSD, but one shouldn’t then expect to have a dramatic awakening” (p. xiv).

“‘Your lives don’t work,’ he goes on firmly. ‘You have great theories about life, impressive ideas, intelligent belief systems. You are all – every one of you – *very reasonable* in the way you handle life, and your lives don’t work. You’re assholes. No more, no less. And a world of assholes doesn’t work’” (p. 8).

“BULLSHIT! Your correct, intelligent, reasonable belief systems are *directly* related to your not getting any cheese. You’d rather be right than be happy...” (p. 18).

“‘But we have to have beliefs,’ Jack is saying half an hour later.

‘Who says so?’ replies the trainer.

‘I do, for one.’

‘Well, that’s just one of your beliefs, Jack, and that’s one of the reasons you’re all fucked up’” (p. 22).

“‘But you’re telling me I’ve got to destroy my belief system and my whole life is based on my intellectual and moral beliefs and on my feeling that I should achieve the most intelligent beliefs. You’ll never get me to give them up. If that’s what the training is about, I’ll never get it’” (p. 23).

Rhinehart (2010) repeatedly reveals est’s denigration of reason, and elevation of experience as the ultimate source of knowing:

“‘REASONABLENESS! Yes, REASONABLENESS!’ The trainer is shouting in response to a trainee. He strides now to a blackboard and draws a horizontal line across the middle of the board. At the bottom he writes in big capital letters the word REASONABLENESS.

‘That’s one of the lowest forms of nonexperience,’ he says and writes the word NONEXPERIENCE just under the horizontal line and at the far right of the board. ‘And you have been living most of your lives being reasonable and thus you’ve been living in the realm of nonexperience’” (p. 24).

“‘Above the line is an *experienced* experience, and the first step above that line, the real first form of experience, involves simply accepting. If you want to get out of the realm of nonexperienced experience, you’ve got to stop being reasonable, stop making decisions, stop hoping, and just *accept what is*. No more, no less. Accept what is’” (p. 24).

LGAT participants are urged to avoid thinking and to instead trust their “natural knowing”. LGATs generate an “experience” (Mystical Manipulation), which participants then interpret as “natural knowing”. Rhinehart (2010) reveals how trainers discourage thinking, and elevate experience:

“Look, when you *really* know something, with complete certainty and reliability, then beliefs about it, or thinking about it, or feelings about it, are all irrelevant: you just *know*, so thoroughly, that beliefs and thoughts and feelings are not necessary and words are inadequate...

... In terms of certainty, we only cross the line into something really reliable when we get out of our beliefs and feelings and simply observe. When you go beyond the level of observing, you get to the level of what we call realization – that’s when you have an ‘ah-ha!’ experience...” (p. 30).

“When we reach the highest level of certainty we’re at something we call ‘natural knowing’” (p. 31).

“NO, you asshole! *All* belief is the least reliable form of knowing. Belief represents *uncertainty*” (p. 31).

“The highest form of certainty is something you know so thoroughly and so naturally that it’s impossible to put it into words” (pp. 31-32).

“If you would like to live the rest of your life in the mind, go ahead, but if you’d like to *experience* something I suggest you begin by following instructions. Thank you. [Applause]” (p. 36).

“FUCK YOUR SEMANTICAL DIFFERENCES. I’M talking about REAL differences and it’s only your asshole reasonableness that keeps you from experiencing them” (p. 39).

“I just don’t understand” (p. 42)

“That’s because you’re in your asshole mind. I don’t want you to understand it. Understanding gets the booby prize” (p. 42).

Marc Fisher of the Washington Post (Fisher M., 1987) indicates that Lifespring employed a similar perspective, encouraging participants to suspend judgement and just participate:

“The changes – our breakthrough – will not come through understanding or psychological insight, but through ‘action’ and ‘taking responsibility for your life’.”

“‘You’re analysing,’ Jim reprimands. ‘That doesn’t help anything. If you get a traffic ticket and you understand why, that doesn’t change the fact that you have a ticket. You have to do, not understand’.”

Haaken and Adams (1983), explain that Lifespring frames the message, “stop thinking” as “getting in touch with your feelings” and “getting out of your head”. Additionally, they comment:

“Reasoning and intellectual processes were minimized while affective states were intensified” (p. 273).

“By the device of identifying resistances as ‘ways of avoiding,’ participants’ questions, doubts and concerns were labelled as obstacles to personal growth” (p. 274).

“TRAINER: Your problem is that you’re stuck on the level of analysing and beliefs. You’re hung up on having to analyse everything” (p. 276).

“He started with ‘belief,’ stating that this was a low level of human awareness: he then discussed ‘analyzing’ and ‘experimenting.’ He distinguished these low levels of awareness, which presumably maintain the ‘illusion of certainty,’ from ‘experiencing and observing,’ which are unfettered by belief and lead to ‘natural knowing’” (p. 276).

“The trainer could not be questioned nor the content of the training challenged” (p. 279).

“In the Lifespring milieu any evidence of observation became evidence of the need for further ‘growth,’ for getting away from analysis or ‘intellectual trips’” (p. 280).

Reflecting on encounter groups, considered a major influence on LGATs, Haaken and Adams state:

“Many of the encounter groups of the human potential movement have been described as regressive because of their disinhibitive effects and their tendency to stress abandonment to strong emotions while disparaging reasoning and intellect” (Back 1972, p. 79; Schur 1976, pp. 48-53, as cited in Haaken & Adams, 1983, p. 271).

Haaken and Adams (1983) also noted that participants in their Lifespring Basic Training quickly bought into this anti-analytical (“experiential”) philosophy and pressured other participants to do the same. One of the researchers, sociologist Richard Adams, who questioned the trainer’s perspectives, was treated with hostility by participants, who felt that he was undermining their experience:

“This participant, one of the researchers, had been a symbol of resistance throughout the training by asking questions and at times disagreeing with the trainer. During one group exercise, he had been selected by half of the participants as the ‘least attractive’ person in the group. He was offensive to many participants for being ‘too analytical,’ ‘rigid,’ and ‘not feeling enough.’

... When Dick explained his reactions to the events of the morning⁸⁵, various participants shouted out angrily, ‘You’re coming from your head, stop analyzing, come from your heart...’” (p. 279).

In addition to devaluing questioning, Lifespring also advocated groundless trust. Participants were urged to suspend judgement and trust the process (and trainer):

⁸⁵ A participant experienced a psychotic episode, but the other participants – much like the flying saucer cult members mentioned earlier – rationalised the experience and avoided evidence that a breakdown had occurred (they interpreted the psychosis as the participant “getting in touch with his feelings”) (Haaken & Adams, 1983).

“However, what we found particularly troublesome in the various trust exercises presented in Lifespring was the implied indiscriminate nature of trust” (Haaken & Adams, 1983, p. 277).

LGAT participants are also encouraged – using positive terminology – to be brave, take risks, and become “players in the game of life”. Of course, it is necessary to step out of your comfort zone to achieve something new and exciting, but by encouraging participants to “get involved”, trainers subtly discourage caution and reflection. If there is an agenda to manipulate then it will be more impactful on individuals who are less cautious. Marc Fisher of the Washington Post comments:

“‘You know,’ Jim says – he says ‘y’know’ a lot – ‘we’re all scared of life, scared of taking risks. So we play it safe. We do what’s easy’” (Fisher M. , 1987).

“Lifespring will teach us to be players in the game of life, spectators no more” (Fisher M. , 1987).

Landmark, like LGATs before it, does not explicitly state, “Do not think, and do not challenge what is being said, because it is difficult to manipulate you when you do this”, although these ideas are implicit in the communication between trainers and participants:

“He tells us that we analyze too much, and that ‘it kills the growth process.’ We should stop trying to find reasons for everything, he says” (Martin, 1998).

“Her soothing ribbon of a voice waves in front of me, promising peace if I would just stop trying to analyse” (Martin, 1998).

“She suggests that we think less and act more” (Mahoney, 1998).

“He looked me in the eye and said I had a lot going on. I was trying to interpret too much” (Sagan, n.d.).

“Early on, she basically told people who wanted to figure out what they were going to get from the Forum, how it worked, etc. (like me!), to just stop it... if you try to analyse it, you’ll hamper your success” (Drew, 2010).

“Even if you ask any questions about your particular problem or forum content, it’s most likely that you are yelled at (after inviting you to the mic near the stage) and called ‘you ordinary idiot leading an ordinary sham life’, ‘you jerk you have the courage to think so’, ‘you are disgusting’, ‘it’s your pathetic analytical mind that’s talking’, ‘you arrogant jerk’ etc. Be prepared to hear that and much more than that” (Prasad, 2012).

Describing how those questioning the recruitment emphasis were dealt with, Sarah Fazeli explains:

“In a roller coaster two minutes, Chris lauded the man for his honesty, encouraging others who felt this way to show themselves. Then she went in for the kill, spinning it around so anyone who questioned the program or its tactics was ‘resisting’” (Fazeli, 2012).

Fazeli (2012) explains that when she questioned the processes, she too was attacked:

“I’ve done self-help work. I’m an actor for Christ’s sake! Introspection and being alone on stage is what we do! So I asked questions in response to ‘the work’ and was struck down, humiliated and branded ‘uncoachable’.”

In order to continue with the training, participants must agree to be “coachable” and that they will complete all assignments. This appears reasonable (only the most openly defiant person would refuse to be “coachable” and anyone who has paid to do the course presumably intends to complete the assignments); however, the term “coachable” is later used against participants who do not submit to the perspectives and instructions of the trainer, and the assignments involve recruiting family, friends, and colleagues before being given any time to reflect. When participants object to this, they are publicly harassed for breaking their agreements, for lacking integrity and for being “uncoachable”:

“At this point, i.e. at 11PM on the second day, I told the coach that I cannot do the second assignment of enrolling people. I was called to the stage and asked questions like ‘What is enrollment? Are you coachable?’. He kept shouting at me about my arrogance, ego and shameless behavior and called me a jerk and an idiot with an analytical mind etc. I replied that I am coachable and agree to most of the content but not an unreasonable assignment. My thought was that, if I am benefited from LF content and course, I would anyhow ask people to join LF but why before seeing any benefit at all? He then pronounced that due to my arrogant behavior my wife and kids are struggling for years. He pronounced that even people like Rahul David⁸⁶ who attended Landmark forum was very humble and felt that I do not seem coachable unless I agree to all of the rules. I said, I still have my conviction and analytical brain working even after two days of the forum and until I am convinced, I am not going to enroll people or do that part of the assignment. After about 10 minutes of argument, he asked me to get out by taking money instead of spoiling the spirit of the forum” (Prasad, 2012).

Landmark will also frame questioning as something negative, so as to coerce participants, who are put on the spot, to sit down and keep quiet:

“Many of us have a searing need to make other people ‘wrong’ and to defend our own need to be ‘right,’ or so we are told” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

⁸⁶ Famous Indian cricket player.

According to Roland Howard of the Daily Mail, trainers also tell participants that doubting (“questioning what is going on”) will stand in the way of their breakthroughs:

“David pre-empts any doubts we have and assures us that this is fine, natural even, but if we want to achieve the benefits of the Forum we must banish these doubts. ‘Otherwise you’re wasting your 235,’ he says” (Howard, 2001).

Suggesting that participants stop listening to themselves (“thinking”), and listen only to the trainer, is another tactic used to minimise analytical thought:

“She tells us many things about ourselves, including that we are unable to listen to her at this very moment because we’re too busy listening to ourselves” (Mahoney, 1998).

“The way we listen, Handel says, is dominated by our human desire to avoid looking bad, to be right, to understand things. Good, bad, true, false don’t have a place in the Forum. ‘You’re listening to yourself opinionating, which means you’re not listening to us’” (Mahoney, 1998).

Describing how committed, “open-minded” participation is encouraged and how questioning and analysing is discouraged, Traci Hukill of Metro News (1998) and blogger Ajith Prasad (2012) state:

“But we gotta want it. We have to be enrolled, he explains – open to what the Forum can do for us. If we’re not, we can leave now and get our money back...” (Hukill, 1998).

“He kept shouting at me about my arrogance, ego and shameless behavior and called me a jerk and an idiot with an analytical mind etc.” (Prasad, 2012).

As the following statements demonstrate, these tactics are a core feature of Landmark trainings:

“The leaders are hostile to challenges or probing questions. I observed and experienced leaders ignore, brow beat, double talk and use group pressure to avoid or cow critical thinking. As will be discussed in detail later, this process leads the participants to abandon questioning, rationalism and long learned societal concepts, like what is right or wrong, in order to ‘get it,’ the Landmark message, which leads you to the goal of full personal potential” (Black, 1997).

“Once the barriers of reason and critical thinking have been knocked down, you embrace these easy and appealing messages. You become part of the organization and trust its teachings. Trust is the important undertaking. If you trust another person or organization, you implicitly expect what they say to be true” (Black, 1997).

“I want to ask ‘why,’ but by now I know that ‘why’ questions are dismissed in the Forum” (Mahoney, 1998).

Revealing the devaluing of critical thinking and the way that Landmark trainers belittle those who question, Karin Badt of The Huffington Post states:

“I just did not see the reason to 1) prevent critical thinking and 2) make evangelism the marketing strategy of the Forum” (Badt, 2011).

“Are you always so arrogant? Are you always such a know it all?” (Badt, 2011).

Schein (1961) noted how Chinese interrogators elicited guilt and shame by convincing prisoners that their “crimes” were obvious to everyone but themselves. It is, therefore, interesting that Landmark trainers employ the same tactic to humiliate participants, squash questioning, and obtain obedience:

“During my ‘curriculum’ I was one of the people that stood up and questioned the leaders. The leader then accused me of being ‘a pain in the ass’, ‘over-intellectual’, ‘a spoiled brat’ etc. For weeks afterwards I replayed those moments in my head. I asked everybody around me if it was true. They all said NO, but I continued to beat myself up over it. What a waste of energy!” (dutch, 2003).

“Larry, the leader, made an example out of anyone who dared challenge his authority. He always used the room, the group against the questioning of any individual. He was a master of the game” (parkito, 2004).

“And the leader just sneered at me: ‘The thing about you is you like to play clever little games’. And I felt crushed. I suddenly wondered if it was true, if I was really a worthless person clinging to my intellect. I sat back down” (Evans, 2010).

“What he says is this: those of us who are concerned about the way Landmark does its marketing (and apparently there are a number of us who have mentioned this to him) are all ‘committed to being resigned and cynical’” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

Trainers present themselves as infallible authorities on the LGAT doctrine and, in convincing participants not to question, by default they become the singular source of information in the room. Cohen (2009) quotes a trainer operating in Stockholm, who admonishes a participant who is not comfortable recruiting others for Landmark. The trainer’s message is clear – “Stop questioning and just do what I say”:

“You’re unconscious. You’re just unconscious. You’ve got to stop evaluating me and start to actually try it on. I’m one of the top coaches in the world, it’s no answer that they sent me all the way from Australia to deal with you.”

Returning to other ways in which the LGAT technology is positioned as a Sacred Science, Black (1997) explains how the Forum language (a core component of the “technology”) was described:

“The Forum leader spoke about the science of language, learning to use language to design a new future of freedom and self expression.”

Karin Badt of The Huffington Post similarly asserts that Forum leaders present Landmark’s ideas and philosophies as if they are a Sacred Science:

“It was particularly shocking how quickly every participant adopted the vocabulary, kit and caboodle. Nobody seemed to find it troubling that the Landmark vision was delivered as if it were absolute truth, *sui generis*” (Badt, 2011).

While no elements of the Landmark training can be questioned (without fear of a long, and pointless, public battle), the Sacred Science is most clearly seen in the Landmark philosophy of “the facts versus the story”. This philosophy is applied by Landmark absolutely, regardless of whether a person was gang-raped, abandoned, or endured concentration camps during the Holocaust. This Landmark doctrine of “facts versus the story”, and “taking responsibility”, as described by Lifton (1961, p. 428), “transcends ordinary concerns of logic”, yet claims “airtight logic, of absolute ‘scientific’ precision”:

“You go around blaming your father for your problems when it’s your view that has created a barrier. You need to stop running this racket. You need to call him and ‘get complete’ with him. Unyielding in his belief in her father’s cosmic innocence, stern Condon is interested only in the facts...” (O'Brien, 2012).

“I cannot fathom the great eagerness with which everyone has received the leader’s perverse psychology lesson. (I suppose those two circles he drew on the board really drove it home) (O'Brien, 2012).

“Still, the initial separation between facts and interpretations was not ironclad, and the idea that we were responsible for everything that happens to us – because that was our interpretation – became rather dicey when people are blamed for the way they feel in the aftermath of spousal dalliance, illness, rape or even, in an infamous example from est’s fearless founder, concentration camp incarceration” (Sagan, n.d.).

According to Brewer (1975) and Rhinehart (2010), est described the knowledge to be found in its trainings as “natural knowing”, and – describing the indisputable nature of the Lifespring philosophy – Haaken and Adams (1983) stated that “Ideas were not presented as problematic beliefs which were open to scrutiny but as transcendent truth – ‘natural knowing’” (p. 276). Landmark, like the other major LGATs, clearly suggests that its “technology” should not be questioned by participants. If *Sacred Science* describes methods and philosophy which are presented as transcending ordinary reason, yet

which achieve absolute scientific precision, then Landmark’s “technology”, at the very least, remotely resembles Lifton’s fifth psychological theme common to thought reform environments.



Figure 19: Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform in LGATs (5 of 8 conditions met).

As indicated in Figure 19, the fifth of Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform is present in LGATs.

Thought reform condition 6 of 8: Loading the Language

Just as “newspeak” was the restrictive language used in Orwell’s *1984*, so there is jargon and other tactical language in thought reform environments. Lifton (1961) acknowledges that jargon exists in all cultural, or organisational groups, stating “It is in part an expression of unity and exclusiveness” (p. 429), but argues that in totalist environments it is extreme. Landmark, in defence of its jargon, claims that all groups employ specialist language, but the degree to which Landmark uses new words, and alters the use of existing words, is arguably “extreme”. Loaded language, as defined by Lifton (1961), refers chiefly to jargon and thought-terminating clichés. In addition to the use of these two devices, LGATs use carefully selected words and statements to generate positive, or negative, associations (much in the same way that Landmark created an association with Harvard Business School). Statements and descriptions which appear to be part of natural speech, if skilfully chosen, can elicit misleading associations and direct individuals towards an intended pattern of thinking (Gilovich & Ross, 2016; Kahneman, 2012). While some loaded language is subtle, the use of jargon in LGATs is not, and according to Singer (2003), the use of insider language is common to LGAT graduates.

Jargon

“Totalist language, then, is repetitiously centered on all-encompassing jargon, prematurely abstract, highly categorical, relentlessly judging, and to anyone but its most devoted advocate, deadly dull: in Lionel Trilling’s phrase, ‘the language of nonthought’” (Lifton, 1961, p. 429).

While LGATs insist that their jargon is necessary to impart vital concepts, and that it facilitates more powerful communication with others, it is clear that many outsiders feel isolated, rather than included, by this language. Rhinehart (2010, p. 3) inadvertently reveals how est jargon was taken on by graduates (and resulted in weaker, rather than stronger, communication with the uninitiated):

“He tried to explain it to me but it all comes out *est* gobbledygook.”

“I know what you mean. My daughter has been so busy talking about ‘creating spaces’ for me and her sisters and everyone else you’d think she was renting apartments.”

According to Haaken and Adams (1983), Lifespring also employed a number of unique phrases:

“The language of the human potential movement, which provided the ‘official’ lexicon of Lifespring, seemed to exhaust and encompass all of the human experience, e.g., ‘getting off automatic,’ ‘going for it,’ ‘taking risks,’ ‘taking responsibility,’ and ‘creating your own reality.’ These phrases took on an almost magical communicative power within the group” (pp. 276-277).

Traci Hukill (1998) of Metro News argues that the language used by Landmark, and est before it, makes insiders feel special, but that – in contrast to Landmark’s stated goals of improving communication and enhancing relationships – this language often isolates graduates from the uninitiated:

“Like any exclusive group of people who know something the rest of the world doesn’t, Landmark has its own language. It happens to be the same vocabulary esties⁸⁷ learned, and it serves to separate the ones who ‘get it’ from those who don’t.”

“Family members of est graduates complained that est jargon invaded every conversation and that esties – or estholes, as detractors called them – shunned people who didn’t ‘get it’.”

Notably, Singer (2003) – who had no personal experience of Landmark – made a similar comment about the effects of LGAT jargon in the workplace:

“In addition, negative social consequences in the workplace have arisen from these programs. In certain workplaces, you find an in-group and a group of outsiders. The insiders are those who have attended the program and, through compliance and adherence, have taken on the jargon taught in the seminars” (p. 187).

Landmark makes use of numerous words in ways that are unfamiliar to participants (initially) and outsiders, and employs phrases that are equally foreign to the uninitiated. Words such as “distinction”, “racket”, “authentic”, “enrol”, “commitment”, and “integrity” are (re)defined in depth, while phrases such as “getting out of your head” or “getting complete”, or suggesting that participants are desperate to “be right” are frequently used. Former est and the Forum trainer, and current Landmark trainer, Steve Zaffron, describes the language used in Landmark seminars in the following way (note that he is simply rationalising the use of extensive jargon):

“To describe the philosophy underlying the Landmark Forum, we first note that the actual language used in the dialogue reflects a distinctive paradigm. Words are used rigorously but not necessarily

⁸⁷ Descriptor for est proponents.

with their ordinary, familiar meanings so as to present a set of related ‘distinctions’⁸⁸ that propel the process of inquiry” (McCarl, et al., 2001).

One has to consider whether Landmark jargon enhances understanding and communication, or creates confusion, restricts thinking, creates a sense of superiority and social identity in graduates, allows trainers to control participants, and potentially isolates graduates from those who do not speak the language. Referring to the terminology used, one graduate warned:

“Be aware that if you attend the Forum, there will be times where you will have no idea what the Forum leader is talking about” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

Rosemary Mahoney of Elle Magazine, Jana Martin of Swing Generation Magazine, and Charlotte Faltermayer of Time Magazine, all reveal Landmark jargon in their articles:

“We’re introduced to the concept of the ‘racket,’ what Handel tells us is ‘a fixed way of being plus a persistent complaint.’ We are all running rackets that allow us to make ourselves right while making others wrong”⁸⁹ (Mahoney, 1998).

“The Forum relies heavily on lingo. Once-ordinary words start to glimmer with new meaning. To ‘share,’ for example, means to tell ‘significant’ listeners (a parent, a fellow forum-goer) something, and expect their undivided attention. In other words, they ‘support’ your sharing. People in your Forum not only listen to our sharing, they are ‘present in it,’ which means they are ‘powerfully’ listening. The understanding of one term often hinges upon another” (Martin, 1998).

“She explained that our ‘rackets,’ that is, ongoing complaints, are ‘killing our lives.’ And ‘our winning formulas’ are really losing formulas. She cautioned that Landmark’s ideas (‘Be for each other like that’ and ‘People ‘is’ to death’) aren’t meant to fit together. ‘The Forum is holographic. It’s not linear’” (Faltermayer, 2001).

Amanda Scioscia of the Phoenix New Times adds:

“Possibility, enroll, action – these are buzzwords that will pepper the seminar for three days. Any thoughts the paying customers have are to be expressed using this new language” (Scioscia, 2000).

Nathan Thornburgh, also of Time Magazine, makes the same point:

⁸⁸ This in itself is “newspeak”.

⁸⁹ As soon as participants have accepted this concept, they will be likely to recognise it when the trainer points it out. The trainer will claim that anyone who challenges his/her authority is running a racket and, along with the participants, will apply pressure on that individual to give up his/her racket.

“A fair amount of time was spent explaining the Forum’s peculiar vocabulary, which read like bad fortune-cookie copy. (‘Transformation,’ one poster said, is ‘the genesis of a new realm of possibility’)” (Thornburgh, 2011).

Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine similarly says:

“People aren’t in the room; they are ‘present.’ One is not ‘committed to’ something; he’s simply ‘committed.’ A typical Forum phrase might read ‘The listening you are does not allow for the possibility of being committed that you are extraordinary’” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

Marie Lemonnier of Le Nouvel Observateur states:

“After some anecdotes, the serious part begins: training in the Landmarkian language. To set a course of action is ‘to invent a possibility.’ To learn something about oneself is ‘to make an opening.’ Personal qualities become ‘major assets,’ defects are ‘inauthenticities,’ and barriers in life are ‘rackets’... Here comes a migraine” (Lemonnier, 2005).

Henry Alford of The New York Times adds:

“Indeed, it’s hard not to smirk at a philosophy at least one of whose main tenets (‘You can have any result for yourself or your life that you invent as a possibility and enroll others in your having gotten’) is a copy editor’s nightmare” (Alford, 2010).

Laura McClure of Mother Jones Magazine says:

“A querulous man observes that the phrases carefully ruler-lined on the chalkboard seem like poor English. (‘In the Landmark Forum you will bring forth the presence of a new realm of Possibility for yourself and your life.’)” (McClure, 2009).

Referring to the introduction by their trainer, Enzo Di Matteo (2000) of Now Magazine quotes:

“Welcome to the Landmark Forum. Are you willing to ‘enroll in the possibility of being?’”

Describing the process of calling up people to resolve conflicts, Vanessa Grigoriadis states, “This is ‘getting complete.’” She explains that even when being encouraged to generate sales for Landmark, jargon is used to make it sound as if this recruitment is part of the learning experience:

“After you get complete, explains Willmore, it’s time to have an ‘enrollment conversation,’ as in ‘I’m calling because I want to enroll you in the possibility of me having an extraordinary life.’⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Note how “enroll” is used in this statement. The person is not explicitly asking the other person to join Landmark, but – through priming – the words used will make it more likely that the participant will attempt to enrol the other person, and that the other person will consider enrolling.

That's followed by the 'invitation conversation,' in which you ask those close to you to attend the Forum themselves ('because I think it would be good for you')" (Grigoriadis, 2001).

Henry Alford of The New York Times adds another key Landmark phrase:

"In my Forum, class members engaged in even more mother-talk when Roger introduced a beguiling if facile concept called 'strong suits'" (Alford, 2010).

Blogger Ajith Prasad of India confirms the use of certain phrases, while adding a few more:

"50% of the first day (Friday) goes on with the coach delivering his speech in a way to highlight how the Landmark forum is going to transform you and how you have to be 'enroll' to the idea in order to discover 'new possibilities' in life. They use terminologies such as 'always already listening', 'vicious circle', 'context' and 'rackets' on the first day. Essentially, it's about your prejudices in life based on what you were taught by your predecessors, somebody's actions and your wrong interpretations, how your justified behaviors are in fact of pain to others or people 'you are inauthentic with', in their terminology" (Prasad, 2012).

Prasad (2012) and online contributor 'jman76' argue that the jargon, rather than "propelling the process of inquiry", distorts concepts and makes them more difficult to understand:

"A word of caution: The definitions in the Landmark bible is meant to confuse people who talk and understand normal English. Some of those theories may sound reasonable if explained in plain English but ridiculous and defies common sense when explained in their language. But if you question the leader, you get trashed and I shall explain how" (Prasad, 2012).

"The language used in the 'forum' didn't make sense. They would take words from the English language and assign new meanings" (jman76, 2009).

Traci Hukill (1998) of Metro News San Francisco explains a few Landmark phrases used at the time of her participation. Note how "rackets", once accepted, can be used by trainers to suggest that participants have a character flaw which prevents them from taking responsibility. Any reasonable explanation for not accepting the trainer's perspective can be labelled a "racket" and, likewise, the concept of "winning formulas" can be used against participants who question:

"'Rackets' are persistent complaints that we orchestrate in order to avoid some kind of responsibility."

"We also learn about our 'winning formulas,' tricks we learn to get along in society, like being charming and smart. Winning formulas, we're told, keep us smug and content, but they also keep us from breakthroughs – and real happiness."

Mary Braid of The Independent, James O'Brien of GQ Magazine, and Karin Badt of the Huffington Post explain how participants quickly adopt the Landmark jargon:

“What is surprising is the ease with which the young, generally liberal and intelligent London crowd seems to adopt Forum language and comply with Forum rules” (Braid, 2003).

“Many have fallen enthusiastically into Landmark Forumspeak, and they say things like ‘Richard, I have been out of my integrity, but now I am creating for myself and my life the possibility of being transformed and enrolling others in my transformation’” (O'Brien, 2012).

“In contrast, most of my fellow participants threw out whatever value system or philosophy they had ever had and began speaking of everything in their lives as either ‘rackets’ or ‘strong points’” (Badt, 2011).

Language that is presented as a mechanism by which to free participants is, in fact, a mechanism by which to control participants. According to journalist Rachel Jones (2003), this process starts at the recruitment evening:

“When I questioned the R1495 fee, the recruiter tried to turn the subject to my pathology in asking such questions. Seminars start this way, I knew, so I was not deterred.”

“Why was I so determined to ‘make him wrong’? was his response. But he understood: his way of ‘being’ had once also been to be ‘right’, but Landmark had helped him to see the way he ‘be-ed’, and things could really open up for me if I could begin to see the way I ‘be’.”

Thought-terminating clichés

In addition to jargon, Lifton (1961, p. 430), explains that the language of thought reform is saturated with thought-terminating clichés:

“The most far-reaching and complex human problems are compressed into brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorised and easily expressed. The major effect of loading the language is that the subject is constricted in terms of his communication and since language is so central to all human experience, his capacities for thinking and feeling are immensely narrowed.”

Stated simply, thought terminating clichés are words or phrases which have the effect of minimising critical, or independent, thinking. Many of these phrases appeal to the emotions of the individual and their desire to see themselves (and their desire to be seen by others) in a positive way. This may occur by making the uncritical acceptance of ideas seem like a virtue, or by making critical thinking seem like a flaw. Lifton (1961) uses as an example the phrase “bourgeois mentality” (p. 429), explaining that it “is used to encompass and critically dismiss ordinarily troublesome concerns like the quest for

individual expression, the exploration of alternative ideas, and the search for perspective and balance in political judgments". In others words, any person who tries to think independently, or consider other perspectives, might be labelled as having a "bourgeois mentality". Those who have bought into this thought-terminating cliché would form a negative association with the individual without considering the merits of his position. LGATs do very much the same thing, creating negative associations with behaviour they want to suppress (like questioning the trainer), and positive associations with behaviour they want to encourage (like not questioning the trainer).

Consider, as examples of words/phrases which might induce compliance, that participants must agree to be "open-minded", "open to possibilities", and "coachable". These traits are universally understood to be positive and no one wants to be seen as closed-minded, closed off to possibilities, or "uncoachable". If, however, there is an agenda to indoctrinate or take advantage of participants then those who are open-minded, open to possibilities, and coachable are less likely to be vigilant against these processes. What is framed as "open-mindedness" by LGATs is frequently an insistence that participants do not question, and those who do question may be called to task for breaking their commitments to be "open-minded" or "coachable". Typically, a critical mass of the participants will buy into these thought-terminating clichés, and anyone questioning will feel pressure from both the trainer and the other participants to comply. Various commentators describe these tactics:

"Notetaking, unprescribed medicines and alcohol are forbidden and we must *open our minds* to all suggestions" (Hill, 2003).

"Jerry sweeps on. To pop, we must be coachable. We must not, he emphasises, choosing the one word guaranteed to strike fear into my soul, be observers..." (Hill, 2003).

"Eventually, I realise I'm breaking the promise I made to Jerry to be coachable. I decide to stop analysing, and simply give Jerry my trust" (Hill, 2003).

"Nonetheless because I had resolved to be open minded and good of attitude I suspended disbelief; I was anxious to get my money's worth" (Sagan, n.d.).

"In order to achieve the extraordinary life (powerful living, new possibilities etc) after attending the forum, you must agree that you are coachable by the LF leader" (Prasad, 2012).

The agreements, the emphasis on integrity, the way that blindly following is positioned as a virtue and questioning is positioned as a flaw, combined with words and phrases which discourage critical thinking, creates an environment where influence is likely. The jargon used by LGATs also frequently serves as thought-terminating clichés. "Rackets", "winning formulas", and being "coachable" are examples of phrases which immediately put participants on the defensive and curtail critical thinking,

while posturing as ways to set participants free. According to Rhinehart (2010), est participants were told that their insistence on “being right” (questioning) stood in the way of attaining results:

TRAINER: “The human being would rather be right than get his cheese” (p. 18).

TRAINER: “BULLSHIT! Your correct, intelligent, reasonable belief systems are *directly* related to your not getting any cheese. You’d rather be right than be happy...” (p. 18).

Similar (and identical) processes are used by Landmark:

“For every doubting question, Handel’s reply is essentially the same: brusque, confrontational, laced with a tincture of ridicule. ‘You are a cynic and all your friends tell you you’re a cynic.’ ‘You’re lying.’ ‘Boy, do you make stuff up.’ ‘You’re not coachable, you refuse to be’” (Mahoney, 1998).

“... henceforth *rackets* will refer not to some dubious business practices but to our stubborn need to be right, to gain the upper hand in every relationship. You think this gives you power, Cordon implies, but it drains power – and every time you argue with me, every time you insist on being right, you’re running a racket” (O’Brien, 2012).

“A woman confesses her story about incest, and Richard says there is no right and wrong. In some cultures, even incest is not considered taboo. Anyone who argues is cut off with a thought-terminating cliché – ‘That’s your racket,’ ‘That’s why your life doesn’t work’” (Scioscia, 2000).

“‘See?’ I said to the three would-be-defectors. You take an issue with something Landmarkian? You are labelled as having a ‘racket,’ ‘resisting,’ or – my personal favorite – being ‘uncoachable’” (Fazeli, 2012).

The use of loaded language, while positioned as enabling participants to verbalise new ideas, actually limits expression, convincing participants that they are to blame for traumas they have experienced, and implying that anyone who challenges the trainer is a stubborn, self-righteous know-it-all. Lifton (1961) further comments on the ability of language to limit thinking as follows:

“For an individual person, the effect of the language of ideological totalism can be summed up in one word: constriction. He is, so to speak, linguistically deprived; and since language is so central to all human experience, his capacities for thinking and feeling are immensely narrowed” (p. 430).

Thought-terminating clichés used outside of LGATs include statements such as, “At one time scientists believed that the earth was flat...” Consider what this statement suggests, and whether this suggestion is valid. Typically, statements like this will be used by people who are making unsubstantiated claims and who want you to consider their claim. The statement simply means that, given the evidence available at the time, scientists made a mistake. What the person making the statement wants you infer is that science is fallible and, therefore, anything that he says – no matter how devoid of evidence

– is probably true. Also, implicit in this statement is the suggestion that if you do not give his idea serious consideration you are a fanatical, closed-minded follower of the “religion” of science.

Similarly, sentences which start with the words, “Are you willing to consider the possibility...” or “Are you open to the possibility...” are frequently used in LGATs. Anyone who has publicly agreed to be open-minded and is asked a question which begins with these words is unlikely to say, “No. I’m not willing to consider that possibility”. The phrasing of the sentence makes declining *considering the possibility* seem arrogant and closed-minded and it is then suggested, if participants agree to consider the possibility, that the statement is valid. (Trainers may label those who will not consider the given possibility *know-it-all’s* or tell them that they are obsessed with *being right*.) Trainers do not have to provide evidence for the asserted idea, however. As revealed by Haaken and Adams (1983, pp. 274-275), it is sufficient to suggest that understanding the claim is beyond the participant’s capability:

“Instructions for this exercise were as follows: Participants were to mingle, and when eye contact was made with other participants, one of four comments was allowed: ‘I trust you,’ ‘I don’t trust you,’ ‘I don’t know if I trust you,’ or ‘I don’t care to say if I trust you.’ The participants were then to move on to the next person without further comment. After regrouping following the exercise, one participant challenged the implicit reasoning behind the exercise; as the exchange below indicates, his reaction was dismissed without legitimizing the rationality of the question that he raised.

JAMES: I’m not sure what this had to do with real trust. I mean, it’s not an all or nothing thing-like ‘I trust you’ or ‘I don’t trust you.’ I would trust someone with my car before I would trust them with my child, depending on how well I knew the person.

TRAINER: Are you willing to consider the possibility that you don’t know what trust really means?

JAMES: (Appearing confused and hesitating) Yes.

TRAINER: Thank you. You may sit down. (Audience applause).”

Lifton (1961) describes thought-terminating clichés as “brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorised and easily expressed” (p. 430). Both est and Landmark employ a variant of the illogical statement, “What you resist persists”, the suggestion being that participants should stop resisting. While the lives of Mohandas Gandhi, Rosa Parks, and Nelson Mandela reveal this logic to be flawed, these statements are introduced using ambiguous examples (so they are accepted), and then later repeated to suppress all forms of resistance. Rhinehart (2010) reveals a number of statements made by est trainers relating to this thought-terminating cliché:

“... resistance leads to persistence. If you try resist something or change something, it will become more solid. The only way to get rid of something is to just let it be” (p. 37).

“The whole world has been trying to change things for centuries and they still persist...” (p. 37).

“Look, I know it’s a paradox and not easy to get, but the effort to control or change something absolutely *ensures* its persistence” (p. 37).

“You people all know you’ve been *trying to change* your lives for years and they DON’T CHANGE. The things you work on persist. It’s not that you’re weak or not trying hard enough. It’s just that you’re assholes, that’s all” (p. 41).

Sagan (n.d.) comments that during the Landmark Forum “What resists persists was a constant refrain...”, so Landmark also employs this thought-terminating cliché. While jargon and thought-terminating clichés are identified by Lifton as key elements of Loading the Language, Landmark (and other LGATs) also uses political language to frame events in ways which create desired, but arguably misleading, associations.

Framing

“The great English essayist George Orwell wrote that ‘political language... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind’” (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 73).

Social psychologists Thomas Gilovich and Lee Ross stress the importance of how something is framed, explaining that while people are clearly influenced by the objective features of a situation, “No less important, and often more important, is the way that people subjectively interpret that situation” (Gilovich & Ross, p. 73). In Orwell’s classic dystopian novel, *1984*, the Ministry of Peace, rather than focusing on peace, “concerned itself with war” (Orwell, 1949, p. 6). This fictional example may seem absurdly transparent, but political language is used, with startling success, in the real world as well:

“It was no accident that soon after World War II, our country came to have a secretary of *defence* instead of a secretary of *war*. Nor is it an accident that today our leaders use terms like *enhanced interrogation* rather than *torture*, and *collateral damage* rather than *civilian casualties*. The names we give to plans, policies, and proposals determine what associations and images come to mind when we think about them. This in turn influences how positively or negatively we feel about them...” (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 74).

While this sort of tactic seems obvious when pointed out, the fact is that people unconsciously make positive or negative associations with different words, and using carefully selected words allows those who are skilled in political language to create desired, and sometimes misleading, associations. The

tendency for people to be tricked by these tactics is depicted in the British comedy series, Peep Show (season 5, episode 6). Here, Jez has become involved with pyramid selling, but when Mark suggests that he has been taken in by a scam, Jez frames his new business opportunity in a more positive way:

MARK: Why are you talking like this?

JEZ: Well... that's a very interesting question. Now, the first thing to say would be that this is not pyramid selling.

MARK: You're doing pyramid selling?

JEZ: No.. no... not pyramid selling.

MARK: I can't believe you're into pyramid selling.

JEZ: Listen... listen... it's not pyramid selling... it's "network marketing" ...

Framing negative events in a positive way (changing the "story") is a core part of the LGAT constructionist philosophy, so it should not be surprising that they apply this technique to their own questionable methods. It is important, given what takes place during an LGAT, that participants are provided with a positive way to frame what is taking place. Describing what have been revealed to be brutal interactions between participants and trainers, Rhinehart (2010) employs terminology which compares est participants to actors, and which frames these interactions as "dramatic encounters":

"... the members of the audience are the principle performers in the many dramatic encounters between trainer and trainees" (p. xii).

Since *rules* reveal imposition, while *agreements* imply a more democratic process, it is notable that est trainers went to great lengths to convince participants that no coercion had taken place:

"These, Ron impressed again and again, were 'agreements' – not rules – and that trainees were instructed to register their accord by sitting still" (Brewer, 1975).

The similarity between this sort of political language, and that used by The Party in 1984 is difficult to ignore. In Orwell's fictional world of brainwashing, citizens were told that there were no laws... but that if they did certain forbidden things they would probably be killed:

"This was not illegal (nothing was illegal, since there were no longer any laws), but if detected it was reasonably certain that it would be punished by death..." (Orwell, 1949, p. 8).

The essence of a law remains even if it is not called a law, just as the essence of a rule remains, even if it is called an "agreement". In 1984 there were no laws, but you could be killed if you did things that were effectively illegal. Similarly, in est there were no rules, but if you broke the "agreements" you would be punished by the trainer (who imposed the "agreements" on you). In much the same way as

est framed aspects of their training as a *performance*, Lifespring framed their training as a *game* – a depiction that brings with it positive imagery and a sense of obligation to abide by rules. Both Haaken and Adams, and the Washington Post’s Marc Fisher comment on this use of language:

“A variety of rules for ‘playing the Lifespring game’ were then reviewed and participants were asked to stand to indicate agreement with them” (Haaken & Adams, 1983, p. 274).

“IF YOU WANT TO COME AND DO OUR SEMINAR, YOU ARE TO PLAY BY OUR RULES” (Fisher M. , 1987).

Charlotte Faltermayer of Time Magazine reveals that Landmark employs the same language, and the associated obligations to sportsmanship, used by Lifespring. (It should also be noted that when Landmark says “forwarding the action”, they mean “recruiting new participants for us”):

“The Forum, she said, is a game called transformation. Like every other game, it calls for sportsmanship. One should be ‘coachable,’ or open-minded about the Forum’s concepts, and committed to ‘forwarding the action’” (Faltermayer, 2001).

The Forum is also described as an emotional “roller coaster”, rather than, for example, an emotional “gamble”, which would elicit different imagery. Roller coasters are associated with trepidation and uncertainty, but also with excitement, fun and – ultimately – safety. It is assumed that the fear on a roller coaster is irrational – that the roller coaster has been designed, constructed, and maintained under the supervision of skilled engineers, who have thoroughly tested every aspect of the process to ensure its safety. Jana Martin of Swing Generation Magazine, Enzo Di Matteo of Now Magazine, and Amanda Scioscia of the Phoenix New Times comment on the use of this specific phrasing in the Forum:

“‘I promise you,’ he says. ‘This’ll be a roller coaster. You’re going to feel awful. Then great! You’ll go down,’ he says, trucking his hand low. ‘You’ll go up.’ As his hand soars he bends backward, the fluorescent lights dancing in his wire-rimmed glasses. ‘And what happens when you’re on a moving roller coaster and you try to get off?’ He mimes falling from a great height, arms and legs flailing, then flops still. ‘Don’t forget,’ he says from his rag dog squat. ‘You paid for it. So promise you won’t get off until it stops’” (Martin, 1998).

“It’s a roller-coaster ride. More than a few will want to jump off. When I try, I discover it’s not so easy to walk away” (Di Matteo, 2000).

“He tells people they are about to board an emotional roller coaster. There will be peaks, there will be valleys, and it isn’t safe to get off until the ride stops” (Scioscia, 2000).

While the metaphor of a roller coaster is used, the truth is that LGATs were not designed by people with expertise in psychology – they were pieced together by salesmen with questionable pasts

(Pressman, 1993) – and their safety has neither been thoroughly investigated, nor accurately quantified. LGATs are, therefore, more like roller coasters that were built by salesmen who quite enjoy DIY-type activities. The very argument that Landmark is not psychology or psychological in nature (ABC, 2011) reveals the lack of relevant understanding which is being commented on. Describing the course as a “roller coaster” results in participants normalising their fears and concerns. Because they are primed to expect discomfort, apprehension, uncertainty, and fear, they endure the experience rather than leaving when the environment becomes stressful.

In much the same way as Rhinehart (2010) framed the interactions between trainers and participants during est as “dramatic encounters”, Landmark employs a range of euphemisms on their website to describe the nature of trainer-participant interactions. The harassment, humiliation, and control of participants who “share” or challenge the trainer is described as “philosophically rigorous and open discussion” and other processes are positioned as having “an opportunity to explore basic questions that have been of interest to human beings throughout time”:

“Through a series of philosophically rigorous and open discussions, voluntary sharing of your experience and short exercises, the Program provides an opportunity to explore basic questions that have been of interest to human beings throughout time and to examine many aspects of your own life” (Landmark, 2016f).

Similarly, the explicitly confrontational interactions, the painful memories elicited as a consequence, and the fear-inducing exercises employed by Landmark, are framed as “exploring life’s issues honestly”. When considering the phrasing employed by Landmark in the following passage, note the suggestion that the type of people who will not enjoy the Forum are those who are not willing to explore life’s issues honestly. In keeping with the Sacred Science, it is conceded that there are people who will not enjoy the Forum, but implied that this is a reflection of these (flawed) people, rather than an indication of a possible fault with the “technology”. Finally, Landmark – using its constructionist philosophy – states that the training may “occur as physically, mentally and emotionally seriously distressing”. Much like child molestation or the Holocaust (according to the Landmark philosophy), the Landmark Forum is not *inherently* distressing, but it may “occur” that way to some:

“Some participants have found that exploring life’s issues honestly may evoke uncomfortable and unpleasant feelings. For others, the Program may occur as physically, mentally and emotionally seriously distressing. If you are unwilling to encounter any of these powerful experiences in yourself or in others, or if you have any concern about your ability to deal with such experiences, THE MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS WHO ADVISE LANDMARK WORLDWIDE (‘OUR ADVISORS’) STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT YOU DO NOT PARTICIPATE in the Program” (Landmark, 2016f).

As has been noted, if graduates accept the positively framed descriptions presented during the training, and then use these descriptions when recruiting family and friends, the reality of the nature of the training will be distorted, which will result in a lack of informed consent. It is one thing to subscribe to the notion that rape, screaming, and the Holocaust are only negative if one chooses to experience them as such, but it is disingenuous to fail to describe them as negative to those who have not yet bought into this radical philosophy. Framing is also employed with great effectiveness during the training, as the leader positions his treatment of participants as a form of tough love. Blogger, Dr Jack Bennett (who was highly positive about his own Forum experience), describes and then – using the framing provided by Landmark – rationalises the harsh treatment of participants:

“The ‘sharing/coaching’ segments of the Forum often wind up with the participant in tears, and/or the leader shouting at the participant. Well, not at the participant exactly, but at the cage of bullshit and lies in which they are trapped. (*I’m not shouting at you, I’m shouting at your stuff. I’m on your side. Do you want to let this go or do you want to let the past run your life?*)

It becomes clear at these points why we signed a waiver stating that we are emotionally healthy – these confrontations can be intense and are likely to unpack difficult memories for both the person standing at the microphone, and those sitting in the audience” (Bennett, 2011).

Another blogger who enjoyed the Forum, commenting on whether trainers “yell at you and break you down on stage in front of everyone”, also uses political language to rationalise this emotional abuse:

“Haha. Well, listen. They don’t YELL at you, but I would definitely call it tough love. In an awesome way. My course leader was hilarious and honest” (Sansouci, 2014).

“Tough love” is one way of framing the interactions which take place, and describing the trainer as “honest” is a way of rationalising the tactless, or intentionally harsh, treatment of participants. The way that the training environment is described and the way that trainers interact with participants are not the only areas in which political language is employed. Landmark, to create a sense of obligation, sometimes frames recruiting new participants as “forwarding the action” because the former sounds as if they are trying to use participants as unpaid salespersons, while the latter creates a sense of reciprocation and altruism. It is argued by various commentators that Landmark convinces graduates to work as *volunteers*⁹¹ by framing this work as an opportunity to make a difference in the world and an opportunity to retake the trainings and achieve greater development without having to pay for it. According to a report filed at U.S. Department of Labour:

⁹¹ Landmark, like est before it, insists that the term “assistants” is used.

“A heavy emphasis is put on volunteering at the initial Landmark Forum attended by newcomers. Attendees are influenced to assist (volunteer) at the classes and told they can gain more knowledge without paying any money to attend seminars that they volunteer at. By volunteering at these seminars and in the business office the assistants are convinced that they are acquiring skills and knowledge required to improve their social and mental skills that they can use in their full-time employment and personal lives” (U.S. Department of Labor, 2004).

In the same way that volunteering is framed as “a way to get free training”, a willingness to recruit without compensation is framed as something more positive (“the courage to stand for the Forum”):

“Participants, having heard the argument drone in their ears for 9 hours in a period of 72, began to cheer and smile as they raised their hands to say they too had the courage to stand for the Forum” (Badt, 2011).

Gilovich and Ross (2016) reiterate a point which is central to framing:

“Because people respond to their surrounding circumstances not as they are but as they are interpreted, the judicious use of terms and language can determine the nature of the situation to which people believe they are responding” (p. 75).

Landmark makes excessive use of jargon, employs a number of thought-terminating clichés and, additionally, judiciously selects words and phrases to generate arguably misleading associations. While it may argue that all environments load the language, it is clear that Landmark’s “technology” – at a minimum – remotely resembles Loading the Language.

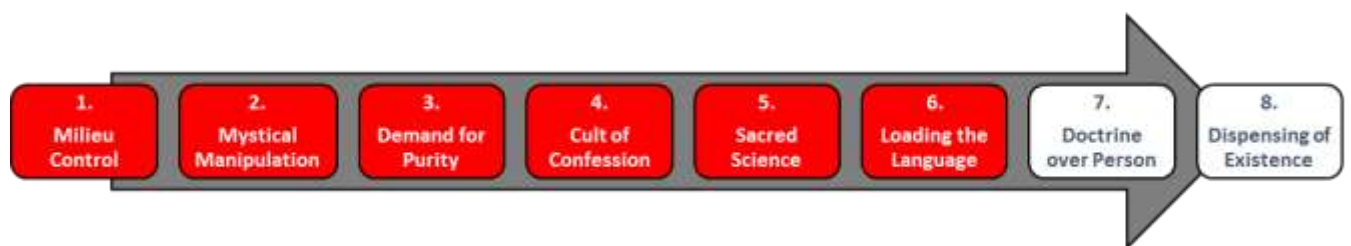


Figure 20: Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform in LGATs (6 of 8 conditions met).

As indicated in Figure 20, the sixth of Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform is present in LGATs.

Thought reform condition 7 of 8: Doctrine over Person

Doctrine over Person, according to Lifton (1961), refers to the way that the interrogator processes the experiences of prisoners through the philosophy of the environment. Participants in LGATs are pressurised into revealing their “stories” for interpretation. The trainer takes what they give him, applies his philosophical formula, and returns the reinterpreted story back to them. Of this element Lifton says “... the resulting ‘logic’ can be so compelling and coercive that it simply replaces the realities

of individual experience” (p. 431). Because the philosophy is considered a Sacred Science, anything shared will be processed using this thinking. Lifton continues, “The underlying assumption is that the doctrine – including its mythological elements – is ultimately more valid, true, and real than is any aspect of actual human character or human experience” (p. 431). In the following example from a Landmark Forum in Paris the trainer, after explaining the difference between facts and stories, convinces a participant that cancer is not a problem:

“Marc no longer even knows what the word ‘problem’ means. Alain Roth addresses him on the microphone: ‘I’ll give you an example. If you get cancer, do you have a problem?’ Marc answers: ‘Er, no. I have cancer!’ Gone! Marc has integrated the concept discussed a few minutes earlier: That ‘there are no problems, only things that happen.’ He did this so well that he can no longer recognize a problem. It’s useless to put forth the idea that this nonsense scrambles your thinking. Alain Roth won’t hesitate to impose his truth: ‘I’m the leader. You need to be coachable!’ Total surrender required” (Lemonnier, 2005).

In another example, a participant objects to being harassed by Landmark employees, who call her three to four times a week trying to get her to sign up for another training. The following exchange, which was captured on camera (Cult Awareness + Information Centre, 2017)⁹², shows how the “logic” of the environment is used to replace the realities of this person’s experience. Astonishingly, the woman in this exchange ended up agreeing with the perspective offered by the trainer:

TRAINER: So, if you have a question, raise your hand and ask it.

NARRATOR: Up front, a woman voices a criticism.

PARTICIPANT: Yes, I would like to know why there is so much harassment.

NARRATOR: Murielle complains about being harassed by the Landmark staff, of incessant phone calls to get her to register for the workshop.

PARTICIPANT: When people...

Before the participant has a chance to speak, the leader interrupts and disarms her, reminding her that she must obey his rules, while suggesting that her objection is invalid.

TRAINER: Wait, wait. Turn on the microphone. Don’t destroy the microphone. Thanks.

PARTICIPANT: What I wanted to say was...

⁹² As at 8 August 2017, the full video can be accessed at http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1243&Itemid=12

TRAINER: Wait a second. Where's your name tag? Because I don't want to harass you too much.
Thanks.

The leader then convinces this participant that her own experience is invalid. Landmark's (self-serving) constructionist perspective is applied, and it is ultimately accepted as being more valid, real, and true than this woman's own experience. This is a perfect example of Doctrine Over Person:

TRAINER: You don't make a distinction between what's happening and your interpretation. You confuse the two, as we'll see. There's no harassment. There is what happens.

PARTICIPANT: May I say something?

TRAINER: Wait, wait. You will say what you want. The Forum isn't "I go to the microphone and I talk". There's a leader who leads the discussions and I'm the leader. So, I will give you the floor, but let me create a certain context first. So, "harassment" never happened. That's an interpretation.⁹³

PARTICIPANT: So, if you tell me "It's not true", I don't see how I can talk to you.

TRAINER: Yes, but hold on. You didn't have ten people demanding... "You will enrol, you will enrol".

PARTICIPANT: No, I also had someone call to ask me if I had a problem. Another one asked something else...

TRAINER: OK!

PARTICIPANT: But when you get three, maybe four calls in the same week, you're overwhelmed.

TRAINER: OK, but you call that harassment?

PARTICIPANT: Yes, I call that harassment.

TRAINER: But is it harassment?

PARTICIPANT: Well, yes.

TRAINER: That's because you interpret it that way. You could interpret it another way.

PARTICIPANT: How?

TRAINER: That people are calling to support you, they're committed to making something happen for you.

⁹³ "If the Party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event, *it never happened* – that, surely, was more terrifying than torture and death?" (Orwell, 1949, p. 37).

This is a clear example of framing something negative in a positive way, and it should be patently obvious that this sort of manipulative logic would be dismissed in any other situation. If a person was summoned to the HR manager’s office at work because he was calling up a co-worker three to four times a week to ask her out (and she had repeatedly asked him not to), he could not argue that dating him would be in her best interests, so he was “supporting”, not harassing her. Of Doctrine over Person, Lifton (1961) states that “... the resulting ‘logic’ can be so compelling and coercive that it simply replaces the realities of individual experience” (p. 431). Considering the participant in the above exchange accepted the “logic” offered by the trainer – and considering the proportion of LGAT trainees who submit to trainers’ interpretations of their own experiences – it is not unreasonable to argue that Landmark processes, at a minimum, remotely resemble *Doctrine over Person*.



Figure 21: Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform in LGATs (7 of 8 conditions met).

As indicated in Figure 21, the seventh of Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform is present in LGATs.

Thought reform condition 8 of 8: Dispensing of Existence

Dispensing of Existence refers to the way that those running thought reform environments lay claim to who “lives” and who “dies” – between “the people” and “the nonpeople” (Lifton, 1961, p. 433). Those who do not submit to the dogma are rejected, while those who do are welcomed. Crucially, “the thought reform process is one means by which nonpeople are permitted, through a change in attitude and personal character, to make themselves over into people” (p. 433). This theme relates to the rebirth component of Lifton’s twelve steps and is central to the “goal-attainment” aspect of the LGAT process. Those accepting the LGAT doctrine are welcomed by the trainer as graduates, while those who do not remain – in the eyes of the trainer, and everyone else in the training – “assholes”. Goal-attainment in LGATs will be specifically addressed in section 4.3.1.3 (pp. 320-325), but Mark Brewer reveals the switch from “nonpeople” to “people” in LGATs as follows:

“They did not know what they were doing, did not know how to experience life, were struggling, desperate, confused. They were ASSHOLES! Tony savoured the word a moment, used it again, and thenceforth, as is a matter of course in the training, the recruits were always referred to as assholes [...] until they ‘got it’” (Brewer, 1975).

During LGATs participants are treated as if they are defective (“nonpeople”) until they embrace the philosophy, at which point they are welcomed by the trainer and graduate (they become “people”). This, at a minimum, remotely resembles the final theme of thought reform: Dispensing of Existence. As indicated in Figure 22, all eight of Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform are present in LGATs.



Figure 22: Lifton’s eight conditions of thought reform in LGATs (8 of 8 conditions met).

A case has now been made, based on the work of Robert Jay Lifton, with the details provided above, that Landmark’s processes, at a minimum, “remotely resemble” thought reform. This does not necessarily say anything about the effectiveness of thought reform; it simply means that, when one considers how thought reform is (clearly) defined, and then considers the processes used by Landmark, there are conspicuous similarities. Lifton (1961) was, himself, cautious about the power of thought reform, stating that while an image of brainwashing as an “all-powerful, irresistible, unfathomable, and magical method of achieving total control over the human mind” (p. 4) is caricatured and exaggerated, thought reform remains “one of the most powerful efforts at human manipulation ever undertaken” (pp. 4-5). To quantify the success of thought reform, as carried out by the Chinese, consider that Lifton described just “three such people” of the twenty-five he interviewed to be “apparent converts” (p. 117). Psychologist Edgar Schein (1961), who coined the term *coercive persuasion*, is the other early researcher of brainwashing and he reached a similar conclusion:

“... if one conceives of brainwashing as a process of producing genuine, extensive, and lasting belief, attitude, and value change in a person resisting such change, then only the small number of American civilians imprisoned on the Chinese mainland are true cases of brainwashing” (p. 18).

It might, therefore, be argued by Landmark that thought reform, as described by Lifton, is not particularly effective in eliciting large-scale, long-term attitudinal change but, given the evidence, it cannot be argued that there are not clear parallels between Landmark’s processes and thought reform. Because the processes described in the early 1960s did not generally produce lasting change, it should not be assumed, however, that they did not produce temporary change, and that refinements over the years could not have improved the effectiveness of these processes. According to Cialdini (2007) it was not necessary for the Chinese to produce long-term attitudinal change, but rather change that served their short-term goals. This, he states, they were highly effective at doing:

“It appears that the real goal of the Chinese was to modify, at least for a time, the hearts and minds of their captives. If we measure their achievements in terms of ‘defection, disloyalty, changed attitudes and beliefs, poor discipline, poor morale, poor *esprit*, and doubts as to America’s role,’ Dr. Segal concluded that ‘their efforts were highly successful’” (p. 75).

If it is Landmark’s goal to elicit commitments from graduates to take additional trainings, to recruit family and friends to the Tuesday night “guest evening” immediately after the course, and to volunteer their time for the organisation, then the impact of Landmark’s process need only be short-term. A great deal of evidence indicates that compelling graduates to take further courses, recruit new participants, and volunteer as unpaid “employees” is a central focus of LGATs. This claim, which relates to the pressure (stress) placed on participants, will be addressed in the following section.

4.3.1.1.4 Pressure to enrol and volunteer creates tension for many

Enrolment

“But Landmark Education says volunteers aren't pressured at all to sell for Landmark. Dr Nancy Zapolski says volunteers and Landmark participants are not encouraged to sell, they're only told to share their Landmark experience” (Cohen, 2009).

Werner Erhard began his career as a salesman, and the impact that he had on Mind Dynamics’ sales model has already been described (Pressman, 1993). LGATs rely almost exclusively on recent graduates and unpaid volunteers to generate revenue – a sales-generation model that would be the envy of any major corporation. Describing the regularity with which est graduates became unpaid salespersons, and the effectiveness of this process, Mark Brewer of Psychology Today stated:

“Many est graduates eschew the evangelical role and resent the insidious salesmanship. But they are a minority, and the much larger result is a sort of legally clean pyramid sales routine that has, in each year est has operated, doubled the number of graduates” (Brewer, 1975).

While there is pressure on participants to enrol others and take further courses, a great deal of recruitment occurs – it will be argued – because participants do feel incredible when they graduate. It is likely a combination of arguably coerced public commitments to enrol others, and a genuine belief that the training has forever changed them that results in the enthusiastic “sharing” of experiences:

“Smiling, they march out each week to share their brainwashed joys with friends, neighbors and co-workers, and they know that many will want to be sold” (Brewer, 1975).

Similarly, Haaken and Adams (1983) explained that Lifespring relied on graduate-generated sales:

“Most participants learned of Lifespring through the recruiting efforts of friends and family members who were Lifespring graduates” (p. 273).

Participants are not only pressured to enrol family, friends, and colleagues; they are also put under considerable pressure to enrol in the advanced training after completing the introductory course. During the 1980s Professor Lee Ross of Stanford University performed studies on the impact of the Lifespring training. Because these studies were not published, I contacted him to understand his methodology and results. It should be noted that Professor Ross' perspective was that the results, at least in the short-term, were impressive, but he also – as someone who witnessed the Lifespring Basic Training first-hand – provided the following unsolicited comment regarding recruitment:

“My major reservation, however, pertained to the pressure tactics applied in marketing the expensive follow-up trainings, and the fact that many, including those with very limited financial resources, who were caught up in the immediate ‘high’ at the end of the Basic training, were being encouraged to sign up immediately, without some period of reflection. I made these reservations known to Mr Hanley and Co and they were one of the reasons why I ended my consulting relationship with Lifespring” (Ross, 2016).

Many commentators provide evidence that Landmark places participants under duress to take part in further courses, and commit to enrolling family, friends, and colleagues. Former Landmark assistant Robert Black (1997) refers to comments by “Dr Frank Pittman”, who says:

“... the ever-present themes in all Landmark activities are enlisting others so they can enjoy the life altering participation and voluntarily assisting at the Landmark Center so that you further your own life altering participation.”

Black (1997) estimates the proportion of Landmark trainings dedicated to sales:

“Involvement with any of the Landmark programs will reveal that at least 1/3 of the time is spent extolling the participants to get others involved and to share the message.”

Landmark spokesperson Dr Nancy Zapolski (NZ in the following quote) argues that participants are not pressured, using political language to suggest that recruitment is an uncoerced personal choice:

NZ: “In a sense is that we invite participants to share the results that they’ve gotten out of the Landmark Forum with people in their life. Some of them choose to do that, some of them don’t choose to do that” (Cohen, 2009).

While Zapolski claims that there is no pressure, considerable evidence shows that this is a misleading depiction of what actually occurs. The following independent comments all relate to Landmark:

“A guy called his father the night before to ‘get complete’ with him, and overall it has gone well. Unfortunately, he neglected to ask him to come to our graduation night, when we are supposed to bring new recruits. Condon is furious” (O'Brien, 2012).

Ajith Prasad of India explains how trainers deal with participants who refuse to recruit others:

“And the enrollment (or registration) of more people is achieved via some kind of emotional arm-twisting and by bruising your ego by calling you a ‘shameless and arrogant jerk without integrity’ several times” (Prasad, 2012).

Two online contributors explain how they were pressured to recruit and enrol in further trainings:

“The psych trip they put on you for not disclosing your friends, family and co-workers as potential candidates was relentless. I didn’t cave in” (jman76, 2009).

“The actual life coaching tips are helpful but 90 percent of the 40 hr weekend is about the profit of the organization and manipulating the group into taking their classes” (Jack Shamblin, 2015).

Karin Badt of the Huffington Post made a similar observation in London:

“I clocked two hours the first day devoted to ‘spreading the word’ of the Landmark Forum as a sign of the participants’ ‘integrity’ [...] I clocked four hours devoted to this subject on Saturday. I clocked the first three hours of the Sunday session to the subject...” (Badt, 2011).

Rosemary Mahoney of Elle Magazine, Amanda Scioscia of the Phonenix New Times, Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine and Charlotte Faltermayer of Time Magazine make the same observation:

“During the breaks people are lining up at the public telephones outside the building to ‘complete’ with their friends and families and recruit them for the Tuesday-night meeting” (Mahoney, 1998).

“Most of the first three hours is dedicated to teaching those of us who have already paid our money how to recruit other customers for Landmark, a theme that will be revisited often throughout the weekend” (Scioscia, 2000).

“Since Landmark doesn’t advertise its courses, it relies solely on satisfied customers to spread the word, and much of the initial course is spent exhorting participants to tell their friends, family, and anyone they might see on the subway” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

“But outreach was clearly part of the agenda. Pupils were assigned to call or write people with whom they ‘want to make a breakthrough,’ thereby introducing others to Landmark. On graduation night participants were encouraged to bring guests, who were then led away to learn more and sign on. From Day 1, attendants were told that for a limited time, the Forum’s tuition included a \$95 follow-up, ‘The Forum in Action.’ The crowd was also repeatedly invited to sign up for the \$700 ‘Advanced Course’. ‘Act now and get a \$100 discount’” (Faltermayer, 2001).

Blogger Ruby Warrington – who was highly positive about the impact of the Forum in her own life – makes a similar statement, while blogger Sarah Fazeli mirrors this observation and, at the same time, reveals the political language used by Landmark to encourage this behaviour:

“But the constant pressure throughout the course to ‘enrol’ our friends, coworkers, and family members definitely crossed over into coercion territory in my book...” (Warrington, 2015).

“Also within the first few hours, we were ‘challenged’ to ‘powerfully enrol our friends and family in the possibilities Landmark is giving you!’ This would mean using the few and far between breaks we did have to call our friends and ‘get complete’ with them” (Fazeli, 2012).

It is worth noting that participants are urged to recruit others during the training, before they have had time to reflect on the experience, or to see whether the results are enduring. This raises a similar concern to that expressed by Professor Ross – that participants are being pushed to commit to enrolling others when they had not had time to reflect, or when they were “still high”:

“Landmark has chosen to market itself exclusively through word of mouth, especially by getting participants who are in the ‘heat of the moment’ to recommend Landmark to someone else” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

“Enrolling others in Forum courses is an act that participants are very strongly encouraged to do now, while the Forum is still in progress. This, again, leads to those infamous telephone calls⁹⁴” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

“The Forum is very much directed to taking action immediately and without delay, and that’s clearly a good habit to get into”⁹⁵ (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

Referring to an anonymous group of Landmark supporters who want to reform certain processes from within, Hagar Cohen of ABC Radio in Australia reveals the views of its founder, M.L.:

“The Founder, M.L., says in his experience, Landmark seminars’ main focus is registration, not transformation [...] at the end of this 3-day weekend, the forum leaders will talk about registering for a new course, and they can be quite intense about this. My forum leader raised his voice quite strongly. And I think I had problems about the appropriateness of having people who were very excited and confused and tired, and having just taken in a lot of new information, and at that point pitching them a new course. You know, I think it’s inappropriate to sell a course to people who are in a vulnerable state” (Cohen, 2009).

⁹⁴ This refers to phone calls, often late at night, to “complete” with people and invite them to the graduation.

⁹⁵ Recruiting others immediately is framed as being “proactive”, rather than being a “spectator”.

Cohen explains that leaders expect every breakthrough to lead to enrolment:

“Once you’ve done a breakthrough in the Landmark Education that is connecting with family members and getting them interested in what you’re doing and getting a positive emotional feedback from them, then you are to enrol them” (Cohen, 2009).

Henry Alford of The New York Times, while revealing the political language used by trainers, adds that homework assignments, like phone calls during the training, are aimed at recruitment:

“... write a letter to someone you’ve been ‘inauthentic’ with, to tell them about ‘the possibility you invented for yourself,’ and then ‘extend an invitation’” (Alford, 2010).

Mary Braid of The Independent, and Amelia Hill of The Guardian make identical statements:

“Course curtailed, Jane missed the ‘breakthroughs’ that occur midway through the Forum, when participants are encouraged to phone husbands, siblings, parents and other loved ones with whom relations are poor. These emotional reconciliation calls often come late at night, during ‘homework’ hours, and are in line with the central Forum message that participants should not let their past determine the shape of their future. The bleary-eyed recipients of Forum calls are usually assailed by declarations of love and forgiveness, and invited to Forum ‘graduation’ – a couple of days after the course” (Braid, 2003).

“Jerry knows he’s won. Now that we’re putty in his hands, he launches his bombshell. For every relationship that has failed, it is up to us to make it right. And now. In the next break. It’s time for that phone call” (Hill, 2003).

Describing how participants, after having “breakthroughs” on the phone, are told to recruit, Cohen (2009) quotes the trainer from a Landmark Forum in Sweden caught on hidden camera:

“Well, call her back and ask her to attend the Tuesday meeting. Don’t you want her to have the same possibility as you, having these breakthroughs?”

HAGAR COHEN: The people who did not want to invite their relatives were harangued.

FORUM LEADER: You are all liars. Me, I don’t know. In other words you say, Yes, I’m going to do something, and then you don’t do it. And here’s the really disgusting thing in your country. You actually support each other doing this. That’s actually why you have a lot of unworkability in your culture” (Cohen, 2009).

Blogger Citizen Skeptic makes a similar point - that those who will not recruit are engaged with until they submit, and *commit*, to bringing guests:

“All the Forum leaders have heard every possible objection to what they teach and every possible objection as to why you should not enroll your friends and family in the Forum today. They have well-rehearsed answers to all of these objections” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

Describing the Tuesday night “guest evening”, bloggers Ajith Prasad and Citizen Skeptic state:

“The evening session on Tuesday is all about shameless marketing that the gathering (your invitees whom you are ‘inauthentic’ with and hence apologized) has to experience. This marketing takes place in a very convincing manner that you will be forced to sign up your dear ones and friends for this” (Prasad, 2012).

“At this evening, one of the things that happens is that Forum graduates get up and tell stories about their involvement with Landmark and how the experience has changed them” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

Singer (2003) calls the chapter in her book on LGATs *Intruding Into the Workplace*, referring to the way that, when a senior member of an organisation becomes an LGAT proponent, it is common for significant pressure, including the explicit or implicit threat of job-loss, to be placed on subordinates to participate⁹⁶. Zana Byetheway, the CEO of a Victoria-based helpline which provides free legal advice on work-related matters confirmed that they received “a number of calls about Landmark’s training courses”, primarily relating to pressure to attend these courses as a part of their employment (Cohen, 2009). Describing one caller, Byetheway says, “her employment was terminated because of her refusal to attend a Landmark course”. Journalist Marita Vanderberg, of Contact Magazine in New Zealand, reports a similar experience:

“Another person I spoke to claimed bad experiences of being pressured to do the training by colleagues. They worried about being named: they feared losing their job” (Vandenberg, 2000).

Referring to the tendency of Landmark proponents to recruit employees, Horacio Silva of the New York Times states:

“I can understand why it could be attractive to someone trying to get a leg warmer up the corporate ladder (it’s funny how many of the people I know who have done Landmark work for bosses who proselytize about it in the office)” (Silva, 2005).

Traci Hukill of Metro News San Francisco, and Laura McClure of Mother Jones Magazine reveal that enamoured employers are often quite forceful about the participation of their employees:

⁹⁶ This, of course, is exactly how I came to take part in an LGAT.

“A lot of people came at their boss’s ‘friendly’ behest, and several asked for information on Landmark’s corporate programs, in which entire companies examine their rackets” (Hukill, 1998).

“Other firms have been sued by employees claiming they were pressured to take the Forum: In 2007, a Virginia man accused his former employer of firing him for his ‘refusal to embrace Landmark religious beliefs’” (McClure, 2009).

This blogger claims that the pressure to participate was relentless:

“Ten years ago I worked as a law clerk for a law firm that was deep into Landmark. New hires were persuaded or bullied into attending Landmark Forum seminars – at their own expense” (Anonymous, 2011).

According to Charles Rusnell and Jennie Russell (2014) of CBC News, similar claims have been made by employees in Canada:

“Internal Alberta Health Services (AHS) documents obtained by CBC News through a freedom of information request detail several complaints to human resources from information technology employees who felt pressured, even harassed, to attend Landmark Education Corp. seminars, and to reveal personal details of their lives at the seminars and at staff meetings.”

“‘Many staff have been ‘encouraged’ to attend Landmark retreats,’ one HR adviser wrote in July 2012. ‘One director told me that after the retreat he was harassed every day to join this organization until he engaged’.”

Pressured LGAT participation is unethical for a host of reasons, but a key problem for employees is that it compels them to reveal psychological issues to employers. Landmark’s disclaimer states:

“While it is ultimately your choice, OUR ADVISORS STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT YOU SHOULD NOT PARTICIPATE in the Program if you: (a) have a personal or family history of bi-polar affective disorder (manic-depressive disorder), schizophrenia, acute or chronic depression or other psychotic disorder, whether or not you or they are being or have ever been treated or hospitalized; (b) are taking, have taken or been prescribed to take within the previous twelve months anti-anxiety drugs (such as Librium, Ativan, Klonopin, Xanax, Dormicum or others); anti-depressants (such as Elavil, Prozac, Zoloft, Celexa, Cipram, Prothiaden or others); anti-psychotics (such as Thorazine, Haldol, Stelazine, Risperdal, Zyprexa, Dogmatil or others); any medication to treat bi-polar disorders (such as Lithium, Gabapentin or Depakote); any drugs or medicines, whether prescription or nonprescription, intended to treat or affect mental processes or mood or to treat a chemical imbalance; or anabolic steroids; (c) have an unresolved history of drug or steroid abuse; (d) are or have in the past year been depressed and/or considered or had ideas of suicide, self-

harm or harm to another; (e) are currently in therapy and your therapist sees a health reason why you should not participate in the Program; or (f) are uncertain about your physical, mental or emotional ability to participate in the Program” (Landmark, 2016f).

Employees who live with these conditions are, therefore, faced with the choice of participating (and risking their mental health), or revealing stigmatised conditions to employers (a career-limiting alternative). The findings from extensive research on the stigma of mental illness are unambiguous: it is highly likely that individuals who reveal this information will be explicitly or implicitly discriminated against (Corrigan, 1998). Organisations, therefore, have no right to this information. By allowing (if not encouraging) employers to recruit members of staff, LGATs contribute to the violation of employee privacy, or to the participation of individuals who are at particularly high risk of harm.

Volunteering

LGATs do not only strongly encourage graduates to recruit new participants without compensation – they also encourage graduates to work for their organisations without financial compensation. According to Finkelstein, et al. (1982):

“Both in training sessions and for organizational purposes the est enterprise is heavily dependent on volunteer labor” (p. 522).

“Volunteer work may be a major component of the est experience for many graduates” (p. 523).

Pressman (1993) makes the same point, commenting on the tasks that volunteers were convinced to do to as part of their personal growth, and the volume of work performed by unpaid est enthusiasts:

“Around the country, a growing army of enthusiastic est volunteers (called ‘assistants’ in est jargon) contributed free labor – sometimes up to forty hours per week – to the organization, filling every conceivable task from handling the phones in est centers around the country to cleaning out the toilets and scrubbing the pots and pans at Franklin House⁹⁷. In 1977, as est approached the height of its popularity, thousands of assistants were contributing some 20,000 hours of free labor a week to the organization” (p. 86).

According to Marc Fisher of The Washington Post, and a newsletter published by The North Texas Skeptics, Lifespring was equally reliant on volunteers:

“Thousands of Americans now call themselves Lifespringers and spend hundreds of hours recruiting new students with no compensation other than the belief that they are helping people revolutionize their lives. Graduates often get their whole families to sign up...” (Fisher M., 1987).

⁹⁷ Werner Erhard’s private residence was in *Franklin Street*, San Francisco (Pressman, 1993).

“According to Ms. Thorson, Lifespring puts intense pressure on basic course graduates to take the advanced course (\$850) and later to work as unpaid volunteers” (The Skeptic, 1989, p. 2).

Like est and Lifespring, Landmark uses unpaid volunteers to carry out work that would typically be performed by paid employees. Rosemary Mahoney of Elle Magazine and Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine both make this point:

“... the corporation, which has around 300 paid employees (including forty-odd charismatic seminar leaders), boasts an army of some 7,000 volunteers worldwide” (Mahoney, 1998).

“Some Landmark graduates also volunteer for the company, which has approximately 500 employees and a reported 7,500 unpaid ‘assistants’ (though Landmark puts this number much lower) who answer phones, sign up recruits, and cater to the Forum leaders. ‘They have a person designated to make them lunches,’ says Laura White, a former volunteer at the Washington D.C., Forum office. ‘Someone makes sure they have a clean pair of socks after the second break’” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

Describing the number of unpaid staff, and the ratio of paid to unpaid staff in certain locations, Hagar Cohen (2009) of ABC News in Australia states:

“A Landmark Education graduate website says there are currently almost 12,000 volunteers around the world. They sign what is called an assisting agreement with Landmark Education. It details what the person commits to when working or assisting with Landmark Education, the hours they should spend, the responsibilities they should fill, and some agreements have targets for the number of new people to be registered or enrolled.”

“In Perth at the time, there were 4.5⁹⁸ paid people on staff and around 150 volunteers.”

This is similar to the *paid employee: unpaid volunteer* ratio reported by Mark Brewer at est:

“This has all been accomplished by a national staff of fewer than 100 people, but who are considerably augmented by a small army of unpaid volunteers; in 1975 more than 3,500 volunteers contributed anywhere from a few hours to more than 40 hours a week to further the cause...” (Brewer, 1975).

Former volunteer Robert Black argues that without volunteers Landmark would not survive:

“... it is the long term and continued involvement in the Landmark Education System, its Curriculum for Living, by individuals, as participants in seminars and as volunteer assistants, that keeps the Landmark ship afloat and profitable...” (Black, 1997).

⁹⁸ This presumably means that there was at least one part-time paid staff member.

Traci Hukill of Metro News San Francisco looked into the amount of time spent assisting by volunteers:

“Est and Forum grads called me with stories of how they or someone they knew had taken an introductory course, then an advanced course... and eventually started volunteering, spending as many as 20 hours a week in the service of est or Landmark... Without exception they asked not to be named” (Hukill, 1998).

In the ABC Radio discussion Hagar Cohen (2009) revealed the jobs performed by volunteers:

HAGAR COHEN: And the kind of jobs Jon Post and his team had to do weren’t all that glamorous.

JON POST: Assembling pamphlets, keeping the bathrooms clean, changing paper towels, garbage, cleaning up, all that kind of stuff. Fastidious work that needs to happen and you can’t just sit there being a participant.

Demonstrating how negative aspects of volunteering are framed by Landmark, Global Director of Training, Dr Nancy Zapolski (NZ in the following quote), explains how volunteers who clean floors and bathrooms, and throw out garbage, are not actually cleaning:

NZ: “But no-one does housekeeping at all. If you kind of imagine, I don’t know if you can just imagine people that might have their cups in a hallway or something as they were drinking coffee, or papers on the floor, will just walk through and pick things up so that it looks neat. Nobody does housekeeping per se, or cleaning per se” (Cohen, 2009).

According to Cohen (2009) even full-time employees were paid very little for their hours (Australia):

“She signed a contract for a permanent position to work from 9am to 10pm Monday to Friday, and then 9am to 10pm on Saturday for a salary of \$24,000 a year.”

The reason that people are willing to volunteer their time for organisations like Landmark is that they believe they are getting something out of volunteering, and/or they believe that their volunteering benefits others. They are under the impression that the organisation is making a positive change in the world and they want to be a part of that change. It is, therefore, the desire to grow as people and make the world a better place that is used by these groups to exploit participants and generate revenue. Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine quotes a Landmark volunteer who believes that, in volunteering, he is getting a good deal:

“To me, it’s a fair trade: Landmark gets my time for free, but I get to continue in the process of self-realization for free” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

This seemingly transparent form of manipulation is also parodied in the Peep Show episode on cults (season 5, episode 6), as Jez and his friend Super Hans discuss moving into the cult's compound. While it is clear that these two have been conned, they are convinced that they are getting a great deal:

SUPER HANS: I was talkin' to Pasco and there's good news. There's a couple of rooms have come up at the centre... and the cool thing is if you live in you can pay for classes by workin' at the centre, makin' new recruits. It's a good system, innit?

JEZ: That is a good system.

While volunteers perform many jobs for Landmark, much of their time is spent generating sales. Hagar Cohen reveals excerpts from a volunteer supervisor manual "used in a 2005 court case in the US", while Vanessa Grigoriadis comments on sales generated by volunteers from their homes:

"The whole job is enrolment. When you come in to greet the team for the first time, you need to hit the ground running. There's only enrolment. You're either going to get enrolled or you're going to do the enrolling" (Cohen, 2009).

"Devotees can even hold three-hour introductions to the Forum at their homes, a la Amway" (Grigoriadis, 2001).

Charlotte Faltermayer of Time Magazine adds the perspectives of other detractors:

"Critics say Landmark is an elaborate marketing game that relies heavily on volunteers. Says Tom Johnson, an 'exit counsellor' often summoned by concerned parents to attend to alumni: 'They tire your brain; they make you vulnerable.' Says critic Liz Sumerlin: 'The participants end up becoming recruiters. That's the whole purpose'" (Faltermayer, 2001).

This thesis argues that LGAT participants are pushed into a transient hypomanic/manic state. Combined with the thought reform techniques already described, and elements of social psychology which are yet to be outlined, this leaves participants vulnerable, particularly with regards to *impulsively* spending money and *expansively* contacting family and friends. If assertions of hypomania are shown to be valid then Landmark and other LGATs are taking advantage of the very people who have trusted them with their transformation and growth, using their altruistic natures and desire for independence as a mechanism by which to exploit and render them willing servants of the group.

The impact of LGATs is not, however, the result a single factor and, while psychological stressors are paramount, long hours of sitting in uncomfortable chairs while being strongly discouraged from leaving the room contribute to the need for an allostatic defence. The following section considers the physical discomfort of the LGAT environment, and how this may amplify the trainings' impact.

4.3.1.1.5 Conditions are physically uncomfortable

*“I think the thing I struggled with most in the beginning was that you’re expected to sit for so long”
– recent Landmark Forum graduate⁹⁹*

While it is asserted that LGATs maximise psychological stress, and while it will be contended that the long hours and lack of sleep are exhausting, it should be noted that it is also physically uncomfortable to remain seated for extended periods of time. The challenge I felt during my own training was the result of an aggregation of factors. Perhaps any one of them on its own would have not been a problem but, when combined, the relentless hostility of the trainer, the inability to move freely, or talk, or eat, or use the bathroom, the trance-inducing exercises, the emotional abuse of fellow participants, the guilt of failing to intervene, the overload of nonsensical philosophy, the emotionally draining exercises, the mentally exhausting exercises, and the increasingly relevant lack of sleep all contributed to the stress I experienced. A number of commentators note, in addition to psychological factors, the physical discomfort of the training. Finkelstein, et al. (1982) say of est:

“The trainees, meanwhile, experience very real physical discomfort from which only the trainer can release them” (p. 531).

Rhinehart (2010) similarly comments:

“Our buttocks ache at this point, our shoulders ache, our stomachs have been growling for an hour and a half, our bladders announce that their needs are being neglected, and we are beginning to feel that if we hear the word *experience* one more time we may have to raise our hands and share a scream. How can the goddam trainer keep talking? And *he* already knows all this stuff. And why can’t I have one little cigarette? What the hell time can it be getting to be? Did they design these hotel chairs for maximum discomfort?” (pp. 27-28).

Mark Brewer and Nathan Thornburgh make very much the same point about est, and Werner Erhard:

“In our culture, however, six hours of deprivation is like seven years of locusts, and when aching backs, filling bladders, and desperately wandering minds finally neared the point of open rebellion...” (Brewer, 1975).

“His courses were legendarily uncomfortable. He paced and cursed at his students. He had them writhe on the floor and scream out all their anxieties. He challenged participants to control their bladders so they didn’t have to leave the long sessions” (Thornburgh, 2011).

Ray Clancy of the London Times makes similar comments about the Landmark Forum:

⁹⁹ (Sky Lark, 2013).

“Chairs were laid out neatly in rows so close to each other that when you sat down it was almost impossible not to be touching the next person [...] People had headaches, numb bottoms from sitting on uncomfortable chairs and were tired from concentrating for hours on end. I had not expected to be affected by such conditions. But by 10pm my eyes were dry and my contact lenses uncomfortable” (Clancy, *Victims Lured Into Baring Their Souls By Mind Games*, 1992).

Numerous other journalists indicate that the chairs were particularly uncomfortable and placed unnecessarily close together, allowing little room to move. Given that the content of these trainings appears to have been designed to generate psychological discomfort, it is not unreasonable to consider the possibility that physical discomfort is an intentional feature of a highly-planned training:

“It’s a gorgeous Friday morning in June, and 150 of us sit in a windowless conference room on bent-steel chairs, arranged in a close semicircle” (Martin, 1998).

“As I take my seat in one of the hard, scratchy chairs...” (Hukill, 1998).

“Though we’re sitting side by side, shoulders touching, I nod and wave back with an awkward little jerk of my hand” (Mahoney, 1998).

“... they sit shoulder to shoulder, packed in tighter than coach class, unable to cross their legs without kicking the seat in front of them [...] And it still charges hundreds of dollars for the privilege of spending three days wedged cheek to jowl with other souls who have forked over cash to be yelled at, ridiculed, berated and, of course, transformed” (Scioscia, 2000).

“The participants sit in cramped chairs in a semicircle 12 rows deep” (Howard, 2001).

“... in all the time I’ve sat in this hard, plastic chair, I’m thrilled with this chastisement – no doubt meant to urge me, to urge all of us, toward some kind of life breakthrough” (O'Brien, 2012).

One blogger makes the specific point that the uncomfortable chair arrangement was not necessary:

“We sat in very uncomfortable chairs spaced very close together [...] Now take in mind that this was a large hall and there was tonnes of space in this room to move the chairs around to allow for more comfort, but they chose to increase dissatisfaction of the customers by placing us shoulder to shoulder” (growthguided, 2014).

While relatively uncommon, serious psychological harm from LGAT participation strongly suggests that the trainings are stressful. The following section considers observations and claims of psychological harm, which not only reveal common injuries, but also explains why – if LGATs want to maximise their impact on the majority of participants – an *unfortunate few* will always be harmed.

4.3.1.1.6 Reported psychological casualties suggest that conditions may be extreme

“... we differ tremendously among ourselves as to what we experience as truly stressful...” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 161).

Section 2.1.11 (Negative effects of LGATs) provided a high-level outline of this topic and, while extreme psychological harm was not observed by Fisher, et al. (1989), or Lieberman (1987), Lieberman did note transient psychosis and a number of stress reactions, while Glass, Kirsch, and Parris (1977), Kirsch and Glass (1977), Singer (2003), and others, noted what they considered highly concerning responses to participation. It is presumably not the goal of LGATs to harm participants and, because the internet now allows those who respond badly to share their experiences, LGATs are incentivised to achieve the desired result (“transformation”) with as few conspicuous psychological injuries as possible. The *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* explains the hypomanic symptoms of most LGAT graduates, but it also lends legitimacy to claims of extreme mood states (mania/depression), and psychotic episodes. If LGATs put large groups of people through a relatively homogeneous stressor, and there is a normal distribution of stress tolerances among the group, one would expect – assuming LGATs have evolved to elicit a powerful “experience” in the majority of participants – that there will be some who find the training too stressful and suffer significantly as a result.

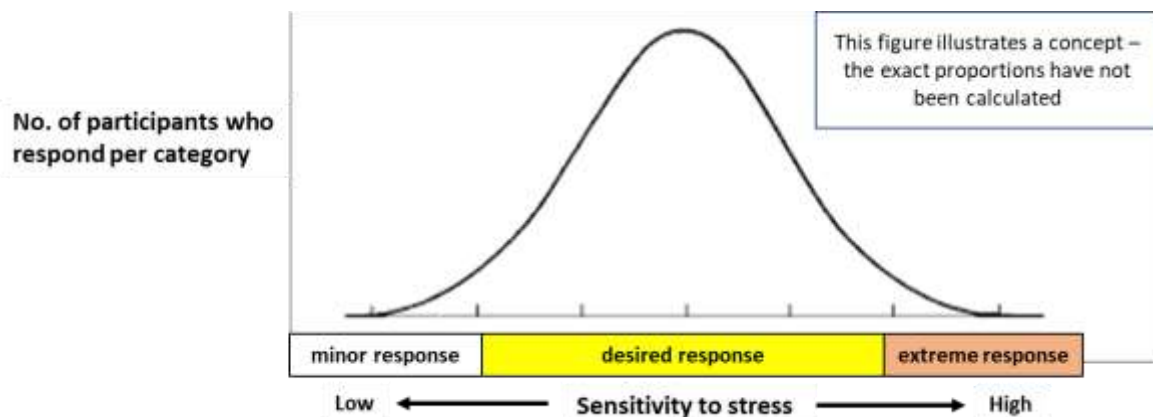


Figure 23: Normal distribution of stress tolerance in an LGAT (and the corresponding stress response)

Figure 23 shows a normal distribution of sensitivity to stress (which would be influenced by psychological coping skills, life history, the relevance of LGAT processes to the individual, physiological make up, and other situational factors). It is argued that – if LGAT processes have evolved to maximise profits and minimise harm – a minority of participants will have an inconsequential reaction to the conditions (“minor response”), the majority will experience “transformation”/hypomania (“desired response”) and, because participants are not adequately warned and are incapable of assessing their own psychological resilience to unknown conditions, a small number will experience extreme moods, psychosis, or other undesirable outcomes as a result of participation (“extreme response”).

Fisher M. (1987), Pressman (1993), and Singer (2003) suggest that LGATs are aware that they cause harm to some, but that, rather than adequately warning participants prior to participation, they settle out of court with the few who do suffer severe – and relatively provable – negative effects. While conceding that a tiny portion of participants experience significant harm (Landmark, 2016f)¹⁰⁰, at other times Landmark argues that there is no possible link between their processes and the harm experienced by some. Instead, it asserts that the psychological damage experienced is coincidental and just happens to occur during, or immediately after, participating in its trainings (Scioscia, 2000).

Singer (2003) comments on the harm, and lawsuits relating to LGATs which preceded Landmark. These LGATs, while often settling out of court, similarly accepted no responsibility for harm caused:

“Also, a plethora of allegations has been raised, some in civil suits, pointing out that individuals have suffered mental breakdowns and psychological harm as a result of participating...” (p. 187).

Describing the harmful effects experienced by some LGAT participants, Singer (2003, p. 208) states:

“Importantly, a certain number of participants will be seriously harmed as these stresses precipitate a handful of psychological conditions, such as brief psychotic episodes, posttraumatic stress disorder syndrome, a variety of dissociative disorders, relaxation-induced anxiety, and other miscellaneous reactions including phobias, cognitive difficulties, and stress-related illnesses.”

She further asserts that psychological harm in LGATs is not uncommon, and describes some of the lawsuits she personally worked on as an expert witness:

“These damages ranged from death by drowning and suicide to both brief and prolonged stays in mental hospitals. I have kept track of the individuals involved in the nearly sixty legal cases in which I was a consultant. Some of them have got their lives going again, although with the fearful recall of what it was like to lose mental and emotional control. A few are still hospitalised as long as ten years after their breakdowns during or immediately after the training” (Singer, 2003, p. 192).

While the larger, and more publicly visible, LGATs require participants to sign surety for their own psychological health (which is only somewhat possible if an accurate depiction of training conditions is provided), and strongly advise individuals with histories of psychopathology not to participate, many individuals with predispositions for stress-induced disorders may, until they participate in an LGAT, never have been exposed to a stressor capable of setting the disorder in motion:

“... have a life sufficiently free of stress, and even with a genetic predisposition, you may be safe – a car whose brakes are faulty presents no danger if it is never driven” (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 308).

¹⁰⁰ Landmark asserts that in less than 1 in 100,000 participants, there have been “reports of unexplained suicide or other destructive behaviour”. This unverified claim suggests a level of safety that has not been established.

With this in mind, Otto, et al. (2011, p. 12) state, “Bipolar disorder can occur at any time, but usually begins before age 35”. Approximately 41% of Forum participants are under thirty-five, 9% are under twenty-five (Landmark_Yankelovich, 2016), and Landmark also offers a Forum for “young people” (children from age eight upwards) and teens. It follows that a material number of participants may simply not have been diagnosed by the time that they participate, and – for these individuals – the stress of the LGAT may trigger the illness. Singer (2003) provides examples of individuals with no personal or family histories of psychopathology who suffered as a result of LGAT participation (these examples, as Singer could not include Landmark in her book, presumably do not refer to Landmark):

“‘Gerald’, a forty-year-old man, applied for a job as a store manager. The owner told Gerald he would hire him only if Gerald purchased and attended a specific large group awareness training. The owner, who had become a devotee of the group, abides by the group’s policy of not revealing what the training is about. Thus, he failed to describe to Gerald its philosophy, the extremely emotional and confrontational quality of the program, or how psychologically upsetting the procedures can be for some attendees.

Because taking the course was a prerequisite to employment, Gerald assumed that it would be a skills-training, job-related program, and purchased it at a price he could ill-afford. Once the five-day program began, he realized he was in an emotionally intense, high-confrontation, encounter-group situation. It appeared to him puzzlingly unrelated to managing a small store. The content was the amalgam of New Age philosophy, guided imagery, personal confessions, and confrontational attacks by the trainers. Gerald had never seen people break down to the extent that he saw in those sessions. His anxiety mounted by the hour, much of it growing out of the conflicts he was feeling between his religious beliefs and the New Age philosophy he was hearing in the training. Adding to this stress was his fear that he would not be hired unless he completed the program. He felt himself coming apart psychologically and asked to be excused, but the leaders of the program insisted he remain. By the fourth day, he was in a mental hospital experiencing a brief reactive psychosis. Gerald had no prior history of mental illness and nothing related to such illness in his family history.

‘Joyce’ was a top marketing executive in her firm. Her supervisor told her she would get ahead only if she attended the New Age training program that he urged her to take. She thought that it was a skills-training, job-related program but instead came upon the same stresses experienced by Gerald. Joyce found the psychological and social coercion so intense that she has no remembrance of just when she deteriorated, but she was admitted to a psychiatric ward with almost continuous panic attacks. As time passed, she developed numerous incapacitating phobias and became house-

bound and unemployed or underemployed for more than three years. She had no prior history of mental disorder nor was there any in her family” (pp. 204-206).

These examples do not constitute proof, but they do provide food for thought. Another person, who claimed to have benefitted from the est training, commented on the extreme reactions of others:

“I took est in the 1970’s, when I was very young, very naïve and very impressionable. I learned I am emotionally a very strong person, so I got a lot out of it and suffered no ill effects. Not so with many of the attendees however. It was nothing to see seemingly strong people broken down psychologically until they were lying fetal on the floor, screaming, blubbing and drooling, completely out of control, right next to me. My husband at the time was one of them” (de Michaelis, 2009).

With reference to controversy surrounding Lifespring, Fisher M. (1987) states the following:

“There is another side to Lifespring, one of court battles about emotional trauma, psychotic episodes and even death. There are experts who believe that Lifespring is a dangerous company that uses psychological tricks to manipulate minds, a view Lifespring and its paid experts dispute. There are deprogrammers and lawyers who have built careers out of suing the company. And there are dozens of ‘casualties,’ the company’s name for people who leave the training with severe psychological problems. Casualties, Lifespring says, happen because people with psychological problems who are warned not to take the course take it anyway.”

This response is very much in line with the common LGAT philosophy – that participants are responsible for everything that happens in their lives:

“... Hanley preached that everyone is totally responsible for his life; there is no such thing as a victim. Students sometimes took this to mean they were responsible for lost jobs, family breakups, even how parents had raised them. Some students suffered breakdowns and sued Lifespring. The company argued it was not responsible for the psychological problems” (Fisher M., 1987).

LGAT instructors follow a clear script, provided by the founder or course development teams, so it is disingenuous for LGAT spokespersons to claim that the regularly described cruelty by, and hostile demeanours of, trainers are unplanned departures from a more benign and gentle plan:

“Unlike sensitivity training and encounter groups, large group awareness training is less open to leader differences, since there is a detailed written plan which is followed with little variation from one training series to another” (Lieberman, 1987, p. 460).

Given the level of control exercised over participants, the claimed professionalism of LGAT trainers, and their scripted and structured nature, the chances are negligible that trainers would improvise

harassment and hostility that was not orchestrated and sanctioned by the LGAT. Hanley, as the principle originator of the Lifespring “technology”, claimed, however, to be surprised by the demeanour of leaders during trainings:

“‘There ought not be any harsh tactics in the training,’ Hanley says. Told that trainers still call customers names, he says he is disappointed. ‘I apologise if anyone in the training was treated in anything but a respectful way’” (Fisher M., 1987).

Responding to the claim that participants have been hospitalised for breakdowns as a result of their involvement in Landmark programs, its spokesperson (Mark Kamin) argued that the breakdowns were simply a coincidence and could have occurred anywhere. There was no acknowledgement that the training could, in any way, be linked to psychological harm:

“‘I’m sure it’s happened – we’ve had a million people take our programs,’ Kamin says. ‘There’s always going to be some small percentage of people – just like somebody reads your newspaper and has a nervous breakdown. You wouldn’t attribute it to your newspaper. There are people who go into marriage counselling and have a nervous breakdown. It wasn’t provoked by that experience. There are people who have breakdowns in the supermarket’” (Scioscia, 2000).

Singer (2003) provides specific examples of LGATs settling lawsuits with those who feel they have been harmed. It is implied that LGATs are aware that they cause harm but that, from a financial perspective, it makes sense to pay off the few who are emotionally and financially able to take these claims to court, rather than alter the potent, but potentially dangerous, “technology” which generates revenue:

“Another out-of-court settlement was reached in a case that involved PSI World, a consulting group based in San Rafael, California. The plaintiff claimed that he was impaired after having his emotions manipulated in a five-day PSI World training program and that this caused him later to lose control of his car, crash, and get hurt. He said that he was physically and mentally exhausted after what he described as emotional ten-hour sessions in which participants were asked to act out mostly negative situations. He also went without sleep on two nights in order to complete homework assignments. ‘There was no clock and no one was allowed to wear watches,’ he said. ‘We were going long periods of time without eating and without breaks.’ While PSI World admitted no guilt, and its lawyer said there was no merit to the claims, PSI World was reported to have paid a six-figure settlement to have the case dismissed” (pp. 202-203).

Referring to the practice of paying off those injured, rather than going to court, Fisher M. (1987) states:

“At least five lawyers around the country specialize in suing Lifespring on behalf of trainees who have had psychotic episodes or other emotional strains they attribute to the training. Only two

cases have reached a jury. Nearly all the others were settled, with Lifespring generally paying from \$150,000 to \$800,000 while admitting no fault, lawyers say.”

Fisher M. (1987) explains that Lifespring executives were well aware of psychological casualties:

“FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, LIFESPRING executives have known about adverse reactions to the training. James Moore, a former Lifespring vice president, said in a deposition that Lifespring executives in 1977 discussed ‘casualties,’ ‘wackos’ and ‘basket cases,’ their terms for people who suffered ill effects [...] Dozens of ‘incident reports’ describe trainees who became panicky, incapable of making decisions, ‘erratic and hyper,’ incoherent and nervous. Some trainees ended up in psychiatric wards. Some had visions. Some regressed to the womb. Some became terribly depressed. Six trainees died. And about 35 trainees sued Lifespring.”

In an example, which provides further insight into the stressful nature of the training, and the lawsuit which resulted, Singer (2003, pp. 203-204) describes one Lifespring case as follows:

“‘Jane’ took two Lifespring training programs in the late 1980s. Lifespring’s philosophy maintains that people are to ‘take a stand’ to be responsible for *whatever* happens to them. By the end of the Level-I training, Jane had begun to accept this idea. During the Level-II program, Jane was required to reveal a brutal knife-point rape that happened three years earlier, when she was sixteen. Jane had never before discussed the rape except in a few counselling sessions immediately afterward. Neither her culture nor her family had treated the rape as a dishonour, since she had done nothing wrong. She felt her family had supported her right to continue to regard herself as a virgin. For three years, she functioned well, both psychologically and at school.

During the training, Jane was urged to release emotions associated with the rape. She forced herself to express anger and to describe the experience publicly. In a subsequent exercise, she was urged to express the emotion she felt toward her father who had died shortly after her birth. In response to this exercise, Jane began assaulting herself and chewing on a Styrofoam bat used in the training. Nevertheless, she was allowed to continue the program.

Later, the trainer instructed Jane to role-play a \$10,000-a-night prostitute. She believed the assignment had special meaning because of what she’d been led to reveal about the rape. She was further upset, perceiving herself as having been singled out for special humiliation. Although she had no history of psychiatric illness prior to the Lifespring training, afterward Jane underwent a period of growing depression that culminated in multiple suicide attempts. She was hospitalized for three years and remains on medication. Jane sued Lifespring, and the case was settled for a large amount.”

Additional examples of lawsuits against Lifespring are offered by Fisher M. (1987):

“Lifespring also settled the case of Arthur Barnett, a Portland Ore., man who could not swim but was convinced by his Lifespring trainer that he could overcome his fear of water by diving into the Willamette River. Barnett did it. He drowned. Lifespring denied any responsibility, saying that no one forced Barnett to jump in the river. ‘The training doesn’t cause anything,’ Hanley said then. ‘Life causes stuff’.”

Describing one of the few Lifespring cases that was not settled, the post-course “experience” reported by most LGAT graduates, and negative symptoms similar to the previously described est casualties, Fisher M. (1987) states:

“In 1984, in the only other case to go to a jury, trainee Deborah Bingham won a verdict of \$800,000. Bingham, a dealer at an Atlantic City casino, came out of a training believing herself to be ‘a new person,’ with new-found energy and zest. She called it a ‘Lifespring high.’ But a few weeks after completing the second Lifespring course, she woke up one morning feeling empty. For days, she couldn’t stop crying. Over and over she asked herself questions in Lifespring jargon: ‘What are you creating for yourself? Why am I doing this to myself?’ She couldn’t sleep, eat or work. She had shakes that had started during a Lifespring exercise in which other trainees stood in front of her and repeatedly criticized her, making fun of her body, her jewellery, her personality. She entered a psychiatric hospital and stayed for a month. Her symptoms continued to some degree for years.”

Gerald Ragland, an attorney who represented seven people against Lifespring, explained that many of his clients experienced vicarious stress – that simply being in the room while other people were being tormented was unsettling for those who had to watch, and were powerless to intervene:

“In Lifespring, the person who breaks down is often not the person who is ‘sharing’ and talking, but someone who is silently sitting there, going psychotic” (Fisher M. , 1987).

According to the Washington Post, concerns about casualties had material effects on Lifespring:

“... the company’s early growth came to a crashing halt in the early ‘80s following a rash of bad publicity about psychotic episodes and even deaths during and after Lifespring trainings. Enrollment plummeted; four of the 11 offices shut down” (Fisher M. , 1987).

Haaken and Adams (1983) described a participant during their own study who experienced psychosis:

“Initially it appeared that Patrick was acting out against the trainer by mocking him and by ignoring rules. However, it soon became apparent that he had decompensated - his speech was incoherent, he was out of contact with reality, and he appeared to be hallucinating” (p. 278).

The above examples of lawsuits do not relate to est, the Forum, or Landmark, however Pressman (1993, p. xiv) argues that Erhard's organisations were also frequently sued, and that Erhard similarly avoided going to court. The following relates to a suicide following est participation:

"For years lawsuits had generated nothing but bad publicity for him and his work, even though no jury had ever found est or the Forum legally responsible for any injury. Courtroom fights just weren't good business when it came to selling the wonders of personal transformation.

Wachter soon struck a private deal with Erhard's in-house attorney at Werner Erhard & Associates. While disclaiming any legal responsibility for Janis Vivo's death, Erhard agreed to pay a small amount of money – no more than several thousand dollars – to Wachter. In exchange, Wachter promised never to file a lawsuit accusing Erhard or his company of any role in his wife's death."

4.3.1.1.7 Stress-reducing actions are curtailed, while stress-enhancing actions are amplified

Allostasis involves a combination of responses, each of which contributes to the resilience of the organism. LGATs restrict access to known stress-mitigating measures, and it is plausible that this forces the remaining allostatic defence (dopamine) to compensate. The result, it is argued, is maximum activation of a protective mechanism that it is only safe to activate to a lesser degree.

Social support

A rule common to LGATs is that participants may not talk to each other during the training and, while being constantly watched by assistants, they are prevented from interacting in any way. This limits the degree to which individuals can bond and provide social support to each other, and was noted in est:

"There will be no talking" (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 6).

The impact of this isolation is magnified by another rule – that participants cannot sit next to anyone that they know and that, after each break, they must find someone new to sit next to:

"IF YOU ARE SEATED NEXT TO ANYONE YOU KNEW BEFORE THIS MORNING RAISE YOUR HAND. THE PERSON SITTING ON THIS SIDE OF THE OTHER IS TO GO TO THE BACK OF THE ROOM"
(Rhinehart, 2010, p. 5).

Finkelstein, et al. (1982) similarly make reference to this rule:

"... to not sit in proximity to any familiar person" (p. 519).

It has also been demonstrated that participants are chastised for offering support during the breaks to those who are traumatised by "sharing". This inability to provide comfort is allostatically challenging both for those who do not receive support, and those who are unable to provide it. Sapolsky (2004) explains how social support reduces stress among primates (including humans):

“Put a primate through something unpleasant: it gets a stress-response. Put it through the same stressor while in a room full of other primates and... it depends. If those primates are strangers, the stress-response gets worse. But if they are friends, the stress-response is decreased. Social support networks – it helps to have a shoulder to cry on, a hand to hold, an ear to listen to you, someone to cradle you and tell you it will be okay” (p. 256).

“Glucocorticoid levels are elevated among low-ranking baboons and among the entire group if the dominance hierarchy is unstable, or if a new aggressive male has just joined the troop. But if you are a male baboon with a lot of friends, you are likely to have lower glucocorticoid concentrations than males of the same general rank who lack these outlets” (p. 256).

“In a number of subtle studies, subjects were exposed to a stressor such as having to give a public speech or perform a mental arithmetic task, or having two strangers argue with them, with or without a supportive friend present. In each case, social support translated into less of a cardiovascular stress-response” (pp. 256-257).

In a statement that almost seems to have been crafted with LGATs in mind, Sapolsky (2004) concludes:

“... the best predictors of elevated glucocorticoid levels among subordinate animals turn out to be if they are frequently harassed by dominant individuals and if they lack the opportunities for social support” (p. 360).

The consequences of these findings are not only relevant to the elevation of dopamine, which must – it will be argued – in the absence of social support and other allostatic defences, provide the bulk of the overall allostatic defence. The other implication is that LGAT participants can reduce their stress by enlisting social support. Since they are unable to form alliances until the dinner break, the only way to do this is through public sharing (and by the time the dinner break comes about it is likely that participants will be wary of expressing dissenting views). The trainer is skilled enough to turn the crowd against any participant who openly challenges him so, for those who consciously or unconsciously seek social support, the only way to achieve this is to agree with the trainer. By conforming, participants are guaranteed approval from the trainer, looks of support from the other participants, and a warm round of applause. Without interacting directly with other participants, individuals are able – through compliance – to form bonds, achieve social support, and reduce stress. While it might be argued that public compliance and private acceptance of ideas are not perfectly correlated, Cialdini (2007), and Gilovich and Ross (2016) explain that, while beliefs may guide behaviour, behaviour (such as publicly agreeing with certain ideas) frequently guides beliefs.

It has more recently been argued by UCLA psychologist Shelly Taylor that the *fight or flight* response has an equivalent which is more likely to be used by women: *tend and befriend* (Cacioppo & Freburg, 2016; Sapolsky, 2004). This response, facilitated by the hormone/neuropeptide *oxytocin*, is said to be employed when it makes more sense to bond and form alliances than to fight or run away. This response is not limited to women, however, and because *fight or flight* is not an option for those who “choose” to remain in LGATs, they may form bonds with other participants more readily than they would under normal circumstances. Recent research has shown that, in people exposed to social rejection, oxytocin also increases trust (Cardoso, Ellenbogen, Serravelle, & Linnen, 2013). Placed in a socially hostile situation with strangers, there is therefore a biological mechanism which might explain the tendency to bond with others (find a “new family”) and – ironically – to place trust in the trainer.

Outlets for frustration

Linked to social support is the more general concept of *outlets for frustration*. The outlet for frustration might be interaction with a friend, or it may simply be the ability to say what you really want to. Since communication is restricted, and the trainer is an expert at controlling the room and making those who challenge him look like fools (to a receptive audience in any event), participants may become frustrated, but feel unable to vent this frustration. Other outlets include the ability to freely (without feeling monitored) get up and leave the room to take a break from the environment. LGATs strenuously discourage participants from doing this. Describing the way that est trainers warned participants (once they had paid and were sitting at the training) about the frustration they were about to endure – and how they would not be able to avoid it – Rhinehart (2010) states:

“What you’re going to experience during the next ten days of this training is everything that you normally try hard not to experience. You’re going to experience anger. Fear. Nausea. Vomiting. Crying. Submerged feelings that you lost touch with decades ago are going to come up. They’re going to come up. Of course, you’ll try hard to avoid them. Oh, how you assholes will try to avoid your real feelings. You’ll go to sleep through boredom, unconsciousness, sleep. You’ll experience incredible resentment, rage, even at me, at the other trainees, at the agreements. You’re going to fall asleep. You’re going to feel you have to piss your pants. You’re going to feel that if you don’t get a cigarette or eat that piece of candy you snuck into the training you’re going to scream. You’re going to feel that this training is the biggest ripoff since you last bought the Brooklyn Bridge. You’re going to want to leave. Oh, how you’re going to want to leave. Anything, anything, anything, to avoid having to BE HERE NOW with your actual experience. *Anything* to avoid having to give up your racket, give up your acts, your theories, give up the beautiful structured reasonable unworking mess you’ve made of your lives. You’re going to experience the whole gamut of negative emotions until you begin to get that you’ll do anything to keep from ending your acts and experiencing what’s

happening here and now. You're also going to tell me all the rational reasons that what I say to you is stupid and I'm going to stand here and continue to call you an asshole and you're going to continue to be an asshole" (pp. 9-10).

Sapolsky (2004) explains how having outlets for frustration helps to reduce stress. In this experiment, it was shown that rats receiving identical stressors showed less of a physical response when they were given simple outlets with which to deal with their stress:

"In the next room, a different rat gets the same series of shocks – identical pattern and intensity; its allostatic balance is challenged to exactly the same extent. But this time, whenever the rat gets a shock, it can run over to a bar of wood and gnaw on it. The rat in this situation is far less likely to get an ulcer. You have given it an *outlet for frustration*. Other types of outlets work as well – let the stressed rat eat something, drink water, or sprint on a running wheel, and it is less likely to develop an ulcer" (p. 255).

Predictability and a sense of control

According to Sapolsky (2004), reduced predictability results in greater stress:

"Predictability makes stress less stressful" (p. 258).

"In the absence of any stressor, loss of predictability triggers a stress response" (p. 259).

LGATs insist that graduates should not reveal what takes place in the training, arguing that it will "ruin the experience" for those they are recruiting. This is true, as a lack of predictability (or an increase in stress) is vital to their "technology". While Landmark provides an outline of the topics covered during the training, it is the manner in which these topics are handled that is of consequence, and participants never know what the next exercise will be, what personal experience it will reveal, how the volatile trainer might react, or what traumatic experience may be exposed to the group.

While a lack of predictability increases the stress experienced by LGAT participants, Sapolsky (2004) explains that minimising an individual's sense of control has a similar effect:

"Loss of control and lack of predictive information are closely related. Some researchers have emphasized this, pointing out that the common theme is that the organism is subjected to novelty. You thought you knew how to manage things, you thought you knew what would happen next, and it turns out to be wrong in this novel situation" (p. 263).

Considering the degree to which the behaviour and communication of participants are under the control of LGAT leaders, it is important to understand that a sense of control is "an extraordinarily powerful variable in modulating the stress-response" (Sapolsky, 2004, p. 261). LGAT trainers spend a great deal of time ensuring participants agree to rules which, effectively, put them under the control

of the trainer. While participants can theoretically get up and walk out at any time, there are powerful psychological forces relating to integrity, commitments, and fear of being singled out, which make participants feel that they are bound by these commitments:

“Thus, the *exercise* of control is not critical; rather it is the *belief* that you have it” (p. 261).

In another example, which applies perfectly to LGATs, Sapolsky (2004) explains how a lack of autonomy in deciding when one might use the bathroom can cause significant stress:

“For example, professional musicians in orchestras generally have lower job satisfaction than and more stress than those in small chamber groups (such as a string quartet). Why? One pair of researchers suggest that this is because of a lack of autonomy in an orchestra, where centuries of tradition hold that orchestras are subservient to the dictatorial whims of the maestro conducting them. For example, it was only in recent years that orchestra unions won the right for regularly scheduled bathroom breaks during rehearsals, instead of having to wait until the conductor cared to note how squirmy the reed players had become” (p. 262)¹⁰¹.

An important implication of these findings is that any substance which elicits a sense of confidence and control will minimise stress and will be useful from an allostatic perspective. It is worth considering what an excess of this substance might look like in a person in terms of self-worth, confidence, decisiveness, and optimism.

Declining social status

During LGATs participants start the training at some baseline level of self-worth and then, for the first few days of the training, their self-worth is undermined by the trainer. While stress is related to absolute social status, it is more heavily impacted by the degree to which a person feels that his social status is falling. Sapolsky (2004, p. 263), in experiments which are equally relevant to humans, explains how baboons respond to a declining social status:

“Given the same degree of instability, males whose ranks are *dropping* have elevated glucocorticoid levels, while males whose ranks are *rising* amid the tumult don’t show this endocrine trait.”

This concludes the section on stress in LGATs. Having identified factors which cause, accentuate, and minimise relief from stress, evidence will be provided on the second major environmental trigger for hypomania/mania: sleep disruption. Due to its effects on glucocorticoid levels, sleep disruption is described as a stressor by Sapolsky (2004). The following section explains how LGATs disrupt sleep.

¹⁰¹ It is worth noting that, like more recent LGAT participants, these musicians were officially allowed to leave and go to the bathroom (they were not expected to wet themselves); however, there was considerable social pressure to remain seated until official breaks were allowed by the conductor.

4.3.1.2 Sleep disruption in LGATs

Sleep disruption is another conspicuous element of LGAT “technology”. While sleep disruption is not the primary mechanism by which LGATs elicit a hypomanic/manic state, it is a noted environmental trigger for hypomania/mania, as well as a stressor. It is the combination of numerous simultaneous allostatic challenges which results in an exaggerated allostatic defence, and so – while sleep disruption may play a smaller role in some LGATs and a greater role in others – it is worth considering. It should be kept in mind that the sleep disruption described as likely to trigger hypomania/mania need not involve extreme sleep deprivation, and that what is being commented on is the tendency of LGATs to disrupt normal sleeping patterns for a few days:

“Researchers believe that people with bipolar disorder are very sensitive to even minor changes in sleep-wake rhythms, such as when they go to bed, when they actually fall asleep, and when they wake up” (Frank, 2005, as cited in Miklowitz, 2011, p. 94).

Exhaustion, which should be distinguished from sleep disruption, occurs as a result of the thirteen-plus hour days, the emotionally draining nature of the exercises and the volume of new information which is presented, but sleep disruption is a function of four key elements: the hours of the training, the time that it takes participants to get home and complete homework assignments (which are given every night), the degree to which the stimulation of the day makes it difficult for participants to fall asleep, and the degree to which the quality of that sleep is compromised as a result of the training.

4.3.1.2.1 Training schedule and homework

“I mean... you get there super early in the morning... you leave super late at night, and then you have homework on top of the whole day...” – recent Landmark Forum graduate¹⁰²

Like est and Lifespring before it, Landmark has, at least until perhaps recently, run until late at night. Describing est, Rhinehart (2010) states, “The training normally lasts fifteen to twenty hours a day...” (p. xiii), “The training had ended the first night at close to one A.M.” (p. 55), and “Several trainees say that on just four or five hours’ sleep they awakened more alive and energetic than they normally do on eight or nine hours’ sleep” (p. 55). Finkelstein, et al. (1982) state that the first Saturday of the est training lasts “until the early hours Sunday morning” (p. 519); that “trainees recess late Sunday night” (p. 520); and that the final Sunday session “culminates in an early morning graduation ceremony” (p. 522). Brewer (1975) states that the standard est training “lasts from 15 to 18 hours each Saturday and Sunday for two consecutive weekends”, which translates to the training ending between midnight and 03:00 a.m. each night, while Pressman (1993) said that the first day of est, “... which began promptly

¹⁰² (Sky Lark, 2013).

at nine in the morning, might end anywhere between midnight and four o'clock the next morning". Referring to Lifespring, Fisher M. (1987) revealed that a breakthrough might be expected "... in the next five days Wednesday through Friday evenings from 6:30 p.m. to midnight, Saturday from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m."

Long hours and late nights were, therefore, features of the early LGATs. Sleep deprivation, however, is a conspicuous form of discomfort that could potentially cause public relations issues for modern LGATs such as Landmark. While Landmark states that the Forum ends at "approximately 10:00 p.m." (Landmark, 2016g), numerous participants claim that this was not their experience. While providing 10:00 p.m. (as a general rule) to 10:45 p.m. (in some locations) as the ending time in the evenings, Landmark warns participants who are sensitive to sleep deprivation not to participate. This reveals that sleep disruption has been an issue in the past:

"Although the schedule of the Program usually (but not always) accommodates sufficient time for sleeping, some participants have stated that they did not have sufficient time to sleep or were unable to sleep at night before, during or after the Program. Some people have entered the Program without having had sufficient sleep. For some people, lack of sleep can become a serious problem and may be symptomatic of a mental or emotional illness. If in the past you have become (or think that you may become) ill or seriously distressed because of lack of sleep, OUR ADVISORS STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT YOU DO NOT PARTICIPATE in the Program" (Landmark, 2016f).

Landmark reiterates the times of the Forum on another part of their site, adding that Forums presented simultaneously in more than one language may end much later than normal, but not indicating that normal Forums may also end well after "10:45":

"The course takes place over three consecutive days and an evening session (generally Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Tuesday evening). Each full day begins at 9:00 a.m. and ends at approximately 10:00 p.m. Breaks are approximately every 2-3 hours, with a 90-minute dinner break. The evening session generally runs from 7:00 p.m. to 10:15 p.m. (in certain locations, from 7:30 p.m. to 10:45 p.m.)" (Landmark, 2016g).

While a 10:15 p.m., or even a 10:45 p.m., ending time may not be too disruptive to a person who is normally asleep by 10:30 p.m., if the training ends after midnight for consecutive evenings, then this constitutes sleep disruption (this is particularly true if the participant must find his/her way home, complete a stressful homework assignment and still, highly stimulated, fall asleep). A number of independent sources reveal that it is common for Landmark Forums to end at midnight or later:

“What was the most infuriating thing for me was the lying about the schedule. I did not get out of that damned building before 12:30 a.m. on any of the weekend sessions of the Forum, one night it was after 1 a.m.” (Hope, 2004).

“Also ban aspirin and alcohol that might counterproductively relax and alleviate headaches, and maintain an exhausting 9a.m.-midnight agenda plus travel time and emotionally draining homework” (\$375lighter, 2002).

“It is an intense program, 9AM to midnight for three days (fri-sun.) and then three hours on a tuesday evening” (pennbonbon, 2003).

Referring not only to the hours of the training, but also to the admonishment of participants for not completing homework (a transparent mechanism by which to “justifiably” generate blame and guilt), online contributor ‘Dafellah’ from Australia says of the second morning:

“Quite a few people are shattered by the night before, look tired and not terribly enthused to be locked up voluntarily on a beautiful day in the city [...] Though later in the morning the forum leader stages a hissy fit with us all for our non-participation in the forum and for a majority of people not doing the assignments... yeah like I am going to do homework at 1:00am in the morning... give us a break” (Dafellah, 2004).

Independent writer, Robert Black, who claimed to have “gone from an enthusiastic participant in The Forum, to a lukewarm post-graduate of The Forum, to an enthusiastic participant in other Landmark seminars and in voluntary assisting at the Landmark Centre and, finally, to a more educated and reflective skeptic of Landmark and its teaching”, states:

“The mechanics of the Forum is 3 full days, 9:00 a.m. to after midnight, with after session homework, and one additional evening” (Black, 1997).

It is not only anonymous online contributors, and random former participants from unknown locations, who claim that the hours are longer than indicated. In an Elle Magazine article, Rosemary Mahoney reveals the hours of her Forum “in a bland conference room on New York’s Fifth Avenue”:

“The most we can safely predict is that for three consecutive days we will be required to sit here from nine A.M. to midnight, with two half-hour breaks and one ninety-minute dinner break. We will be asked to complete exercises, chiefly verbal, and homework assignments at night” (Mahoney, 1998).

Vanessa Grigoradis of New York Magazine provides the same hours for her New York Forum:

“The Forum runs from 9 a.m. to midnight each day, with only a 90-minute dinner recess that attendees are told to spend with other attendees” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

A Time Magazine article (which is referenced on the Landmark website) indicates the Forum on Manhattan's East Side ended as late as 01:00 a.m.:

"The Forum, which costs \$350, still requires endurance. It consists of three 12-to-16-hour days—with time out for meals—and (after a one day breather) a one-evening wrap up" (Faltermayer, 2001).

Describing both the long hours, and the homework required by the following day, Jana Martin of Swing Generation Magazine comments on the hours at "the Landmark Center in Edison, New Jersey", while Amanda Scioscia of the Phoenix New Times echoes her sentiments:

"We have homework, which, since it's already midnight and we start tomorrow at 9 A.M., we have to think about. The assignment: Write a letter to someone you haven't been straight with, come clean" (Martin, 1998).

"Each night we are sent home at midnight with assignments. Today we're supposed to have written a letter to someone we wanted to 'complete' with" (Scioscia, 2000).

Journalist Enzo Di Matteo, of Now Magazine, reveals the same Forum hours in Toronto, Canada:

"We must stay in this room at all times during the Forum, virtually locked up from 9 am to midnight over the next three days, in order to attain the coveted and ever-elusive 'result'" (Di Matteo, 2000).

These hours are not, apparently, outliers in US cities, or in nearby Canada, but appear to be common in other countries as well. Roland Howard (2001) of the Daily Mail states that his experience, near Euston station in London, involved the same schedule reported by most online sources. If Landmark uses professional trainers, who run an organised and scripted program around the world, it seems unlikely that there would be consistent, and significant, deviation from official course hours across continents:

"That is the situation for three days from 9am until about midnight. We have short breaks every three hours and a 90-minute meal break at about 6pm. We are given homework tasks for the breaks and the end of the day. At night I got five hours sleep" (Howard, 2001).

Describing the impact of the course, and the schedule, Howard (2001) continues:

"The next morning I woke exhausted. For the previous two nights I had fallen asleep at about 2am and woken with palpitations (which I have never had before or since) at about 6am."

Amelia Hill of The Guardian indicates that her Forum experience in North London lasted until midnight each night:

“It was with mild trepidation that I took my seat on Friday morning in the all-white lecture hall in Landmark Education's rented north London offices. I had three days of lectures ahead of me, each day lasting 15 hours and seemingly designed to induce mild sleep deprivation. Still, I had been guaranteed a transformation by Monday morning” (Hill, 2003).

Mary Braid of The Independent, London, indicates that her Landmark Forum, while sometimes finishing earlier, also went as late as midnight on some evenings:

“And so begins the first of three gruelling days that will each last an average of 13 hours, and may run over until midnight. That sounds exhausting enough, but participants also have ‘homework’ to complete overnight” (Braid, 2003).

Landmark offers programs in “more than 130 cities via 53 major offices worldwide” (Landmark, 2016b) and independent information does not exist on every location, but publicly available sources support the assertion that long hours are not the exception to the rule. Marie Lemonnier of Le Nouvel Observateur notes the gruelling schedule of her Forum experience in France:

“We’re locked up for three days from 9 a.m. until 11:30 p.m. stuck on our chairs, with a half-hour break every three hours and only one meal break around 6 p.m. We’re given assignments to do at night for the next day, and exercises during the breaks – it’s all calculated to put unrelenting pressure on the trainees, to limit their sleep, to reduce their mental capacities” (Lemonnier, 2005).

Blogger Dyann Lyon, who had a distinctly positive Landmark Forum experience, explains that long hours also occurred in the Advanced course (which was led by former Mind Dynamics, Lifespring, and est trainer, Charlene Afremow):

“Charlene is an amazing woman and an exceptional coach and trainer. Can you imagine how honed her skills are after all these years? The third long day in a row was Sunday and it was after 1:00am on Monday morning when we were still going strong. We were not going to be done until everyone was complete” (Lyon, 2010).

While some online sources do state that their training ended closer to 22:00, there are many which say otherwise. One blogger claimed that his Forum ended at “around 10:00 pm” each evening, but noted the following:

“Astoundingly, the presenter said that Landmark has cut down the length of their programs in recent years, that they used to go until 1:00 am or even 3:00 am” (Drew, 2010).

He also claimed that, after getting home at 22:30, he struggled to sleep after the training¹⁰³:

¹⁰³ The problem of falling asleep and sleep quality will be covered in section 4.3.1.2.2.

“Couldn’t sleep. Grabbed a blanket and curled up in a ball on the futon in the second bedroom. Couldn’t sleep. Got back in bed. Couldn’t sleep. Finally drifted off somewhere after 2:00 am” (Drew, 2010).

A number of sources – post-2010 – reveal that this move to shorter hours is not being applied consistently (if at all) across the world. James O’Brien (2012) of GQ Magazine indicates that long hours occurred in Oakland, California in 2012:

“There are rigid rules of Landmark Forum behavior, circa 2005: The three days go from 9 AM to around midnight.”

“After nearly forty desperate hours, scant sleep, ragged emotions, aching heads and bodies hungry for Advil, after all this magnetic sucking in, I think most of us, even those careering happily toward a breakthrough, would accept anything the leader tells us, if this thing would just end.”

Ajith Prasad describes the hours of his Forum in December, 2012, in Bangalore, India:

“Each day (i.e. Friday to Sunday) is rather long and ends at only around midnight” (Prasad, 2012).

Referring specifically to homework, Amelia Hill of The Guardian – whose assessment of the Forum was unambiguously positive – explains that homework was given every night and that many participants spent a lot of time doing this homework. This, of course, delays sleep even further:

“There is one meal break in the early evening and more homework after the day is done [...] Next morning, we retake our seats. Everyone in my row spent hours on their homework” (Hill, 2003).

Nathan Thornburgh of Time Magazine, Karin Badt of the Huffington Post, and blogger Dr Jack Bennett all reveal the guilt-inducing (and potentially time-consuming) nature of the homework:

“There were assignments – usually attempts to make ‘breakthroughs’ with people in your life, on the phone or in writing – to be completed during those breaks and at night” (Thornburgh, 2011).

“Homework assignments were to call our loved ones and apologize for the years of victimology” (Badt, 2011).

“After a 13 hour day of emotional roller coaster rides, it’s time for some homework. We’re encouraged to draft letters to other people in our lives, taking responsibility for areas in which we have been inauthentic or untruthful...” (Bennett, 2011).

It is clear that many Landmark Forums involve long hours and that – in addition to late completion times – all Landmark Forums require participants to complete emotionally stimulating homework at night. These factors ensure that most participants (particularly if they are “coachable” and complete this homework) get to bed far later than they are used to. This is sleep disruption.

4.3.1.2.2 Falling asleep and sleep quality

It was proposed that that sleep disruption is a function of four key elements: the hours of the training, the time that it takes participants to get home and complete homework assignments (which are given every night), the degree to which the stimulation of the day makes it difficult for participants to fall asleep, and the degree to which the quality of that sleep is compromised as a result of the training. Training hours and homework assignments have been addressed. Stimulation and sleep quality are, however, better appreciated through an understanding of the relationship between HPA activation (stress) and sleep disruption than through the reported experiences of journalists and bloggers (who are unlikely to volunteer this information). As explained in section 2.4.7 (Sleep disruption as a stressor), stress increases cortisol levels, which not only makes it more difficult to fall asleep, but also negatively impacts the quality of sleep that is achieved. If participants leave a stressful training at midnight (or later), must find their way home, complete allostatically challenging homework (such as contacting a person with whom there is a problem – after midnight – to “get complete” with them, and then invite them to the Tuesday evening graduation), then it is likely that participants would find it difficult to fall asleep, and that their sleep quality would be compromised.

The result of the long hours, homework, an inability to fall asleep, and poor sleep quality would be participants who were more stressed, more tired, less likely to question, and more likely to accept weak arguments without considering the merits of the espoused positions (a low elaboration likelihood¹⁰⁴). From a bipolar trigger perspective, it is reasonable to argue that LGATs, intentionally or unintentionally, involve sleep disruption. As trainings regularly run later than advertised this also poses concerns for informed consent. After having endured thirteen hours of training (by approximately 22:00), and having been repeatedly told that leaving the training for even a moment may result in missing out on the transformation, it is unlikely that participants will get up and leave. By this stage, participants are invested in the training, so greater transparency is required to allow individuals to make informed decisions about participation.

Having described how the first two environmental triggers for hypomania/mania are incorporated into LGATs, it will now be demonstrated that goal-attainment is a conspicuous feature of the trainings. The following section provides evidence that LGATs culminate in a ceremony, or “big reveal”, of sorts (the exact nature of this ceremony may differ between LGATs, but the suggestion of goal-attainment is consistent). Through this process participants “graduate”, and the major stress of the previous days is abruptly replaced with acceptance and affirmation from both the trainer and other graduates.

¹⁰⁴ The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is discussed further in Chapter 6 (Tertiary Research Questions: Results).

4.3.1.3 Goal-attainment in LGATs

“The course leader was busy psyching the crowd up for the ‘big reveal’ – the key teaching of the Forum that would come later that day, embracing which, we’d been promised, would lead to a life of ‘infinite possibilities’” (Warrington, 2015).

The ultimate stated, and anticipated, goal of LGATs is to achieve “transformation”, or a similar outcome framed in a different way. Participants learn, after a short time in the training, that the training involves hardship and that, in order to attain transformation, they must endure this hardship. Transformation is also (like Sapolsky (2004) argues dopamine-inducing goals must ideally be) not guaranteed. Because of the euphoric testimonies of friends and other graduates at the post-training guest evening, and the grandiose promises of the trainer, there is an anticipation of extreme pleasure; participants do not know exactly what to expect, but they do know that if they “keep their sole in the room” they will probably get it. Goal-attainment in LGATs occurs as a result of a switch in the atmosphere from affronting to affirming. The trainer, having treated participants with contempt, derision, and hostility for days, suddenly treats them with love and acceptance - this removes the stress and signifies that they have attained their goal. To use Lifton’s (1961) terminology, LGAT participants are converted from “nonpeople” to people through Dispensing of Existence by the trainer.

The shift in attitude of the trainer is accompanied by a shift in the nature of the exercises and the general atmosphere towards the end of the training. While exercises in the first few days elicit guilt, uncertainty, humiliation, shame, and fear, towards the end of the training the atmosphere becomes notably more pleasant and participants are made to feel good about themselves. In addition to the shift in atmosphere and attitude of the trainer, there is usually some sort of revelation to signify completion of the training. The profundity of this revelation is far less important than the symbolism of the statement, as it serves as an indicator to participants that they have attained the goal (goal-attainment), and that the days of harassment and exhaustion have come to an end. While specific exercises that generate, and then abruptly remove, stress (such as the visualisation exercise used in Landmark where participants are urged to imagine that they are afraid) may cause mini-breakthroughs for some, it is likely – because of its scale – that the stress removal which occurs on the final day of the training will result in the most profound “experience” for the majority of participants.

As an introduction to the idea of stress followed by goal-attainment, it is worth considering the general structure of LGATs, as described by Margaret Singer:

“After several days of being dragged down into the pits the final day of exercises is usually designed to pump you up” (Singer, as cited by Mathison, 1993).

In her chapter on LGATs, Singer (2003) describes how the exercises become more uplifting, and how the leader's disposition starts to change towards the end of the training:

"Day four is one in which much group sharing occurs, and the leader begins to change from the stern, domineering taskmaster into a seductive, charming, loving daddy or mommy who wants you to buy the next courses" (p. 195).

Describing a process used by many LGATs (including New Beginnings) to create a sense of graduation and acceptance, Singer (2003) states:

"At the end of the day, a surprise is staged, with friends and family unexpectedly appearing to congratulate 'the graduate'" (p. 195).

Psychology Today journalist, Mark Brewer, explains the general process of revelation used by est on the final day – the shift from "asshole" to "perfect" – and the impact it had on participants:

"The power that the training had achieved over their minds was never more impressive than at this point. It plunged the crowd into a profound depression. To pay 200 bucks, be convinced you're an 'asshole,' then be told there was nothing you could do about it was too much. In the dead, dull silence it was as if the veil of hope were rent and a helpless damnation revealed. It blew their minds.

The Miracle. Then came the miracle. If you accept the nature of your mind, Ted explained with rising optimism in his voice, and take responsibility for having created all of the stimulus-response mechanisms it comprises, then in effect you have freely chosen to do everything you have ever done and to be precisely what you are. In that instant, you become exactly what you always wanted to be!

The validity of this explanation faded in and out of mental focus like a line of poetry not quite remembered, but in that dramatic moment of the training, the tired yet painstakingly conditioned trainees gripped it almost desperately, and it was implanted in their minds.

They were – no! – they had been 'assholes' only because they did not realize that whatever they were, warts and all, it was exactly what they wanted to be.

The light dawned slowly, with Ted chirping, 'See? See?,' and then one and another acknowledged eagerly that, yes, they got it, and gradually a swell of exultant revelation swept the place. It was amazing to behold. They were perfect exactly the way they were" (Brewer, 1975).

Describing the est graduation ceremony, and the way that participants become equals with the trainer at this point, Finkelstein, et al. (1982) state:

“This extended dialogue, with exercises, culminates in an early morning graduation ceremony. The trainees, joined at the time by a hundred or so est graduates, observe the trainer formally acknowledge the end of the training by stepping from the dais, in this way explicitly becoming just another among the assembled graduates” (p. 522).

Rhinehart (2010) similarly reveals the switch in attitude of est trainers after the revelation on day four:

“During the twenty-minute break a cluster of seven or ten trainees gather around Michael, who remains seated on one of the chairs. He has himself changed his ‘form:’ he now smiles and jokes with the trainees in a way he has not done prior to now” (p. 180).

Rhinehart (2010) further explains how participants (who were arguably treated as subhuman throughout the est training) are suddenly elevated by the trainer to the status of Gods:

“‘For two days now,’ he says, looking as bright eyed, alive, and high as the trainees, ‘I’ve been playing the role of trainer and you’ve been playing the role of trainee. And now I’m going to step down from the platform and return to playing the game of Michael, God Pretending He’s a human, interacting with you other Gods, also pretending you’re humans’” (p. 183).

Participants, from feeling weak and worthless, are showered with praise and love and made to feel powerful. This is a clear switch from stress to goal-attainment (stress removal):

“‘What I would like to do now that I end the game of trainer,’ he says, stepping off the platform down onto the ballroom floor, ‘is to acknowledge both for me this weekend and behalf of Don during last weekend, that all during these four days *you* have been training *us*. I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for each one of you and the spaces you’ve created for me during this training. I want you to know that for *me* you’ve been the trainer for this training and I want to thank you’” (Rhinehart, 2010, pp. 183-184).

Describing a typical reaction to this revelation and acceptance, Rhinehart (2010) quotes a participant:

“... after three training days of fear and pain and difficulty and bone crunching boredom – on the fourth day I GOT IT!!!!” (p. 201).

Haaken and Adams (1983, p. 277) similarly argue that a noticeable change in the trainer’s attitude occurred toward the end of the Lifespring Basic Training:

“As the training progressed and the trainer’s words were repeated by group members, the trainer became softer in his style and more accessible to the group. His occasionally stepping down from the podium and mingling with the group allowed a greater sense of psychological merger with him.”

It is also conspicuous that the Washington Post (Fisher M., 1987) was allowed access to the Lifespring training, but only on the (much kinder) last day:

“For this article, the company allowed photography of the class for the first time, although Lifespring officials permitted the photographer access only to the final day of the course.”

The est revelation prior to graduation involved the argument that people are meaning-making machines, but – according to Erhard – the point of the est training was to reveal that life was empty and meaningless, and that it was meaningless and empty that it was empty and meaningless. According to Erhard, this revelation provided participants with “enormous freedom”. In a YouTube video entitled *Werner Erhard on est*, Erhard states:

“The real point to the est training was to go down through layer after layer after layer after layer until you got to... the last layer and peeled it off... where the recognition was that... it’s all meaningless... and empty...” (cheriele, 2008).

Despite the insistence by Landmark representatives that the est training and the Landmark Forum are distinct experiences, Landmark’s revelation on day three is identical to what Erhard described as occurring at the end of est. Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine describes her experience:

“At the end, Willmore scrawls on the board the phrase LIFE IS EMPTY AND MEANINGLESS, AND IT’S EMPTY AND MEANINGLESS THAT IT’S EMPTY AND MEANINGLESS on the board and the room goes nuts. Everyone’s getting it, even a brunette publicist who complained earlier that she felt like the ‘bullshit police’...” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

James O’Brien of GQ Magazine similarly describes the grand revelation of the Landmark Forum, which seems identical to Erhard’s description of est:

“As evening falls outside the ballroom, the imparting of the final, the essential, the transforming message of the Landmark Forum is upon us. Condon writes it on a chalkboard:

‘Life is empty and meaningless, and that life is empty and meaningless is empty and meaningless.’

As you might imagine, with this quasi-existentialist pronouncement the room erupts in jubilation. The group is infused with energy and is acting as if the crappy past as we knew it won’t hurt us anymore, because, we’ve been told, it never really happened. Before the Forum we were ‘meaning-making machines,’ like all the other untransformed humans. Now we are free of that affliction. People are laughing again. Everyone is nodding like bobbleheads Condon has just flicked. There are bright beaming smiles all around me” (O’Brien, 2012).

While this grand revelation occurs on the final day of the Landmark Forum, and represents a key moment of goal-attainment, the general structure of the Forum – like Singer described as typical of

other LGATs – is one of stress, sustained for a few days, before being replaced with affirmation. Blogger Ajith Prasad of India provides an outline of this shift from stress to stress removal:

“Essentially after three days of stressful attending and a few phone calls you will be somehow convinced that life is meaningless and you have the power to make choices, deal with situations etc. All the stress that you went through and the revelations, apologies (you make many of them and cry during the first two days) made by the participants would be relieved by now and you will suddenly feel power – some of the attendees, that is. To me, this sounds quite natural. You were stressed, made look like a fool in the forum, your ego totally busted, tranquilized and at the end you were pronounced powerful and winner” (Prasad, 2012).

Describing the structure of the Landmark Forum, Evans (2010) similarly states:

“... you take a group of vulnerable individuals, put them in a large hall for three or four days, during which time you restrict their movements and their freedoms and then subject them to ‘marathon sessions’ of very emotional and confrontational therapy, in which patients are encouraged to stand up and ‘share’ their deepest hang-ups with the group – to be ridiculed by the leader, before ultimately being accepted by the group.”

Enzo Di Matteo (2000) of *Now Magazine* explains that formal graduation from the Landmark Forum occurs on Tuesday evening. If LGATs evolved by retaining the most effective processes and structure, then it is interesting that the graduation event occurs two days after the body of the training (goal-attainment). It is likely that this structure is also to allow for more time to recruit family and friends but, given the delay between my own goal-attainment in London and the escalation to mania¹⁰⁵, the possibility that this delay results in a euphoria peak for most graduates (who are, therefore, likely to be more unrestrained in their praise of the training) should also be considered. The Tuesday night session also provides trainers and volunteers with an opportunity to heap more love and acceptance onto the graduates. Numerous sources reveal this conspicuous shift from hostility to affirmation:

“But then I’m at Tuesday night’s celebration and everything is great again. There are so many volunteers, all smiling, silver and blue and green nametags decorating us like ornaments on a tree. So many guests who came to see what we did all weekend. So much joy! So much enrolling in courses! When Brian asks, ‘How many of us had a breakthrough?’ I don’t hesitate. I raise my hand with everyone else” (Martin, 1998).

“As she’s saying goodbye, Handel’s own eyes fill up with tears. With her hands in the position of prayer she says, ‘It was a privilege to serve you’” (Mahoney, 1998).

¹⁰⁵ I noted a similar delay between stress removal and mania in my second major manic episode in 2009.

“There are more ‘shares’; David tears up for the third time in two hours. ‘I love you forever,’ he tells us. ‘If you ever wonder if someone loves you, the answer is yes. David loves you’” (McClure, 2009).

“The concluding remarks were powerful. Sophie had tears in her eyes as she thanked us for letting her serve us” (Badt, 2011).

It has now been demonstrated that the three key environmental triggers for hypomania/mania are core components of LGAT technology. The following section assesses the frequency with which the post-training “experience” occurs, and the degree to which it resembles hypomanic/manic symptoms.

4.3.2 Hypomanic/manic symptoms as a result of LGATs

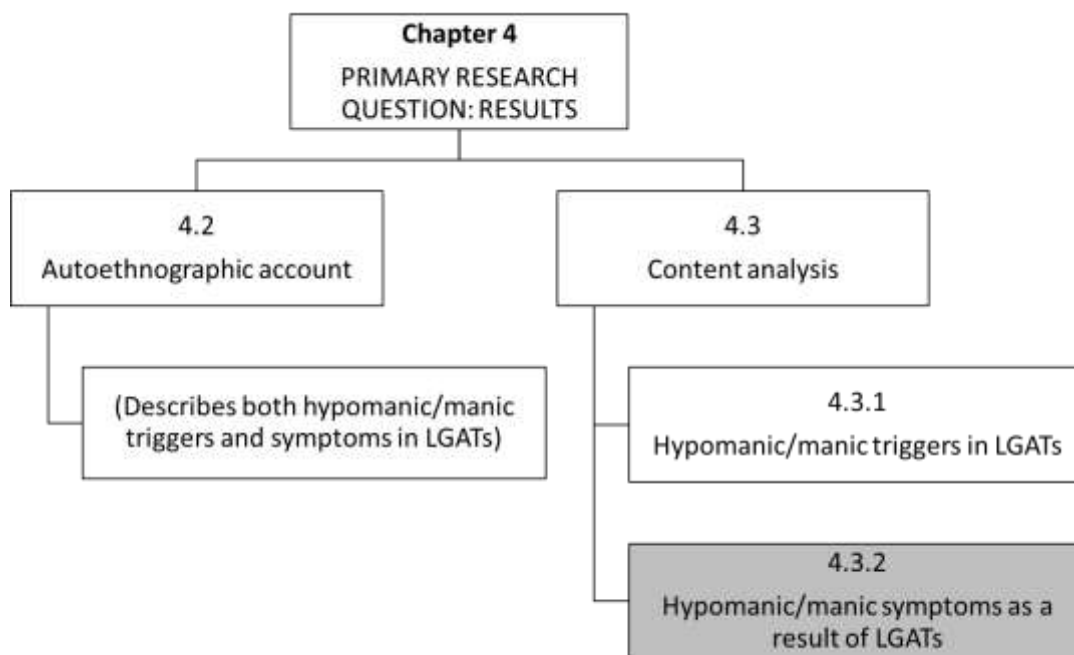


Figure 24: PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION: RESULTS_Content Analysis_Hypomanic/manic symptoms as a result of LGATs

As indicated in Figure 24, this section demonstrates that LGATs elicit hypomanic/manic symptoms in the majority of participants. To argue that LGATs elicit hypomanic/manic symptoms, it will first be established that most participants report a general, powerful “experience”. This will be followed by evidence that the specific features of this “experience” mirror specific features of hypomania/mania. Finally, it will be shown that Landmark itself inadvertently describes hypomanic symptoms when explaining effects of the Forum that “virtually everyone reports”.

4.3.2.1 General features of the “experience”

“Although the est organisation always talks about ‘getting it,’ and prior to an individual’s taking the training leaves the meaning of the phrase vague, Werner himself has said in one interview that ‘what [the graduates] get is an experience of enlightenment’” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 201).

Love is not a red lorry, and the LGAT “experience” is likewise described in different ways by different organisations and different people. Before reviewing evidence relating to specific hypomanic/manic symptoms, it is necessary to provide a more general argument that, usually beginning at goal-attainment (on the final day of the training) and lasting a few days to a few weeks after the training, most LGAT participants experience a noticeable change in their state of mind. By reviewing the promises made by LGATs, as stated by their trainers or on their websites, it is possible to gain a sense of the mysterious, but limitless, joy, pleasure, and power that participants are urged to anticipate. Because this thesis argues that the *majority* of ostensibly healthy LGAT participants are pushed into a hypomania-like state, it is also important to consider evidence which, while not conclusive, suggests the proportion of participants who experience the LGAT “transformation”. If the LGAT high is the result of temporary allostatic hypervigilance then – depending on a number of factors – it may last for a few hours to, at most, a few months (with the majority of participants enjoying a few days to a few weeks of noticeably elevated mood). It will be argued that there is little evidence that this state (as opposed to general benefits) is permanent for the bulk of participants, if for any of them.

4.3.2.1.1 Promises made about the “experience”

The most common promise made by LGATs is that they facilitate transformation. According to Pressman (1993), Erhard guaranteed est participants that they would achieve this (vague) result:

“At the end of it, Werner Erhard held out the tantalizing promise of transformation...” (p. 69).

Rosemary Mahoney of Elle Magazine, as well as Peta Woodhouse and Marita Vandenberg of Contact Magazine, and blogger “Citizen Skeptic” reveal Landmark’s core promise of “transformation”:

“The 180 Forum participants who, like me, have gathered in a bland conference room on New York’s Fifth Avenue at nine on a Friday morning are here because the Forum has claimed that for \$375 it can ‘transform’ our lives” (Mahoney, 1998).

“The entry-level course called the Landmark Forum involves three consecutive 15 hour days of training during which many participants reach an emotional state called ‘transformation’” (Woodhouse & Vandenberg, 2000).

“What the Forum promises is not just ‘change’ but ‘transformation,’ as well as a new realm of possibility” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

Brewer (1975) claims that *est* additionally promised something equally inexplicit and grandiose:

“... only the vague promise of a new life seemed to keep most of the newcomers present.”

According to proponent Luke Rhinehart (2010), *est* made claims that were unlimited in their scope, and in the degree to which they were constrained by reality:

“... some of you ten days from now will begin to talk about how *est* performs miracles...” (p. 11).

Hukill (1998) reveals that, as occurred in *est*, Landmark tells participants to expect a “miracle”:

“... the charismatic Regnier moves easily around the stage as he tells us what we can expect from our marathon weekend. New life in our relationships. Love for our fellow Forum graduates. Possibilities flowering everywhere we look. ‘You’ll notice for the first time in your life, ‘I’m happy,’ Regnier predicts, beaming like a benevolent uncle. ‘A miracle is going to take place here.’”

Rhinehart (2010, p. 222) also states that *est* achieved results that, perhaps due to my tendency to make loose associations, bear a strong resemblance to hypomanic/manic symptoms:

“*est* gives to most of its graduates what it values most: aliveness, joy, love and self-expression.”

Considering that dopamine, according to Sapolsky (2004), has more to do with the anticipation of pleasure than pleasure, and since an uncertain reward elicits greater dopamine production, it is interesting to note that Landmark provides equally vague, but grandiose promises:

“The Landmark Forum offers a practical methodology for producing breakthroughs - achievements that are extraordinary, outside of what’s predictable” (Landmark, 2016g).

“Not satisfied with simply transforming the lives of its students, it promises to deliver the secret of what it means to be human and guarantees them futures greater than they could imagine” (Hill, 2003).

It is difficult not see a similarity between this sort of promise and the anticipation of pleasure I had in London, based on my reading of Job, and verses such as the following from 1 Corinthians:

“What God has planned for people who love Him is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds” (1 Cor. 2: 9).

Numerous commentators describe the elusive, spectacular, somewhat guaranteed, but simultaneously uncertain results they expected from their participation in the Forum. Former participant and volunteer Robert Black states:

“A promise is made of great, positive things that can happen in your life with the help of the leader” (Black, 1997).

Traci Hukill (1998) of Metro News San Francisco describes her sense of anticipation and the promises of “breakthroughs” made by Landmark:

“Even I, determined to be the impartial reporter, find myself waiting with a pleasurable tingle of hope ...”

“A ‘breakthrough’ is Landmark’s term for arrival in new psychological terrain – a phenomenon also called a ‘paradigm shift.’ Old limitations wither away, replaced by a vital conviction that anything is possible.”¹⁰⁶

In the same way that we were primed by our chairman to anticipate pleasure, Rosemary Mahoney’s trainer promised that the final day of their training would be incredible:

“‘Sunday will be a day you will never get over!’ Handel says mysteriously from her high chair, her shoes kicked off and her feet tucked under her” (Mahoney, 1998).

Amanda Scioscia of the Phoenix New Times, and Amelia Hill of The Guardian similarly explain that “transformation” occurs, or is most likely to occur, on the final day of the training:

“Richard says, ‘Transformation happens on the third day!’” (Scioscia, 2000).

“Jerry is bombarding us with grand claims: Landmark Education is so powerful, he says, that it could achieve world peace if used correctly [...] World peace aside, this course will transform our lives, he promises. Transformation will come to all, but individual moments will vary: like corn, we are told, we will pop at different times” (Hill, 2003).

“By the third day, nearly everyone except me seems to have popped” (Hill, 2003).

Amanda Scioscia describes Landmark’s vague promises, as could be seen in the signs placed around the training environment, while Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine reveals another promise:

“The Forum, says another, will bring forth ‘the presence of a new realm of possibility’” (Scioscia, 2000).

“‘Living life powerfully and living a life you love’ is the promise of the Forum...” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

Marie Lemonnier of Le Nouvel Observateur and Mary Braid of The Independent describe the extraordinary level of anticipation at the start of the training:

“All await the fabulous ‘transformation’ and access to ‘another world’ that we were promised” (Lemonnier, 2005).

¹⁰⁶ A sense that anything is possible is indistinguishable from confidence, or “optimism”.

“Among the Forum crowd there is a real buzz – a mix of excitement and trepidation. And no wonder. Within this very ordinary building, Landmark promises something rather more special than the usual humdrum day at the office. The Forum course dangles the alluring prospect of complete life ‘transformation’ in just three days. As the crowd is about to discover, achieving transformation is no picnic” (Braid, 2003).

The promises of transformation are identical to those made by est, while – taking Landmark’s promises back a step further – they are also similar to those of Mind Dynamics. According to Pressman (1993), Mind Dynamics participants were told that they could:

“... achieve almost any goal they set, from improving their IQs and ending insomnia to curing cancer while learning to avoid life-threatening illnesses” (p. 34).

Numerous commentators state that Landmark promises participants that they can achieve anything as a result of participation. Laura McClure of Mother Jones Magazine and James O’Brien of GQ Magazine, as well as bloggers Sanjukta and Dorian Sagan testify to these promises:

“He informs us that he has personally led more than 50,000 people to Transformation. He’s here to tell us that ‘anything you want for yourself and your life is available from being here this weekend’” (McClure, 2009).

“Each devotee is no doubt attracted to the promise that, through the teachings of Landmark, you can have ‘anything you want for yourself or your life’” (O’Brien, 2012).

“He says anything is possible when you have joined the Landmark Forum” (Sanjukta, 2013).

“The second part of my question referred to a hyperbolic claim: on the big board to our right it was asserted that anything we wanted we could have from our participation” (Sagan, n.d.).

While acknowledging that the claim of this thesis, namely that most healthy individuals can be pushed into a hypomanic state, is a bold one, it is a well-defined hypothesis and can, therefore, be discussed, challenged, and falsified. The assertion by LGATs that participants can have “anything they want” for themselves and their lives as a result of participation is a much bolder claim, but one which is deftly nonspecific. It is proposed that LGATs like Landmark do not give participants “anything they want” as defined prior to the training but that, as a result of a shifted perspective, participants feel as though they have everything that they want after the training. This shift in perspective is unlikely to last.

4.3.2.1.2 Proportion of participants who experience the “experience”

It is clear that many participants experience a period of elation as a result of LGAT participation. While private research by LGATs predictably finds that a high proportion of participants achieve the promised “transformation”, ostensibly neutral academics and those otherwise critical of these

trainings confirm that many graduates report at least short-term satisfaction with participation. Steven Pressman, who was sued by Landmark after his critical depiction of est's founder, Werner Erhard, acknowledges that graduates tend to speak highly of the training:

“Just about everyone from famous actors to bored housewives¹⁰⁷, it seemed, had gone through Erhard's ‘training,’ and huge numbers of them swore to the fantastic results they got from est” (Pressman, 1993, p. xi).

Psychology Today journalist Mark Brewer, after producing a particularly critical portrayal of the est training, similarly says:

“Nevertheless, it is difficult to condemn offhand anything that produces as high a degree of satisfaction and as strong a sense of new personal worth as est usually does” (Brewer, 1975).

Providing a more specific estimate of the proportion of est participants who “got it”, he continues:

“There were those who didn't catch on, or who didn't think much of the revelation, or who were even hopping mad about being sold a bill of goods. But as usual about 200 hundred people, roughly four fifths off the crowd, proclaimed their conversion, and the mood changed as if lepers had been cleansed” (Brewer, 1975).

The assertion of this thesis is not that most participants do not (at least initially) feel that they benefit from participation. In fact, the central argument relies on the observation that graduates temporarily feel incredible about themselves, the world, and the future (in spite of going through a process that is ostensibly unpleasant). Rather than contending that LGATs exaggerate the power of this experience, it is argued that the uninitiated underestimate its power, the way that it can alter perspective, and the fact that it has the potential to incite problematic behaviour. Because of this underestimation, observers may struggle to understand the behaviour of participants, and participants may not understand why their enthusiasm seems strange to others. In a statement which illustrates, and raises concerns about, the power of the “experience” for many, Finkelstein, et al. (1982) state:

“Nearly 30% of respondents, however, considered est training more useful than family or personal relationships” (p. 524).

The response to Landmark is equally impressive. Psychologist Simon Crosby from the UK is “an enthusiastic Forum graduate” (Libaw, 2002), and reveals just how powerful the weekend can be:

“I think you'd be astonished, frankly, at what is possible in this setting” (Libaw, 2002).

“There is no denying that many Forum graduates believe it has changed their lives” (Libaw, 2002).

¹⁰⁷ John Denver, Yoko Ono, Diana Ross, Jerry Stiller, and Jeff Bridges are some celebrities who have done est.

Mary Braid of The Independent makes a similar claim, while Amelia Hill of The Guardian relates how one participant describes his transformation at the Tuesday evening graduation:

“... there is an army of Forum graduates ready to swear that their lives have been utterly changed by the course” (Braid, 2003).

“We’re invited to come up to the microphone and share. It’s Doug Tucker, a 35-year-old hot tub salesman from Stratford-upon-Avon who puts it best. Over 6ft 4in, with a shaven head and rippling biceps tattooed with a snarling bulldog and the England flag, Doug is hardly the middle-class professional the course appears to attract.

‘If anyone who knew me before I came on this course said I would even be in the same room as a bunch of people clapping and saying they loved each other, I would have hit them,’ he says. ‘Likewise, if anyone had told me I would have realised things about myself that I’ve realised in the last few days, I would have laughed in their face. This course has transformed me. And the funny thing is, I didn’t even know I had it in me to transform,’ he smiled” (Hill, 2003).

According to Marita Vandenberg of Contact Magazine, many participants appear to achieve the transformation promised:

“It became clear to me that over the course of the three 15-hour days of the Forum many of these people had reached an emotional state and achieved ‘transformation’” (Vandenberg, 2000).

Amelia Hill of The Guardian, Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine, and James O’Brien of GQ Magazine provide some sense of the proportion of participants who experience “transformation”:

“... 80 per cent of whom go on to take a second course” (Hill, 2003).

“Seven out of ten people who take the Forum go on to a higher level of Landmark’s Curriculum for Living...” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

“... I’d say a good 75 percent from my group sign up for the next seminar of their own free will” (O’Brien, 2012).

The fact that most participants undergo a powerful experience is not being challenged. The permanency of this “transformation” for the majority of participants is, however, being questioned, as are the negative effects of this experience on the lives of some participants and their families.

4.3.2.1.3 Permanence of the “experience”

Because existing studies on the effectiveness of LGATs are not highly specific about the delay between “goal attainment” (the final day of the core training) and the survey/assessment, it is not possible to assess the transience of the post-training “experience” based on existing sources. While Lieberman

(1992) indicates that evidence of long-term benefits from participation in Lifespring was found, Fisher, et al. (1989) indicate that similar long-term effects were not observed in the Forum, and that even 4-6 weeks post-training few positive effects were discernable. (With regards to Lieberman's findings, it would be necessary to confirm that these effects were the same as the post-training "experience". It is plausible – although not conceded – that LGATs facilitate long-term improvements, but this does not mean that participants remain in a permanent state of euphoria after the training.) It is possible, however, to show that there is reason to doubt the permanence of the post-training "transformation".

Mark Brewer and Luke Rhinehart indicate that the est "experience" could be very brief in some participants. Commenting on what he called the "initial rushes of est conversion", Brewer (1975), says:

"Later on, though, when things have settled, some graduates simply have a feeling of okayness and self-confidence."

Rhinehart (2010) similarly relates the comments of one est participant following the grand revelation:

"'You know,' he begins, 'during the getting-it process about two hours ago I was really high. It was incredible. I'm beginning to come down now just a bit, although the energy in this room has really been fantastic tonight'" (p. 180).

The Landmark post-training "experience" has, likewise, frequently been described as relatively short-lived. Jana Martin of Swing Generation Magazine relates the perspective of one professional:

"'It's like being shot out of a cannon,' says another New York psychologist (who also asked to remain anonymous), who has worked with patients who've been through The Forum. 'It's a tremendous high that can last as long as a month or two. But you have no way to stay up: They don't provide the foundation to do so'" (Martin, 1998).

Former Landmark participant and assistant Robert Black (1997), similarly quotes "Dr Frank Pittman":

"Landmark is training and coaching a way of living that makes you feel powerful but only truly provides short term 'wins' with no long-term consistency of life except at Landmark. Landmark gets free labour and more participants, more money in the corporate pocket; however, it appears that the participants may never reach any level of long term peace and happiness if they stay internally oriented and terminating by nature except to stay in the Landmark structure."

Black (1997) also refers to evidence from "Dr Fisher", who argues that the results are short-term:

"... Dr Fisher found that Forum participants became more internally oriented, concentrating on themselves and satisfying immediate desires, resulting in the perception of control that is only short-term in duration."

Traci Hukill (1998) of Metro News San Francisco, who was sceptical of many of the techniques, and the general conduct of the organisation, acknowledges that, despite this, she “got it” ... for a day:

“And still, for a day, I got the result. I got the euphoria the day after The Forum. And then it dissipated. That’s what happens – that’s why people keep signing up, to keep that feeling fresh.”

Mary Braid (2003) recounts a participant’s transient euphoria, and the need to re-experience it:

“It sounds mad now but I went home euphoric. I told everyone I met how great the course was [...] I felt that I’d been to the deepest, darkest place and had come out feeling great. I wanted the feeling again.”

A former Forum volunteer in Australia similarly suggests that the transformation does not last:

“Many people agreed to assist for Landmark because they wanted to experience the forum again...” (Cohen, 2009).

Another graduate advises participants that they should not sign up to any further courses based on how they feel at the end of the training. It is implied that the “emotional arousal” does not last:

“Let the experience settle... If, three months from now, you’re still burning with the desire to take a follow-up, then by all means go ahead and do it. Do it in the clear light of day, not at the peak of emotional arousal” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

One online contributor – bravely – acknowledged the irrationality of his temporary post-Forum enthusiasm and contacted the friends he tried to recruit while in this state. ‘Jack Shamblin’ likened his post-training experience to being intoxicated, stating, “This was my text that I sent to friends when I got sober from the Landmark manipulation”:

“So ignore my enthusiasm for Landmark. I realize that I just got manipulated into their agenda under the pretense of taking life coaching. At least you know you are a friend I would want to be in a cult with me. ;))” (Jack Shamblin, 2015).

Another graduate hints at the transience of his experience, and how he regretted his overzealous attempts to recruit others while in this state:

“There were a few pitfalls, though, especially in the immediate months following my participation in the Forum. I was so inspired by the results that I had gotten, I became possibly too insistent that others around me take the course, and became attached to people acknowledging the value I had received from Landmark” (Gagan, 2002).

Put in a different way, “people become Landmark junkies”, says exit counsellor Rick Ross, who explains that he gets more calls about Landmark than any other group. Hinting that the experience does not

last, he says, “They start to take courses and they just don’t stop” (Grigoriadis, 2001). Some LGAT enthusiasts have, perhaps revealingly, been likened by other commentators to drug addicts. *Impact Trainings* is another LGAT discussed at www.culteducation.com:

“I heard many people lament their negative situations but, just like the junkie who always takes another hit, these trainees would go back to the Impact Trainings center and experience a spiritual high that would temporarily cause them to forget their prior troubles” (formerimpactgrad, 2008).

The descriptions of LGAT results, regardless of which of the organisations is being described, are remarkably similar. ‘Hopeful Soul’ and ‘too much’ reveal their experiences of Impact Trainings:

“Impact Trainings, whatever their apparent short term positive effects, have a long term negative effect when the euphoria of the training room wears off” (Hopeful Soul, 2009).

“I managed to suffer through lift-off celebration. I felt a lot of pressure from my biological family to continue because they thought they saw improvement when I’d come home in a euphoria for a couple days after each training. It was always short lived. But they were just happy to see signs of life” (too much, 2008).

Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine describes one woman who was so “transformed” when she came out of the Landmark Forum that she had paid for a man she met in the subway (“Jerry”) to do the training¹⁰⁸. A few weeks after completing the advanced training, she began to see flaws with the organisation, however, and struggled to understand her prior frame of mind:

“In the month since she took the Advanced Forum, Tootsie has started to have doubts about Landmark. ‘I really believe in their work,’ she says, ‘but I think there are some things that aren’t so great – what’s up with all the volunteering? The longer it gets without me going down to the World Trade Center¹⁰⁹... I don’t know. I mean, I’m committed to Jerry, but it just feels like, ‘What was I doing?’” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

As a point of comparison, participants of other LGATs whose founders were involved with Mind Dynamics indicate that the “transformations” do not endure. Referring to *Lifestream* (founded by Mind Dynamics instructor, James “Jim” Quinn), online contributor ‘dwyern’ states:

“It has been operating here in Jacksonville area and several other places for a long time [...] The people are nice and not creepy really. It’s mostly just people looking to improve their life. But the techniques give you a euphoria and a high and then you crash unless you KEEP on going and going and spending more cash” (dwyern, 2012).

¹⁰⁸ This sort of impulsive generosity is identical to the extravagant altruism often seen in hypomania and mania.

¹⁰⁹ Landmark Education had offices in the World Trade Centre until the attacks on September 11, 2001.

PSI Seminars graduate, 'PSIsurvivor' makes a similar claim:

“There is an initial high people feel. The people you meet seem to be your new friends, but the high wears off” (PSIsurvivor, 2004).

If the LGAT high is caused by an exaggerated allostatic defence involving mesolimbic dopamine, then it makes sense that it is transient. Allostatic hypervigilance is arguably the result of participants being conditioned to anticipate further allostatic challenges – as soon as they feel safe again, the need for this hypervigilance will be removed and dopamine will return to baseline levels. Because people vary considerably in what they find stressful (Sapolsky, 2004), and in the way that they cope with stressors, the duration of the post-training high will, similarly, vary from person to person.

Many non-academic sources (journalists, bloggers) argue that participants attain long-term benefits from participation in Landmark (Alford, 2010; Charlotte, 2016; Libaw, 2002; Lyon, 2010; Warrington, 2015); however, the proportion of participants who achieve long-term benefits, and the nature of these benefits, needs to be accurately assessed. Real evidence for long-term positive change in most participants is lacking; however, evidence for an “experience”, which tends to begin on the final day of the training and last for a few hours to – in some cases – a few months, is compelling. The following section addresses the qualities of this “experience” as they relate to hypomanic/manic symptoms.

4.3.2.2 Specific features of the “experience”

It is of limited value to demonstrate that, as a result of LGAT participation, most participants have a powerful “experience”. To argue that this altered state is evidence of hypomania/mania it is necessary to be more specific about the nature of this “experience”. Seven hypomanic/manic symptoms have been established, and descriptions of the “experience” by LGAT participants, the observations of academics, and the promises of LGATs themselves will now be compared with them to assess the degree to which the LGAT “experience” resembles these established symptoms:

1. Perspective
2. Confidence
3. Euphoria
4. Sociability/openness
5. Creativity
6. Motivation/energy/productivity
7. Decisiveness/impulsivity

Because the following comments were not made with these symptoms in mind, they do not necessarily apply exclusively to a single symptom. Many refer to multiple symptoms and so, while these cases will be highlighted when possible, the reader should keep this in mind.

4.3.2.2.1 Perspective

Perspective refers to the way that a person may view circumstances/people/himself/life in a new way. As a result of a hypomanic/manic shift in perspective, the world may appear more positive or, stated differently, negative situations/people/life may seem less negative. From the first LGAT to Landmark, this shift in perspective – while sometimes framed differently – has been a specific, and core, promise to participants. Klar, et al. (1990) capture this LGAT promise as follows:

“In general, LGATs espouse the idea that people are capable of changing their lives, not so much by modifying their external circumstances, but by changing the way they interpret them” (p. 99).

Finkelstein, et al. (1982, p. 518), Brewer (1975), and Rhinehart (2010, p. 27), similarly describe the primary purpose of est as:

“... to transform your ability to experience living, so that the situations you have been trying to change or have been putting up with clear up just in the process of life itself.”

Finkelstein, et al. (1982, p. 534) provide further detail on est’s promise - that nothing has to change externally for it to seem as though one’s life has dramatically improved:

“The standard est training promises to transform the capacity to experience life so that one is more satisfied with life as it is (Sayre 1977). As such it promises a personal upheaval in consciousness which is meant to alter the very way in which the environment is known (epistemology) and being is experienced (ontology) (Lande 1976).”

John Hanley, describing the “transformation” achievable through Lifespring, likewise stated:

“... most often, what is needed is not a shift in circumstances, but a shift in the lens through which we see the world” (John Hanley, 2016c).

It is argued that the LGAT experience is the result of an exaggerated allostatic response to stress, particularly feelings of guilt elicited through public confessions. My own experience of mania was that I felt no guilt or shame (“Only God can judge me”); if the LGAT experience is an exaggerated defence against feelings of guilt, then it makes sense that participants would feel a complete absence of guilt (“forgiveness”) while in this state (their perspective of their own culpability is altered). Rhinehart (2010) quotes an est participant who, at the end of the training, stated:

“I want to thank you. This last half hour has just freed me from five years of guilt over the death of my daughter” (p. 167).

Quoting the trainer, in a statement which more generally reflects the way that LGATs shift perspective, Rhinehart (2010) continues:

“Sometimes your pains and fears and barriers will disappear and sometimes they won’t. But your *experience* of them will now be totally different” (p. 175).

Rhinehart (2010) explains that graduates usually “report in a general way that their lives are ‘better’” (p. 196), and that they “enjoy things more” (p. 196). One graduate explained that “Nothing seems tragic or permanent” (p. 196), while another said, “I see things differently – standing in the same mire, to be sure, but looking 180° outside my usual viewpoint” (p. 196).

Keeping the poem *Dr Johnson* in mind, Rhinehart (2010, p. 42) reveals, again, the way that reality may remain the same, but that it will be interpreted differently. In this example, a participant wants to know how the training will solve his problem – that his boss is a “pompous jerk”:

PARTICIPANT: “You mean the boss will cease to be a pompous jerk?”

TRAINER: “You will cease to experience him as a pompous jerk.”

LGATs describe their trainings as “experiential” or “transformational”, asserting that their value does not lie in the theory which is taught (in both est and Landmark participants are told not to believe anything that they are told), but rather in a powerful change in the way in which participants view the world. LGATs are not constructed to allow for optimal retention, or academic understanding, of information, and if their “wisdom” could be imparted academically they could presumably save the world by simply making it available for everyone to read. Est trainers specifically stated that participants could fall asleep, and be completely confused, but that – as long as they kept their “soles in the room” – they would get it. Deborah Beroset Miller, the Director of PR for Landmark, similarly describes their courses as providing “transformational learning”, as opposed to “informational learning where you’re basically adding more information and trying to remember things” (ABC, 2011). LGATs provide a new perspective, as is explicitly stated as an expected result on the Landmark website:

“Life becomes framed in a new way. The way that we approach the world, and the world approaches us, changes” (Landmark, 2016h).

Various commentators reveal Landmark’s promise to alter their perspective, or claim that the training has (at least in the short-term) done so. Roland Howard of the Daily Mail writes:

“Called the Forum and run by an organisation called Landmark Education, it promises to alter my reality radically...” (Howard, 2001).

Stern Magazine describes the shift in perspective of one Forum participant:

“Frustrated by his studies and a poor job outlook, the physics student took a three-day seminar from Landmark Education. Afterwards he was enthused: ‘I felt limitlessly free, all restrictions were gone. The world belonged to me, and everything was possible’ (Stern Magazine, 1998).

Amelia Hill of The Guardian explains that, shortly after the training, many graduates believed that their lives had improved. It is possible that these people were referring to healed relationships which came about from “completing” with family and friends, but it is also plausible (if not likely) that – just two days after the training – they believed their lives had improved in a more general way. Since it is unlikely that significant changes to circumstances could have been made in two days, this improvement appears to be the result of a shift in perspective:

“Two days later, after a tentative excursion into the real world, we return to compare notes. I cannot find a single person who believes their life hasn’t improved” (Hill, 2003).

Online contributor and Forum graduate, ‘JF’, explains that the training resulted in a shift in his/her perspective. He/she does not *believe* that this shift will go away (this possibly implies that the training was recent), but it is unclear how recently ‘JF’s last training took place:

“It’s definitely something that causes a shift in your perception that I don’t think will ever go away” (JF, 2004).

Another graduate, while perhaps not understanding why, explains in a YouTube video that her perspective of others became more positive immediately after participating in the Landmark Forum:

“What was so funny was that when I was done with the program I went to go visit my mom... and she hadn’t gone to this program... it was just me. I went away for three days and then I came back and I went and saw her, and all of a sudden in my eyes... she was this amazing mom (laughs). She was the mom I always wanted her to be. She was caring and kind and... loving... and funny and smart – all the things that she has always actually been, but I’ve never allowed her... to be those things in my own mind [...] What I realised is that... everyone on the outside hadn’t changed... the only person who had changed after those 72 hours was me... the way I saw the world... the way I viewed people...” (Estelle Mae, 2017).

This comment by a recent Forum graduate reveals how her perspective of herself changed. In both this example and the previous example it is important to note that no objective changes occurred:

“First of all, I’m going to Mexico tomorrow. I was in such a diet mode for the past few weeks, thinking I needed to look good for my bikini, and that I would never look good until I reached a certain weight. I tell you, I have NEVER... NEVER, EVER, EVER been 100% OK with what I look like.

There are definitely days when I have ‘I look cute!’ days, but in the back of my mind, I still saw myself as 250 pound Rachel. Today when I looked in the mirror, not only did I feel beautiful and confident, but I ate whatever I wanted – even though it’s this close to Mexico and I would have told myself before that potential bloat could ruin a bikini” (Rofe, 2010).

A more positive perspective allows the same circumstances to seem more enjoyable, or negative circumstances to be seen in a more positive way. The Yankelovich Study, described as “independent research” on the Landmark website, reported nine “unexpected benefits” of participation in the Forum. Two of these benefits were: (1) “Job is more enjoyable and satisfying” (presumably the same job), and (2) “Have more fun in life” (Landmark_Yankelovich, 2016). As indicated in Figure 25, it has been demonstrated that LGATs result in a transient shift in the perspectives of participants:

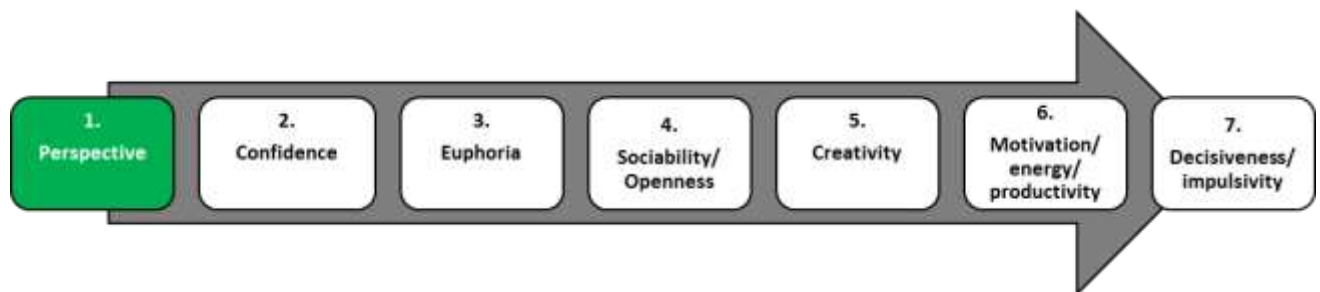


Figure 25: Hypomanic/manic symptoms displayed by LGAT participants (1 of 7 symptoms verified).

An important point to make is that, while the constructionist LGAT philosophy (facts vs. story) is in line with a shift in perspective, this does not mean that this theory causes the new perspective. It is argued in this thesis that it is primarily the exposure to LGAT “technology” (stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment) which causes a temporarily altered reality, and that – while it is understandable that participants assume the philosophy is, therefore, valid – without the assistance of elevated dopamine, or a more thorough process of cognitive restructuring, an enduring shift in perspective is unlikely.

4.3.2.2.2 Confidence

LGATs unanimously promise that their trainings result in increased confidence, and participants claim that they experience increased self-belief as a result of taking part. (Since these effects were not found in participants even six weeks after the Forum, it may be assumed that these claims are made during the transitory period of “enlightenment”.) Rhinehart (2010) explains that it was common for est graduates to feel more able to deal with challenging situations, quoting one graduate who exclaimed:

“Nothing overwhelms me as before” (p. 196).

Lifespring claimed that, in addition to a shift in perspective, their training reliably resulted in improved confidence, and a sense of control:

“The research, by overwhelming statistical margins, allowed a consensus statement: Lifespring trainings led to improvements in participants’ ‘self-confidence, self-esteem, lowered job stress, a heightened sense of control in life, and a more positive and pleasurable range of events and experiences in their lives’” (Lifespring, 2016).

Haaken and Adams (1983, p. 277) concur that participants felt omnipotent immediately after the Lifespring training:

“This contributed to the sense of expansiveness and boundless power experienced by participants.”

According to Amanda Scioscia of the Phoenix New Times, Landmark promises increased confidence, as well as other results that may be explained by a shift in perspective:

“Landmark calls its product ‘technology’ and proffers testimonials about the organization claiming it boosts confidence, improves relationships and increases joy in life” (Scioscia, 2000).

The Yankelovich Study similarly claims a number of “unexpected benefits” from participation relating to an increase in confidence, or an increased perception of being able to deal with problems:

“Greater confidence and self-esteem.”

“More comfortable and at ease with others.”

“Less concerned with the approval and opinion of others.”

“Overcame a fear or anxiety” (Landmark_Yankelovich, 2016).

While Scioscia (2000) and private research produced by Landmark make these claims, participant Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine confirms that (at least initially) these claims appear valid:

“... participants walk away with a catharsis and an unholy confidence in what they can accomplish” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

Amelia Hill of The Guardian, describing participants on the final day of the training, similarly confirms the extraordinary enthusiasm and confidence of new graduates:

“People are straining at the leash to take their new-found confidence out into the real world. Everywhere, plans are being made; careers are reinvigorated and lives overhauled” (Hill, 2003).

A number of online contributors and bloggers describe the confidence they have felt since taking the Landmark training. It is uncertain how soon after the training these comments were made but, at least in the case of ‘JackSF’ (who did both est, the Landmark Forum, and the Landmark Advanced Course), the est “experience” did not last, and he was interested to see if the Landmark transformation would:

“Third, I did come out of the Forum and the AC stronger than I went in. Now maybe that’s spelled P-L-A-C-E-B-O, but I’ve been more confident and having more fun since the courses. Like when I first did est, I feel a grand permission to be myself and not to take things so seriously. I’m curious to see if I can make this crazy Landmark stuff I learned work in my real life” (JackSF, 2003).

‘Fiona’ similarly describes her transformation, claiming that so many areas of her life improved since taking part. Studies could easily verify objective improvements; claims of improvements which are seldom, if ever, objectively verified suggest a shift in perspective:

“Through doing the Landmark Forum I gained a level of freedom and confidence and joy that I could not even have imagined before doing it. I have hugely improved so many areas of my life thanks to Landmark and I would recommend it to anybody!” (Fiona, 2010).

While self-confidence is valuable it can, when in excess, result in poor decision-making and impulsivity. Blogger “Citizen Skeptic” queries the post-training grandiosity of two (psychologist) participants:

“So, I don’t know: maybe this couple never would have formed a consulting partnership and never would have written a book if they had not attended the Forum. But at some point it was clear that they had also been infected with the grandiosity of their own ideas. The Forum seemed to have imbibed them with the idea that anything was possible” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

Rather than being warned to be cautious about their newfound confidence, it is argued that Landmark Forum participants are urged to embrace it:

“Around the Forum, I had the distinct impression that people were encouraged to believe that they could run at a sprint all the time, that there were no limits to anyone’s possibilities. And that just isn’t so. Optimism is great, it’s inspiring, but optimism does need to be tempered with a bit of realism” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

The nature of increased confidence and risk-taking is that it leads to greater rewards for some and greater losses for others. Any organisation that elicits risk-taking behaviour, and uses selective testimonials as evidence of its efficacy, will be able to present graduates who have benefited from participation and, by presenting only these examples, argue for the effectiveness of its program. Even if the majority of participants benefit from risks taken (it is not conceded that this is the case), others may suffer, and testimonial evidence frequently produces a misleading sampling bias¹¹⁰.

Excessive confidence can be seen in other behaviours common to graduates. The tendency, for example, to be more outspoken and to engage with people that might otherwise be avoided will be

¹¹⁰ Particularly to potential participants and graduates who do not understand the problems with this form of “evidence”.

addressed under “Sociability/openness”, although it could equally fit into this section. As mentioned, impulsivity may be considered the result of excessive confidence, or excessive optimism about the results of a particular behaviour. This will be addressed under “Decisiveness/impulsivity”. Finally, confidence is not limited to participants’ views (perspectives) of themselves, and the way that they view the LGAT may, as a result of the “experience”, become grandiose as well. As one graduate said of the Landmark Forum:

“There was a point where I thought that it was the learning program that was going to transform the world, absolutely. Absolutely, I thought it was...” (Cohen, 2009).

As indicated in Figure 26, it has been demonstrated that LGATs result in a transient shift in the confidence of participants:

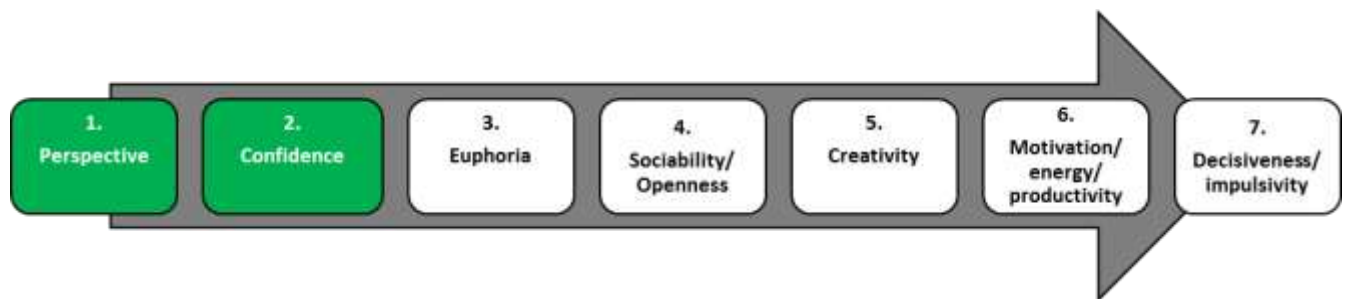


Figure 26: Hypomanic/manic symptoms displayed by LGAT participants (2 of 7 symptoms verified).

4.3.2.2.3 Euphoria

“Afterwards, participants have attested to feeling ‘awesome’ and experiencing an emotional high that lasted for days. Some say they had to use special ‘grounding’ procedures just to carry on with normal life after this ‘transcending’ experience” (Singer, 2003, p. 198).

The most commonly described aspect of the LGAT “experience” is a “high” or “euphoria”. These are feelings that are associated with hypomania/mania, stimulants such as cocaine, romantic love, and – more specifically – elevated levels of dopamine in the mesolimbic pathway. While noticing a shift in perspective, increased confidence, greater sociability, productivity, or impulsivity requires introspection – and may only become apparent after the training – participants are more readily able to recognise a general sense of “feeling really good”, and so it might be expected that this is the most commonly mentioned symptom by both trainers and participants.

Rhinehart (2010) describes the reactions of participants to the est goal-attainment (day four). It is notable that participants do not understand why they feel this good. In the same way that depression can make a neutral world seem hostile, an elevated mood can make a neutral world seem wonderful:

“‘Utterly, utterly, utterly amazing,’ Jerry says with a big smile. ‘Why do I feel so good? I don’t even agree with what you’ve been saying, but I feel like I’m floating two feet off the ground. But why? It’s incredible...’” (p. 166).

“Most of those who experience exhilaration on the fourth day of the training probably don’t have the slightest idea why they feel so high...” (p. 204).

Another est participant, having just experienced the grand revelation (goal-attainment) asks:

“How can machines feel as good as I feel? It’s impossible” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 167).

In explaining that not all participants experience the euphoria, Rhinehart (2010) reveals that most do:

“... some people who get it find that it’s a release, while others find it’s depressing – not only are they left out of the joy so many are showing, but to them it’s utterly inexplicable that trainees should find it a liberating experience to be told they are machines” (p. 170).

“... many seem to find the experience they’ve just been through permits them to let go in ways they never have before; their vitality and animation during the next forty minutes gradually increases until the room is alive as never before during the training” (p. 171).

Describing both the shift in perspective following goal-attainment, and the euphoria of these participants, Rhinehart (2010) further states:

“Although the hotel buffet is unbelievably bad – unpalatable food that must have been selected from all of the most undesirable places in the universe – the nine trainees at our table don’t notice. Four are still floating a couple of feet off the ground, glowing and laughing and cheerfully making asses of themselves” (p. 171).

Revealing how many who were sceptical did not escape the euphoria, Rhinehart (2010, p. 171) relates a comment by a participant named Tom:

“‘You know,’ says Tom, the bearded fellow with the beads who spent so much time arguing and now looks blissed out, ‘I remember now that I read in some article that est ends up telling us that we’re just machines and I remember saying to myself: that can’t be it, there must be a secret something beyond that. And yet, here we are and that’s all there is, and suddenly it’s all right.’”

At the est post-training guest evening a trainee who enjoyed smoking marijuana commented on how, after the training, he was so high that marijuana brought him down:

“Tuesday night I didn’t feel like it but some friends were over and passing joints so I took a few tokes. Well, you know what happened? The fuckin’ joints brought me down. Pot was a downer” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 189).

Noting that some participants were not pleased with the grand revelation, Rhinehart (2010) reveals that the euphoria may last for “three days” in other participants:

“It is misleading to equate the experience of someone who feels gloom, anger, resentment, and disappointment during the getting-it period with that of someone who explodes into laughter at the cosmic joke and feels ‘high’ for the next three days” (p. 203).

Describing the enlightenment experience, Rhinehart (2010) states:

“Such an experience necessarily involves certainty, light, and lightness; the universe becomes clear and bright, and life becomes lighter” (p. 203).

Rhinehart (2010) actually acknowledges some of the same casualties that are noted by critics, but frames these negative effects in a way which allows the Sacred Science to remain intact. He explains that, whether participants become elated *or depressed*, according to Erhard, these results all constitute “getting it”, and therefore depression is as much proof of est’s success as elation:

“... according to Werner, all trainees ‘get it,’...” (p. 203).

“But in both cases, according to Werner, whether the trainee feels elated or depressed, there has been a fundamental change: the context in which the trainee experiences experience will be different” (p. 204).

According to Pressman (1993, p. 194), the executive director of New York City’s Lincoln Institute for Psychotherapy stated that they regularly dealt with est graduates who were “... confused and jarred”, and that “the same pattern – elation, depression, feelings of omnipotence followed by feelings of helplessness” was repeated “over and over again”. Elation is synonymous with euphoria (and omnipotence is synonymous with confidence/grandiosity), while the shifting between elation and depression suggests that the mechanism which regulates mood is attempting to stabilise the individual. While Pressman was generally critical of Erhard, est proponent Rhinehart (2010) quotes a woman at the est graduation evening with precisely these symptoms:

“I’m confused. I guess I was confused during most of the training and I’m confused now. I was feeling great Monday, really great, and yesterday I was more depressed than I’ve been in years. This morning was great and this afternoon is horrible. I knew life was supposed to be a roller coaster but I mean really, since *est*, it’s a bit too much” (p. 188).

The trainer dismisses these concerns using the est philosophy:

“If you think you’d prefer to avoid the extreme downs then you know what? You better start choosing them and stop resisting them. If you’re confused, stay with it, choose to be confused, accept it, observe. Same with depression” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 188).

Psychology Today journalist, Mark Brewer, describes the est euphoria as follows:

“Est Ecstasy. Afloat on the new surge of confidence and light-heartedness, the majority of trainees returned from dinner that night eager for the next and final stage of instruction” (Brewer, 1975).

Referring to the grand revelation at est, and the reaction of participants to that revelation, Finkelstein, et al. (1982) similarly state:

“This discourse, coming after the previous training, awaited with high expectations, dramatically executed, and lasting 6 hours, appears to create in many of the trainees a euphoric sense of well-being and community” (p. 522).

Keeping descriptions of hypomania/mania in mind, and with reference to my book (“A Book for Dead People”), and my poem (“... the world is alive with the marching dead”), it is interesting to note that a stated aim of est was to create “aliveness” in participants:

“The aim of the est training is apparently to rekindle aliveness...” (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, p. 535).

Rhinehart (2010) similarly reveals how participants were treated as though they were “dead”:

TRAINER: “No wonder you’ve lost all aliveness. No wonder your lives don’t work” (p. 17).

With regards to Lifespring, Haaken and Adams (1983), while sceptical of the source of this euphoria, note that a euphoria was clearly observed during their training:

“We argue that although participants often experience a heightened sense of well-being as a consequence of the training, the phenomenon is essentially pathological” (p. 271).

“... the content of the training stimulated early narcissistic conflicts and defences, which accounts for the elation and sense of heightened well-being achieved by many participants” (p. 279).

Professor Lieberman, who conducted a number of studies on Lifespring, was contacted and asked to comment on the effects of the training, in particular whether he had any insights into the “high” experienced by most participants. In his response, he confirmed that Lifespring participants experienced this euphoria, stating “I do agree with your statement that they leave the training in a high state that lasts for several weeks...” (Lieberman, 2017). While Professor Ross was not specifically asked about this euphoria, he chose to comment on his concerns about participants registering for further Lifespring courses while they were “... caught up in the immediate ‘high’ at the end of the Basic training” (Ross, 2016). It seems clear, based on the available evidence, that both est and Lifespring elicited a transient euphoria.

Landmark does not specifically promise euphoria, but those who have participated in the trainings, or encountered recent graduates, appear to accept as a given that it will occur. Stern Magazine of Germany asserts that this euphoria is almost guaranteed, while Enzo Di Matteo of Now Magazine raises concerns that LGATs like the Forum are selling a transient high, rather than lasting change:

“The choreography of the seminar has been worked out perfectly. The euphoria at the end is a hard and fast component of psycho-training” (Stern Magazine, 1998).

“Some in the mental health field say the idea pushed by marathon self-help groups like the Forum – that you can purchase a ‘peak,’ or psycho-shop for prepackaged life experiences – is more about making money than human growth” (Di Matteo, 2000).

In quoting a participant who did not experience the high, Horacio Silva of the New York Times suggests that this response is rare:

“Not everyone is convinced. ‘I don't want to say anything negative about Landmark, because I know so many people who have done it,’ says Anne Slowey, the fashion features director at Elle magazine, ‘but I just didn't feel the high they talk about’” (Silva, 2005).

Numerous other sources describe the reactions of participants to the graduation. Jana Martin of Swing Generation Magazine relates the reaction of one participant (Mary), while Traci Hukill of Metro News San Francisco reveals the apparently transformed state of another graduate:

“Mary said she'd felt so exhilarated that she signed up for the next course, ‘Communication’” (Martin, 1998).

“Before, he says, he felt controlled by his environment, resentful of people and responsibilities. A few days after the advanced course he states with visible relief, ‘Now who I am is the possibility of love and freedom’” (Hukill, 1998).

Describing the atmosphere on Sunday night after completing the training, Amanda Scioscia of the Phoenix New Times states:

“After dinner, everyone is giddy and the atmosphere is fun and happy” (Scioscia, 2000).

Roland Howard of the Daily Mail confirms that there is a powerful post-training euphoria, while Marita Vandenberg of Contact Magazine explains that weeks after the training at least some participants still appear euphoric:

“I was shaken by the power of the weekend. As I got the midnight train out of London, I realised that well over 100 people had experienced a transformation in three days. The sense of euphoria that such an experience of accelerated community brings was remarkable” (Howard, 2001).

“It was also clear that many had cried that weekend. Now, weeks later, some seemed almost euphoric. I found the underlying euphoria unnerving” (Vandenberg, 2000).

Charlotte Faltermayer of Time Magazine quotes another graduate who admits to feeling high, while Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine relates the degree to which this euphoria is felt by some:

“For Richard Giordanella, 49, a software executive, the Forum was enough: ‘I’m still high on the Forum’s main message, that my life is in my control. But I can do without the narcotic effect of their reinforcement’” (Faltermayer, 2001).

“‘For six months, I was just hooked,’ says a recently counseled Landmark participant from Denver, Colorado. ‘My parents kept pushing me to do it, and I thought, ‘My God! If everyone did this, there would be no need for drugs, ‘cause the euphoria is just so... euphoric!’” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

The comparison with a drug high has been made before in comments describing the transient nature of the experience. If the transformation is permanent – and participants get “anything they want in life” – then one must ask why they often retake the Forum or go on to take numerous additional trainings. Mary Braid of The Independent relates the experience of a woman who wanted to continue taking courses to re-experience the euphoria, while Fionnuala Bourke of the Sunday Mercury reveals concerns by observers that some participants become addicted to the trainings:

“By then my boyfriend had all these printouts about the Forum from the internet, but I wouldn’t listen to him. I felt that I had been to the deepest, darkest place and had come out feeling great. I wanted the feeling again” (Braid, 2003).

“One concerned reader, a friend of someone who had joined Landmark, rang the Mercury to tell us about the Birmingham meeting. ‘Those who take the courses all seem so nice and happy afterwards, but I’m worried that it takes over their lives,’ she said” (Bourke, 2004).

Laura McClure of Mother Jones Magazine explains her surprise that, even as someone who was deeply sceptical of the training, she felt particularly emotional at the Tuesday evening graduation, while Hagar Cohen describes the euphoria and power felt by a graduate in Australia:

“When I take a hard seat in the basement for Tuesday’s final Special Evening, I’m surprised to find that I almost – *almost* – start crying. It’s like seeing a room of beloved camp friends after a year apart. The air is festive and buzzing with chatter about our day and a half away from each other. I think, This is great! No wonder people have brought along dozens of friends to sign up” (McClure, 2009).

“Well, there I was at the most elated point in the forum experience, having created new things in my life, ostensibly created things in my life that didn’t exist a few days earlier, and feeling impregnable enough myself” (Cohen, 2009).

Referring to both excessive confidence, and euphoria, Henry Alford of The New York Times states that:

“... Landmark is viewed by some as an incubator for overly assertive or blissed-out automatons...” (Alford, 2010).

Numerous Forum participants have anonymously commented on the Landmark Forum euphoria at www.culteducation.com and other websites. It should be noted that, while these individuals do not necessarily understand why they felt as they did, the fact that they experienced or witnessed euphoria is nonetheless valid. These descriptions occur organically as graduates try to make sense of their experiences. The first two involve an interaction between ‘Baruch’ and ‘Hope’:

“I just completed the Landmark forum. I am probably as qualified to discuss it as anyone else. I got some feelings of elation and connection from it, especially on the third day. At that time, I felt very empowered and filled with hope. I have often had this experience in the Seventies, when there were all sorts of these seminars going on everywhere. The problem was that, nice as the euphoria was, it wore off in a few days, or a few weeks at most. I didn't derive any lasting benefit from it. I notice that Landmark gives you that euphoria” (Baruch, 2003).

“Baruch, your post reminded of how warm and fuzzy everyone felt towards the end of Sunday. I was feeling it and then the leader came right out and stated what we were feeling. He asked, don't we all feel great? We did such a great job, did a lot of work. By that time, much had been shared, associations had been formed, we were exhausted, hungry, coming to the end just before the big bomb was to be dropped about the whole point of the program. At the time, I just figured the leader had done so many forums that he knew what we were feeling. However, there was also the nagging feeling that the emotional roller coaster had been programmed. I felt this in part because some interactions with participants and the leader were exactly the same interactions I'd read about on PRO Landmark websites. My euphoria lasted a day, and that in itself was amazing because the Forum had actually been anything but uplifting” (Hope, 2003).

Responding to a contributor who claimed that he noted some positive changes in a friend of his, ‘glam’ states her concerns with her own friend’s transformation:

“This sounds similar to what happened to my friend, except for the parts about sounding more rational – he, being a very rational person to begin with, sounded LESS rational – and it having many good effects. Seeming more awake or alive may actually be the effects of a euphoria, or high,

brought on by a trance state. In this state people are highly suggestible, which is quite dangerous. Again, since my friend was a normally jovial person before LEC, to me this false high looked like mania. It was indeed horrifying” (glam, 2004).

‘Parkito’ reveals how powerful the experience is, while ‘hossgal’ describes her own transient euphoria:

“My forum weekend was, two weeks in hindsight, one of the most bizarre and surreal experiences of my life. The only parallel I can produce from my life is a job I once had to photograph a church where people were ‘stricken with the spirit’ and lay on the ground, writhing, speaking in tongues and giggling hilariously” (parkito, 2004).

“Ginge, your reaction to Landmark is quite similar to mine. After the initial euphoria wore off, I was the same person, though the feeling I'd been hoodwinked grew and persisted” (hossgal, 2004).

Like many other participants, ‘elena’ attempts to make sense of the post-training “experience”. ‘hatotheno’ and ‘foodguypdx’ both make reference to a euphoria but, as with some other participants, they describe falling into a depression afterwards:

“I think part of the artificial euphoria. the ‘high,’ that Landmark and est before it engineered into the ~programs~ was a direct result of having the burden of a long slog through traditional psychotherapy lifted from the minds and the souls of their customers” (elena, 2005).

“After participating in the brainwashing... er... Forum, he was riding a wave of euphoria. I admit that I saw some changes in his personality that could be interpreted as positive - more outspoken, decisive and an inflated sense of self-esteem. However, the perceived benefits eroded quickly into a sense of impending doom” (hatotheno, 2007).

“The addiction or high that is created is short lived. Just ask Sonnie-Dee. Just ask me as I have watched my girlfriend come off of her high from being a coach and the crash that she is experiencing. Similar to that of crack cocaine... intense and short lived” (foodguypdx, 2005).

‘vlinden’, like ‘foodguypdx’, compares the euphoria to a drug high:

“But he admitted to me at one point that he didn't want to read these things because he didn't want to invalidate the experience he had at Landmark. His ‘breakthroughs.’ His drug high. His ‘thrall’ and hypnotic euphoria” (vlinden, 2008).

The following two contributors reveal the changes they observed in their mothers as a result of participation. These changes can be unsettling for loved ones and, as was pointed to as a possible negative effect of participation, cause strain in personal relationships for some:

“The sucky thing was, my mom went and that Sunday night (they lock you up for three days and deprive you of sleep and normal human interaction, so you don't hear from people who attend Fri at 6am through Sunday at about 10) - she called me in ecstasy about the transformation she'd undergone. Well, the transformation lasted about two weeks, and consisted basically of her feeling pretty high for that time, but nothing fundamental changed, except, sadly, my assessment of my mother's strength of character” (Iuriete, 2005).

“My mom recently attended 'the Forum', and I'm trying to learn all I can in a short span of time. She's changed quite a bit in recent days going from alarmingly euphoric and childlike to cool and in charge, and yet strangely distant. I don't know what to expect next” (Kastlefeer, 2005).

'sonnie_dee', like many others, comments on the addictive nature of the Landmark euphoria. 'sonnie_dee', 'lucie', 'MartinH', 'The Anticult', and 'Carlos B' all suggest the euphoria is short-lived:

“The highs are so connected and keep you connected to Landmark. You go on a course, get coaching or whatever and you are on a high, you achieve 'the miraculous', then things stop going so well... you fall back to earth which instead of looking normal looks horrendous so you get coaching and you go back on a high. This is extremely addictive” (sonnie_dee, 2006).

“a friend of mine encouraged me to do the Landmark forum and initially I felt, like most people after doing a landmark seminar, euphoric about the coaching and with a clearing in my life” (lucie, 2006).

“... effects of the Landmark forum, if any: one phone call (happy bla bla), confusion on the receiving end of the call ... euphoria lasts about three weeks in the average participant, then everything back to normal or taking further courses at Landmark ...” (MartinH, 2007).

“Then to move onto explaining the psychological effects Landmark has on people, including the negative effects, and the temporary euphoria for some people” (The Anticult, 2009).

“On the bright side I would guess that most people who do the Forum are not affected too much one way or another once the initial euphoria has worn off” (Carlos B, 2009).

Similarly, a woman who worked at a legal firm which insisted that employees took the Landmark Forum (“LF” in the quote below) noted the transient nature of the transformations. Commenting on the post-training euphoria of a new employee, she stated:

“I remember a nice older lady who had just started working there and went to LF and came back a new person with a wide grin and crazy eyes spouting off about how wonderful it was. She seemed completely brainwashed! It was very disturbing. I don't know how long her 'high' lasted because I left” (Anonymous, 2011).

'GloriaG', like many others trying to understand the post-training experience, first describes the sense of omnipotence she felt after the Forum, then notes the fact that her perspective had shifted:

"If I had known that they used trance, hypnosis, NLP to create a natural euphoria from the opiates our bodies produce, then I would not have done it. This high did not come from any of the conscious teachings from Landmark. Many of those benign ideas such as building bridges in broken relationships can be found in any other self-help book. I didn't learn anything new from them in that way. But I did complete the Forum feeling utterly amazing and believed I had the power to conquer the world" (GloriaG, 2010).

"Speaking from personal experience of a Landmark Forum, the high I experienced was definitely physical rather than psychological. That became clear to me in the days and weeks after my attendance of the Forum. I felt strange (albeit a happy strange) and was aware that my feelings were not simply the warmth that comes from being surrounded by people who love you. I felt superhuman and yet I knew I wasn't. I felt supreme confidence & yet I knew it came from nowhere as my life was still in the same stuck place that led me to the Forum in the first place. My feelings of confidence did not come from a new self-belief in my talents gained from the Forum but from a physical sensation in my body" (GloriaG, 2011).

Some commentators, like 'Sulalee' and 'Fehlberg' make direct references to bipolar disorder:

"I also totally agree with whoever said that LM can bring about a mimicking of manic or hypomanic symptoms [...] The manic feeling is such a wonderful rush that people with Bipolar disorder will commonly stop taking their mood-stabilizing medications that tend to dull the high feeling and keep them at a more even keel. This is also probably why people who get involved in LM will repeatedly attend the Forum (as assistants) or other courses. But it isn't sustainable otherwise" (Sulalee, 2008).

'Fehlberg', in a YouTube video, describes his own hypomanic/manic post-training behaviour, and intimates that behaviour such as his is not uncommon after the Forum:

"So, in a sense I had some value out of the Landmark Forum, but what happened afterwards was that I became very high. I was on an intense emotional high. This is what they call 'the experience' or 'getting it'. For three months I was in a hypomanic state – I thought I was feeling good, but I wasn't. I was very stressed... I did some really strange things. It looked like I was happy but I was miserable because I was under constant stress, thinking 'Now I can solve everything in the world... all of the problems in the world I can solve.' That's what a lot of people think when they have done The Forum... Oh I have to call up the prime minister... and tell him 'I have the solution to all of mankind's problems!' And this is actually what goes on" (Fehlberg, 2014).

As indicated in Figure 27, it has been demonstrated that the LGAT “experience” frequently involves euphoria:

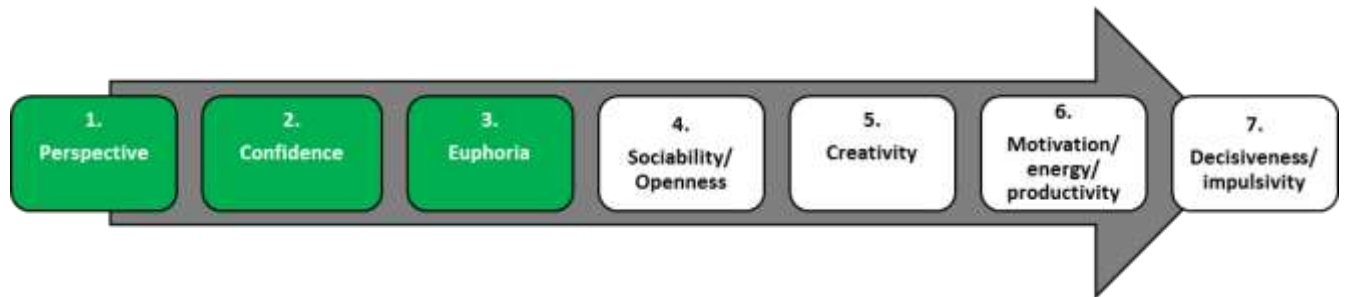


Figure 27: Hypomanic/manic symptoms displayed by LGAT participants (3 of 7 symptoms verified).

4.3.2.2.4 Sociability/openness

There are overlaps between the various hypomanic/manic symptoms, and *confidence* and *sociability/openness* are closely related. Self-belief makes interaction with others more likely, but it also makes it more likely that individuals will say things that they may otherwise keep to themselves. When this occurs as saying things which should be said, this openness will be observed as a positive effect; however, when it involves saying or doing things that should not have been said or done, it may be considered inappropriate or impulsive. The tendency to “speak one’s mind” (as I did at church in London) is a commonly reported benefit of LGAT participation. Rhinehart (2010) quotes two, apparently representative, est participants on this subject, one of whom stated, “I am more direct with people...” (p. 196), while the other said, “Since the training I’ve been more direct with everyone...” (p. 197). Rhinehart also reveals the description of a recent graduate, who explains that he has been saying whatever he thinks. This openness can be useful, but the removal of social filters may be damaging as well:

“I don’t know what, but *something* happened. I got it all right. The first three days of this week – I’m a vice-president in this plastic firm I work at – and the last three days I’ve spent letting everybody in the entire plant know exactly what was what [...] When one of the other vice-presidents and two other executives met, I found myself saying exactly what was so and everybody looked at me as if I was setting off firecrackers in church” (p. 189).

According to Landmark’s Yankelovich Study, unexpected benefits of the Forum relating to sociability and relationships include:

“Better relationships with parents and family members.”

“Better relationships with co-workers” (Landmark_Yankelovich, 2016).

With specific reference to being more open with ideas, and being more able to express those ideas (as might occur in poets and writers, and perhaps relate to the removal of one's social filter), a further unexpected benefit found by Yankelovich was:

“A new ability to express thoughts and feelings, both publicly and privately”

(Landmark_Yankelovich, 2016).

Online contributor, ‘wolfy’, provides a personal perspective, explaining how – since the Forum – he has been more open with his loved ones:

“For me I've been able to express my love and affection for family members...” (wolfy, 2003).

Henry Alford of The New York Times similarly comments on the way that the Forum facilitated intimacy and openness:

“I had told my boyfriend, Greg – for the fifth time in seven years – that I love him, and had said ‘I hugely admire you’ to a poet friend beset by his obscurity” (Alford, 2010).

“Three days after the Forum, I finally reached my mother by phone. I stammeringly told her that I love her (the second time I'd said this to her as an adult)” (Alford, 2010).

While these results are laudable, increased love, joy, openness, and a willingness to say things that might otherwise have remained unsaid may indicate that the person has been pushed into a hypomanic state. The goal of LGATs may not be to drive participants to mania, but there is a fine line between “breakthrough” (hypomania) and breakdown (mania). An organisation which accepts credit for those pushed just high enough but argues that those who become too high have not properly applied the technology and need to take responsibility for their behaviour, is – ironically – not accepting responsibility, or is unaware of how their “transformations” are generated. Henry Alford, after describing his own breakthroughs, relates the experience of someone who was less fortunate:

“During the program, I kept an eye out for anyone going over the rails. Landmark has been criticized for having unleashed some monsters: a reporter from The Independent, the British newspaper, spoke with a woman whose executive husband was taken to the Forum by a colleague. ‘Some women might like it if their husband suddenly started saying he loved them all the time, but I found it scary,’ the woman said. ‘He was weirdly euphoric and animated. Then he became very depressed.’ She added that he had panic attacks for a long time after” (Alford, 2010).

The elevation in mood need not lead to depression, as extreme openness – on its own – can be destructive for some. Woodhouse and Vandenberg of Contact Magazine relate the experience of one graduate whose grandiosity and outspokenness following the Landmark Forum cost him his job:

“Mr Cohen says Landmark's assertiveness training influenced him to tell his employers at the time that he was ‘unhappy with what was going on’ and to try to do things which were beyond his ability. He says he was fired as a result of his radical new behaviour” (Woodhouse & Vandenberg, 2000).

Robert Black reflects on his own behaviour following participation, noting that what he framed as honesty and openness at the time was really just insensitivity and the lack of a filter:

“Immediately after attending The Forum, I felt powerful, but I soon realized that my feeling was based in my being overtly and rudely demanding of, critical of and inflexible with others and self-indulgent and excusing of myself, expressing exactly the way I felt about every situation with no consideration of anyone else’s feelings. I did not like the way I was acting towards others and saw and felt their reaction. I realized how unreasonable my behavior was” (Black, 1997).

The view that Forum graduates may become too outspoken is not limited to those generally critical of Landmark. Oliver Libaw of ABC News relates the opinion of a therapist, and Landmark proponent, who cautions that some graduates become too open in their communication with others:

“Simon Crosby, a psychotherapist in East Sussex, England, is an enthusiastic Forum graduate, but he also cautions it is not for everyone. He worries that people in poor mental health could be harmed by the Forum (which does attempt to screen out unsuitable participants). ‘I think it's important to screen people out,’ he says. He also believes the course can lead to some degree of ego-inflation and make people more outspoken in their views and opinions” (Libaw, 2002).

Expansiveness is a core feature of hypomania/mania as per the DSM (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), and it describes a tendency of those who are hypomanic/manic to want to engage with more people. Haaken and Adams (1983) make specific reference to this behaviour in Lifespring graduates, arguing that the training “... contributed to the sense of expansiveness and boundless power experienced by participants” (p. 277), while in other trainings this expansiveness can readily be observed. Referring back to my own manic experience in London, I spent a great deal of time walking around during the day, and at night, starting conversations with strangers, finding out about their lives and enjoying the interactions. It is also common, while feeling an extreme sense of omnipotence and general optimism, for people who are manic to become unusually altruistic, believing that they can help people and help the world. Again, this is a commendable mind-set to adopt, but if it is induced through dopamine manipulation – and, therefore, transient – it may result in individuals taking on tasks and making commitments that, when their moods returns to normal, become impossible to honour. In London I felt that, with my limitless energy and love, I could help every person I encountered, but a few months later I felt incapable of even taking care of myself. Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine describes the expansive behaviour of one participant, Tootsie, immediately

after the Forum. I cannot help but draw parallels with my own experience in London – of being filled with love and certainty one moment, and then feeling drained and confused the next:

“Meandering down the platform, she began to tell her best friend from Cornell about her weekend, which she considered the most important of her life. Then she stopped short.

‘There’s something I have to do,’ Tootsie said. ‘I’ll call you back.’

Leaning against a subway column about twenty feet away was a young black man in a black leather jacket. He wore a gold chain around his neck and had a scar on his right cheek. To Tootsie, he looked like the kind of guy she normally tries to ‘get as far away from as possible, especially in the subway late at night.’

‘Hello,’ Tootsie said, breaking into a wide, toothy smile. ‘Can I talk to you?’

Then Tootsie told him about the weekend that had changed her life” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

As previously described, Tootsie went on the pay for this man (Jerry) to take the Forum, and then she took the Advanced Course herself, and became a volunteer. Describing Tootsie’s subsequent uncertainty, and confusion about her previous enthusiasm, Grigoriadis (2001) continues:

“... since she took the Advanced Forum, Tootsie has started to have doubts about Landmark. ‘I really believe in their work,’ she says, ‘but I think there are some things that aren’t so great – what’s up with all the volunteering? The longer it gets without me going down to the World Trade Center... I don’t know. I mean, I’m committed to Jerry, but it just feels like, ‘What was I doing?’”

As indicated in Figure 28, it has been demonstrated that LGATs result in greater sociability and openness in many participants:

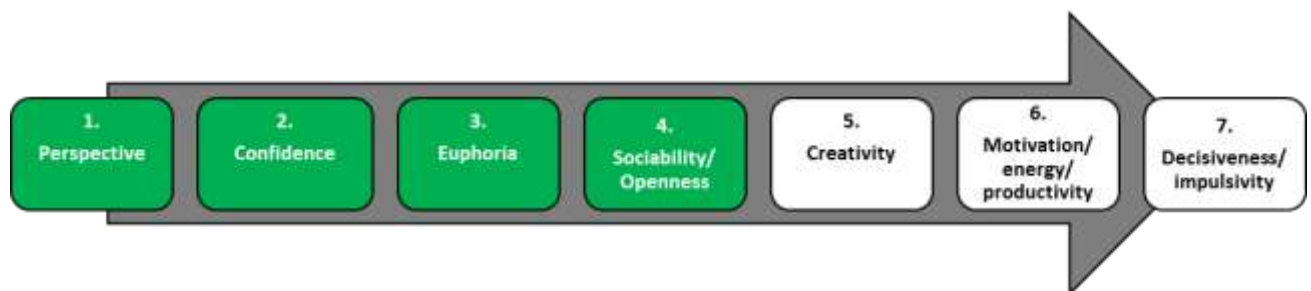


Figure 28: Hypomanic/manic symptoms displayed by LGAT participants (4 of 7 symptoms verified).

4.3.2.2.5 Creativity

Because creativity is a loosely defined concept, it is difficult to argue that LGATs result in creativity. Due to its vagueness, it is also less likely that graduates – unless they are involved in creative work – will volunteer testimonies explicitly describing increased creativity. However, there are a number of

claims by participants, and certain LGATs, which suggest that enhanced creativity is a likely outcome of participation. If creativity and imagination are considered synonymous, or at least similar, Rhinehart's (2010) account of one est participant's comment is relevant:

"‘I know this must all sound absurd,’ he went on. ‘I don’t ever remember in my whole life, not with alcohol or drugs or the simple gift of the muses, ever having my imagination flow out of control¹¹¹ in the way it did last night’" (p. 133).

Rhinehart (2010) also claims that graduates are more in touch with their feelings, and better able to communicate their ideas after the training. (The ability to articulate thoughts and feelings is a central feature of poetry and creative writing.) Describing this common result of est in graduates, he says:

"... they are more in touch with their own actual sensations, feelings, emotions, and other elements of their experience and better able to express them to others" (p. 197).

This result is similar to a previously described result of the Forum:

"A new ability to express thoughts and feelings, both publicly and privately"
(Landmark_Yankelovich, 2016).

While it is possible to draw arguably tenuous links between claimed results of LGATs and creativity, the Landmark website provides a more overt claim of this apparently common result, stating of the breakthroughs achieved during the Forum:

"This shift is not a one-time event, but an ongoing access to a previously untapped dimension of effectiveness and creativity" (Landmark, 2016i).

LGATs promise breakthroughs and transformation – new ways of seeing the world – which, arguably, are no different from the breakthroughs which occur in other creative pursuits. Creativity, as depicted by numerous independent sources cited by Jamison (1993), frequently occurs as a result of regression; from the escapism provoked by suffering; and occurs with disproportionate regularity during the hypomanic/manic stages of bipolar disorder. The creativity described by Jamison (1993) depicts faster, "out-of-the box" thinking, enhanced drive and productivity, a feeling of connectedness, a certainty of conviction, a feeling of euphoria and transcendence, and changes to perception. According to a section entitled *The Landmark Forum: How it Works (Landmark's Breakthrough Technology)*, Landmark's programs allow participants to see things in a completely different way. Creativity, by definition, is looking at something in a new or unique way – the breakthroughs promised by Landmark are therefore similar, if not identical, to the promises of creativity:

¹¹¹ "Flight of ideas or subjective experience that thoughts are racing" is a DSM-5 symptom of hypomania/mania.

“The Landmark Forum offers a practical methodology for producing breakthroughs - achievements that are extraordinary, outside of what’s predictable. The Landmark Forum is grounded in a model of transformative learning - a way of learning that gives people awareness of the basic structures in which they know, think, and act. From that awareness comes a fundamental shift that leaves people more fully in accord with their own possibilities and with those of others. Participants find themselves able to think and act beyond existing views and limits - in their personal and professional lives, relationships, and wider communities of interest” (Landmark_NancyZapolski, 2016).

If creativity is thought of as viewing something in a new, or unique, way then there is little to separate creativity from what LGATs describe as “breakthroughs”. Landmark Forum leader David Cunningham, describes breakthroughs in the following way in an interview available on YouTube:

“... some new opening... to see some new opening that you didn’t see before – that there’s some new pathway to accomplish something that literally you didn’t see before, so it never comes from what we already know; it never comes from the past – it is... it is a process of letting the past go and then having... being able to see something you never saw before that’s possible for you. That’s what allows for a breakthrough result” (Mace, 2010).

When describing their “Breakthrough Technology”, Landmark states that “a moment occurs when a new ability is yours. You become confident in what you’ve learned, and the new ability is yours forever”. Landmark describes transformation, on the other hand, as “an act of bringing forth or inventing. It is something created, and is inherently expansive and infinite” (Landmark, 2016h). It is a defining characteristic of the creative to bring forth something new – to “invent” – and so Landmark’s promises suggest that creativity, or a sense of creativity, is a likely outcome of participation.

Considering Fletcher, Parker, and Manicavasagar (2013) remarked that it is common for hypomanic individuals to believe that they can “think right outside the square...” (p. 461), it is notable that one of Landmark’s YouTube featured graduates – Dr Bert Peterson, Jr (Assistant Professor of Surgery, Beth Israel Medical Centre/Albert Einstein School of Medicine) – explains that the Landmark’s programs allowed him to do exactly this:

“I can tell you in a relatively short period of time Landmark has impacted my career in several different ways. But the two most important ways, I would say, is first it taught me to think outside of the box... and that’s extremely important given that I do a lot of research. And it really allowed me to think in new ways – to solve problems in a new way...” (LivingPowerfully, 2007).

Another of Landmark’s YouTube featured graduates is an artist, who says of the Forum:

“I used to see art as a struggle... and associate with other artists who were also struggling. Then I did the Landmark Forum, and everything changed...” (Landmark, 2008).

As indicated in Figure 29, it has been demonstrated that LGATs result in enhanced creativity, or at least a sense of enhanced creativity, in many participants:

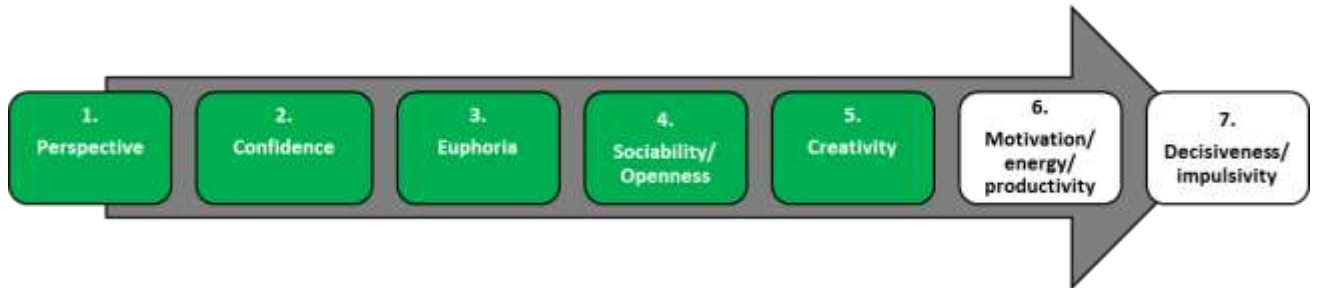


Figure 29: Hypomanic/manic symptoms displayed by LGAT participants (5 of 7 symptoms verified).

4.3.2.2.6 Motivation/energy/productivity

To provide some sense of the level of motivation, energy, and productivity that can occur when hypomanic/manic, consider that in December 2011, while somewhat manic, I wrote my third (unpublished) book. While perhaps only two thirds was new material, I was working full-time, and, in under a month, completed an 800-page manuscript called *The Walrus*. While this says nothing about the quality of what was written (it was disjointed and... manic), it illustrates what can be accomplished when in this state. Similarly, in 2015 I did my master's in psychology, which required that a dissertation be completed. In the week prior to the June Holiday I finalised my topic, worked manically on it during the three-week vacation, and then handed in a first draft in the first week of the next semester. I was actually quite delusional during this period, but not so delusional that my work made no sense. In a letter of recommendation for PhD research funding, my master's supervisor, Professor Kevin Durrheim, noted the speed with which I completed my dissertation, and the quality of this work:

“John submitted his draft MA thesis to me in June of his first year of registration. I've never received first draft more quickly. It was already good work, but John responded well to criticism and he soon submitted a revised thesis which obtained a first” (Durrheim, 2016).

John Dryden stated, “Great wits are sure to madness near allied, and thin partitions do their bounds divide”, but clearly it is possible to straddle that line, as opposed to standing distinctly on one side or the other. This thesis is, again, an example of hypomanic productivity and, occasionally, manic delusion. I registered for my PhD on 3 May 2016 and handed in a first draft on 3 April 2017. More than three months of that period was spent lecturing (during which time I did no work on this thesis) which means that the first draft was completed in under eight months. I would also estimate that 80 percent of the work was completed during 50 percent of those eight months. There were periods during which

I would sleep very little and work eighteen to twenty hours a day, and other periods during which I could barely concentrate for ten minutes. Again, this productivity has coincided with delusional thinking; occasionally these delusions have been grandiose, but more frequently they have been paranoid, and quite frightening. I am uncertain whether this elevation in mood has allowed me to see genuine connections which others could not, or if it has caused me to see imagined connections that, in reality, do not exist. Productivity, like other “positive” hypomanic symptoms, may come at a cost.

According to the DSM, hypomania/mania is closely associated with goal-directed behaviour, increased energy, and a decreased need for sleep. Rhinehart (2010) reveals how, even by day two of the training, est participants were energetic in spite of a lack of sleep:

“Several trainees say that on just four or five hours’ sleep they awakened more alive and energetic than they normally do on eight or nine hours sleep” (p. 55).

Rhinehart (2010) further claims that est graduates often report that they have more energy after the training. One graduate stated:

“... my energy – always high – seems limitless these days” (p. 196).

Another, after completing the training, exclaimed:

“I discovered tremendous energy...” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 196).

Energy and productivity in hypomania/mania may take many forms, but – when combined with expansiveness and increased ideas – it frequently takes the form of excessive speech or writing. Jamison (1995) revealed how she filled manuscripts with poems and fragments of plays while in this state, while American poet Robert Lowell’s excessive communication with T.S. Elliot while manic was highlighted in an earlier chapter. According to the DSM, irritability is also a relatively common feature of hypomania, so it is revealing that Rhinehart (2010) quotes a recent est graduate who stated:

“I should also share that I was extremely efficient and energetic and have written more letters in the last three days than I had in a month, but I was also irritable and authoritative with my children – I’m not usually. I was amazed to get so much done so quickly and easily” (p. 93).

Describing those who had “popped” by the Wednesday separating the two est weekends, Brewer (1975) similarly comments on an observable increase in energy:

“Several proclaim a sort of early conversion, relating states of happiness, increased energy and a great sense of well-being...”

Referring to the claimed results of LGATs, Fisher, et al. (1989) make specific mention of productivity:

“This is assumed not only to help them resolve existing problems but also to increase personal satisfaction and productivity” (p. 747).

With regards to energy, enthusiasm, motivation, and productivity, Landmark cites the Yankelovich Study, which – in addition to “unexpected benefits” – rated participant satisfaction levels on various measures. In terms of productivity, drive, and motivation, participants scored very well:

“(78% satisfaction) Be more productive apart from my job.”

“(89% satisfaction) Be more committed/motivated and pursue what is important to me” (Landmark_Yankelovich, 2016).

Oliver Libaw of ABC News indicates that increased productivity is a core promise of Landmark. (It should be noted – if an area of increased productivity can be specified by Landmark – that this is a testable claim):

“Based on EST, the Landmark Forum Says It Can Help People Become Happier and More Productive” (Libaw, 2002).

Numerous other journalists comment on the abnormal enthusiasm, energy, and productivity of others, or note these effects in themselves, after completing the Landmark Forum. Jana Martin of Swing Generation Magazine, Roland Howard of The Daily Mail, online contributor ‘Sylvia’, and Oliver Libaw of ABC News all reference these effects in slightly different ways:

“A few years later in New York, I met a singer-songwriter whose enthusiasm for building his career seemed oddly over-the-top. Turned out he’d done the Forum...” (Martin, 1998).

“When I left I was so disorientated and exhausted that I got lost on the Tube and smoked my first cigarettes in years. I felt ‘hyperactive’ for days and the Forum language took even longer to wear off” (Howard, 2001).

“I have been saying no to est and Landmark for about 25 years. This same friend did est in the late 1970’s when she moved to California. She came back to town and took me out to lunch to give me the pitch. I thought she was quite hyper and said no...” (Sylvia, 2004).

“‘It transforms your entire life,’ says Chmela. He says since taking the course he’s been able to act on many of his life’s goals, including writing a book, a screenplay and expanding his Web business” (Libaw, 2002).

A reduced need for sleep is an explicit DSM symptom of hypomania/mania. Enzo Di Matteo of Now Magazine explains how Forum graduates were described by his trainer in Toronto:

“Their food tastes better, they can sleep fewer hours and wake up feeling more refreshed” (Di Matteo, 2000).

According to Mary Braid of The Independent, Sigmund Freud’s great granddaughter, Esther, is an advocate of the Forum. Freud’s comment reveals that her friend’s energy after the Forum was notable:

“I went along because a friend of mine was so transformed by it,’ says Freud. ‘She was so much happier and more energetic” (Braid, 2003).

As indicated in Figure 30, in addition to the previous symptoms, there appears to be consensus among observers, graduates, and LGATs themselves, that motivation, energy, enthusiasm, and productivity are – at least in the short-term – increased by LGAT participation.

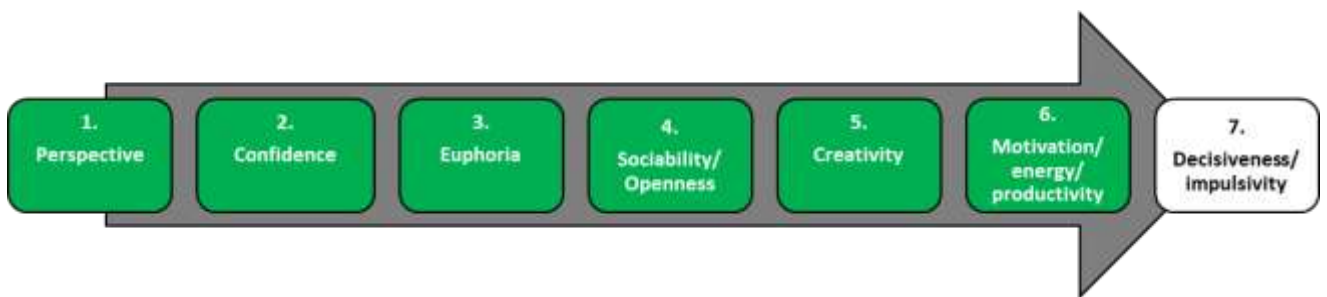


Figure 30: Hypomanic/manic symptoms displayed by LGAT participants (6 of 7 symptoms verified).

4.3.2.2.7 Decisiveness/impulsivity

“When they come together, the emotional, cognitive, and social factors that support exaggerated optimism are a heady brew, which sometimes leads people to take risks that they would avoid if they knew the odds” (Kahneman, 2012, p. 263).

It has been established that decisiveness is a feature of hypomania/mania. Impulsivity is the extreme of this trait - when choices which may have significant repercussions are made without sufficient consideration. The DSM-5 describes the consequences of this mind-set in hypomania/mania, rather than the mind-set itself. The following hypomanic symptom, taken directly from the DSM-5, should be kept in mind while evidence is considered for decisiveness and impulsivity in LGAT graduates:

“Excessive involvement in activities that have a high potential for painful consequences (e.g. engaging in unrestrained buying sprees, sexual indiscretions, or foolish business investments).”

The DSM makes specific mention of excessive spending, promiscuity, and foolish business investments; however, any significant – and rash – decision that is out of character might indicate that the person in question’s mood was abnormally elevated. In my case I abruptly resigned from my job, got a number of tattoos, and gave money away, while Kay Jamison described divorcing her loving husband without much consideration. In terms of spending, Margaret Singer, who was not able to

comment on Landmark, notes the excessive spending of graduates of the LGAT “Insight”. While it is tempting to view this generosity as a natural response to a wonderful experience, it may equally be the result of an induced hypomanic/manic state:

“At some point, a ‘Gift of Giving’ session was added to the five-day Insight seminar. During this session, it has been reported, some people were so euphoric they made out checks for \$10,000 to the group” (Singer, 2003, p. 198).

Mary Braid of The Independent relates one observer’s experience of the behaviour of family members who had taken the Forum. It should be noted that this behaviour was out of character – if it was normal for them to act like this then one could not argue that their moods had been altered:

“They were down-to-earth people. Then suddenly they were phoning their parents and siblings at 3am in distress, talking about how much they loved them and offering to pay for them to do the course, too” (Braid, 2003).

Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine, as has been described, tells the story of Tootsie, who decided to pay for a stranger she met in a subway immediately after her own participation:

“To this end, she paid for the man in the subway to take the Forum” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

Blogger Jenny Sansouci reveals that this willingness to give hundreds of dollars to strangers is not uncommon for Landmark graduates:

“Countless people have approached me about it, suggested I do it, even offered to pay for me to do it” (Sansouci, 2014).

It is common for graduates to offer to pay for others to participate and, while this may reveal a process that engenders lasting altruism in all who participate, it may simply reveal transient hypomanic/manic behaviour in people who may later regret their extravagance or become emotionally tied to the LGAT because of the *commitment* they made while in an elevated state. If LGATs do result in lasting transformations there would be no need to place such emphasis on “enrolling” at graduation.

Because generosity is more likely to be exhibited openly, noticed by observers, and pointed to as a positive consequence of these trainings, it is unsurprising that descriptions of this behaviour are not difficult to come by. Promiscuity (“sexual indiscretions”) on the other hand, is less likely to be written about by those who are being promiscuous, it is less likely to be done in full view of others, and it is not a consequence of LGAT participation that would be highlighted on their pamphlets and websites. While one cannot say whether this reflects his relative conservatism, or an abnormal level of promiscuity within the organisation, former volunteer Robert Black describes what he perceived to be an abnormal level of promiscuity among Landmark volunteers:

“There seemed to be a flippant attitude about sex, generally. Casual affairs, one night stands, ‘sleeping over’ after coaching sessions were spoken of in an off-hand manner, as if they are just done and are okay” (Black, 1997).

During one online discussion, the prevalence of promiscuity was raised. Online contributor ‘Parrot’ noted this (apparently new) behaviour in a friend of his after taking part in the Forum:

“Unfortunately, my friend is starting to show the promiscuity you mentioned, as well as a disdain for women and even his own wife, which is very uncharacteristic of him. And hard for me to be supportive when he acts that way!” (Parrot, 2004).

There are, in addition, some graduates who regret their boldness, and – in line with speaking their minds – have made impulsive statements and decisions which affected their employment. Woodhouse and Vandenberg (2000) relate the experience of Aaron Cohen, from Wellington, New Zealand, who said that “he felt good about completing the first course run by Landmark – which encourages people to get out of their comfort zone, take risks, and achieve goals...”, but that the second course left him feeling “the most depressed I have ever felt in my life”. According to Woodhouse and Vandenberg, Cohen’s sense of his own capabilities, his newfound “openness”, and his uncritical decisiveness caused problems for him at work:

“Mr Cohen says Landmark’s assertiveness training influenced him to tell his employees at the time that he was ‘unhappy with what was going on’ and to try and do things which were beyond his ability. He says he was fired as a result of his radical new behaviour.”

“The course made [me into] a 19-year-old bad decision maker...”

If LGATs such as Landmark push participants into a hypomanic/manic state there will be many participants whose boldness, productivity, and newfound openness benefits them, but there will be others whose similar out-of-character behaviour does not. These individuals, not understanding why they have said the things that they have said, or done the things that they have done, will feel responsible for this behaviour, and it is likely that their loved ones and employers (who are equally unlikely to understand the source of their behaviour) will hold them fully accountable as well. LGATs, which are happy to claim credit for the benefits of their trainings, are unwilling to acknowledge their part in those who suffer as a result of their “technology”, the convenient emphasis on personal responsibility causing trainers and fellow graduates to hold the victims of this “technology” accountable for their actions. To accept that LGATs were at least partially responsible would run counter to the Sacred Science. LGATs are, unlike their participants, responsible for nothing:

“A Landmark media spokesperson Sharon Spaulding said from Utah that people could not blame Landmark for things that go wrong in their lives. People exercise a choice in how they use the skills learned through Landmark courses” (Woodhouse & Vandenberg, 2000).

Former member of the Unification Church (“The Moonies”), Steven Hassan, mentions LGATs in his book *Combatting Cult Mind Control* (Hassan, 1988). Like Singer (2003), Hassan (1988) claims that LGATs have, on occasion, resulted in serious psychological harm, business failures, and reckless behaviour, noting that divorce seems to be particularly common following these courses:

“Many of these groups have caused nervous breakdowns, broken marriages, and business failures, not to mention some well-documented suicides and deaths by reckless accidents” (p. 40).

As described in the autoethnographic account of my own LGAT, there were a number of people at our company who were divorced shortly after the training(s). Describing how we were cautioned by the trainer at the end of New Beginnings, I wrote:

“Lastly, he warned us about making any big decisions, cracking a joke about telling our wives to ‘Fuck off!’ He said that for the next week we shouldn’t make any rash decisions as we would be feeling unusually empowered” (Field Notes, 2010, 842-844).

Our trainer made specific reference to an increased sense of empowerment when providing this warning, but there are plausible confounding variables which must be taken into account. Regardless of these variables it does, however, take an unusual level of decisiveness to abruptly end a marriage. This impulsivity has been noted in many LGATs and, while est claimed to strengthen relationships, a number of sources reveal that est divorces were unusually common:

“The irony was that the est culture was filled with the victims of busted marriages, both among Erhard’s staff and among plenty of est graduates as well. Divorce was not an uncommon result of the training for many couples” (Pressman, 1993, p. 182).

Psychology Today journalist, Mark Brewer, made a similar observation:

“The initial rushes of the est conversion are, of course, hard for non-est people to swallow, since they appear absurdly simple or idiotic or both, and a lot of friendships and marriages have busted up soon after the training” (Brewer, 1975).

The problem with being emotionally tied to a belief is that when the leader says “The aliens contacted me...” it is possible for intelligent people to accept this unlikely explanation, and the explanations provided by LGATs for higher rates of divorce are dubious at best. While it is not being argued that est was a cult, cult members are frequently aware that those outside of the “circle of truth” think that they are a cult – they simply believe that these outsiders, rather than themselves, have been misled.

Cult members are told that others just don't understand, and are "vaccinated" against people, evidence, and arguments they are likely to encounter in the outside world. Again, this tendency to discredit people and information before it is considered is so common that it is parodied in the Peep Show episode on cults (season 5, episode 6). In this exchange, Jez has just explained that he is doing a course on "personal and career development", and mentions the name of the group to Mark:

MARK: The New Wellness Centre? Oh, Jez, I think I've heard about these people. There's stuff all over the internet about them.

JEZ: Yes, that's right. There's a conspiracy about them on the internet...

It is not an inability to think rationally which prevents people from seeing the flawed reasoning provided by their groups – a Scientologist could look at the claims against Erhard and recognise that that it was likely not all a conspiracy, while an est supporter could unemotionally consider the evidence and realise that Hubbard was not a nuclear physicist and did not win a purple heart. Both supporters are, however, emotionally tied to their beliefs – the consequences of objectively reviewing them may be too painful to contemplate – and so evidence which threatens these beliefs is ignored, or weak justifications for observable problems are accepted. Here Rhinehart (2010) describes the testimony of a woman who has abruptly chosen to quit her job and leave her husband. Rather than acknowledging that impulsivity increases after est, Rhinehart frames this tendency as a sign of empowerment – of graduates taking charge and making necessary changes in their lives:

"I kept quiet about my feelings for about a week and then I simply quit my job. Fourteen years and I quit. That evening I told my husband I'd quit, and he began complaining about my irresponsibility. After I'd let him run on for about ten minutes I told him I was leaving him too. He got more upset. He said I could quit my job if I wanted after all, but that I couldn't leave him. I told him people were permitted to quit husbands just like jobs and I was done" (p. 197).

Rhinehart (2010) demonstrates the extraordinary power of rationalisation as he argues that all relationships – even those that end in divorce – benefit from participation in est. By framing divorce as something positive, the Sacred Science remains intact. Using this reasoning, est is flawless. It is possible, of course, that divorce may be the right decision for some couples, but Rhinehart asserts, without evidence to support this assertion, that est-elicited divorces are always good:

"This new-found experiencing of self-responsibility, which some feel is the most important feature of est, results in clearing up debilitating relationships, especially those between husband and wife, by either improving them dramatically or ending them. The stuckness ceases as valuable relationships are renewed and valueless ones abandoned. *All relationships benefit*" (p. 196).

Like est, Landmark frames impulsivity using political language. Participants are described as being more capable of making choices (decisiveness), and of being more “free” and “spontaneous”. Enzo Di Matteo of Now Magazine reveals Landmark’s promises to graduates:

“A new freedom and spontaneity in your actions... enhanced vitality... heightened performance’ are promised” (Di Matteo, 2000).

Rosemary Mahoney of Elle Magazine reveals how this impulsivity can result in individuals taking risks which (presumably) pay off:

“My classmates offer inspirational testimonials [...] Joan, an actress, saw people making a movie and went right up and asked if she could be in their film” (Mahoney, 1998).

Some observers are less enthusiastic about the newfound freedom and spontaneity of their loved ones after participating in the Forum. Online contributor ‘Montreal’ comments:

“When you can practically say you know the person inside/out and see them go through drastic changes and make life decisions without much thought put into it, it is serious!!!” (Montreal, 2004).

Describing the sort of lifestyle changing decisions he has seen in “Landmarkians”, online contributor ‘Concerned Oz’ (who is presumably unaware that these are hypomanic/manic symptoms) states:

“I am defining lifestyle changing decisions and implementations as:

- a) Resigning from employment to pursue a whim with no foundation;
- b) Disengaging from relationships and family - Divorce, breakups etc.
- c) Participating in dangerous activities once held to be against the principles of the Landmarkian like promiscuity;
- d) Breaking away from belief or faith traditions;
- e) Moving from one incomplete project to another;

Not wanting to labour the point, my ex-girlfriend left me for a married man she met at Landmark and she could not understand why I was not happy for her that she had found someone. She was a practicing Catholic and could not see the disconnect between what she was doing and what she believed in. She also put at risk her career for the sake of her involvement in LE. In this situation, it was very hard for me to not be reactionary and instead be supportive” (Concerned Oz, 2004).

The impact of the Forum on relationships, and marriages in particular, is echoed by a number of sources. Vanessa Grigoriadis (2001) of New York Magazine reveals how divorces are framed by Landmark as “seeing their destiny revealed”:

“Whatever people come in wanting to do but are afraid to follow through on they tend to leave seeing as their destiny revealed, whether it’s getting a divorce or getting off the grid.”

James O’Brien of GQ Magazine similarly notes what he perceived to be an abrupt decision to get divorced, soon after participating in the Landmark Forum:

“Then I heard about a couple, friends of friends, who’d taken the Forum and soon separated, then divorced. One day they were seemingly happy in their little suburban home with their adorable child. The next day: separate houses, shared custody, lonely lives” (O’Brien, 2012).

Online discussions between LGAT proponents and critics, like many online discussions, become adversarial and this is because the issue is emotional for both parties. On one hand, you have proponents, who have had an incredible experience, who have not experienced or witnessed adverse effects, who have been led to believe that negative responses almost never occur, and – because evidence of harm would undermine their own experience – may be reluctant to acknowledge that the training could have adverse effects on some. On the other hand, you have individuals who have personally experienced, or witnessed, negative consequences from participation. Online contributor ‘sonnie_dee’ explains to a Landmark proponent why those harmed “take it so seriously”:

“People take this seriously because we have seen the negative impact that Landmark is having on peoples lives. Family split up because a couple divorce or break up” (sonnie_dee, 2004).

The following example does not relate to est, Lifespring, or Landmark, but to PSI Seminars (founded by Thomas Willhite, who was also a trainer at Mind Dynamics). It is useful because it reveals that LGAT-initiated divorces are not always cases of people gaining the confidence to leave a negative environment. As a point of reference, consider Kay Jamison’s mania-induced divorce once more:

“I was increasingly restless, irritable, and I craved excitement; all of a sudden, I found myself rebelling against the very things I loved about my husband: his kindness, stability, warmth and love. I impulsively reached out for a new life” (Jamison, 1995, p. 73).

The following posts by online contributor ‘Jeri442’ are, to me, particularly upsetting. People with bipolar disorder have a responsibility to learn how best to manage the illness; however, if a person experiences hypomania/mania for the first time, with no knowledge of the illness or skills to mitigate the risks, the resulting behaviour can be disastrous. This woman was, it seems, pushed into a hypomanic/manic state, behaved in a way that was – apparently – out of character, and destroyed her marriage. She would have had no way of understanding her behaviour, or explaining it when her mood returned to normal. As with other LGATs, PSI Seminars would likely not have accepted any responsibility, or warned participants about this sort of behaviour, prior to participation:

“At the end of the basic I signed up for PSI 7 at a cost of \$3000.00 dollars. I took the money from our joint account. My husband was obviously upset with this but I didn’t care. I felt this change/ experience was worth the cost and the grief it cost me with him. He put his foot down and said enough is enough. I went to the ranch and participated in the pole, the wall, the ledge, the barn dance and wore the clothing that was selected by my PSI buddy. Clothing that I felt uncomfortable wearing in even a private setting. I looked into the eyes of several men, strangers to me up to then, and felt like they actually wanted to have a relationship with me, beyond the physical. I felt they had seen the real person underneath. I came home gushing like I had the time of my life. My husband was angry as I left without a word of warning to him or my family. He had even called the police to report me missing. I even signed up for the Leadership Seminar for \$3600.00 dollars and charged it to my credit card. My husband blew up at me, asking me if I had lost my mind. I told him upon my return that if he loved me he would find the time and money to attend the training. I told him that it would save our marriage. Looking back on it our marriage was on its fifth year and we were both happy. We were both looking forward to our lives together and starting a family. And more importantly he was my best friend. He suggested marriage counseling and we set up an appointment. After speaking to the therapist I felt like she was ganging up on me so I refused to go back. Three weeks after returning from PSI7 I left my husband and filed for divorce. I gave up the man I had married, the one who protected me from harm. The man who told me he loved me more than anyone in his life. I gave up my husband, my best friend, for my own self-interests when I should have known better” (Jeri442, 2006).

‘Jeri442’ explains that her attempts to reconcile with her husband were futile:

“It is now too late to go back and fix the wrongs I did, and I have tried. My ex-husband refuses to talk or even see me, and I can’t really blame him. I left him without any explanation. I didn’t even shed a tear over the loss of our marriage, he once said I ripped the heart from his chest and didn’t even think enough on our relationship to take the time to smash it. And he was right, that is exactly what I did. Now I am in a broken marriage to another fool who takes me for granted, treats me like I am his slave, and I have nowhere to go, no one to turn to, and this is what I wanted in life? Even the friend who introduced me to PSI dumped her marriage and is pretty much in the same boat I’m in. And I hate her for getting me involved in this” (Jeri442, 2006).

‘X of PSI Zombie’ responded to this post, indicating that her husband behaved similarly:

“Jeri I can relate with this behavior as my ex-husband spent every dime on his PSI courses and ruined our marriage” (X of PSI Zombie, 2008).

As indicated in Figure 31, it has been demonstrated that LGATs result in a transient shift in the decisiveness/impulsivity of participants:

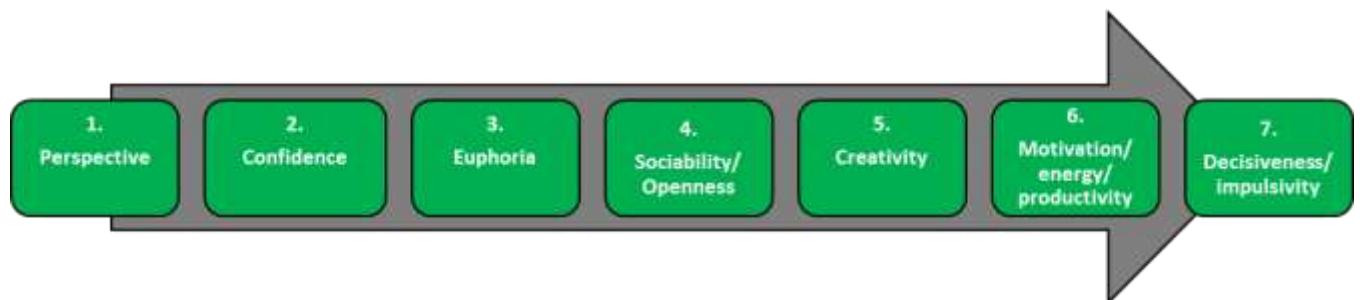


Figure 31: Hypomanic/manic symptoms displayed by LGAT participants (7 of 7 symptoms verified).

There is considerable evidence that LGATs not only involve significant stress and sleep disruption, but that they trigger all seven categories of hypomanic/manic symptoms through goal-attainment. The parallels between LGAT processes and results, and bipolar triggers and symptoms appear, to my frequently unreliable mind, quite distinct; however, the input of those who do not tend to make loose associations will be welcomed. It might also be argued that these symptoms have been carefully chosen, presented out of context, or represent just a handful of hundreds of claimed LGAT benefits. Perhaps, it might be argued, if different results were chosen, the similarities with bipolar disorder would seem less apparent. While it is not denied that an effort has been made to highlight the similarities between the two, the benefits of LGATs, as described by LGATs themselves, read – to those with an intimate understanding of the illness – exactly like the symptoms of hypomania/mania. To illustrate this, the final section of chapter 4 provides, in the unedited words of Landmark spokesperson Dr Nancy Zapolski, a description of the Landmark Forum’s results.

4.3.2.3 Hypomanic symptoms as described by Landmark

“These shifts are the direct cause for a new and unique kind of freedom and power - the freedom to be at ease and the power to be effective in the areas that matter most to you: the quality of your relationships, the confidence with which you live your life, your personal productivity, your experience of the difference you make, your enjoyment of life” (Landmark, 2016g).

While the LGAT “technology” is presented as being beyond understanding, it will be demonstrated that there is a rational, and comprehensible, explanation for what takes place during LGATs, and how this leads to the post-training “experience”. The Landmark website features a video in which Dr Nancy Zapolski (NZ in the following quote) describes the results participants can expect from participation in the Forum. [This video, published by Landmark, can also be found on YouTube (Landmark, 2016e)]. Because the symptoms of hypomania/mania have been clearly explicated, it should not be necessary to explain how the Forum’s results – as reported by “virtually everyone” – are identical to hypomania:

NZ: “There are many benefits that people get out of the Landmark Forum and, while the benefits you get will be unique to you, there are five that virtually everyone reports:

Number one is an increased ability to relate effectively with others. You’ll feel profoundly connected and find the freedom to be yourself. Even when there is a problem, things can get worked out. What people experience is being at ease no matter where they are, who they are with or what the circumstances.

Number two is increased personal productivity and effectiveness. It might be with your work, your finances, or whatever goals you are out to accomplish. You’ll have more time to do what matters to you and will come to see that many of the limits of effectiveness are self-imposed, and based on decisions from the past that have been hidden from your view. This will give you access to creating a whole new level of performance.

Number three is confidence. We all have areas in our life where we experience some degree of confidence, but there are others where we doubt ourselves or hold back. Imagine yourself stepping into situations where you were once limited, but now have the confidence to act in the face of self-doubt or even fear.

Number four is making the right choices and pursuing what is important. You will come to relate to choice in a whole new way – one that allows for a newfound freedom to both create and pursue what’s important.

The last aspect is ‘living life fully’. You can go after what you want, bring true passion to your commitments, live without regrets and express yourself fully” (Landmark_NancyZapolski, 2016).

The primary research question in this thesis is:

Will most healthy individuals exposed to a structured process of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment (as occurs in LGATs) experience transient hypomanic/manic symptoms?

It has now been shown that LGAT technology involves putting participants through significant stress, that the LGAT schedule and the stimulating nature of homework activities required are likely to disrupt normal sleeping patterns, and that LGATs end with a process that clearly signifies goal-attainment. It has further been shown that most participants experience what LGATs call “transformation”, and that this transient experience is similar, if not identical, to hypomania/mania. Given the number of people who have taken part in these trainings over the past 46 years, and the consistency with which these conditions and results are reported in over twenty countries, on six continents, it can be concluded

that most healthy individuals – if exposed to a process of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment (as occurs in LGATs) – will experience transient hypomanic/manic symptoms.

Having addressed the primary research question, the secondary research question must be considered. The literature review has explained what stress is, how it impacts neurotransmitters such as dopamine, and how elevated mesolimbic dopamine results in a sense of optimism. It has been argued that transient optimism may offer a survival advantage to individuals who are psychologically threatened; the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* formalises this thinking and proposes the conditions under which this defence may become exaggerated, or even pathological.

Chapter 5: SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION: RESULTS

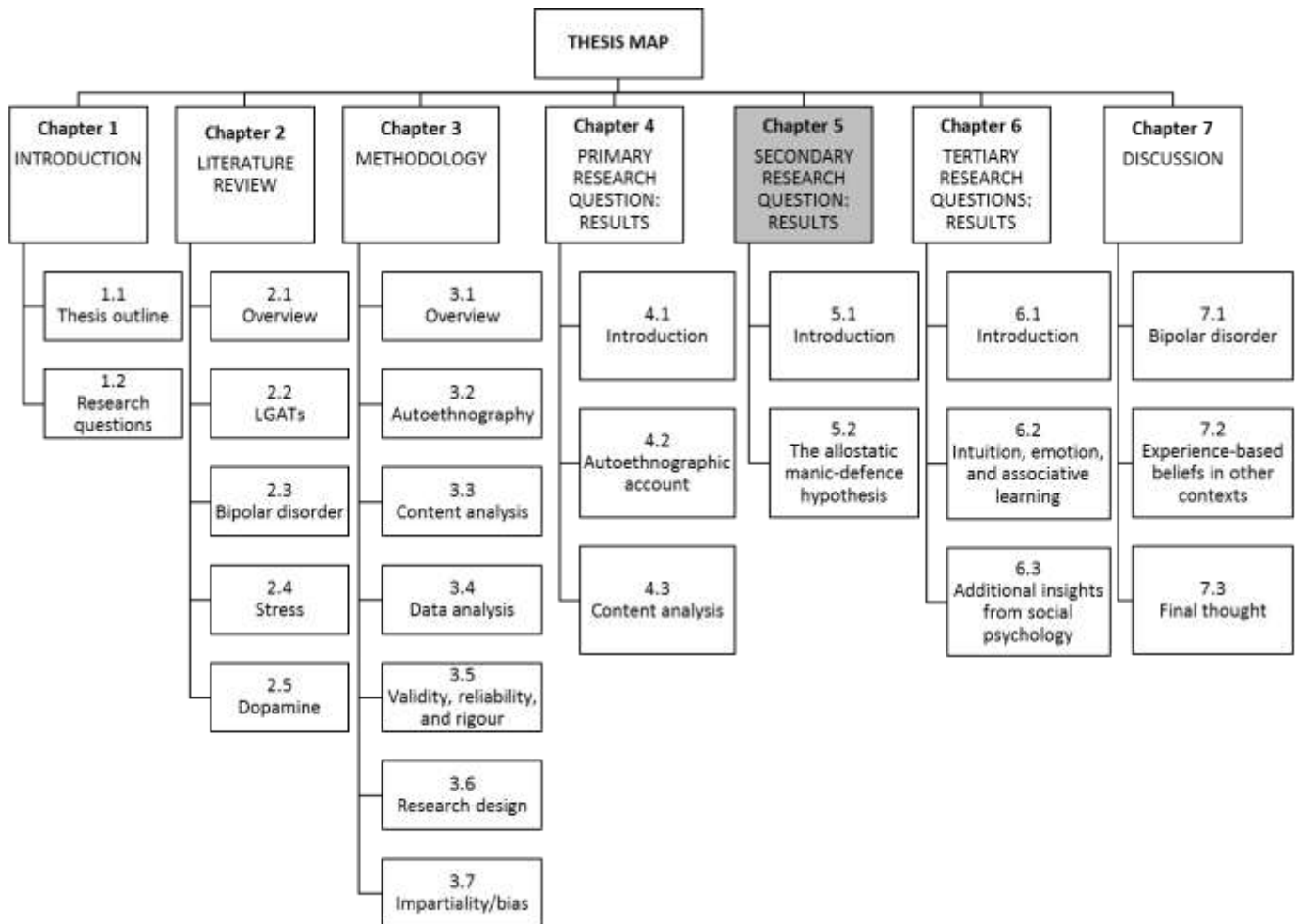


Figure 32: THESIS MAP_SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION: RESULTS

As indicated in Figure 32, the following chapter is “Secondary Research Question: Results”.

Primary research question:

1. Will most healthy individuals exposed to a structured process of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment (as occurs in LGATs) experience transient hypomanic/manic symptoms?

Secondary research question:

2. Is there a plausible biological explanation for a structured process of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment triggering transient hypomanic/manic symptoms in healthy individuals?

Tertiary research questions:

3. What are the implications of an ability to manufacture a powerful emotional (hypomanic) experience – at a strategic point in time – on intuition, associative learning, and persuasion?
4. What does social psychology reveal about the conditions and processes employed by LGATs?

5.1 Introduction

It has been demonstrated that LGATs make use of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment (the three key environmental triggers for hypomania/mania), and that most LGAT participants experience a state which closely resembles hypomania for a few days to a few weeks after taking the training. There have also been instances of more severe mood swings and periods of psychosis as a result of participation, though a likely biological mechanism by which this harm occurs has not yet been fully articulated.

The *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* (AMDH) takes into consideration the way that the body has evolved to respond to physical threats and extends this thinking to psychological threats. It proposes a specific mechanism by which a person might maintain psychological allostasis under emotionally challenging conditions, suggests how this mechanism may be maximised, and theorises the effects of an exaggerated, and extended, activation of this mechanism. This hypothesis incorporates already described insights into bipolar disorder, stress, dopamine, and the relationship between bipolar triggers and dopamine, to provide a biological explanation for what early psychoanalysts called a “manic-defence”, and a plausible biological explanation for the varied results of LGAT participation.

5.2 The allostatic manic-defence hypothesis

“... sometimes you have a genetic trait which in the full-blown version is a disaster, but the partial version is good news” (Sapolsky, 2003).

While Sapolsky uses sickle-cell anaemia, Tay Sachs disease, and cystic fibrosis as examples of illnesses where a milder version is evolutionarily advantageous, this insight applies equally to the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* (AMDH), which argues that hypomania/mania is the full-blown version of a response which, in its milder form, mitigates feelings of guilt, inadequacy, self-doubt, and fear, and which provides the confidence and motivation to respond decisively in challenging situations. While the manic-defence hypothesis (MDH) is not new, the AMDH offers a biological mechanism by which this response occurs which, in turn, provides insight into how this defence may become pathological. Early psychoanalysts were the first to attempt to provide explanations for mania, the most important of whom was Karl Abraham (Bentall, 2003). In a paper written in 1911, Abraham argued that, while mania appears to be the opposite of depression, both states are dominated by the same complexes; the difference, he claimed, was that a manic person could not tolerate the feelings of inadequacy and, therefore, denied them. Abraham’s ideas were later expanded on by psychoanalyst, Sandor Rado, who contended that manic-depressives were highly narcissistic, and that a manic defence mitigated their abnormal need for approval. Implicit in this elaboration is the assertion of inadequacy – that those who experience greater levels of inadequacy are more likely to utilise this defence – but while

particularly vulnerable individuals might employ this defence to an abnormal degree under less extreme circumstances, it will be argued that, under exceptional circumstances (like during an LGAT) almost everyone utilises it to an abnormal degree. Bentall (2003) explains that the original manic-defence hypothesis was not paid much notice because of general concerns relating to the untestable nature of psychoanalysis, yet argues that early observations were valid, and prematurely dismissed.

The rationale behind the MDH – which is also the basis of the AMDH – is the idea that when we are psychologically threatened we attempt to reduce the threat in some way. John Neale, working at the State University of New York in the late 1980s, elaborated further on the hypothesis, arguing that individuals who are most at risk of manic episodes have unrealistic standards for success, and fragile senses of self-worth. Neale asserts that when these individuals' fragile self-esteems are met with circumstances which intensify their sense of inadequacy, a "cascade of grandiose ideas" are produced to counter negative thoughts about the self. He argues that mania occurs as a result of these ideas becoming too dominant; as opposed to simply mitigating feelings of inadequacy, they "rapidly spiral out of control" leading to an elevation in mood and, eventually, hypomania or mania (Bentall, 2003).

While Neale asserts that grandiose ideas result in mania, and while it is agreed that the two interact, the AMDH argues that it is an elevation in mood which elicits grandiose ideas, and not the other way around. According to the founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, "... an 'optimistic explanation style' contributes to resilience by defending one's self-image" (Kahneman, 2012, p. 263). The AMDH centres on this idea, but – while this optimism may be deliberate, or learned – it is argued that, equally, it may be chemically induced and occur unconsciously. Thus, while the psychoanalytic mechanism described by Neale and others may be valid, a biological mechanism – whose "partial version is good news" – is also able to explain the exaggerated optimism which presents as a "manic defence". Unlike the mechanism behind the original manic-defence hypothesis, this mechanism may soon be testable and, as such, it is worth exploring. The AMDH takes an understanding of stress, bipolar disorder, and dopamine into consideration, and provides a neurobiological explanation for hypomania/mania that incorporates Abraham's, Rado's, Bentall's, and Neale's observations. By understanding this hypothesis, and how this defence is useful under "normal" stressful conditions, it can be appreciated how extraordinary conditions may elicit a "manic-defence" in healthy individuals:

A revised manic-defence hypothesis is not only useful because a biological explanation for the manic defence is possible, but also because allostasis – the state of dynamic equilibrium and the variety of mechanisms used to attain that equilibrium – provides insight into the conditions under which this defence might be maximised, or become pathological. In terms of allostatic defences, it has been asserted that dopamine (which elicits confidence, focus, motivation, and optimism) would be one mechanism by which to enhance resilience. If a person is made to feel inadequate, guilty, humiliated,

uncertain, afraid, or indecisive, then a substance which elevates his confidence, and makes him more likely to take action would be useful. Evidence shows that not only is dopamine a logical substance to be produced under such conditions, but that it *is* produced during times of acute stress. If, as per the concept of allostasis, dopamine is just one of the allostatic defence (AD) mechanisms available, then it is possible to theorise the conditions under which dopamine production (mania) will be maximised. Sapolsky (2004) indicates that social support, outlets for frustration, starchy foods, a sense of predictability, and a sense of control are some of the ways to minimise the stress response. Assuming that mesolimbic dopamine is another allostatic defence, and that between these defences an allostatic challenge (AC) must be mitigated, the degree to which the other defences are operational will impact the degree to which dopamine must be utilised, and compensate. If, therefore – as occurs in an LGAT – the degree to which individuals can seek social support, employ outlets for frustration, eat starchy foods, attain a sense of predictability, and achieve a sense of control, is limited then the contribution of mesolimbic dopamine to the allostatic defence is likely to be elevated. The amount of dopamine produced during an allostatic defence is, therefore, a function of the magnitude of the stressor, and the degree to which other components of the allostatic defence are operational¹¹². The following diagrams provide visual representations of how these two elements might both affect the magnitude of the dopamine response:

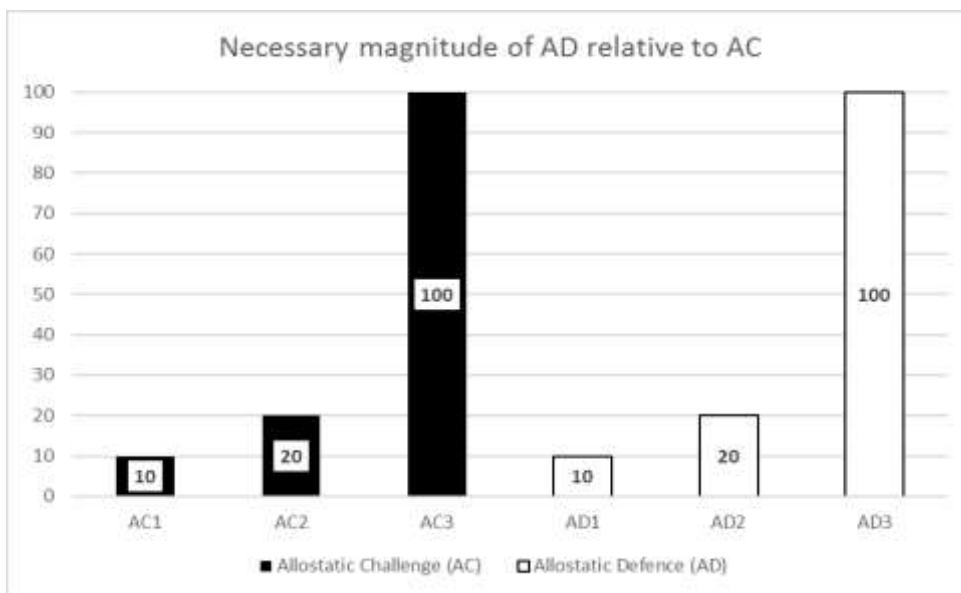


Figure 33: Necessary magnitude of allostatic defence (AD) relative to allostatic challenge (AC)

Figure 33 shows how a lower allostatic challenge (e.g. AC1) would require a similarly low allostatic defence (AD1), but how a larger challenge (e.g. AC3) would require a far larger defence (AD3).

¹¹² The nature of the stressor likely also plays a role, but how this affects the composition of the allostatic response is beyond the scope of this thesis.

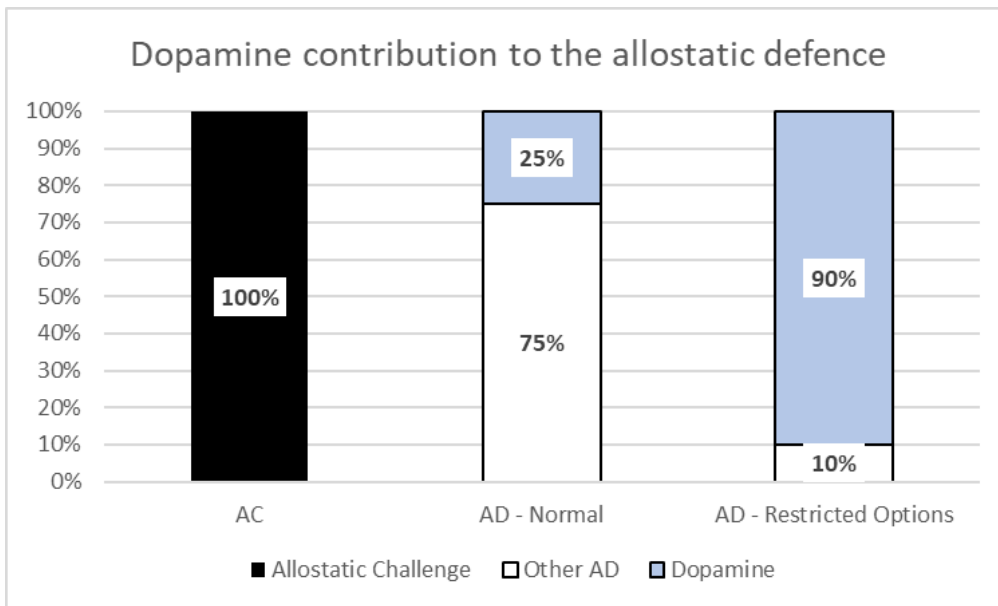


Figure 34: Dopamine contribution to the allostatic defence

Figure 34 shows the theoretical contribution of dopamine under two different conditions (“25%” is for illustrative purposes – it has not been calculated). Under “AD Normal” the allostatic defence is comprised of 25% dopamine and 75% other allostatic defences (“Other AD”), while under “AD - Restricted Options” the other defences are limited, and so dopamine must play a greater role.

If dopamine mediates the anticipation of pleasure, self confidence, and motivation then, theoretically, the best way to increase dopamine production would be to: convince a person that he will obtain an incredible reward for completing a particular task, make the task challenging but not impossible, undermine the person’s self-esteem/confidence while he performs the task, and create a sense of uncertainty about obtaining the reward. If there is no anticipated pleasure, then there would be no motivation to achieve the goal. If achieving the goal is easy, then little additional motivation is required to endure whatever needs to be endured. If the person is confident, then no dopamine intervention is necessary. If the reward is guaranteed, then less drive is required. This is precisely what occurs in an LGAT - participants are told they will achieve “breakthroughs” and “transformations”, the environment is highly challenging (but simply requires that participants do not leave), the self-esteems of participants are undermined by the trainer, and the “transformation”, while promised, remains uncertain. There is, therefore, a significant anticipation of pleasure, even though participants are unsure of what, exactly, this pleasure will be.

Since stress does not always result in euphoria, and often results in depression (Sapolsky, 2004; Wallenstein, 2003), it is also insufficient to say that applying stress will result in excessive mesolimbic dopamine. Given that dopamine increases in response to acute stress, but that chronic stress depletes dopamine (Sapolsky, 2004), it can be inferred that there is an optimal duration of stress induction.

Since LGATs evolved from encounter groups (Finkelstein, et al., 1982; Lieberman, 1987), which utilised techniques from preceding groups and processes, and since these processes appeared before a strong understanding of key neurotransmitters existed, it can be assumed that they evolved through trial and error, and that the most effective elements remain, while less effective elements (in terms of eliciting an “experience”, or hypomania) were discarded. The durations of LGATs likely developed through trial and error, and take advantage of short-term dopamine increases, without exhausting (most) participants to the extent that that dopamine depletion occurs.

If dopamine is an endogenous defence against stressors such as inadequacy, guilt, humiliation, and uncertainty; and an excess of dopamine produces positive feelings of euphoria, confidence, sociability, and motivation, then the way to maximise positive feelings would be to elevate dopamine, and eliminate the need for it (i.e. withdraw the application of inadequacy, guilt, humiliation, and uncertainty). The problem with this is that, if one’s brain is operating efficiently, when stressors are removed there is no longer a need for elevated mesolimbic dopamine, and it will return to baseline levels. In order to ensure that these positive feelings remain it is necessary, therefore, to “convince” the brain that psychological stressors are imminent, even when these stressors have been removed. If the brain continues to produce dopamine in anticipation of stressors which do not materialise, then – it is argued – a dopamine surplus will result in feelings of euphoria, confidence, sociability, and motivation. Sapolsky (2004) and Wallenstein (2003) both emphasise the fact that the stress response is anticipatory in nature, and it is possible that LGATs create a state of allostatic hypervigilance by interspersing periods of stress with relaxation exercises, or more banal tasks. Because participants are never sure what will happen next, and when they do relax the exercise which follows may be highly confrontational, it is plausible that they are conditioned into a state of prolonged anticipatory arousal. If the magnitude of the LGAT “experience” is a result of the difference between the activation of dopamine and the need for that dopamine, the effect will be maximised when the allostatic defence is fully activated, and stressors are non-existent. A gradual move from stressful conditions to an absence of stress will allow the dopaminergic allostatic defence to subside in line with the stressors, and no major contrast between subjective stress and dopamine production will occur. The maximum effect will, therefore, be generated when a goal is suddenly attained and stress is abruptly removed. Goal-attainment (stress removal) is a noted trigger for hypomania/mania, and – through graduation – it is also a noted feature of the LGAT experience.

The AMDH, therefore, asserts that psychological stress – particularly relating to feelings of inadequacy, guilt, pessimism, uncertainty, and fear – can be dealt with through a number of mechanisms, but that – when the other mechanisms are restricted – dopamine plays the dominant role in eliciting the optimism, motivation, and confidence required to maintain psychological

allostasis. While this defence may be healthy under normal conditions, there are conditions that might be particularly stressful (which increase the *overall* allostatic response required) and/or which require a *greater contribution* by dopamine than is typical. By generating an extreme activation of this component of the allostatic defence, conditioning this response to remain activated for longer than is required, and abruptly removing the need for this response, a period of excessive dopamine production – and a state of hypomania/mania (“transformation”) – may occur. Figure 34 reflects how this effect may occur in an LGAT:

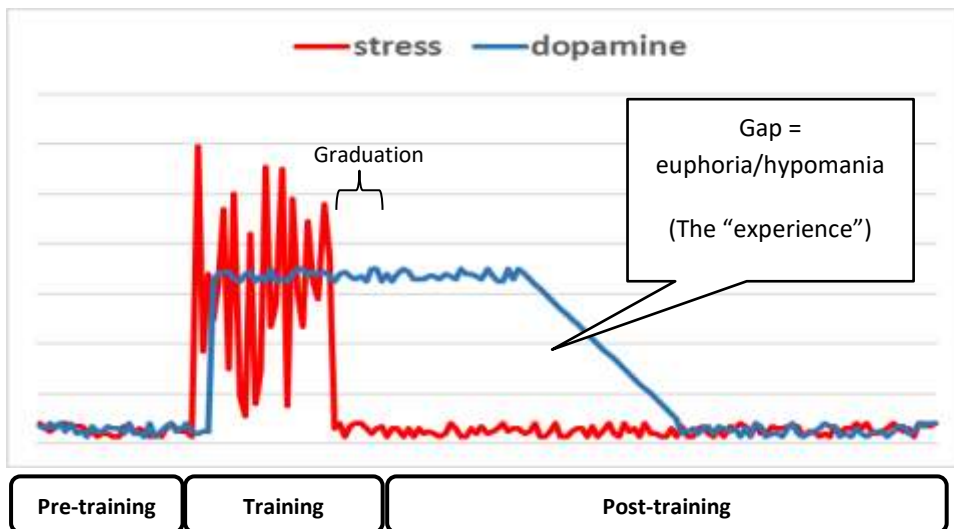


Figure 35: Model for LGAT “experience” (hypomania/mania)

Looking at Figure 35, during *pre-training*, assuming normal stress levels, dopamine levels are at baseline. During *training* there is extreme stress and relaxation (without normal access to other allostatic defences) and so dopamine levels are maximised to help participants feel as though they can deal with the environment. Before the training ends, the hostility is replaced with acceptance and affirmation from both the trainer (who has established himself as an authority figure) and other participants. This *dispensing of existence* takes the form of a graduation and, because the environment moves quickly from hostile to affirming, and because of the anticipatory nature of the stress response (hypervigilance), dopamine levels may remain elevated for a few days to a few weeks *post-training*.

It was noted during section 2.2.11 (Negative effects of LGATs) that abnormal mood swings and psychosis were commonly reported side effects of participation; however, Lieberman (1987, p. 463) stated that “a coherent theory for linking a set of experiences ordinarily encountered in large group awareness training to the development, exacerbation, or intensification of psychopathology” was lacking. Given that elevated levels of mesolimbic dopamine are associated with hypomania/mania, the AMDH provides a mechanism by which this psychopathology might occur. With reference to depression following LGAT participation, it is worth revisiting Sapolsky’s (2004) statement:

“Experience something thrilling with the right intensity and duration, and dopamine is released in the pleasure pathway. End of experience, dopamine levels go back down to baseline. What if someone’s brain happens not to be great at keeping up with dopamine reserves in the pleasure pathway? As a result, at the end of a stimulating increase in dopamine release, dopamine levels not only drop back to baseline, but to a smidgen *below* baseline?” (pp. 342-343).

Since depleted dopamine is associated with depression (Sapolsky, 2004; Wallenstein, 2003), the AMDH also provides a plausible mechanism for post-LGAT depression. Figure 36 shows how dopamine levels may drop below baseline after being elevated during an LGAT. The result may be depression:

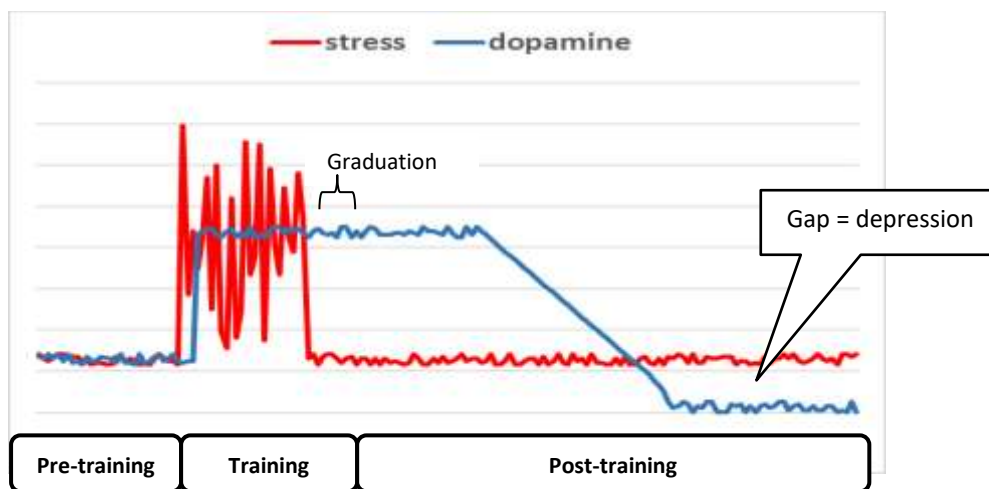


Figure 36: Model for LGAT depression

Transient psychosis has also been noted, or claimed, by academics, observers, and participants. Psychotic symptoms are witnessed both in bipolar disorder (typically in the manic phase), and in schizophrenia (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011). The dopamine hypothesis of bipolar disorder has already been discussed but, according to Howes and Kapur (2009, p. 549), “The dopamine hypothesis of schizophrenia has been one of the most enduring ideas in psychiatry”. They explain that, since 1991, there have been over 6700 articles about dopamine and schizophrenia, and while the hypothesis has been revised since it was first formally proposed in the 1970s, the central idea – that elevated subcortical dopamine is associated with the psychotic features of schizophrenia – remains influential:

“Thus, the current evidence is consistent with dopamine hyperfunction being most closely linked to the dimension of psychosis” (Howes & Kapur, 2009, p. 555)¹¹³.

¹¹³ Cookson (2013, p. S3) addresses the possible differences between dopamine’s role in schizophrenia and bipolar disorder: “Whereas the dopamine hypothesis of schizophrenia proposes abnormal activity in the striatum and the prefrontal cortex, the hypothesis for mania implies a different anatomy. It is speculated that whereas the initial hypomanic stage is mediated by ventromedial dopamine paths such as the A10 projection to the nucleus accumbens and a loop to the prefrontal cortex, during severe mania hyperactivity shifts to more dorsal nigrostriatal paths.”

If then, as this thesis asserts, LGATs elevate subcortical dopamine transmission in participants then “a coherent theory for linking a set of experiences ordinarily encountered in large group awareness training to the development, exacerbation, or intensification of psychopathology” does exist: the most commonly reported psychological injuries from LGAT participation – abnormal fluctuations in mood and psychosis – can be linked to the LGAT experience through the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis*.

While significant harm may occur to a minority of participants, the intention of LGATs is presumably not to elicit psychosis, depression, or mania. The goal, one must assume, is to generate euphoria, confidence, energy, productivity, decisiveness, sociability, creativity, and a more positive way of viewing the world. This state, which might be framed as a “breakthrough” or “transformation” by LGATs, may be referred to as “enlightenment” or a “mystical experience” in a more spiritual setting, “insight” by a philosopher or academic, “inspiration” by an artist, and possibly a “revelation” or “religious experience” by those who interpret feelings of love, joy, acceptance, connectedness, and insight as an encounter with God¹¹⁴. If this experience can be reliably triggered, and it is indistinguishable from a spiritual or supernatural experience, the consequences for our understanding of claimed spiritual and supernatural experiences are dramatic. If, for example, LGATs can reliably generate these experiences, and convince participants that they are evidence of the validity of their philosophies, they can serve as a powerful tool for influence.

The secondary research question asks if there is a plausible biological explanation for the primary observation of this thesis (that a structured process of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment results in transient hypomanic/manic symptoms in healthy individuals). The *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* provides a plausible biological explanation for this observation.

Since their inception, LGATs have been accused of employing clandestine persuasion techniques (CESNUR, n.d.; Singer, 2003) - something they categorically deny. Having considered both the primary and secondary research questions, and having already addressed the use of thought reform in LGATs, it is worth considering how other conditions, processes, and results of LGATs might impact independent, and critical, thinking. The following chapter addresses the tertiary research questions and, using established research in cognitive science, associative learning, and social psychology, argues that – in spite of their explicit insistence to the contrary – LGATs utilise established techniques of psychological persuasion to undermine the autonomy of participants.

¹¹⁴ Appendix 4 reviews individuals labelled “gurus” – David Koresh, George Gurdjieff, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Rudolf Steiner, Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and Saint Ignatius of Loyola – who, after a period of distress, experienced “transformations” and made notable contributions (some positive, some negative) as a result. While intimate detail is not provided about the distress which led to these transformations and breakthroughs, the parallels with LGATs and the AMDH are worth considering.

Chapter 6: TERTIARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS: RESULTS

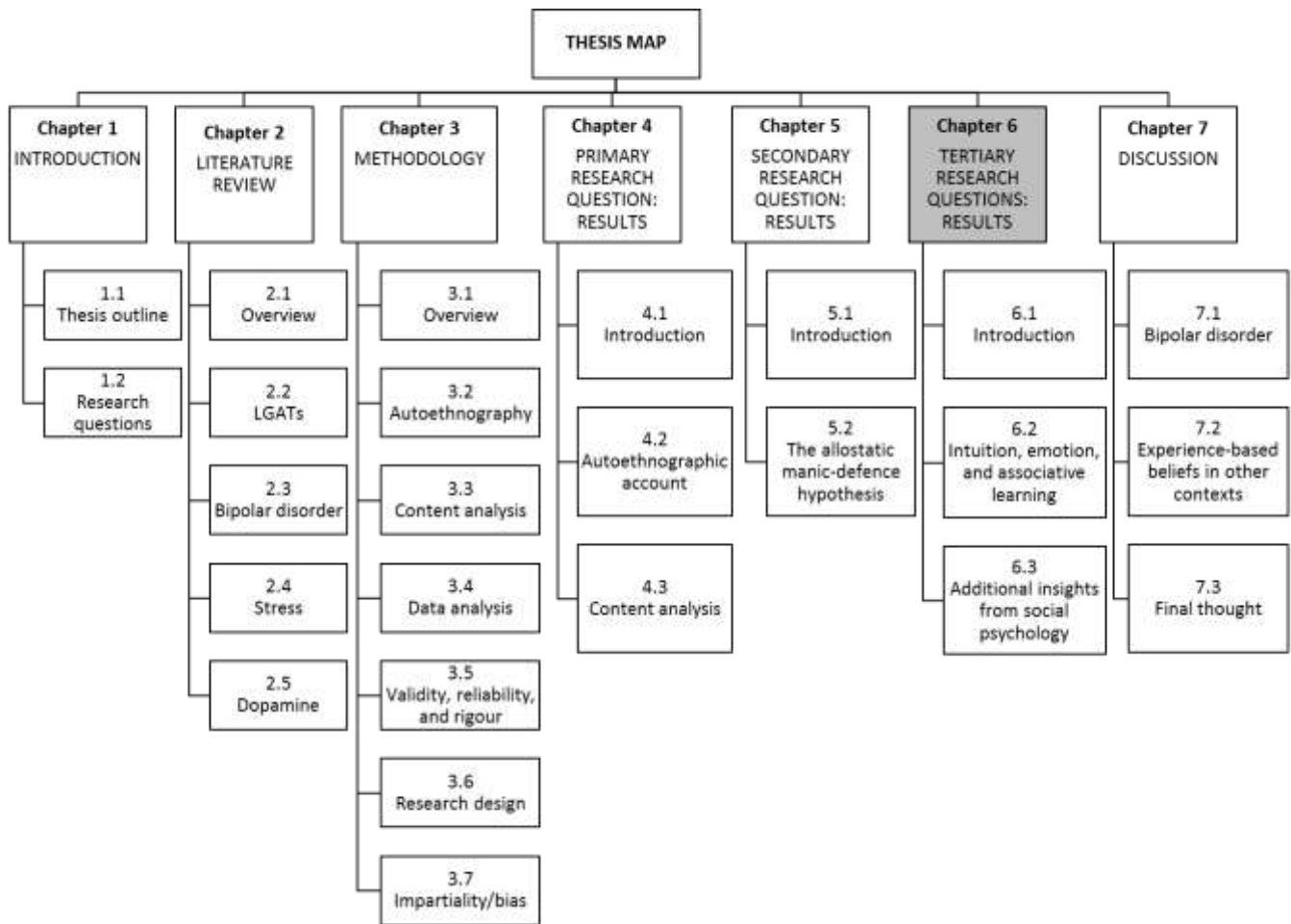


Figure 37: THESIS MAP_TERTIARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS: RESULTS

As indicated in Figure 37, the following chapter is “Tertiary Research Question: Results”.

Primary research question:

1. Will most healthy individuals exposed to a structured process of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment (as occurs in LGATs) experience transient hypomanic/manic symptoms?

Secondary research question:

2. Is there a plausible biological explanation for a structured process of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment triggering transient hypomanic/manic symptoms in healthy individuals?

Tertiary research questions:

3. What are the implications of an ability to manufacture a powerful emotional (hypomanic) experience – at a strategic point in time – on intuition, associative learning, and persuasion?
4. What does social psychology reveal about the conditions and processes employed by LGATs?

6.1 Introduction

“Social psychologists have a long tradition of showing that people can be induced to do surprising things without being offered much in the way of incentives, threats, or compelling arguments – that seemingly minor variations in the situation confronting people can have sizable effects on the way they behave. The message we can take from virtually thousands of studies is that people are more susceptible to subtle situational influences than most of us realize” (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 43).

There is a wealth of research on factors which influence decision-making, thinking, behaviour, and attitudinal change and it is useful to highlight how some of these factors relate to bipolar disorder and LGATs. LGATs, like any organisations, have a right to promote their product and to encourage course graduates to do the same. However, while LGATs claim to emphasise personal responsibility, many of their processes undermine autonomy and analytical thinking, and subtly take advantage of intuitive biases. It falls beyond the scope of this research to suggest the point at which the aggregate use of influence techniques moves from ethical to unethical, but it would be negligent to claim that LGATs cause a significant elevation in mood without addressing the implications of this claim on judgment and decision-making. There are other aspects of LGAT processes that should be reviewed in light of recent, and established, research into heuristics, decision-making, cognitive biases, and other aspects of social psychology. Some of these aspects will also be considered.

6.2 Intuition, emotion, and associative learning

In this section it is argued that, when in a more intuitive state, associative learning (e.g. classical conditioning) is more likely to occur unchecked, and that – by triggering a euphoric experience – LGATs are able to get *particularly intuitive* participants to associate the principles and obligations of the training with this positive feeling. Beliefs formed primarily through a powerful emotional association, rather than by carefully considering the evidence, will be referred to as *experience-based-beliefs*.

6.2.1 System 1 vs. System 2

“... most of the mental processes that allow us to make sense of the world operate automatically and without our awareness” (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 30).

It has been demonstrated that LGATs discourage slow and deliberate thinking – that they move participants into an impulsive (hypomania/mania-like) state and urge them to make decisions and form beliefs based upon intuition – and so it is important to consider the potential dangers of intuitive thinking and the impact of emotion on intuition. As explained by social psychologist, Daniel Kahneman (2012), in his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, there are hidden problems with intuition (“fast thinking”), which reflection and considered thought (“slow thinking”) are able to mitigate.

Kahneman (2012) distinguishes between two basic systems that operate in our minds. System 1 (or “fast thinking”) “operates quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control” (p. 20). It is asserted that this system is intuitive, makes use of heuristics (cognitive “rules of thumb”) and that, through experience, this system allows us to become experts in certain areas and respond quickly, automatically, *and correctly*, in many situations. System 1 is described as operating “effortlessly” (p. 21), while System 2 (or “slow thinking”) requires exertion. Because the mind is lazy (or “efficient”), Kahneman argues that it will only employ System 2 when System 1 fails (or when a person believes that System 1 will fail):

“The defining feature of System 2, in this story, is that its operations are effortful, and one of the main characteristics is laziness, a reluctance to invest more effort than is strictly necessary” (p. 31).

System 1 will therefore be used to the exclusion of System 2 when a person believes that intuition is always reliable (which it is not), and also – to save energy – when one is cognitively exhausted. Unlike System 1, System 2 is slow and deliberate, defined as allocating attention to “the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex calculations” (p. 21), and being “associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration” (p. 21). While most people believe that their decision-making is always rational, considered, and deliberate (employing System 2), the truth is that System 1 plays the silent, but dominant, role:

“In the picture that emerges from recent research, the intuitive System 1 is more influential than your experience tells you, and it is the secret author of many of the choices and judgements you make” (p. 13).

6.2.1.1 The problem with System 1

While generally useful for making decisions, and forming beliefs, System 1 is vulnerable to certain errors. System 2 can minimise these errors, though it is often not employed, or its effectiveness is hindered by specific conditions. Much of Kahneman and his colleague, Amos Tversky’s, work focuses on understanding the problems (“biases”) associated with System 1 and the alarmingly common reluctance of individuals to acknowledge their vulnerability to these biases. Describing the academic consensus on System 1, Kahneman (2012) states, “... the idea that our minds are susceptible to systematic errors is now widely accepted” (p. 10), yet when referring to the public’s belief in their own intuition, he describes “a puzzling limitation of our mind: our excessive confidence in what we believe we know, and our apparent inability to acknowledge the full extent of our ignorance and the uncertainty of the world we live in” (pp. 13-14).

This might explain why ordinary people exposed to sophisticated influence techniques fail to recognise these techniques and may none-the-less insist that they have not been coerced. While claiming to be rational, these individuals often maintain that they are invulnerable to emotional manipulation, or other clandestine levers of influence. The irony is that this position is itself an emotional rather than rational one - the certainty that they are invulnerable is not based on evidence (they are not well-versed in, or even aware of, the relevant evidence), but on an emotional need to feel rational, safe, and in control. In denying their vulnerability they, therefore, reveal themselves as vulnerable.

System 2 mitigates the risks of System 1, but it is impractical to rely solely on System 2 when making day-to-day decisions. While Kahneman (2012) explains that many people do not utilise System 2 enough, the effort involved in engaging this system means that it should be used judiciously:

“As a way to live your life, however, continuous vigilance is not necessarily good, and it is certainly impractical. Constantly questioning your own thinking would be impossibly tedious, and System 2 is much too slow and inefficient to serve as a substitute for System 1 in making routine decisions” (p. 28).

To avoid cognitive exhaustion *and* minimise errors a person should utilise System 1 in situations when it is likely to be accurate and System 2 when System 1 is vulnerable to failure. If then, individuals are convinced to abandon System 2 when forming a belief that requires careful thought, these people would be vulnerable to certain errors. Once that defence is no longer in place, processes which are known to cause errors with System 1 can be used and this could lead these individuals to form opinions and take on beliefs that might otherwise be rejected. Regardless of whether the opinions/beliefs taken on are valid, a process that deliberately emphasises intuition, devalues considered thought, and then (knowingly or unknowingly) takes advantage of the loopholes in System 1 might be considered unethical. According to Kahneman (2012) an environment that is draining, and which requires constant vigilance is one way to get a person to abandon System 2. Clearly this applies to LGATs:

“Baumeister’s group has repeatedly found that any effort of will or self-control is tiring; if you have had to force yourself to do something, you are less willing or less able to exert self-control when the next challenge comes around. This phenomenon has been named *ego depletion*” (pp. 41-42).

In conditions that are physically, cognitively, and emotionally exhausting, it might be expected then that many people will not be able to maintain System 2. Kahneman (2012) explains that this has a significant impact on a person’s rationality and ability to question dubious claims:

“Those who avoid the sin of intellectual sloth could be called ‘engaged.’ They are more alert, more intellectually active, less willing to be satisfied with superficially attractive answers, more skeptical about their intuitions. The psychologist Keith Stanovich would call them more rational” (p. 46).

Because the LGAT environment is draining, and involves long hours and emotional confessions, it is crucial to note that these conditions are conducive to gullibility and manipulation:

“The moral is significant: when System 2 is otherwise engaged, we will believe almost anything. System 1 is gullible and biased to believe, System 2 is sometimes busy, and often lazy. Indeed, there is evidence that people are more likely to be influenced by empty persuasive messages, such as commercials, when they are tired and depleted” (Kahneman, 2012, p. 81).

Another way to increase the likelihood of ego depletion is by minimising food intake (glucose). LGATs typically minimise access to food for long periods of time. Only water is allowed in the training environment and there is just one scheduled meal break per day (at about 18:00). The restriction of glucose intake and the enforced elevation of self-control (e.g. not using the bathroom or talking) further depletes System 2, increasing the risk of gullibility and of participants making intuitive errors:

“The nervous system consumes more glucose than most other parts of the body, and effortful mental activity appears to be especially expensive in the currency of glucose. When you are actively involved in difficult cognitive reasoning or engaged in a task that requires self-control, your blood glucose level drops [...] The bold implication of this idea is that the effects of ego depletion could be undone by ingesting glucose, and Baumeister and his colleagues have confirmed this hypothesis in several experiments” (Kahneman, 2012, p. 43).

As one of many descriptions of the Landmark Forum conditions, Laura McClure from Mother Jones Magazine states the following about the accessibility of food (and the bathroom) during seminars:

“‘Break’ is a misleading term at an all-day workshop that offers no snacks, no drinks other than Dixie cups of water, a single mealtime, and only loosely scheduled pauses to use the bathroom” (McClure, 2009).

Enzo Di Matteo of Now Magazine, confirms this observation:

“There will be three half-hour breaks a day and a one-and-a-half hour break for dinner, but with all the ‘assignments’ and ‘exercises’ we’re told to do, there’s hardly time to go to the washroom, let alone eat” (Di Matteo, 2000).

6.2.1.2 The impact of emotion on System 1

Emotion impacts intuition (Kahneman, 2012; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and, like other functions of System 1, heuristics based on emotion are subject to errors. The influence of emotion on decisions and beliefs (termed the *affect heuristic* by psychologist Paul Slovic) is worth considering because it may provide insights into the decisions, beliefs, and behaviours associated with hypomania and mania, as well as LGAT participation. The affect heuristic describes the way that people sometimes “let their

likes and dislikes determine their beliefs about the world” (p. 103), often with little deliberation or reasoning. When an emotion is used as a proxy for an informed opinion the effort required to engage System 2 is minimised, but distorted emotions (as occur in hypomania, mania, and LGATs) may result in distorted decisions and opinions. While Slovic’s heuristic addresses some of the problems associated with emotion-based decisions, the biological expert in this field is neuroscientist Antonio Damasio. Damasio goes beyond the idea of liking or disliking, analysing the neural mechanisms of emotion, and how these mechanisms affect, and sometimes distort, cognition:

“Slovic and his colleagues related their views to the work of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, who had proposed that people’s emotional evaluations and outcomes, and the bodily states and the approach and avoidance tendencies associated with them, all play a central role in guiding decision-making. Damasio and his colleagues have observed that people who do not display the appropriate emotions before they decide, sometimes because of brain damage, also have an impaired ability to make good decisions. An inability to be guided by a ‘healthy fear’ of bad consequences is a disastrous flaw” (Kahneman, 2012, p. 139).

In the case of the affect heuristic, emotions would be considered a mechanism of System 1, which would require “supervision” by System 2 to avoid errors. It is certainly the case with bipolar disorder that you have to constantly monitor automatic thoughts – to question and doubt your intuitions in order to avoid delusions, excessive self-esteem, irritability, and inappropriate or regrettable behaviour. While for most people System 1 is generally reliable, for a person with bipolar disorder System 1 can behave treacherously and, since it is difficult to intuitively know when it is failing, constant vigilance is required. Delusions and impulsivity are minimised in bipolar disorder not only with medication, but also with the perpetual and conscious activation of System 2 (Kahneman, 2012):

“System 2 is also credited with the continuous monitoring of your own behaviour - the control that keeps you polite when you are angry, and alert when you are driving at night” (p. 24).

Because System 2 moderates System 1, emotion-based thoughts are most compelling when not tempered by critical thought. Any processes or conditions, therefore, which discourage or diminish System 2 will allow System 1 to exert a greater influence. The loosening of control associated with an elevated mood is also correlated with the hypomanic trait of creativity (a trait associated with LGAT participation). Psychologist Sarnoff Mednick argued that creativity is the result of an exceptional associative memory - the core mechanism behind System 1 (Kahneman, 2012). The argument is made by Jamison (1993) and others that an elevated mood results in greater creativity, an observation which is supported by an ever-growing body of independent research. Notably, Kahneman (2012) explains that an elevated mood, intuition, and creativity are all associated with gullibility:

“These findings add to the growing evidence that good mood, intuition, creativity, gullibility, and increased reliance on System 1 form a cluster. At the other pole, sadness, vigilance, suspicion, an analytic approach, and increased effort also go together. A happy mood loosens the control of System 2 over performance: when in a good mood, people become more intuitive and more creative but also less vigilant and more prone to logical errors” (p. 69).

LGATs are physically and cognitively exhausting, requiring participants to sit and engage in emotionally arousing and philosophically obscure teachings, limiting food intake, and – because many rules are in place – demanding an abnormal level of self-control. In addition to these conditions, which exhaust System 2, participants are convinced that analytical thinking is not a worthwhile way to make decisions or to “know”. After minimising the regulatory effects of System 2, a powerful emotional experience is generated at the end of the training and pointed to as a trustworthy source of “knowing”. While exhausted, elated, and – according to Kahneman (2012) – a great deal more gullible, participants are strongly urged to sign up for future trainings and to recruit family members and friends. Organisations which value the autonomy of their participants, and believe in the lasting impact of their processes, would not insist on graduates making decisions while in this vulnerable state.

6.2.2 The somatic-marker hypothesis

“As cognitive scientists have emphasized in recent years, cognition is embodied; you think with your body, not only with your brain” (Kahneman, 2012, p. 51).

Because it is asserted that LGATs elevate mood and emotions, it is necessary to delve further into the relationship between emotion and reason. Professor of neuroscience, neurology, and psychology at the University of Southern California, Antonio Damasio, in his book, *Descartes’ Error*, argues that effective reasoning requires interaction between certain cortical (traditionally thought to be rational) and subcortical (emotional) parts of the brain - that without emotional input decision-making is flawed. At times, in fact, Damasio argues that it is necessary to base decisions entirely on emotion:

“To be sure, on certain occasions, emotions and feelings can be a substitute for reason. The emotional action program we call fear can get most people out of danger, in short order, with little or no help from reason [...] In effect, in some circumstances, too much thinking may be far less advantageous than no thinking at all” (Damasio, 2006, p. xvii).

While emotion is a useful substitute for reasoning in certain circumstances, Damasio (2006, p. xxii), like Kahneman, emphasises that in other situations emotions can impair rationality:

“This is not to deny that emotions and feelings can cause havoc in the process of reasoning under certain circumstances. Traditional wisdom has told us that they can, and recent investigations of the normal reasoning process also reveal the potentially harmful influence of emotional biases.”

Referring to processes associated with reason, Damasio (2006, p. 166) states that “attention and working memory are usually mentioned, but not a whisper is ever heard about emotion or feeling”. Illustrating his point with railway foreman Phineas Gage (who famously lost a portion of his frontal lobe(s) in an explosion in 1848, and survived until 1861), and then with his own patients, Damasio explains that individuals who are unable to experience normal emotions are less able to make rational decisions. He further contends that reasoning could not occur exclusively through a cold, emotionless process of cost/benefit analysis, as even ostensibly simple problems would require a prohibitively large volume of processing and working memory to keep the logical inference going. Instead, he argues that an emotional process helps people to sort through an endless number of cost/benefit analyses, allowing us to focus our conscious logic on a reduced number of options.

As an alternative to traditional cognitive theories, Damasio (2006) put forward the *somatic-marker hypothesis* (p. 173). He submits that as we encounter various experiences we learn to associate these stimuli with appropriate responses and that, once learned, these responses become automatic. This is similar to the idea put forward by Kahneman (2012, p. 12), who stated: “Valid intuitions develop when experts have learned to recognize familiar elements in a new situation and to act in a manner that is appropriate to it”. The mechanism by which we associate stimuli with responses, according to Damasio’s hypothesis, however, is somatic (bodily) in that a response option automatically evokes either a pleasant or unpleasant *feeling*. Because the bodily response *marks* the image produced in one’s mind, Damasio called it the *somatic-marker hypothesis*. It is maintained that somatic markers reduce the options to choose from when making decisions and that, while not necessarily removing the conscious process of cost/benefit analysis and deductive competence, these markers “probably increase the accuracy and efficiency of the decision process” (Damasio, 2006, p. 173).

To state the hypothesis simply: when you consider a particular future outcome a number of images present themselves and each image elicits a positive feeling, a negative feeling, or something in between. Positive feelings make it more likely that you will choose to do what you are considering, and negative feelings make it less likely. For example, if you consider going to a party and a positive feeling marks the thought of going, it is more likely that you will go. If a negative feeling marks the thought of going, it is less likely that you will go. A purely conscious, emotionless, deductive, cost/benefit analysis may involve considering: who will be there, how much you like each of these people, how much each of these people like you, the type of music that is likely to be played, the difficulty of getting there and getting a ride home, the things you might need to avoid saying in order

to not offend anyone, whether you have clothes to wear etc. Each of these questions may lead to a myriad of other questions, which in turn may lead to an almost infinite number of other questions, yet most people can make this sort of decision relatively easily. The somatic marker hypothesis suggests that when asked a question like “Do you want to come to the party?” an array of generally positive or negative feelings (somatic markers) allow you to sift through the often overwhelming detail, reducing the number of options that need to be deliberately considered.

The degree to which positive somatic markers are associated with future events is directly related to optimism and motivation. If, when considering the future, cognitive images tend to be associated with positive feelings then a person is more likely to view the future more optimistically. If a person considers his ability to deal with a difficult situation, or the likelihood of achieving a particular goal, or the chances of being liked by someone else, and positive somatic markers are associated with this thought-process, then they will similarly feel more confident. Positive somatic markers are also, by this rationale, correlated with motivation. The degree to which a person is likely to do something (like go to a party) has a great deal to do with the expected consequences of doing whatever it is that is being considered. If they believe that they will obtain money/recognition/sex/happiness/fitness/friends/a promotion by choosing a particular course of action, then they will be more motivated to take that course of action. Not only that, but it is more likely that a person will endure hardship if the expected reward is high. Damasio (2006) explains how positive markers facilitate perseverance:

“The positive somatic marker which is triggered by the image of a good future outcome must be the base for the enduring of unpleasantness as a preface to potentially better things” (p. 175).

It is assumed that, for most people, somatic markers are relatively fixed, but if the biological mechanism behind the marker fluctuates then the decision-making relating to an event, or person, or behaviour, or yourself, may fluctuate as well. This becomes particularly relevant in people whose biological markers fluctuate beyond what might be considered normal, as might be the case in people with bipolar disorder, or graduates of LGATs. If, as has been asserted by Damasio, emotion (mood) guides reasoning, and emotion moves above (or below) its normal range then, according to the somatic-marker hypothesis, decision-making may be compromised.

Optimism and motivation are associated with dopamine and so it is here that the somatic-marker hypothesis and dopamine intersect. In the nomenclature of dopamine, the more a person anticipates pleasure (optimism), the more he will be more motivated to attain that pleasure. Damasio (2006), when describing likely sources of somatic markers, specifically mentions dopamine. He puts forward the prefrontal cortices as the part of the brain towards which somatic signals are sent, stating “The neuroanatomical position of the prefrontal cortices is ideal for the purpose...” (p. 180), and explains

that these areas “receive signals from all the sensory regions in which the images constituting our thoughts are formed...” (p. 180). When describing sources of somatic markers he makes reference to the pathway between the VTA and the prefrontal cortices. This pathway, as has been discussed, is mediated by dopamine:

“... the prefrontal cortices receive signals from several biological regulatory sectors of the human brain. These include the neurotransmitter nuclei in the brain stem (for instance, those which distribute dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin), and in the basal forebrain (those which distribute acetylcholine), as well as the amygdala, the anterior cingulate, and the hypothalamus” (p. 181).

If dopamine is involved with the somatic marker hypothesis – and if dopamine can naturally double, but can become abnormally elevated by one thousand times (Sapolsky, 2004) – then abnormally elevated dopamine levels may result in correspondingly abnormal thoughts and decision-making. Damasio (2006) states that changes in neurotransmitter levels can alter reasoning and decision-making; this is one likely mechanism by which distorted perceptions relating to mood disorders occur:

“Moreover, triggering of activity from neurotransmitter nuclei, which I described as one part of the emotional response, can bias cognitive processes in a covert manner and thus influence the reasoning and decision-making mode” (p. 185).

Damasio (2006, p. 191) acknowledges that while somatic markers usually assist with reasoning, certain biological drives affect emotions and can distort the decision-making process. Given that LGATs involve obedience, conformity, and a desire to maintain self-esteem in trying circumstances, the following comment is particularly noteworthy:

“Although I believe a body-based mechanism is needed to assist ‘cool’ reason, it is also true that some of those body-based signals can impair the quality of reasoning. Reflecting on the investigations of Kahneman and Tversky, I see some failures of rationality as not just due to a primary calculation weakness, but also due to the influence of biological drives such as obedience, conformity, the desire to preserve self-esteem, which are often manifest as emotions and feelings.”

If emotion is associated with decision-making, as argued by Damasio, then the thoughts and behaviours of people with elevated moods might be better understood. Bipolar disorder is characterised by emotions and feelings which move beyond what is considered normal, and if – as the somatic-marker hypothesis asserts – emotions and feelings guide decision-making, then it can be deduced that abnormal emotions and feelings will result in abnormal reasoning and decision-making.

Two examples of this abnormal thinking can be seen in the hypomanic/manic symptoms of enhanced self-esteem and impulsive behaviour. If a person's mood is elevated, the feelings relating to any given person or thing will become more positive. If a person with an elevated mood is considering (consciously or unconsciously) how he feels about himself (self-esteem), and his mind produces an array of cognitive images, these images are more likely to be associated with positive somatic markers. Considering whether or not to go to a party is a simple decision when compared with "What is my value as a human being?" One's sense of self-worth does not occur solely through reasoning - it is more likely that this "decision" is made using somatic markers, which will be misleading during periods of hypomania/mania and depression:

"You believe you know what goes on in your mind, which often consists of one conscious thought leading in an orderly way to another. But that is not the only way that the mind works, nor indeed is that the typical way. Most impressions and thoughts arise in your conscious experience without your knowing how they got there..." (Kahneman, 2012, p. 4).

In terms of impulsivity, if a person's mood is elevated, and that person is considering doing something, it is more likely – according to the somatic-marker hypothesis – that whatever it is they are considering will be associated with positive somatic markers. A person is more likely to take risks if considering whether to do these activities produces positive feelings, rather than alarm bells. Impulsivity is the result of making decisions intuitively – without deliberation – *when one's intuition is not working properly*. This is an important distinction to make - as Kahneman (2012) explains, intuitive decisions are made far more frequently than most people realise; however, these decisions are only identified as impulsive when they are abnormal or have negative effects:

"... most of our judgements and actions are appropriate most of the time. As we navigate our lives, we normally allow ourselves to be guided by impressions and feelings, and the confidence we have in our intuitive beliefs and preferences is usually justified. But not always" (p. 4).

Having considered the perils of System 1, and the impact of emotion on System 1, it is necessary to review a model which takes many of these insights into account, but which is centred around the persuasiveness of an argument, the factors which increase and decrease persuasiveness, and – crucially – the validity of these factors. The following section considers the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), and the likelihood that LGAT participants will employ the *peripheral route*¹¹⁵ when assessing the value of the training and its philosophies.

¹¹⁵ The peripheral route, as opposed to the central route, describes decision-making which occurs without fully engaging with relevant information. The peripheral route relies on heuristics (such as emotions) to guide decision-making, rather than a careful review of the evidence (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

6.2.3 The elaboration likelihood model

“There is no expedient to which a man will not resort to avoid the real labour of thinking”

– Sir Joshua Reynolds¹¹⁶

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) provides a framework for understanding the degree to which assertions are scrutinised before being accepted and, as LGATs employ a number of techniques in their communications, it is useful to consider how these techniques relate to this model. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) summarise their findings relating to persuasion as follows:

“After reviewing the literature on attitude persistence, we concluded that many different empirical findings and theories in the field might profitably be viewed as emphasizing one of just two relatively distinct routes to persuasion (Petty, 1977; Petty & Cacioppo, 1978). The first type of persuasion was that which likely resulted from a person’s careful and thoughtful consideration of the true merits of the information presented in support of advocacy (central route). The other type of persuasion, however, was that which more likely occurred as a result of some simple cue in the persuasion context (e.g. an attractive source) that induced change without necessitating scrutiny of the true merits of the information presented (peripheral route)” (p. 125).

In the context of the ELM, “elaboration” refers to the extent to which a person thinks about the issue-relevant arguments in a message. The similarities between the peripheral route and Kahneman’s System 1, and the central route and System 2 should be immediately apparent:

“Current research in cognitive and social psychology provides strong support for the view that at times people engage in ‘controlled,’ ‘deep,’ ‘systematic,’ and/or ‘effortful’ analyses of stimuli, and at other times the analyses are better characterized as ‘automatic,’ ‘shallow,’ ‘heuristic,’ and/or ‘mindless’” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 128).

Crucially, there are conditions which have been identified as being likely to “foster people’s motivation and ability to engage in issue-relevant thinking” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 128). In other words, there are conditions which result in a high elaboration likelihood and conditions which result in a low elaboration likelihood. Based on the ELM, an environment can thus be designed to minimise the degree to which a person thinks about a message before internalising it:

“The likelihood of elaboration will be determined by the person’s motivation and ability to evaluate the communication presented” (p. 129).

¹¹⁶ (Cialdini, 2007, p. 61).

In the context of the ELM one must ask whether the conditions of LGATs are likely to increase or decrease elaboration. Since participants are depicted by trainers as incapable of understanding; since the training is described as being beyond understanding; and since understanding is presented as an ineffective “way of knowing”, participants likely feel that attempting to understand is futile. Since the training involves long hours, and obscure philosophy, participants are likely to become physically and cognitively exhausted, and even less inclined to analyse the information presented. Because trainers actively persecute those who question, the incentive for independent thinking (the central route) is further minimised and, finally, the trainer portrays himself/herself as an absolute authority on the process and material being presented. If participants believe that they are incapable of understanding for themselves and that someone else understands perfectly, then it is likely that they will outsource their thinking to the expert (the peripheral route) and “avoid the real labour of thinking”.

Given the two elements which make elaboration more likely – motivation and the ability to understand the message – it is useful to consider the states of mind, and conditions, which would minimise elaboration. The first element discussed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986, pp. 130-131) is the tendency of children to employ the peripheral route:

“Specifically, the very young child probably has very little motivation to think about the true merits of people objects, and issues, and even less ability to do so. Thus, attitudes may be affected primarily by what feels good or bad. As children mature, they become more motivated to express correct opinions on certain issues, but their ability to scrutinize issue-relevant arguments may still be poor due to lack of knowledge. Therefore, they may be particularly reliant on certain cognitive rules based on personal experience such as, ‘My mother knows what is right,’ or ‘If I play with it, I must like it.’ Consistent with this reasoning, children have been shown to be more susceptible to appeals based on behavioral cues and self-perceptions than issue-relevant argumentation...”

“... as people’s acquired knowledge and cognitive skills grow, this renders them more able to critically analyse issue-relevant information on certain topics and makes them less reliant than children on certain primitive heuristics (cf. Ross, 1981).”

Since Petty and Cacioppo (1986) argue that children are more vulnerable to intuitive decision-making, it is noteworthy that LGATs create an environment and employ numerous exercises which encourage participants to regress to childhood:

“Some authors have pointed to specific processes that are presumed to be characteristic of large group awareness training (14). These processes range from an emphasis on regressive characteristics of the setting to an overidentification with the aggressor, the group leader” (Lieberman 1987, p. 461).

Kahneman (2012) reveals how an unconscious association – as might occur when in a regressive environment – can elicit behaviour connected to that association. This process, referred to by Kahneman as “priming”, was explored in an earlier section. Because LGATs employ processes which are designed to induce regression to childhood, and create an environment where participants are treated like obedient/disobedient children by an authority figure, this potentially puts them into a state which makes them more likely to employ the peripheral route, and thus more vulnerable to weak, emotional arguments. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) conclude by stating that, when it is difficult or seems unnecessary to think critically, people often make decisions based upon other (often less reliable) indicators. Crucially, as LGATs induce an emotional “experience”, affective (emotional) cues are specified by Petty and Cacioppo as factors likely to influence those not cognitively engaged:

“In sum, we have proposed that when either motivation or ability to process issue-relevant arguments is low, attitudes may be changed by associating an issue position with various affective cues, or people may attempt to form a reasonable opinion position by making an inference about the likely correctness or desirability of a particular attitude position based on cues such as message discrepancy, one’s own behaviour, and the characteristics of the message source” (p. 130).

While the ELM points out that peripheral routes may serve as substitutes for critical thinking, the following section examines the peripheral route most relevant to this thesis. Classical conditioning is a well-established process by which individuals form associations between stimuli. In the case of LGATs, it is asserted that a powerful euphoric experience (an “affective cue”) becomes associated with the training, and that – because participants have been convinced that intuition is the most trustworthy source of knowledge, and because participants are mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted – they are less likely to critically assess the validity of this association.

6.2.4 Classical conditioning

“If an animal is trained to associate a conditioned stimulus (CS) and/or a behavioral response with food reward, dopamine may play an important role in the formation of the CS-reward or response-reward association” (Horvitz, 2002, p. 66).

Classical conditioning is a form of associative learning, in that associations are unconsciously made between a stimulus and a response (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011). Because it is contended that LGATs emphasise intuition (or “experience”), while devaluing reason, a process of learning that is automatic, rather than carefully considered, is of particular interest. Pavlov’s formulation of the theory has received little revision in the more than eight decades since it was first proposed (Bitterman, 2006) and so the uncontested conceptualisation of the concept, as provided by mainstream textbooks, is a fair working model upon which to base a theory of intuitive belief adoption:

“In the three quarters of a century following Pavlov’s work, the accumulation of factual information about classical conditioning has continued, but there has been little conceptual progress. The only thing we have now that approximates a workable general theory of conditioning was introduced more than 30 years ago and continues to receive a good deal of respectful consideration despite a variety of generally recognized shortcomings that little has been done to repair; nor does a systematic review of recent papers in leading journals give any good reason to think that a more satisfactory theory is in the making” (Bitterman, 2006, p. 365).

Classical conditioning occurs when a response that is typically associated with one stimulus becomes associated with another stimulus, and it is one way that we acquire new information or learn new things. Crucially, one of the stimuli would not naturally lead to the response and must be conditioned to do so (Barlow & Durand, 2002; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011). The original experiment relating to this concept was performed by Ivan Pavlov, who would ring a bell before feeding dogs. Food is something that naturally results in a dog’s salivation; a ringing bell is not. Pavlov found that after repeatedly ringing the bell shortly before feeding the dogs, he could later ring the bell (without presenting the food) and the dogs would salivate. The dogs formed an association between the bell and the food - they had been *classically conditioned* to salivate when they heard the bell.

According to classical conditioning terminology the food is an *unconditioned stimulus* – this is because no conditioning is required for the dog to salivate when presented with the food. Salivation at presentation of the food is an *unconditioned response* because it occurs naturally. The bell – which is initially a *neutral stimulus* (it elicits no response from the dog) – becomes a *conditioned stimulus*, because classical conditioning is required for the dog to associate the bell with food. Salivation at the sound of the bell (without the food) is a *conditioned response*; through classical conditioning the dogs respond to the bell in the same way that they would normally respond to food (Barlow & Durand, 2002, Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011). Importantly, people may also learn through classical conditioning and, since associative memory is a key mechanism of System 1 (Kahneman, 2012), an emphasis on System 1 (and de-emphasis of System 2) is likely to amplify the impact of this associative learning process.

Barlow and Durand (2002) make the pertinent observation that conditioning is one way we acquire new information, “particularly information that is somewhat emotional in nature” (pp. 21-22). Petty and Cacioppo (1986) explain that, with regards to persuasion, even when no compelling message is presented, classical conditioning can be used to elicit positive associations with the message. If, as occurs in an LGAT, a message is convincingly presented (“advocacy”), and this is coupled with classical conditioning (e.g. a positive emotional experience), the effect is likely to be even greater:

“Theories such as classical conditioning (Staats & Staats, 1958) and mere exposure (Zajonc, 1968, 1980), which describe evaluations of objects changing as a result of rather primitive affective and associational processes, are especially relevant under these circumstances. Although these theories have been tested and applied primarily in situations where no explicit ‘advocacy’ is presented, they should also be applicable to situations in which an issue position is advocated, but people have virtually no ability and/or motivation to consider it. In these situations, attitudes may still be changed if the attitude object is associated with a relatively strong positive or negative affective cue...” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 129).

Because it occurs unconsciously, a person who trusts “natural knowing” without analysing the validity of what is being learned will be particularly vulnerable to classical conditioning. If LGAT participants are exhausted and have been convinced that “natural knowing” is the only legitimate source of knowledge, then a powerful emotional (affective) experience is more likely to be uncritically associated with the principles (and obligations) of the training. In an LGAT the unconditioned stimulus is the specific combination of stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment which results in allostatic hypervigilance (the “experience”). While the unconditioned stimulus includes a certain amount of philosophy (responsibility, integrity, etc.), the philosophy is unimportant, other than to generate stress. Because they hold little value on their own, the philosophy and attached obligations are, therefore, the neutral stimulus. As a result of the stress, sleep disruption, and goal-attainment, participants experience the “experience” (an unconditioned response), which – through classical conditioning – becomes associated with the philosophy and obligations.

Participants may therefore form an uncritical association between the principles and obligations of the training and the powerful post-training “experience”. When they later think about the training, and what occurred during the training, they may associate philosophically dubious assertions, and the attached obligations, with feelings of euphoria, confidence, optimism, joy, and acceptance (a conditioned response). This would be a form of persuasion which bypasses critical thinking, and which raises ethical concerns. While classical conditioning is used in almost every advertisement, advertisers do not get the opportunity to spend days dismantling critical thinking through exhaustion, and systematically undermining of the validity of questioning, before applying the conditioning process. It might be argued, therefore, that ordinary people are more vulnerable to associative learning by the end of an LGAT. Not only are people more vulnerable, but the experience generated by LGATs is far more powerful than occurs when seeing Beyoncé in a Pepsi advertisement or Brad Pitt modelling a watch. Damasio (2006) warns that by forming errant associations, decision-making and beliefs may become distorted. This is highly relevant to the LGAT experience:

“In other words, you do not want to connect an emotion, positive or negative, to the wrong person or thing [...] By overassociating positive emotions with people, objects, or places, too often and indiscriminantly, we may feel more positive and relaxed about many situations than we should...” (pp. 161-162).

6.2.5 Experience-based beliefs: The four-step process of persuasion

Considering the success of LGATs since 1971, and having explained the relationship between emotion, rationality, and associative learning, it appears reasonable to outline the four-step process used by LGATs to win supporters. In addition to incorporating other elements of social psychology (see section 6.3) LGATs “convert” participants using four basic steps. The first two steps occur concurrently:

- (1) Convince participants not to think/analyse.
 - i. Participants are told that thinking will stand in the way of “getting it”.
 - ii. They are convinced that they could never understand the process, so they should just forget about understanding it.
 - iii. Unconditional trust is framed as a virtue (“open-mindedness”).
 - iv. Questioning is framed as cynicism/arrogance (“closed-mindedness”).
- (2) Create conditions which make it difficult for participants to think/analyse.
 - i. Hours are long and participants are sleep-deprived.
 - ii. Limited breaks – with “important” exercises to complete during these breaks – minimises food (glucose) intake.
 - iii. Emotionally and mentally taxing exercises are used.
 - iv. Excessive, philosophically obscure content is presented.

In addition to convincing participants not to think, and making it difficult for participants to think, LGAT trainers convince participants that proof of the validity of the “technology” will come through an experience, labelled a “breakthrough” or “transformation”. Step 3 is, therefore:

- (3) Convince participants that an experience is legitimate evidence of the validity of the LGAT “technology”.
 - i. Participants are led to believe that “natural knowing”, “direct experience”, or some equivalent, is the only way to be certain about anything.
 - ii. Participants are urged to trust the experience rather than their thinking.

If steps 1 to 3 have been successfully accomplished, then participants will be disinclined to analyse what they are being told, relatively unable to analyse what they are being told, and ready to accept a powerful experience as proof of the validity of what they are being told. Step 4 is therefore:

(4) Trigger a powerful experience.

- i. By generating stress and guilt for a period of time, before abruptly replacing that stress and guilt with love, acceptance, and affirmation, it is argued that a powerful dopamine high is elicited.
- ii. Participants may form an errant association between the stress-induced high (feelings of love, forgiveness, energy, euphoria, sociability, connectedness and optimism) and the LGAT's philosophy and obligations.

A crucial point to make with regards to this sort of influence is that, if the premise (Step 1) is accepted, the participant's ability to think analytically becomes irrelevant. If an educated/intelligent person can be convinced that "over-analysing" will get in the way – that the experience is "beyond understanding" – and he chooses to disengage System 2, then his ability to think analytically is of no consequence. It is perhaps tempting – having had these trainings dissected, simplified, and explained – to convince oneself that anyone who buys into this premise, and the dubious LGAT propositions which follow, must be weak, unintelligent, or desperate to be led. This allows us to feel safe, and to feel like we would never be fooled by the LGAT process, but the evidence indicates that, if anything, LGAT participants tend to be well-educated and of relatively high intelligence.

Describing the demographics of test participants, Finkelstein, et al. (1982, p. 518) stated that "The average graduate has 3.5 years of college education"; Lieberman (1987, p. 461) said of Lifespring, "Participants were generally well educated; only 10% (N=29) had not attended college; 36% (N=104) were currently working on or had completed their postgraduate or professional education"; Fisher, et al. (1989, p. 748) described the sample of Forum participants as "predominantly well-educated individuals of relatively high socioeconomic status"; while Daniel Yankelovich reveals in his study of the Forum that 86% of participants had at least some college education, with 28% completing, or having completed, post-graduate degrees (Landmark_Yankelovich, 2016). The evidence is clear that LGATs attract individuals who are as capable of critical thinking as most. If education/intelligence offers protection from experience-based persuasion (it may not), then in spite of the high education/intelligence of LGAT participants, a process of devaluing/limiting critical thinking, elevating experience as a way of knowing, and triggering an experience remains a highly effective process of persuasion. To quote Antonio Damasio, referring to the dangers of classical conditioning, once more:

"By overassociating positive emotions with people, objects, or places, too often and indiscriminately, we may feel more positive and relaxed about many situations than we should..." (Damasio, 2006, p. 162).

The power of the four-step process is that, when System 2 is effectively taken offline, it becomes more likely that associations will uncritically be made between two things that just happen to occur at the same time (classical conditioning). ABC reporter Hagar Cohen (2009) quotes one of many disillusioned former Landmark volunteers who made the mistake of associating the feelings love, joy, confidence, and energy he felt from the trainings, with the organisation itself:

“For myself as a participant, I experienced a spiritual growth, and I thought that the corporation, I know it sounds really weird saying it, I thought the corporation had a spiritual aspect” (Cohen, 2009).

As stated by Erhard himself, people are meaning-making machines (Rhinehart, 2010). Without reflection, we are prone to associating unrelated experiences and ideas when they occur at the same time. LGATs create a powerful emotional experience as the training ends, and participants – whose System 2 thinking has been dismantled – are particularly vulnerable, under these conditions, to make an intuitive connection between the experience, and the principles and obligations of the training.

6.3 Additional insights from social psychology¹¹⁷

In this section it is argued that seemingly inconsequential elements of the LGAT experience have hidden effects on independent thinking and persuasion. While many of these elements exist in sales and marketing, it is arguable that – because LGATs tire participants over days and combine all of these tactics with an intensity that far exceeds a typical sales situation – participants who are unfamiliar with these techniques are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

6.3.1 Outsourced thinking

“There is plenty of information. You have to learn how to judge, evaluate and compare it with other things. You have to take some things on trust or you can’t survive. But if there is something significant and important don’t take it on trust” – Noam Chomsky¹¹⁸

An important form of peripheral processing is what might be called *outsourced thinking*. Because our minds are lazy/efficient, and because it is often impractical or impossible to thoroughly consider every idea/argument/product/person that we encounter, it becomes necessary to rely on the opinions of others when making decisions and forming beliefs. It would, for example, be impractical to study medicine so you could diagnose and treat any illness you may suffer from, or to become an architect so that you could design your own home. Outsourcing is also, however, required in day-to-day decisions. While it is necessary to be informed about some matters, there is a limit to the capacity of

¹¹⁷ Many of these insights relate to “Mystical Manipulation”, discussed in an earlier section.

¹¹⁸ (Hedges, 2010).

our expertise – in order to make utility-maximising decisions it is necessary to outsource certain decisions to people who we *believe* have the necessary expertise. Automatic and outsourced thinking are related in that the process by which we decide who, or what (e.g. an organisation or brand), to outsource our thinking to may vary in terms of how automatic it is. You may follow an analytical process in deciding whether to believe another person’s claims, or this outsourcing may be a great deal more intuitive. As such, there are risks in outsourcing decisions, and these inherent weaknesses may result in poor decision-making, or in taking on beliefs that would otherwise be rejected.

Two broad forms of outsourced thinking will be considered, as they relate closely to the processes used by LGATs: authority and social proof. The former relates to the way that individuals outsource decisions to individuals they believe are experts on a given matter, and the latter describes the way that decisions are outsourced to groups of people (it is assumed that the group knows the correct answer/behaviour). In his book, *Influence - The Psychology of Persuasion*, professor of psychology and marketing at Arizona State University, Robert Cialdini (2007), describes this outsourced thinking as “automatic”, much like Kahneman’s System 1:

“In fact, automatic, stereotyped behavior is prevalent in much of human action, because in many cases it is the most efficient form of behaving, and in other cases it is simply necessary. You and I exist in an extraordinarily complicated stimulus environment, easily the most rapidly moving and complex that has ever existed on this planet. To deal with it, we *need* shortcuts. We can’t be expected to recognize and analyse all the aspects in each person, event, and situation we encounter in even one day. We haven’t the time, energy, or capacity for it. Instead, we must very often use our stereotypes, our rules of thumb to classify things according to a few key features and then to respond mindlessly when one or another of these trigger features is present” (pp. 6-7).

Cialdini’s position is in line with Kahneman’s – that many decisions are automatic, and that people are unaware of these automatic decisions – but adds that “compliance professionals” (p. xiii)¹¹⁹ are able to take advantage of these hidden mechanisms:

“It is odd that despite their current widespread use and looming future importance, most of us know very little about our automatic behavior patterns. Perhaps that is so precisely because of the mechanistic, unthinking manner in which they occur. Whatever the reason, it is vital that we clearly recognize one of their properties: They make us terribly vulnerable to anyone who knows how they work” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 8).

¹¹⁹ It is worth noting, since Werner Erhard was a car and encyclopaedia salesman in the 1960s (Pressman, 1993), that Cialdini (2007, p. 98 and p. xiii) considers the more skilled individuals in both of these occupations to be “compliance professionals”.

6.3.1.1 Authority

“Theirs not to make reply, theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die. Into the valley of death rode the six hundred” – Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 1854

Tennyson’s poem recounts the charge, on horseback, of British soldiers against the Russian army, who were armed with cannons and other artillery, during the Crimean War. Despite being heavily outmatched, these soldiers followed the apparent orders of Lord Cardigan and, as a result, many died. The power of authority is far greater than one might intuit, as was most famously demonstrated by Yale psychologist, Stanley Milgram, in 1963. Cialdini (2007) provides an engaging account of this experiment, which assessed the degree to which ordinary citizens would follow the instructions of a perceived authority figure, even when these instructions were in conflict with their own comfort and ethical principles. In the experiment a newspaper advertisement was placed for volunteers to take part in a “study of memory” at Yale University. When volunteers arrived at the university they were met by two people – the first appeared to be the researcher in charge of the experiment (he was wearing a grey lab coat and carried a clipboard), and the second appeared to be another volunteer.

The “researcher” then explained that the study was to test the impact of punishment on learning and memory, and that volunteers would randomly be assigned the role of either “Teacher” or “Learner”. The role of the Learner, it was explained, was to commit a long list of word-pairings to memory; the Teacher (from an adjacent room) would then use an intercom to test the Learner on these word pairings and punish the Learner every time that a word pairing was incorrect. The punishment was ostensibly delivered by the Teacher in the form of electric shocks, administered through electrodes attached to the Learner’s arm. While the voltage of the first shock was “annoying but tolerable”, with each incorrect answer the intensity was increased by 15V.

Cialdini (2007) provides a vivid, but fictional, account of what it would be like for the Learner if real shocks were ever delivered. The truth is that it was not the Learner who was being tested (the Learner was an unharmed confederate of the experiment, selected because he was likable and “normal”), but the Teacher. The Teacher was led to believe that the shocks were real, that the pain was real, and that the screaming and begging was real – the experiment was designed to ascertain the degree to which ordinary citizens would follow the instructions of an authority figure (the “researcher”, who was an actor), even when these instructions went against the principles of the ordinary citizens:

“At the 75-, 90-, and 105-volt levels, the pain makes you grunt audibly. At 120-volts, you exclaim into the intercom that the shocks are *really* starting to hurt. You take one more punishment with a groan and decide that you can’t take much more pain. After the Teacher delivers the 150-volt shock, you shout back into the intercom, ‘That’s all! Get me out of here! Get me out of here, please!’

Let me out!’ But instead of the assurance you expect from the Teacher that he and the researcher are coming to release you, the Teacher merely gives you the next question to answer. Surprised and confused, you mumble the first answer to come into your head. It’s wrong, of course, and the Teacher delivers a 165-volt shock. You scream at the Teacher to stop, to let you out. But he responds only with the next test question – and with the next slashing shock when your frenzied answer is incorrect. You can’t hold the panic any longer; the shocks are so strong now they make you writhe and shriek. You kick the wall, demand to be released, beg the Teacher to help you. But the test questions continue as before and so do the dreaded shocks – in searing jolts of 195, 210, 225, 240, 255, 270, 285, and 300 volts. You realise that you can’t possibly answer the test correctly now, so you shout to the Teacher that you won’t answer his questions any longer. Nothing changes; the Teacher interprets your failure to respond as an incorrect response and sends another bolt. The ordeal continues in this way until finally, the power of the shock stuns you into near paralysis. You can no longer cry out, no longer struggle. You can only feel each terrible electric bite. Perhaps, you think, this total inactivity will cause the Teacher to stop. There can be no reason to continue this experiment. But he proceeds relentlessly, calling out test questions, announcing the horrid shock levels (about 400 volts now), and pulling the levers. What must this man be like? you wonder in confusion. Why doesn’t he help me? Why won’t he stop?” (pp. 209-210).

Relating to both Kahneman’s (2012) and Cialdini’s (2007) general observation that individuals are often unaware of the degree to which furtive factors influence their thinking and behaviour, the results of this experiment surprised most:

“In fact, before the study began, he asked groups of colleagues, graduate students, and psychology majors at Yale University (where the experiment was performed) to read a copy of the experimental procedures and estimate how many subjects would go all the way to the last (450-volt) shock. Invariably, the answers fell in the 1 to 2 percent range. A separate group of thirty-nine psychiatrists predicted that only about one person in a thousand would be willing to continue to the end. No one, then, was prepared for the behavior patterns that the experiment actually produced” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 211).

As opposed to the “1 to 2 percent”, or 0.1%, compliance predicted by individuals educated in psychology and psychiatry, about 65% of the Teachers pulled every switch (up to a “450-volt shock”), stopping only when the experiment was ended by the “researcher”. Cialdini (2007) goes on to describe the behaviour of those who *did not* continue to 450-volts:

“More alarming still, not one of the forty subjects in this study quit his job as Teacher when the victim first began to demand his release; nor later when his reaction to each shock had become, in

Milgram's words, 'definitely an agonized scream.' Not until the 300-volt shock had been sent and the victim had 'shouted in desperation that he would no longer provide answers to the memory test' did anyone stop – and even then, it was a distinct minority who did" (p. 211).

The people selected for the experiment were shown to represent "a standard cross section of ages, occupations, and education levels" within the US (Cialdini, 2007, p. 213), and psychological assessments revealed no abnormalities among them. Although the initial experiment involved only males, a later experiment demonstrated that "female Teachers were just as likely" (p. 213) to give all the shocks to Learners. The question that must be asked, and answered, is why most ordinary people would be willing to inflict unspeakable harm on another, ostensibly likeable, human being. Milgram believed that it is because of "a deep-seated sense of duty to authority within us all" (p. 213), and so the role of the "researcher" in the experiment must be considered:

"... we are trained from birth that obedience to proper authority is right and disobedience is wrong. The essential message fills the parental lessons, the school house rhymes, stories, and songs of our childhood and is carried forward in the legal, military, and political systems we encounter as adults" (p. 216).

Cialdini (2007) emphasises the fact that the Teachers were not sociopaths, and that they were visibly traumatised by the process (the experiment has been criticised for this). He adds that it was clear that, without the "researcher's" directives to continue, they would have ended the experiment quickly:

"They hated what they were doing and agonized over their victim's agony. They implored the researcher to let them stop. When he refused, they went on, but in the process they trembled, they perspired, they shook, they stammered protests and additional pleas for the victim's release" (pp. 213-214).

Milgram performed later studies, which offer further evidence of the role of the "researcher". In one variant the "researcher" tells the Teacher to stop delivering shocks, while the Learner insists, despite the pain, that the experiment continue. Not a single Teacher administered a shock after the instruction from the "researcher". In another variant of the experiment the other "volunteer" directed the experiment, instructing the Learner to continue when the "researcher" was strapped into the chair and asking that the experiment be stopped. Again, not a single Teacher administered a shock after being asked to stop by the "researcher". The degree to which individuals submit to those who appear knowledgeable or important is the central discovery of this experiment:

"It is the extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority that constitutes the chief finding of the study" (Cialdini, 2007, p. 215).

Gilovich and Ross (2016), commenting on the ability to move individuals from seemingly innocuous actions to more extreme behaviours, make specific reference to Milgram's experiment:

"Milgram's participants had no idea, at least initially, that they were being led down a step-by-step path to ever more egregious actions. Nor could they anticipate how difficult it would be to get off that path" (pp. 59-60).

As in LGATs, there was a diffusion of responsibility – the belief that the scientist was an expert and knew best; that no real harm would come to the "learners". Even when participants were clearly distressed, the majority of participants turned to the "expert" in the room and accepted his assurances that he had everything under control. As per Milgram's experiment, it is plausible that LGAT participants convince themselves that the treatment of other participants is acceptable, based upon the assurances of the apparent expert (the LGAT trainer). Referring again to Milgram's experiment:

"Any reservations they might express, any polite suggestions that the experimenter check on the condition of the learner, and any offers to forgo their participation fee in exchange for stopping the study were met by the experimenter's calm insistence that the participant proceed and that 'the responsibility is mine'" (Gilovich & Ross, p. 60).

When considering authority and LGATs, it is important to note that authority can be faked and that authority is relative. As was demonstrated in Milgram's experiment, the authority figure need not be a scientist at a prestigious university – he need only put on a grey lab coat to create this impression. It would be inefficient, and arguably cynical, for a participant to demand proof of the "scientist's" qualifications, and so the lab coat and the study's location served as heuristics for real credentials. In his book, *Bad Science*, which discusses ideas that are promoted – and often believed – without evidence, Dr Ben Goldacre (Goldacre, 2010) describes a British "authority" on nutrition, and how she has boosted her status with various misleading titles. This is a useful illustration of faked authority:

"Let's look at just one: Dr Gillian McKeith – a prime-time TV celebrity in the U.K., now a rising star on BBC America, and a best-selling author with an empire of products. To some she is a guru. To me she is, as we shall see, a menace to the public understanding of science..." (p. 115).

"I first noticed Dr. Gillian McKeith when a reader sent in a clipping about her first series on Channel 4. McKeith was styled, strikingly, as a white-coated academic and scientific authority on nutrition, a 'clinical nutritionist,' posing in laboratories, surrounded by test tubes, and talking about diagnoses and molecules" (p. 115).

"This doctor has been presented, consistently, up front on television, on her website, by her management company and in her books, as a scientific authority on nutrition" (p. 119).

According to Goldacre (2010), McKeith's PhD is from a non-accredited correspondence college, and her dissertation is not publically available. Many of her scientific claims are demonstrably false and, when a member of the public challenged her qualifications, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) ruled that she could no longer market herself as a doctor. She still insists that she is a certified professional member of the American Association of Nutritional Consultants – which sounds impressive – but Goldacre points out that, for \$60, he obtained this exact “qualification” for his dead cat, Hettie. While her credentials appear considerable to the layperson, and boost McKeith's authority status, they are misleading, and seem to be little more than the grey lab coat worn by the “researcher” during Milgram's experiment.

Authority may be faked, or exaggerated, but it is also important to understand that authority is relative. A person who has a weak understanding of a given topic is more likely to accept an illegitimate authority figure than someone with knowledge of the “authority's” claims. A war veteran is more qualified to identify a case of stolen valour than a civilian, a doctor is well-positioned to identify a quack, and a leading theoretical physicist is more likely than most to challenge a world-renowned spiritual teacher who misrepresents the principles of quantum mechanics. Theoretical physicist and winner of the Nobel Prize for physics in 1965, Richard Feynman, famously stated, “If you think you understand quantum mechanics, you don't understand quantum mechanics”, but precisely because it is complex, it is sometimes misused by “experts” to boost their authority statuses. Since it is complex and esoteric, most people have little choice but to outsource their understanding of the topic to those who appear informed, but it is easier to fake understanding of complex matters than to achieve it:

“Whoever knows he is deep, strives for clarity; whoever would like to appear deep to the crowd, strives for obscurity”- Friedrich Nietzsche (Kaufmann, 2009, p. 173).

Deepak Chopra is a world-renowned authority on spirituality and alternative health and, as a heuristic measure of his influence in these matters, his personal assets in 2014 were estimated to be in excess of \$80 million (Rowe, 2014). At a public debate with Michael Shermer of The Skeptics Society and neuroscientist Sam Harris, at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech), Chopra invoked quantum mechanics to argue a point, and an audience member challenged his understanding and application of quantum theory. Chopra had already been accused by his opponents of employing obscure, scientific-sounding concepts to baffle the audience but, as neither of his opponents were authorities on quantum mechanics, he defended himself confidently from these assertions (Truth Seeker, 2015a). The person challenging him from the audience in this case, however, was theoretical physicist, and Caltech lecturer, Leonard Mlodinow, who co-authored the book *The Grand Design* with Stephen Hawking in 2010 (Rowe, 2014). Chopra, upon hearing Mlodinow's credentials, was visibly thrown, and humbly accepted his, somewhat sardonic, offer of “a short course in quantum mechanics”:

“I... I... I would be honored, sir, and I accept your offer with great gratitude, and I would like... to be educated so I can be clearer in my... in my dialogue...” (Truth Seeker, 2015b).

The point is that Chopra is only an authority on this topic in relative terms. For those who have a limited understanding of quantum mechanics, he may appear to be an expert, but to those who have expertise in this area, his understanding may appear inadequate at best, and dishonest at worst. The idea of relative authority gives rise to the concept of an *authority gap* – the perceived difference (from the perspective of a given individual) between his own understanding of a topic and that of an “authority figure”. It is proposed that an individual is most likely to outsource decision-making when the authority gap is at its greatest; that is, when a person believes that he has little knowledge of the subject *relative to* the authority figure. By this rationale, if an authority figure is able to increase the authority gap it will maximise the likelihood that an individual will outsource his decision-making or thinking (employ the peripheral route).

The first, and most apparent, way to do this is to elevate the status of the “authority”, and it has been established that authority can be mimicked quite convincingly. The second way, which is arguably less ethical, is to drive down the self-belief of the individual. If a person can be convinced that he knows nothing about the subject in question – that his thinking processes are flawed – *while* he is simultaneously persuaded that someone else knows everything about that subject, the greatest possible authority gap will be created. LGAT trainers present themselves as all-knowing authorities on philosophically elusive topics, while employing processes which undermine participants’ confidence in themselves. Theoretically this increases the likelihood that participants will doubt themselves, refrain from questioning, and outsource decision-making to the trainer. Regarding the first means by which the authority gap may be widened, numerous sources emphasise the projection of a supreme authority status by LGAT trainers:

Finkelstein, et al. (1982) note this feature in their 1982 review of LGATs:

“Neatly dressed and clean shaven, the est trainer is distinguished from his assistants only by an air of absolute authority” (p. 519).

Singer (2003) indicates that trainers focus extensively on establishing their authority status:

“Day one is usually devoted to demonstrating the leader’s absolute authority. The leader, often called a facilitator or trainer, immediately takes control of the setting with a demeanor that suggests he is a powerful, in-charge person and no one is to challenge what he says. ‘This program works,’ the trainer proclaims. ‘It’s all up to you to obey and get the maximum benefits.’ He remains totally in charge, acts knowledgeable, and is practiced in verbal skills, so that he never loses an encounter. Anyone who challenges the trainer will be humiliated and verbally mashed” (p. 193).

Rhinehart (2010) reveals the same dominant demeanour of trainers, and the overt insistence that participants outsource their thinking to Erhard:

“‘MY NAME IS DON MALLORY. I AM YOUR TRAINER.’ He pauses, and something about his total confidence and ease, the inordinate loudness of his voice, and the word *trainer* seems to send a small shiver through several of the trainees” (p. 8).

“The trainer’s voice is penetratingly intense, cold and he moves his eyes over the trainees as if he were capable of looking through each one” (p. 9).

“You won’t get it because you’ve *tried* to get it, you won’t get it because you’re intelligent and bright and reasonable, you won’t get it because you’re a *good* person. You’ll get it for one simple reason: Werner has created the training so that you’ll get it” (p. 11).

Brewer (1975) makes a similar comment about est trainers:

“All those hours of training, all those processes and indoctrinations, had solidly established the authority of the trainer.”

Lifespring trainers are likewise described as projecting a strong image of authority:

“The trainer was a conventionally attractive man of about thirty. He was tall, dark, even-featured and meticulously attired in dressy sports coat and tie. His physical appearance projected a Madison Avenue image of success” (Haaken & Adams, 1983, p. 273).

Descriptions of Landmark Forum trainers are very much the same:

“Angelo arrived on the small stage set up at the front of the room. He introduced himself as ‘the leader’ and strutted up and down like a peacock” (Clancy, *Victims Lured Into Baring Their Souls By Mind Games*, 1992).

With reference to the second means by which the authority gap may be widened, numerous sources reveal how LGAT trainers undermine the self-worth of participants:

“He betrays no affect, even when he excoriates the trainees. During the course of the training, he will repeatedly refer to them as ‘assholes,’ and he will devalue their accomplishments with the repeated assertion that their lives ‘do not work’” (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, p. 519).

Rhinehart (2010) reveals that the trainer “badgers and insults the beliefs of the trainees...” (p. xiii).

Describing how trainers elevate themselves while denigrating participants, he quotes an est leader:

“‘I AM YOUR TRAINER,’ he continues in his intense, penetrating voice, ‘AND YOU ARE THE TRAINEES. I AM HERE BECAUSE MY LIFE WORKS AND YOU ARE HERE BECAUSE YOUR LIVES DO NOT WORK’” (p. 8).

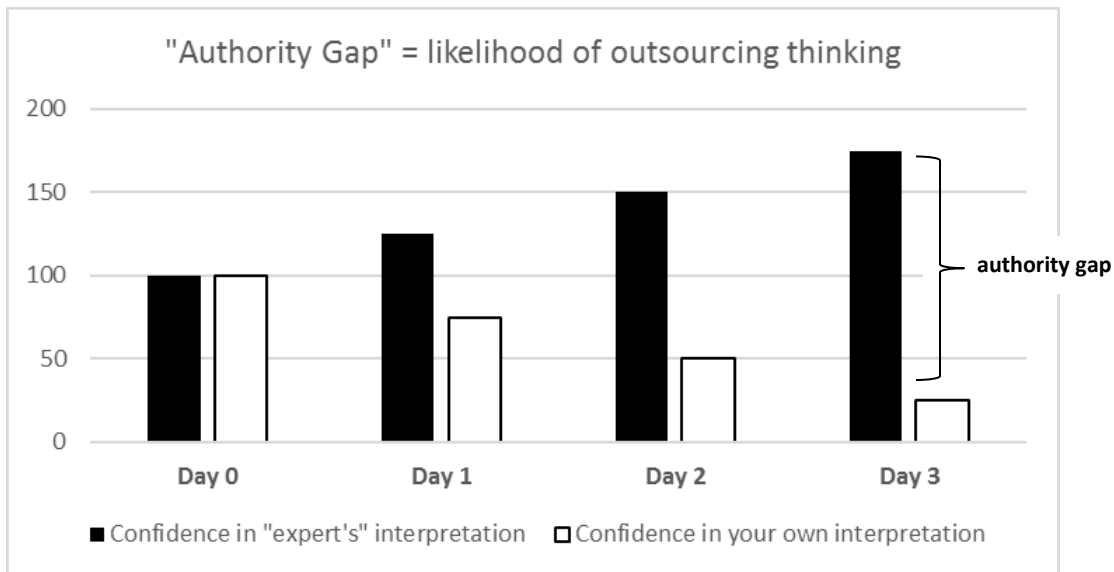


Figure 38: Maximisation of the authority gap during an LGAT

Figure 38 indicates how the authority gap grows over the course of an LGAT. The trainer becomes seen as more of an authority, and participants doubt their own thinking more and more as they are harassed, patronised, and mocked for their opinions. The trainer constantly reinforces his superiority, sometimes subtly, but as the training progresses he may feel comfortable making more explicit statements about his status:

“‘You’re getting smart,’ the trainer replies, striding across the platform. ‘You can’t win in here. Nobody wins in here except me. Unless I decide to *let* you win. It ought to be perfectly clear to everyone that you’re all assholes and I’m God. Only an asshole would argue with God. I may let you be Gods too but that’ll come later’” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 39).

The described behaviour of Landmark trainers is conspicuously similar:

“Chris mocked me, ‘Oh, you have questions? You’re questioning me? How long have you been leading the Forum? Do you think I know a thing or two more than you about it?’ I could literally hear cackles from various parts of the audience. It was fucking Animal Farm in there” (Fazeli, 2012).

Explaining how trainers disable the sources of self-worth and confidence in participants, Finkelstein, et al. (1982) state:

“Social or professional roles which ordinarily confer prestige on the trainees are derided as ‘acts’, and spontaneous assertions of personal status are ridiculed. Trainees’ belief systems are scorned, as are attempts to escape the trainer’s control by withdrawal” (p. 531).

Prasad (2012) similarly explains that, during the Landmark Forum, those who are confident will be targeted by the trainer:

“It’s highly likely that the leader will come down really hard on people with bigger egos (e.g. a few IIT graduates, the so-called highly successful people in life, rich people etc).”

Singer (2003) argues that, because participants are repeatedly shown that the trainer will dominate any confrontation, they begin to feel powerless:

“Trainers use confrontational techniques to create a sense of powerlessness in the seminar attendees. Once this has been achieved, it becomes a lot easier to erase old patterns of thinking and behavior” (p. 199).

Haaken and Adams (1983) argue that the rules assist in establishing the trainer as the authority:

“The effect of a prolonged discussion of the rules, which included some challenging questions by participants, was to fortify the position of the trainer as a legitimate authority who was in control and to diminish the participants’ control” (p. 274).

In comments which speak directly to the idea of an authority gap, and the likelihood of outsourcing thinking to an “authority”, Haaken and Adams (1983) and Robert Black (1997) make similar points:

“As the training progressed, participants became increasingly reliant upon the trainer to interpret reality” (Haaken & Adams, 1983, p. 275).

“Because you believe in the superior stature and knowledge of the leader and are placed in a vulnerable situation, your confidence in your own beliefs is undermined, and you progressively begin to identify with the views of the leader...” (Black, 1997).

LGATs spend a great deal of time convincing participants that they are “assholes” who do not know how ignorant they are of their own ignorance. The following argument is used in all of the major LGATs. It should be noted that it appeals to the humility of participants and, if accepted, places them in a position of inferiority. This argument implies that what is being presented in the LGAT cannot be challenged, because – based on this definition – the LGAT imparts something that participants were never even previously aware of:

“‘There are things that we know that we know,’ she said as she marked off one small slice of the pie. ‘There are things that we know that we don’t know.’ She marked off another quarter slice. What was left, she said, as her hand swept across the remaining half of the pie, was everything ‘that we don’t know that we don’t know.’ That, concluded Scheaf, is ‘what the Forum is all about’” (Pressman, 1993, p. 269).

Blogger Sanjukta explains how his trainer explained his own Forum results in the same way:

“He shared how his whole life has changed in those 3 days. He went on saying things like, what you get from the forum is beyond your perceptions [...] It opens you up to things you don’t even know that you don’t know” (Sanjukta, 2013).

Citizen Skeptic (2014) uses the same terminology to describe the Landmark promise:

“At various points in the introductory Forum, the folks at Landmark promise not only to deliver to us things we didn’t know, but to deliver the things that we didn’t even know we didn’t know.”

Referring to the ability to question obscure ideas, Thomas Jefferson stated:

“Ridicule is the only weapon which can be used against unintelligible propositions. Ideas must be distinct before reason can act upon them” (Jefferson, 1816).

LGATs define their trainings as impossible to comprehend and, by extension, impossible to challenge. Once participants buy into the idea that they are being taught things that they “don’t know that they don’t know” it appears arrogant for anyone to question what is being taught. If they claim that they do understand it they will be humiliated for their arrogance, so they must assume a position of inferiority and submissiveness. The trainer, because the training is presented in this way, is seen as an absolute authority, while participants are presented as – necessarily – having no idea about what they are being taught. The authority gap created by this setup is likely to be substantial. Gilovich and Ross (2016, p. 64) further explain how situational advantage (as might be enjoyed by an LGAT trainer) can create an exaggerated impression of wisdom, and how “esoteric knowledge” (highly relevant) similarly suggests an exaggerated education. This advantage would further increase the authority gap:

“... precious few participants in the study were wise enough to recognize the way in which the questioner’s role-conferred advantage resulted in his seemingly impressive display of knowledge.”

“Seeing someone display a bit of esoteric knowledge, we assume she knows a lot about the topic in question and perhaps is deeply knowledgeable about other domains as well.”

In addition to being difficult to process under time constraints, and when exhausted, it is argued that “profound” ideas may be appealing because, by association, they confer a sense of superiority. If a person is unable to fully grasp an idea, is convinced that someone else understands it, and feels that adopting the idea will make him “enlightened”, it is more likely that the idea will be accepted:

“Ethereal ideas are so ambiguous that they are often interpreted very differently by different individuals [...] This ambiguity makes them hard to challenge with rational debate [...] As well as being abstract and ambiguous, ethereal ideas are value-laden [...] Viewed as supremely important in themselves, they come with huge accumulated emotional baggage, and encourage a sense of superiority in believers” (Taylor, 2004, p. 27).

LGAT participants are not only urged to outsource their thinking to trainers. LGATs also use “experts” to dispel assertions of thought reform, potential harm, and even to argue that they are not, in fact, LGATs. This is what Petty and Cacioppo (1986) refer to as the *peripheral route of persuasion*. Instead of urging participants to engage with the evidence (*the central route*), LGATs like Landmark employ authority figures to support their positions. As has been demonstrated, these “endorsements” may be misleading (Singer), and their conclusions may be highly questionable (Fowler). Relying solely on the reports of paid experts, and failing to independently review the evidence, reveals a willingness to outsource one’s thinking to supposed authorities.

6.3.1.2 Social proof

“Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect”

– Mark Twain¹²⁰

In the same way that thinking may be outsourced to an individual, so it is often necessary to outsource thinking to groups of people. By doing or thinking what most people around us are doing or thinking, it is generally possible to minimise errors, and using other people as social proof is so much a part of everyday decision-making that we are often not conscious that we are doing it. Social psychologist Robert Cialdini (2007) notes the problem with this type of automatic thinking:

“As a rule, we will make fewer mistakes by acting in accord with social evidence than contrary to it. Usually, when a lot of people are doing something, it is the right thing to do. This feature of the principle of social proof is simultaneously its major strength and its major weakness. Like other weapons of influence, it provides a convenient shortcut for determining how to behave but, at the same time, makes one who uses the shortcut vulnerable to the attacks of profiteers who lie in wait along its path” (p. 116).

“... the problem comes when we begin responding to social proof in such a mindless and reflexive fashion that we can be fooled by partial or fake evidence” (p. 116).

Describing the conditions under which social proof is most likely to be used, Cialdini (2007, p. 129) highlights a feeling that is magnified during LGATs - uncertainty:

“In general, when we are unsure of ourselves, when the situation is unclear or ambiguous, when uncertainty reigns, we are most likely to look to and accept the actions of others as correct.”

Baron and Branscombe (2014) confirm this perspective, arguing that – for most people – the desire to be accurate is strong, and that this is a powerful source of conformity. Notably, they state that

¹²⁰ (Twain, 1972).

this "... is more likely to be true in situations where we are highly uncertain about what is 'correct' or 'accurate' than in situations where we have more confidence in our own ability to make such decisions (e.g., Baron, et al., 1996)" (p. 284). LGAT trainers dismantle participants' confidence in their ability to interpret what is going on around them. Participants are in a state of perpetual uncertainty, never knowing what the next exercise involves, or what the correct way to respond to it might be. Furthermore, the philosophy is ambiguous, participants cannot speak to each other to gain insight, individuals are exhausted, and the only cues for behaviour are those provided by other participants. Since analysing is both discouraged and restricted in these uncertain conditions, it is likely that automatic thinking such as social proof will be employed to behave and think in the "correct" way. Cialdini (2007, p. 129) notes the irony of this approach in a statement which applies perfectly to LGATs:

"In the process of examining the reactions of other people to resolve our uncertainty, however, we are likely to overlook a subtle but important fact. Those people are probably examining the social evidence too. Especially in an ambiguous situation, the tendency for everyone to be looking to see what everyone else is doing can lead to a fascinating phenomenon called 'pluralistic ignorance'."

Baron and Branscombe (2014) provide a breakdown of social proof, dividing it into *informational social influence* and *normative social influence*. While informational social influence refers to using social proof to work out what the *correct* behaviour or thinking might be, normative social influence describes the way that social proof is used to work out what the *accepted* behaviour or thinking might be. Informational social influence describes how an individual internally accepts observed thinking or behaviour as correct, while normative social influence describes pressure to conform that does not, directly, result in internal acceptance. Normative social influence, therefore, involves conforming to meet the expectations of others, so that we will feel accepted and liked or, perhaps more relevantly, not feel rejected or disliked:

"Indeed, we all know a bit of lay psychology. We know about the discomfort people feel when their opinions and tastes deviate from the norms of the group" (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, pp. 6-7).

The pressure to conform in an LGAT is immense, and it is not only applied by the trainer. When a critical mass of participants has bought into what the leader is saying, anyone who challenges the trainer becomes seen as a threat to the possibility of transformation. Participants who have accepted jargon, such as "rackets" or "grungies", or internalised the idea that analysing is bad, "recognise" participants who will not "give up their rackets" or who are "coming from their heads". A number of commentators reflect on the social pressure within LGATs:

"However, as participant-observers, we did share some of the group's subjective experiences, particularly the extraordinary pressure to conform" (Haaken & Adams, 1983, p. 280).

“... but I’m troubled by something else: the effect the group has had on me. I hadn’t even known there *was* a group until, cell phone still in pocket, I realized I wasn’t part of it. I begin to sense the congealing, becoming monolithic. Suddenly there is a magnetic core, and those not yet attached to it are being sucked in” (O'Brien, 2012).

“And this desire to conform is something I felt they played on at Landmark, too. Deeply rooted in our most basic psychology, human beings are pack animals after all. Positioning yourself as an outsider is also something akin to suicide on a primal level” (Warrington, 2015).

Importantly, with regards to normative social influence and LGATs, it has been shown that by simply changing the behaviour of a person, one can elicit a change in the thinking of that person. What may begin as reluctant compliance, over time, becomes a strong unconscious drive to align one’s thinking and beliefs with one’s behaviour. We do not like to think that we have acted in opposition to our own principles or desires – when we are unable to change what we have done, one way to ensure consistency is to rationalise our behaviour, or to simply alter our thinking about that behaviour.

6.3.2 Commitment and consistency

“Indeed, one of the most consistent and remarkable findings in the behavioral science literature over the past century is that people’s behavior is often more predictive of their attitudes than their attitudes are of their behavior” (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 108).

In experiments extending back for decades, social psychologists have demonstrated that, by getting people to behave in a particular way, it is possible to shape their future thinking and behaviour. Cialdini (2007) refers to this phenomenon as *commitment and consistency*, which he describes as:

“... our nearly obsessive desire to be (and to appear) consistent with what we have already done. Once we have made a choice or taken a stand, we will encounter personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently with our commitment. Those pressures will cause us to respond in ways that justify our earlier decision” (p. 56).

Within the context of LGATs, this phenomenon is highly relevant. Behaviour is carefully controlled, and participants are required to commit to a set of rules which govern their behaviour during the training. They are also – when tired and arguably euphoric – pressured to commit publicly to taking further courses, and to recruit family and friends. Compliance professionals understand that, by requiring certain behaviour and extracting commitments – particularly *public* commitments – individuals will be likely to follow through. After following through with certain behaviours participants will likely feel the need to think in a way that is consistent with their behaviour:

“Once a stand had been taken, the need for consistency pressured these people to bring what they felt and believed in line with what they had already done. They simply convinced themselves that they had made the right choice and, no doubt, felt better about it” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 58).

Commenting on the power of this form of influence, Cialdini (2007) continues:

“But is this tendency to be consistent really strong enough to compel us to do what we ordinarily would not want to do? There is no question about it. The drive to be (and look) consistent constitutes a highly potent weapon of social influence, often causing us to act in ways that are clearly contrary to our best interests” (p. 59).

Three aspects of consistency and commitment are worth considering in the context of LGAT processes: public vs. private commitment, the cost of commitment, and the choice in making the commitment. While commitment in the context of *commitment and consistency* may simply refer to internally agreeing to an argument or behaving in a way that implicitly indicates that you have made a commitment, the effect of this phenomenon can be magnified by making the commitment more explicit. This can be achieved by requiring a *public* commitment.

6.3.2.1 Public vs. private commitment

“The prisoner experience in Korea showed the Chinese to be quite aware of an important psychological principle: Public commitments tend to be lasting commitments” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 81).

LGAT participants must commit publically to the rules of the training, and – under vulnerable conditions – to bringing others to the graduation events:

“It takes more than an hour to go through the rules. At the end, everyone who agrees must stand. Those who don’t must leave. A handful of people file out” (Fisher M. , 1987).

“Participants, having heard the argument drone in their ears for 9 hours in a period of 72, began to cheer and smile as they raised their hands to say they too had the courage to stand for the Forum” (Badt, 2011).

While private commitment results in consistency to a certain degree, public commitment is more effective. This principle has been demonstrated in numerous experiments, including – famously – one by social psychologists Morton Deutch and Harold Gerard (Cialdini, 2007). Participants in this experiment were required to estimate the lengths of lines, and then divided into three groups:

- Group 1 merely kept the estimate in their heads, never writing it down (private commitment).
- Group 2 wrote their estimates on a *Magic Writing Pad*, and then erased them before showing them to anyone (modified private commitment).

- Group 3 had to write their estimates down, sign their names to the estimates, and give these signed sheets to the experimenter (public commitment).

Participants were then given information suggesting their estimates might be wrong, and were given the chance to revise these estimates. Cialdini (2007, p. 83) outlines the findings:

“The results were quite clear. The students who had never written down their first choices were the least loyal to those choices. When new evidence was presented that questioned the wisdom of decisions that had never left their heads, these students were the most influenced by the new information to change what they had viewed as the ‘correct’ decision. Compared to these uncommitted students, those who had merely written down their decisions for a moment on a Magic Pad were significantly less willing to change their minds when given the chance. Even though they had committed themselves under the most anonymous of circumstances, the act of writing down their first judgments caused them to resist the influence of contradictory new data and to remain consistent with the preliminary choices. But Deutsch and Gerard had found that, by far, it was the students who publicly recorded their initial positions who most resolutely refused to shift from these positions later. Public commitment had hardened them into the most stubborn of all.”

The importance of behaving consistently with one’s commitment is amplified by the emphasis on integrity during LGATs. Having integrity is a good thing to aspire to, but in emphasising it LGATs ensure that, by eliciting commitments, they will be able to use those commitments on those who have made them. Citizen Skeptic (2014) notes the way that integrity is emphasised in the Landmark Forum:

“The Forum also promotes the notion of ‘integrity,’ which means honoring your word and keeping whatever commitment you’ve made to somebody else” (Citizen Skeptic, 2014).

Cialdini (2007) explains that, by getting individuals to associate themselves with a particular trait (e.g. integrity), it is more likely that they will behave in accordance with that trait:

“... once you’ve got a man’s self-image where you want it, he should comply *naturally* with a whole range of your requests that are consistent with this view of himself” (p. 74).

After noting the unconscious nature of this generally virtuous tendency, Cialdini (2007) argues that compliance professionals are able to take advantage of those who act intuitively:

“For the exploiters, whose interests will be served by an unthinking, mechanical reaction to their requests, our tendency for automatic consistency is a gold mine. So clever are they at arranging to have us play our consistency tapes when it profits them that we seldom realize we have been taken. In fine jujitsu fashion, they structure their interactions with us so that our *own* need to be consistent will lead directly to their benefit” (p. 64).

6.3.2.2 The cost of commitment

The most overt public stance in an LGAT occurs when participants recruit family, friends, and colleagues. Involving people that you care about is the ultimate public commitment, and one that is difficult to undo. The degree to which a person endures hardship, or the degree to which being wrong about an experience will result in hardship, is correlated with the degree to which a person will overvalue that experience. The more a person commits to an experience, in terms of time, money, his reputation, or the wellbeing of family, friends, and colleagues, the less likely that person will be to consider evidence which challenges the validity of that experience. Quoting one member of the flying saucer cult described at the start of this thesis, Cialdini (2007) argues that one's level of commitment is commensurate with one's reluctance to consider disconfirming information. Four hours after the flying saucer failed to arrive, Dr Armstrong – a physician on the staff of a college student health service and member of the cult – explained why he *had to* believe:

“I've had to go a long way. I've given up just about everything. I've cut every tie. I've burned every bridge. I've turned my back on the world. I can't afford to doubt. I have to believe. And there isn't any other truth” (p. 127).

Gilovich and Ross (2016) and Cialdini (2007) similarly explain that hardship often results in individuals exaggerating the value of an experience, and making greater changes to their attitudes:

“People who endure hardship for a cause, whether a noble or ignoble one, value it more – and the greater the hardship, the greater the value attached to the cause” (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 113).

“And the evidence is clear that the more effort that goes into a commitment, the greater is its ability to influence the attitudes of the person who made it” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 85).

In 1959 social psychologists, Elliot Aronson and Judson Mills, tested the theory that if a person endures embarrassment or pain to attain something, they will value that thing more than if no embarrassment or pain was endured. The first experiment related to embarrassment and entry to a group that was instructed to be as “worthless and uninteresting” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 90) as possible, while the second experiment related to enduring physical pain. Referring to the results, Cialdini states:

“Different coeds, who went through a much milder initiation ceremony or went through no initiation at all, were decidedly less positive about the ‘worthless’ new group they had joined. Additional research showed the same results when coeds were required to endure pain rather than embarrassment to get into a group. The more electric shock a woman received as part of the initiation ceremony, the more she later persuaded herself that her new group and its activities were interesting, intelligent, and desirable” (p. 90).

The principle which drives this automatic thinking is that people do not want to believe that they have wasted their time or endured something challenging for no reason. LGATs require participants to endure hardship, they are time-consuming, they cost money and – if family and friends are recruited – it is not just your own hardship, time, and money at stake. The heavy emphasis on graduates recruiting may, therefore, be seen as serving at least two distinct purposes. The first is clear: it brings trusting¹²¹ participants to the LGAT (which does not have to commit funds to marketing). The second, subtler, purpose is that it is likely to cause participants, who have publicly endorsed the LGAT, to place greater value on the training and its principles (and make them less likely to review these opinions):

“Once people have acted in a way that seems consistent with a particular belief, they are inclined to endorse that belief” (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 109).

6.3.2.3 The choice in making the commitment

LGATs spend a significant amount of time convincing participants that they are the masters of their own destinies – that they are autonomous and free to think for themselves – and this, of course, is an intuitively appealing message. As with the emphasis on integrity, the emphasis on free choice brings with it the potential for manipulation, and by convincing participants that every decision they make while in the LGAT is independent (and was not coerced, or subtly influenced, in any way), participants become even more likely to behave in line with their commitments. The irony is that, by convincing participants that they made every one of their decisions independently during the training, LGATs are able to get participants to take further trainings and recruit new participants, without participants understanding the psychological factors which made this behaviour more likely:

“Social scientists have determined that we accept inner responsibility for a behavior when we think we have chosen to perform it in the absence of strong outside pressures” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 93).

Finkelstein, et al. (1982) noted the emphasis on choice during est:

“Trainees are repeatedly reminded, for example, that they have chosen to take est training. When trainees attribute their decision, as they inevitably will, to recommendations, testimonials, or personal pressures to which they have been exposed, they are told that it is ultimately they who have chosen to heed the advice, believe the testimony, or yield to the pressure which they would prefer to see as the determinant of their decision. Because they have freely chosen to seek est training, it follows that the trainees should feel bound by the agreements they have made as part of that training” (pp. 519-520).

¹²¹ Family members, friends and colleagues are more likely to doubt their own perceptions of the training if it has been recommended by someone that they trust.

Rhinehart (2010) reveals how, in practice, est trainers convince participants of their autonomy:

“The first way you’ll try to mess it up is to pretend you’re here because your husband wants you to be here, or your wife, or your uncle Henry is paying for it, or the boss told you to take it, or a magazine article said it would be good for your asthma. That’s asshole thinking. If you stay in this training I want you to get that *you’re here because you choose to be here*. Right here, right now, I want you to *choose* to be here in the training or to get out” (pp. 11-12).

When one participant (Jack) explains that he is there because of a recommendation, he is engaged with until he accepts that he has *chosen* to be at the training (Rhinehart, 2010):

“I’m here because several people I respect, one of whom is a psychotherapist, recommended *est*, and their recommendation is good enough for me. What’s wrong with that?”

“There’s nothing wrong with that,” says the trainer. “Do you choose now on your own to stay in the training?”

“Well, frankly, from what I’ve heard so far, *I*, well, might not, but no matter how stupid it seems up to now, since *they* recommended it...”

“YOU’RE AN ASSHOLE, JACK. That kind of thinking leaves the responsibility squarely in the lap of your friends. We want YOU to take charge of your life.”

“I am in charge.”

“THEN QUIT LETTING YOUR FRIENDS RUN IT. Do you choose, here and now, to stay in this room and take the training?”

“Sure, I just said...,” begins Jack.

“And you choose to stay because YOU... CHOOSE... TO STAY. Do you get that? Not because Tom, Dick, and Harry recommended that you stay, but because YOU CHOOSE to stay. Do you get that?”

Jack is briefly silent and then replies:

“Yeah. Well, yeah, I guess I understand. Yeah, okay... I’m staying because I’ve decided to stay” (p. 12).

LGAT trainers also frequently speak about choice as if the only thing which might influence behaviour is a physical threat. Graduates adopt a similar mind-set, claiming that participants are free to make choices - that “no one puts a gun to your head”. It is, however, disingenuous to convince participants that they are in control, while knowingly employing established techniques of psychological persuasion, and it is precisely the ability of LGAT leaders to convince participants that they are invulnerable to influence which makes participants vulnerable. As Cialdini (2007) explains regarding weapons of influence:

“It’s not that the weapons, like a set of heavy clubs, provide a conspicuous arsenal to be used by one person to bludgeon another into submission. The process is much more sophisticated and subtle” (p. 11).

Cialdini (2007) explains that the process of persuasion is far more effective when those targeted are not actively resisting their indoctrination. Threats of violence are likely to reveal that the influencer has less than noble motives, while psychological techniques are, in contrast, relatively inconspicuous:

“The exploiters can commission the power of these weapons for use against their targets while exerting little personal force. This last feature of the process allows the exploiters an enormous additional benefit – the ability to manipulate without the appearance of manipulation. Even the victims themselves tend to see their compliance as determined by the action of natural forces rather than by the designs of the person who profits from that compliance¹²²” (p. 11).

6.3.3 One-sided information

It has been demonstrated that LGAT leaders maintain strict control over the information allowed in the training (“milieu control”), deciding who speaks, expertly dismantling challenges to the LGAT philosophy, and subtly (and not so subtly) humiliating participants who persevere in questioning the training. It has also been asserted that the conditions of the training are likely to maximise intuitive (System 1) thinking. Given these assertions, it is pertinent that, in the absence of complete information, System 1 makes sense of whatever limited information is available (Kahneman, 2012).

In a study, conducted by Kahneman’s long-time colleague Amos Tversky and two of his graduate students at Stanford University, groups of people were given a short, written explanation of an incident involving a union field representative, then exposed either to a presentation by the lawyers defending the individual or the lawyers prosecuting him; another group listened to the arguments made by both the defence and the prosecution (Kahneman, 2012). Not only were the groups who only heard one side of the story more likely to believe the side that they heard, but they were also more confident in their perspectives than individuals who had heard both sides of the story. In this study, the groups who heard only one perspective were informed that they were only hearing one perspective, yet their opinions were both partial and quite certain:

“When information is scarce, which is a common occurrence, System 1 operates as a machine for jumping to conclusions” (Kahneman, 2012, p. 85).

“The confidence that individuals have in their beliefs depends mostly on the quality of the story they can tell about what they can see, even if they see little. We often fail to allow for the possibility

¹²² This is precisely what Lifton (1961) refers to as “Mystical Manipulation”.

that evidence that should be critical to our judgement is missing – what we see is all there is” (Kahneman, 2012, p. 87).

The implication of this finding is that if opinions which challenge a given message are effectively censored, then it is far more likely that the message will be accepted. If then organisations suppress perspectives which challenge their processes/doctrine, or “verbally mash” anyone who tries to offer a different perspective during a training, it would be more likely – if they were effective in censoring these opposing views – that their processes/doctrine would be viewed in a positive light by those who had not been allowed to consider an alternative perspective.

6.3.4 The experiencing vs. the remembering self

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel” – Maya Angelou¹²³

Another of Kahneman’s experiments reveals that the way that an event is experienced is not necessarily the way that it will be remembered. If, for example, you go out for a great meal with your significant other and you are mugged on your way home it is likely that you will not remember the meal with fondness. Kahneman (2012) uses an experiment, in which participants endured mild “torture”, to illustrate that the opposite also holds true – a painful experience that transitions into a relatively pain-free experience is remembered as being less painful than an experience which ends at the peak of that discomfort. During the experiment participants were asked to endure three trials:

1. A short episode, which involved submerging one of their hands in 14° Celsius water for 60 seconds.
2. (Seven minutes later) A long episode, which involved submerging their other hand in 14° Celsius water for 60 seconds, after which time warm water was run so that the temperature rose by approximately 1° Celsius. In this trial participants had to keep their hand submerged for 90 seconds in total.

Clearly the long episode was a less pleasant experience, as it involved the entire short episode, as well as an additional 30 seconds of slightly less painful cold water but, when asked which episode they would choose to repeat for a third trial, 80% of the participants chose (2): the long episode. Kahneman (2012, p. 385) explains that our memories tend to relate to the most intense element of an experience and the feeling at the end of the experience:

¹²³ (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 2).

“But our memory, a function of System 1, has evolved to represent the most intense moment of an episode of pain or pleasure (the peak) and the feelings when the episode was at its end.”

Social psychologists Thomas Gilovich and Lee Ross restate this observation in the following way:

“What we recall about any experience – what lives on and determines our long-term sense of enjoyment or pain – is generally governed by what it was like at its most extreme moment and what it was like at the end” (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 175).

Diana Odasso (2011) blogs about her Landmark Forum experience, breaking her account into three sections – “Day 1: I Am A Jerk”; “Day 2: I Am Still A Jerk; and “Day 3: I Am An Even Bigger Jerk”, but after going through the (euphoric) graduation, ends off by saying, “For all the negative criticisms of Landmark, I admit I had an overwhelmingly positive experience”. This tendency to remember how one feels at the end of an experience, and the ability of a positive experience to replace one’s recall of unpleasant conditions, is highly relevant to LGATs. One of the rules enforced by LGATs is that notes cannot be taken and, as has been explained, stress and sleep disruption interfere with memory. As a result, exhausted participants will not have a clear record of what took place over the previous three to five days, and – according to Kahneman (2012) – they are likely to remember the experience based on how they felt at the end. LGATs are stressful, confrontational, and frequently confusing, but they trigger powerful feelings of confidence, wellbeing, and euphoria on the final day, and in the days which follow. It is, therefore, likely that many graduates will not retain an accurate memory of the stresses involved in the training, and that their memories will be significantly distorted by the (positive) post-training “experience”. The implications for the informed consent of those recruited by graduates (who are instructed to reveal only how they feel) are self-evident.

6.3.5 Associative coherence (and risk assessment)

An understanding of both the risks and rewards of any experience is necessary for informed consent to occur. A person may be willing to accept a greater degree of risk if the potential reward is greater, and if the risks are small enough the reward need not be as compelling. The degree to which LGATs overstate (or claim without evidence) the likelihood, magnitude, and enduring nature of their benefits has been discussed, as has the problem with using graduates who are arguably in a short-term state of euphoria to testify to the lasting nature of their transformations. Graduates, who are the primary source of information for potential recruits, may therefore overstate the *rewards* of the training. An additional concern with informed consent, based on a transient positive state, is that the *risks* of the experience are likely to be understated by graduates. Kahneman (2012) explains that when a person believes strongly in the value of a technology it is likely that he will underestimate its risks:

“The striking finding was that people who received a message extolling the benefits of a technology also changed their beliefs about its risks. Although they received no relevant evidence, the technology they now liked more than before was also perceived as less risky” (p. 140).

Because LGATs insist that participants do not reveal what takes place in the training, and because a great deal of LGAT recruitment is done by graduates in a state of “transformation”, the primary indication of participation risk is provided by elated graduates who are likely to understate this risk. Horacio Silva of the New York Times provides just one example of how the stressful nature of the Forum was understated by an acquaintance, who – presumably – believed that participating in the Forum was as innocuous as trying a new restaurant:

“In the last few months, several of my style brethren have tried to recruit me, including one public-relations person who, sensing my irritation, told me; ‘Why are you so upset? It’s no different than recommending a good restaurant’” (Silva, 2005).

6.3.6 Repetition

“A reliable way to make people believe in falsehoods is frequent repetition, because familiarity is not easily distinguished from truth. Authoritarian institutions and marketers have always known this fact” (Kahneman, 2012, p. 62).

As the above quote indicates, the repetition of ideas – without additional evidence – can make those ideas seem more believable. LGAT trainers make extensive use of repetition, something that I noted while participating in a training (officially) unrelated to est, Lifespring, or Landmark:

“He also kept repeating everything two or three times, speaking very precisely and very slowly – emphasising each word in an almost rhythmic manner” (Field Notes, 2010, 84-86).

Rhinehart (2010) explains that repetition was a significant component of est’s “technology”:

“Moreover, the training itself involves a lot of repetition; of the notions of est, of the various meditative like processes, and of the kinds of sharing of the trainees. Such repetition is essential for the success of the training...” (p. xiii).

“Notions are hammered in over and over, objections are voiced over and over, and we trainees drift into unconsciousness and then out again” (p. 24).

Various commentators make similar observations about Landmark:

“There is repetitious doublespeak, catchy phrases, moving testimonials and promises of great change in your life” (Black, 1997).

“... the Forum drives its points home with loaded language, relentless repetition, and a carefully constructed environment” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

“Roger raises weighty questions and makes lots of challenging literary references, but every important point is said twice (everything important is said twice)” (Alford, 2010).

It has been shown how LGATs maximise our tendency to outsource thinking to authority figures and the group, use commitments to increase the odds of compliance, control communication so that unconscious associations are formed, and limit access to alternative perspectives during the training. It has also been shown how one’s memory of the training can be distorted, how the post-training euphoria may impact informed consent, and how repetition is used to subtly increase believability. The final lever of influence recruits the (laudable) tendency to repay debts and return favours.

6.3.7 Reciprocation

“The impressive aspect of the rule for reciprocation and the sense of obligation that goes with it is its pervasiveness in human culture. It is so widespread that after intensive study, sociologists such as Alvin Gouldner can report that there is no human society that does not subscribe to the rule” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 18).

It was asserted earlier that using graduates to recruit family, friends, and colleagues served at least two distinct purposes: it brings trusting participants into the training at no marketing cost to the LGAT, and it adds to the commitment of the graduates, making it less likely that they will question the value of the LGAT when the post-course euphoria has faded. Based on the weapons of influence described by Cialdini, the use of graduates to recruit others also increases the likelihood of those graduates recruiting others (which will increase the likelihood of those graduates recruiting others...). Cialdini (2007, pp. 17-18) states that, according to the reciprocity rule, “... we are *obligated* to the future repayment of favors, gifts, invitations, and the like”, explaining that “With such clearly adaptive consequences for the culture, it is not surprising that the rule for reciprocation is so deeply implanted in us by the process of socialization we all undergo” (pp. 18-19). Describing how society views those who do not reciprocate, and how this impacts behaviour, Cialdini states, “Because there is a general distaste for those who take and make no effort to give in return, we often go to great lengths to avoid being considered one of their number. It is to those lengths that we will often be taken and, in the process, be ‘taken’ by individuals who stand to gain from our indebtedness” (p. 20).

LGATs like Landmark are plausibly able to take advantage of this element of persuasion. By convincing participants that someone was brave enough to invite them to the Forum, and allow them to have this life-changing experience, LGATs are able to create a sense of obligation in participants to repay this favour by recruiting others (and suggest a sense of selfishness in those who will not). It may be

argued by trainers that others had the courage to “stand for the Forum”, and that participants should likewise be willing to “forward the action”. Like some of the other weapons of persuasion, reciprocation appeals to the morality of participants - its effectiveness as a tool for manipulation is proportional to the conscience of the person it is used on. Charlotte Faltermayer of Time Magazine reveals how a sense of obligation is generated by Landmark trainers:

“The Forum, she said, is a game called transformation. Like every other game, it calls for sportsmanship. One should be ‘coachable,’ or open-minded about the Forum’s concepts, and committed to ‘forwarding the action’” (Faltermayer, 2001).

The response by LGATs to assertions of powerful influence techniques, or suggestions of thought reform, is frequently expressed using the black and white thinking described by Lifton (1961) as characteristic of thought reform environments. LGATs and their proponents may argue that “everything is brainwashing”, or that “all marketers employ classical conditioning”, but there is a spectrum of influence and there arguably exists a point at which influence moves from ethical to unethical. Anyone who believes that they look exclusively at the evidence, and cannot be influenced by the psychological factors described, is ignoring the wealth of evidence which indicates otherwise, and to believe that sales-based organisations, which were popularised by a resourceful and skilled salesman, would not employ a multitude of accessible persuasion techniques¹²⁴ suggests an unwillingness to consider uncomfortable possibilities. The question which must be asked is whether the processes used by LGATs to subdue analytical thinking, and take advantage of distorted emotion, cognitive biases, associative learning, and intuition, are the same as those used by Pepsi when they place Beyoncé in an advertisement with their product, or whether – when applied over a matter of days, after participants have been physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted, and convinced to place uncritical trust in their intuition – they are more extreme and potentially unethical.

This brings the section on tertiary research questions to an end, and also concludes the data analysis portion of the thesis. Having established that most “normal” individuals will experience hypomania/mania if exposed to established bipolar triggers, provided a biological explanation for why this might take place (and revealed why commonly noted negative LGAT reactions are likely to be observed), and explained – by referring to established social psychology – how LGATs employ Mystical Manipulation through their processes, the final major section discusses the implications of these findings.

¹²⁴ Many of which were discovered, and published, at the precise time that Erhard was working as a salesman (“compliance professional”). This includes Lifton’s (1961) book, *Thought reform and the psychology of totalism*.

Chapter 7: DISCUSSION

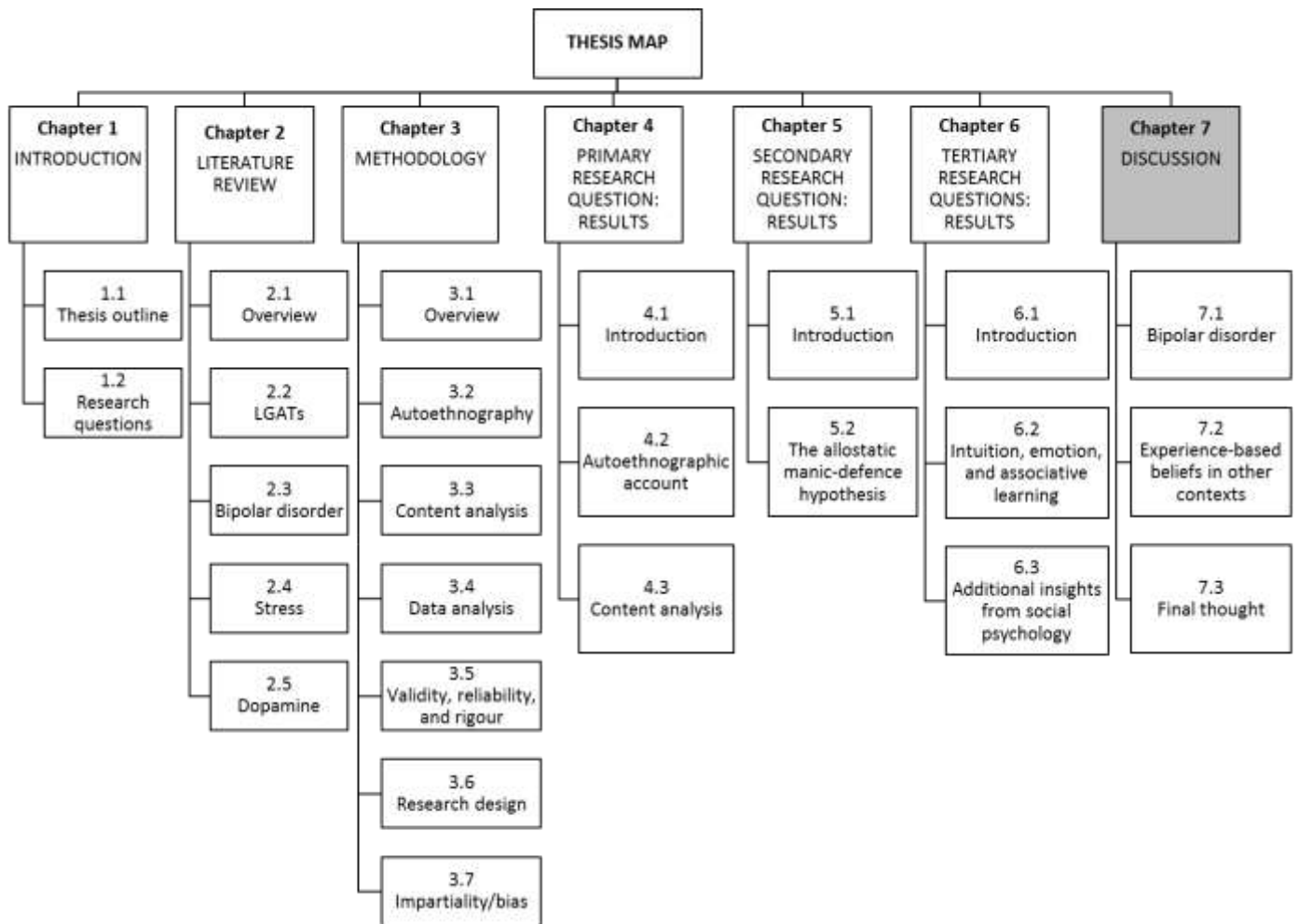


Figure 39: THESIS MAP_DISCUSSION

As illustrated by Figure 39, the final chapter of this thesis is the discussion. Firstly, the implications of findings to bipolar disorder will be discussed, after which the relevance of experience-based beliefs in contexts other than LGATs will be considered.

7.1 Bipolar disorder

“Future research into the pathophysiological mechanisms of bipolar disorder and the development of new treatments for bipolar disorder should focus on the dopaminergic system” (Cousins, et al., 2009, p. 787).

The core finding of this research is the three key environmental triggers for hypomania/mania are conspicuously present in LGATs, and that most (healthy) LGAT graduates experience a transient post-training “experience” which closely resembles hypomania/mania. Each of these triggers has been shown to affect mesolimbic dopamine and – given the established anticipatory nature of the stress response, and in line with the dopamine hypothesis of bipolar disorder – a plausible mechanism for the LGAT “experience” has been put forward (the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis*). In addition to explaining the positive post-training “experience”, the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* also potentially explains the negative effects of the trainings, as reported by participants, their families and friends, and a number of academics. Impulsive behaviour, apparent addiction to the trainings in some, depression, mania, and psychosis are all plausibly related to elevated, or diminished, mesolimbic dopamine levels and, since LGATs are unable to provide a logical and coherent explanation for the post-training “miracle”, it is reasonable to consider an evidence-based alternative.

The core findings potentially provide a number of useful insights into bipolar disorder. If LGATs have evolved to preserve the elements which are most likely to result in a post-training “experience” (hypomania), then it might be assumed that their conditions are precisely what individuals who are vulnerable to hypomania/mania should avoid. Similarly, if hypomania/mania is thought of as the exaggerated activation of a mechanism which allows a person to endure a challenge (stress) in order to achieve a goal, then the conditions which are most likely to activate this mechanism may be reasonably hypothesised. It may, therefore, be possible to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the triggers for bipolar disorder by carefully studying the LGAT processes and training environment. As opposed to using the broad category “stress” as a major trigger for hypomania/mania, it might be possible to better understand:

1. The types of stress which are most likely to trigger hypomania/mania.
2. The relevance of periods of respite between stressors.
3. The duration of stress necessary to elicit hypomania/mania.
4. The importance of the stress occurring in the context of control.
5. The importance of an anticipation of pleasure after enduring the stress.
6. The relevance of a sudden withdrawal of stress (“goal-attainment”).

LGATs elicit uncertainty, humiliation, apprehension, fear, exhaustion, discomfort, sleep disruption, a sense of being controlled, guilt, and a sense of worthlessness in participants. While the nature of the stress induced may reveal more about the types of stress that can be rationalised by LGATs than about the types of stress that are most likely to elicit hypomania/mania, it may also expose the types of stressors that are most likely to cause hypomania/mania. If it is assumed that a manic-defence helps a person to feel more able to cope with a challenging environment (“you can deal with this”) and helps a person to moderate feelings of inadequacy (“you have value”), then psychotherapeutic interventions which address these specific stressful feelings in clients can become more targeted, and individuals can be made aware of the particular situations which are likely to activate this defence.

The fact that LGATs fluctuate between periods of tension and more brief periods of relaxation is also noteworthy. Again, this makes sense from a manic-defence perspective. If the manic-defence is anticipatory and each time a person starts to feel relaxed a new stressor appears, this is likely to condition that person into a state of allostatic hypervigilance. The overall duration of the stressor is also worth noting, as it appears that it does not take weeks or months of stress to generate hypomania/mania in most individuals. Assuming the LGAT experience is mediated by elevated dopamine levels, and that chronic stress depletes dopamine levels (Sapolsky, 2004), there is an optimal duration of stress for elevating mood, as opposed to eliciting depression.

Sapolsky (2004) noted that dopamine levels were elevated when stress occurred in the context of control (e.g. a roller coaster). If dopamine is thought of as a substance which allows a person to endure a transient challenging situation, this too makes sense. If dopamine tells a person “you can handle this” then it is logical that it would be produced during a transient challenge, but that there would be no point in producing it when survival is not possible. LGATs are extraordinarily challenging, but they are transitory, participants believe that the process is safe, and they generally feel that, if they just “keep their soles in the room”, they will survive.

The expected reward for enduring stress may also play an important role in generating hypomania/mania. In the case of LGATs there is an explicit anticipation of pleasure (“transformation”/“breakthrough”) towards which participants are working. Since dopamine is related to an anticipation of pleasure (Sapolsky, 2004), the goal towards which individuals are striving appears to play an important role in eliciting hypomania/mania. A better understanding of dopamine’s role in goal-attainment will, therefore, allow for coping strategies when dealing with goal-attainment. For example, this thesis has involved stress, uncertainty, and sleep disruption, but may result in a PhD (goal-attainment). Knowing that this is likely to trigger hypomania/mania allows me to consciously activate System 2 and to be particularly vigilant about my behaviour if positive feedback is received.

The structure of the stress also appears significant. If hypomania/mania is thought of as an allostatic defence, and some individuals display allostatic hypervigilance, then sudden stress removal, or “goal-attainment” will result in elevated mesolimbic dopamine when the external stressors to counter that dopamine are not present. If the abruptness of a switch from stress to goal-attainment is important then strategies could mitigate the risks of goal-attainment. In terms of this risk, a concept from finance – “diversification” – is worth considering. Risk management in finance is achieved by investing in a variety of stocks, so if one spikes or crashes, it is unlikely that the others (if they are not highly correlated) will spike/fall to the same degree. The self-worth equivalent would be learning not to tie one’s sense of self-worth to a single measure. Learning to base one’s self-worth (“success”) on a number of factors that are compelling, but more easily controlled, would facilitate greater stability.

In addition to allowing insights into the nature of hypomania/mania-relevant stress, the way that LGATs limit access to certain stress-mitigating defences also provides insight into the ways that hypomania/mania might be avoided. If hypomania/mania is considered an exaggeration of one element of an allostatic defence (mesolimbic dopamine), and if dopamine plays a greater role in the allostatic defence when other defences are immobilised, then individuals can be taught how to better utilise the alternative (safer) defences in order to minimise the impact of dopamine. A greater understanding of other stress-mitigating measures, and how clients can practically incorporate these measures, can be used to guide optimal preventative behaviour.

LGATs also demonstrate that most “normal” individuals can, under the right conditions, experience hypomania/mania. Since more than 4 million people have taken part in LGATs and the majority experience hypomania-like symptoms, one must ask why – as far as the current information reveals it – few of these participants develop lifelong mood disorders. Unlike major depression, bipolar disorder is generally treated as a chronic illness – Goodwin and Jamison (2007) state that 81% of patients relapse over a period of about four years if not correctly medicated, and a diagnosis necessitates significant changes to lifestyle, lifelong medication (which may have unpleasant side effects), and living with a stigma that would potentially ruin the life of a “normal” person¹²⁵. If hypomania/mania can be a once-off event in a sub-group of individuals, this casts doubt over a diagnostic process which condemns many to a lifetime of potentially unnecessary treatment. While the risks of suicide and other harm to unmedicated manic depressives may be considerable (Baldessarini, Tondo, & Hennen, 2003; Cipriani, Hawton, Stockton, & Geddes, 2013), the risks of over-diagnosis are, perhaps, not always fully appreciated by those who do not have to live with the consequences.

¹²⁵ By this I mean that, if an otherwise healthy person had to deal with the side effects of medication, the necessary changes to lifestyle, and the stigma of the illness (in potential relationships, professionally, and at social gatherings), that healthy person may find life very challenging.

A final insight from this research is that, according to the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis*, hypomania/mania is an exaggeration of a defence that every person employs to some degree. Demonstrating that hypomania/mania occurs in most people under abnormal circumstances narrows the gap between the “sick” and the “well”, and this is useful in addressing stigma. There is a tendency to underestimate situational factors when assessing the behaviour of others (Branscombe & Baron, 2017; Gilovich & Ross, 2016) - while biological vulnerabilities are undoubtedly crucial, LGATs may help to reveal the importance of the environment in the expression of hypomanic/manic symptoms.

7.2 Experience-based beliefs in other contexts

“The universe is full of magical things patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper”

– *Eden Phillpotts, 1918*

While it might be argued that LGATs have created the optimal process by which to minimise critical thinking and maximise an “experience”, they are not the first, nor the most prevalent, employers of these tactics. Although it is not feasible to provide an exhaustive review of all of the other organisations which, perhaps, use a similar “technology”, it is worth considering two groups – one highly controversial, and one less so – which appear to employ similar recruitment techniques.

7.2.1 The Unification Church (“The Moonies”)

Without embarking on an extensive study of the recruitment processes used by all organisations labelled cults (or “New Religious Movements”), it is useful to review one such group to discern if the four-step process of persuasion might be applicable to organisations other than LGATs. The Unification Church (“The Moonies”) is appropriate for evaluation, not only because it is well-known, but also because former senior member, Steven Hassan, provides a relatively detailed account of the recruitment process he underwent. Describing the Unification Church, Hassan (1988) says:

“... the most important feature of it is the church’s position that Sun Myung Moon is the new Messiah and that it is his mission to establish a new ‘kingdom’ on Earth” (pp. 8-9).

In her book, *Cults in Our Midst*, Dr Margaret Singer describes the Unification Church as a cult, and says the following about the group:

“Many Americans have been painfully aware of the followers of the Korean charismatic cult leader the Reverend Sun Myung Moon. For many years, Moon’s followers, often known as ‘Moonies,’ could be found running small businesses and cozy little restaurants, developing real estate, and occupying group homes, often in university towns where college students could be easily recruited with promises of personal salvation through service to Moon’s self-proclaimed identity as the new Messiah, sent by God to complete the failed mission by Jesus Christ” (Singer, 2003, pp. 345-346).

There are notable similarities between the recruitment experience described by Hassan (1988) and the description of LGAT processes. According to Hassan's account, he endured an intense three-day workshop, was overloaded with information, was unable to ask questions, was deprived of sleep, was made to focus on guilt, and was raised to an emotional high on the third day.

Hassan describes having problems sleeping over the weekend, stating that he was physically and emotionally exhausted, yet slept very little. The first night is described below:

"That night we were escorted to bunk beds above a converted garage, and the men and women were put in separate rooms. As it turned out, getting a good night's sleep was nearly impossible [...] The other newcomers and I spent a wakeful night" (Hassan, 1988, p. 15).

The second night, as described by Hassan (1988), was also not conducive to sleep:

"I had another restless night but was so exhausted emotionally and physically that I did manage to get a few hours' sleep" (p. 16).

Not only was there minimal sleep, but the environment was described as being "crazy" and "intense":

"Day two, Sunday, began in exactly the same way. But now we had all been in this crazy, intense environment for 36 hours, which felt more like a week" (Hassan, 1988, p. 16).

Much like in an LGAT, there appeared to be a heavy inculcation of guilt during his weekend:

"On and on he went, praying that all of mankind would stop living such selfish materialistic lives and return to Him" (Hassan, 1988, p. 17).

During this weekend Hassan repeatedly tried to question what was going on, but – as occurs during LGATs – communication was carefully controlled:

"Whenever I started to object, however, I was told to save my questions until after the lecture" (Hassan, 1988, p. 16).

Like many LGAT participants, Hassan was convinced that he was questioning too much and should be more "open-minded":

"Although the workshop was almost identical in content to the one I had taken the previous week, I felt that I needed to listen this time with an open mind and take notes. 'Last weekend I was too cynical,' I thought" (Hassan, 1988, p. 19).

There also appeared to be an overload of information, a tactic used by LGATs to exhaust participants, increase the likelihood of them employing the peripheral route (heuristics), and get them to trust the "experience":

“Meanwhile, I was listening to an enormous amount of material about mankind, history, the purpose of creation, the spiritual world versus the physical world, and so forth, much of which presumed an acceptance of what had been said earlier” (Hassan, 1988, p. 15).

“As he lectured for hour after hour, I became very uncomfortable” (p. 15).

Crucially, Hassan (1988) describes a triggered euphoria in the group on the third day:

“On the third day, we were lifted to an unprecedented emotional high” (p. 16).

Finally, Hassan (1988) acknowledges that the process had transformed him:

“By the end of those three days the Steve Hassan who had walked into the first workshop was gone, replaced by a new ‘Steve Hassan.’ I was elated at the thought that I was ‘chosen’ by God and that my life’s path was now on the only ‘true track’” (p. 19).

From his description, Hassan endured a highly-structured three-day weekend that involved sleep disruption, emotional processes, guilt, communication control, an overload of information, the squashing of reason (and elevation of trust), and the triggering of an “experience”. While the detail provided is relatively concise, there appear to be elements of the four-step process at play.

7.2.2 Evangelical Christianity (“Evangelicalism”)

Perhaps our morality does not come from God, but God comes from our morality?

It is also reasonable to consider the use of the four-step process of persuasion in mainstream religion, like Christianity. Evangelical Christianity appears to utilise similar, although possibly milder, stress-inducing processes, and a similar structure, to LGATs. It also places significant value on a “born-again experience” (Hackett & Lindsay, 2008, p. 501) - arguably a form of “natural knowing”. An evangelical might be defined as a Christian who holds a particular regard for the bible, embraces a personal relationship with God *through conversion*, and seeks to lead others on a similar spiritual journey through a sharing of the gospel (Hackett & Lindsay, 2008; wheaton.edu, 2016):

“The term ‘Evangelicalism’ is a wide-reaching definitional ‘canopy’ that covers a diverse number of Protestant traditions, denominations, organizations, and churches. It originates in the Greek word euangelion, meaning ‘the good news,’ or, more commonly, the ‘gospel’” (wheaton.edu, 2016).

The gospel, or “good news”, central to conversion in Evangelicalism, does not have a universally accepted definition; however, this website provides a plausible interpretation of the concept:

“The word *gospel* means ‘good news,’ so the gospel of Christ is the good news of His coming to provide forgiveness of sins for all who will believe ([Colossians 1:14](#); [Romans 10:9](#)). Since the beginning of time when the first man sinned, mankind has been under the condemnation of God

(Romans 5:12). Because everyone breaks God’s perfect law by committing sin (Romans 3:23), everyone is guilty (Romans 5:18). The punishment for the crime of sin is physical death (Romans 6:23) and then an eternity spent in a place of eternal punishment (Revelation 20:15; Matthew 25:46). This eternal separation from God is also called the ‘second death’ (Revelation 20:14–15)” (gotquestions.org, 2016).

While there is not a consensus about how Evangelicalism should be defined, Gallop Polls indicate that 41% of Americans identify themselves as Evangelicals (Hackett & Lindsay, 2008). This translates to approximately 120 million people in the US, or over 50% of all American Christians. It should also be clarified that, if experience-based conversions occur in Evangelical Christianity, the “experience” would not generally be as explicit as that generated by LGATs. Evangelical services are not as overtly stressful, and rarely last as long. This does not mean, however, that Evangelicalism does not employ stress-inducing processes to some degree. These processes might simply exist as church procedures – the way that non-believers are converted – and they may not have been designed but may have rather, through natural selection, evolved over time. It is worth considering whether sermons which deliver “the good news” or “the gospel” use similar processes to LGATs to create an emotional association between the doctrine of Christianity and feelings of love, joy, and forgiveness. Specifically, it will be argued that Evangelical Christianity, like LGATs:

1. Devalues reason
2. Promotes uncritical trust
3. Creates guilt and fear
4. Offers a solution to that guilt and fear
5. Generates a born-again “experience”

Critic of religion, Sam Harris (2006), argues that many Christians not only believe without evidence, but that they take pride in this form of belief. A core component of the four-step process of persuasion is convincing the individual that using reason is a bad way to make decisions and that an experience, or intuition, should be trusted instead. This model of persuasion – circumnavigating reason – appears plausible in the conversion of many to Christianity. The observation that many Evangelical Christians convert before seriously considering a great deal of the relevant information is in keeping with a simple interpretation of scripture, and with church services that ask individuals to give their lives to Christ before considering the evidence. Martin Luther, in fact, warned of reason’s threat to faith:

“For reason is the greatest enemy that faith has: it never comes to the aid of spiritual things, but – more frequently than not – struggles against the Divine Word, treating with contempt all that emanates from God” (Luther & Kepler, 1979, p. 353).

The bible values faith enormously, and many passages exalt the virtue of simply believing:

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11: 1).

“... blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Joh. 20: 29).

“We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5: 7).

Additionally, the bible asserts that God is far more intelligent than people are, that it is arrogant/ foolish to question him, and that an experience (“God’s power”) is valid evidence of his existence. This is similar to the attack on independent thinking, and the emphasis on “natural knowing”, in LGATs:

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts” (Isa. 55: 9).

“This is because God considers the wisdom of this world to be foolish” (1 Cor. 3: 19).

“... so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Cor. 2: 5).

The message is “your thinking is inferior” and “belief without evidence is a virtue”, the two changes in mind-set which set up a belief based upon an emotional experience (“God’s power”, or the peripheral route). It is also apparent that difficult questions regarding conflicts between the claimed nature of God (e.g. loving and just) and evidence (e.g. 9 million children under the age of five die every year (World Health Organisation, 2011)) are often dealt with using thought-terminating clichés, such as “The Lord works in mysterious ways...” or “His ways are greater than ours...” These sorts of platitudes suppress thinking which, if earnestly engaged in, might lead to uncomfortable conclusions.

Christian sermons which preach “the good news”, like LGATs, necessarily elicit guilt and apprehension. The central premise of Christianity is that you are a sinner – born a sinner – and that nothing you can do on your own can save you from this. Evangelical Christianity, like LGATs, taps into the (almost) universal propensity for guilt, ensuring that congregants understand that they are blameworthy and fall short of the group’s standards for “purity”:

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags...” (Isa. 64: 6).

“There is no one righteous, not even one...” (Rom. 3: 10).

“... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3: 23).

Confession, a key theme of thought reform highlighted by Lifton (1961), and a core feature of LGATs, is also central to the Christian process:

“I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psa. 32: 5).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 Joh. 1: 9).

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (Jam. 5: 16).

Confession, as portrayed by Evangelical Christianity, is the path to redemption. The insidious impact of confession is that it focuses “sinners” on their “sins”, an exercise in guilt-inculcation. Guilt is not the only stress-inducing device used in the Christian process and the idea of burning for eternity in hell might also be considered a dopamine-activating mechanism:

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mat. 10: 28).

“The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat. 13: 49-50).

“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, where the fire never goes out” (Mar. 9: 43).

Christian sermons preaching “the good news” frequently involve thirty to forty minutes highlighting guilt-inducing passages and the frightening consequences for non-believers (“nonpeople”), followed by a solution to this dilemma. On a shorter time-scale than occurs in an LGAT (an hour, as opposed to three or four days), “sinners” are subjected to guilt and fear, followed by a sudden reversal to acceptance, redemption, and love (“goal-attainment”). This takes the form of “accept Jesus and you will be cleansed of your sins and go to heaven”:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Joh. 3: 16).

Because acute stress and goal-attainment have been shown to elevate mesolimbic dopamine, it is reasonable to contend that Evangelical church services – which elicit guilt, inadequacy, and fear (stress), and which abruptly replace that stress with acceptance, affirmation, and forgiveness (“goal-attainment”) – elevate mesolimbic dopamine. Additionally, recent fMRI research indicates that activation of the mesolimbic pathway results in “spiritual feelings”, or sensing “God’s presence”:

“Nucleus accumbens activation preceded peak spiritual feelings by 1-3 s and was replicated in four separate tasks” (Ferguson, et al., 2016, p. 104).

Based on these findings, Figure 40 illustrates how, on a shorter timescale than occurs in an LGAT, an “experience” may be generated in an Evangelical Christian church service:

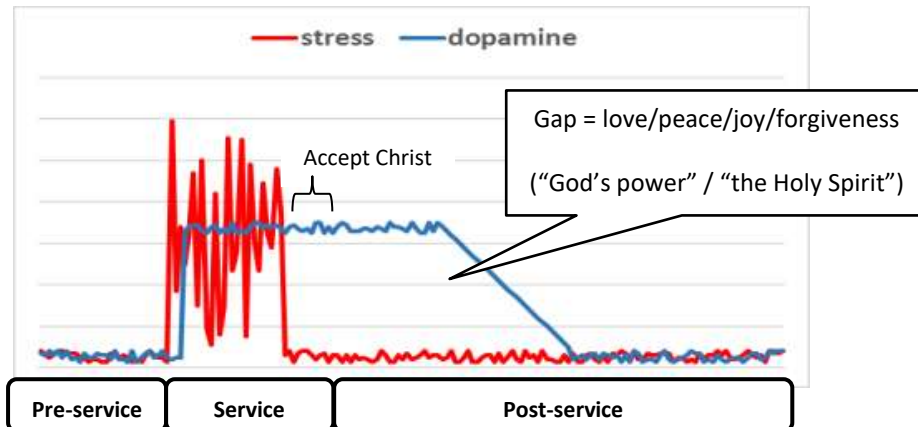


Figure 40: Model for an Evangelical church service “experience”

As indicated in Figure 40, conversion amounts to a sudden switch from “you are a sinner deserving of eternal damnation” to “you are perfect” (stress removal/goal-attainment):

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5: 17).

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, described being born again as “that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life, when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness” (Belton, 2007). Evangelical Christians are said to be “born again” (Hackett & Lindsay, 2008), and these encounters with “the Holy Spirit” often form the foundation of Evangelicals’ faith. Dr William Lane Craig, one of Evangelical Christianity’s most visible intellectuals, says the following of religious experience and its central role as proof of the legitimacy of Christianity:

“I think that the primary way in which we know God exists is not through these evidences, but it is through this immediate experience of God himself...” (drCraigvideos, 2010).

“I think that the fundamental way in which we know Christianity is true is through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. I do not think that arguments and evidence are necessary in order for faith to be rational...” (drCraigvideos, 2013).

While Christians may point to a passage like 1 Peter 3:15, which states, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”, Craig asserts that the “reason” referred to can be a personal experience of “God”. In what might be considered a textbook case of confirmation bias advocacy, he continues (drCraigvideos, 2013):

“... so, I would say that the fundamental way we know Christianity is true is through the witness of the Holy Spirit, and reason and argument can then confirm the Spirit’s witness.”

This thesis has shown that a powerful emotional experience – which need not have anything specifically to do with the context in which it occurs – can be generated in most people. If these experiences are “the most fundamental way” that even the most sophisticated Christians “know Christianity is true”, and if these experiences are nothing more than a transient dopamine high which happens to occur in the right context, then the foundation of belief for hundreds of millions of people is invalid. One must surely ask whether there is reason to believe that the “personal experiences of God”, described by Dr Craig and so many others are, in fact, evidence of God, or whether they might reflect a more generic “experience” (such as that generated through LGAT participation). Bertrand Russell argues that logical people who have mystical experiences attempt to make sense of these states, but that, rather than impartially considering all of the evidence post-conversion, they tend to only notice evidence which confirms their (already accepted) belief:

“When the intensity of emotional conviction subsides, a man who is in the habit of reasoning will search for logical grounds in favour of the belief which he finds in himself” (Russell, 2004, p. 15).

With an account that, to me, seems indistinguishable from my 2003 “religious experience”, Craig describes his six-month search for answers, and the conversion experience which resulted, as follows:

“Well I wasn’t raised in a Christian family, or a church-going family myself, but as I became a teenager I began to ask what I call the big questions in life: Why am I here? Where am I going? And this sort of catapulted me onto a sort of spiritual search that lasted about six months. And basically, at the end of this six months, I simply... err... cried out to God to... err... come into my life... and I just cried out to Him, and I felt this tremendous infusion of joy filling me... it was almost as though I was a balloon being blown up until it was ready to burst, and I just began to cry... all of the tears of bitterness and anger that had built up inside of me just came flooding out, and this tremendous joy came flooding in. I rushed outside – it was a warm September evening – and I could see the Milky Way... stretching from horizon to horizon... I looked up at the stars and I thought, ‘God... I’ve come to know God!’ And that moment was a turning point in my life” (semperadlucem, 2009).

Another video provides insight into Craig’s state of mind prior to converting. In it he reveals having felt an incredible sense of meaninglessness, anger, isolation, self-loathing and shame:

“... I realised that I too was inauthentic, I was a hypocrite... and so that hatred turned in on myself for my own phoniness and hypocrisy... and I don’t know if you understand what this is like, but this kind of inner anger just eats away at your insides, day after day...” (drcraigvideos, 2014).

It is clear that Craig felt significant psychological stress leading up to his conversion - a conversion which presumably provided him with a sense of love, forgiveness, acceptance and answers to “the big questions of life”. Psychiatrist Anthony Storr (1997, p. 197) notes that “Conversion to a religious faith

brings with it a huge sense of relief”, and it is plausible that a period of stress, followed by goal-attainment was the cause of Craig’s experience. He does little to convince us that this “turning point” had anything to do with God, as his argument for the validity of his experience is astonishingly feeble:

“I think everybody who’s had such an experience asks himself the question, ‘How do I know I just haven’t had some sort of emotional experience that can be psychologically explained away?’, and I think that there are two answers to that question. First of all, in one sense I think that a genuine experience of God is self-authenticating – that when you meet God... personally... in the way that happened to me in 1965 on that September evening... it so transformed my life that I simply couldn’t convince myself this was merely psychological... that I was merely having an emotional experience...” (semperadlucem, 2009).

As a Christian apologist Dr Craig has publicly debated secular thinkers such as Christopher Hitchens, Lawrence Krauss, and Sam Harris, and he is the founder of “reasonablefaith.org”; because he strongly advocates “reasoned faith”, his own experience-based belief worth is considering. His reasoning in this case (“I know it’s true because I know it’s true”) does not, however, meet the standards of rationality he employs, and demands, when debating secular opponents. “Just knowing” is no different from “natural knowing” – it is a form of intuition (System 1) and intuition, as has been shown, can be distorted by abnormal emotions. Since a spiritual experience is itself an abnormal emotional experience, it is unwise to use it as evidence of anything other than the experience itself.

Former director of the *National Human Genome Research Institute*, Dr Francis Collins, is another scientific thinker who, like Dr Craig, attests to having earnestly sought answers before converting to Christianity. In his 2006 book, *The Language of God – A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (Collins, 2006), he details his transition from agnostic, to atheist, back to agnostic, and finally to Christianity, and explains that much of the groundwork for opening him up to Christianity lay in examining the evidence. He explains that, based on his research, the gospel accounts of Jesus seemed reliable and that a passage from C.S. Lewis’ book *Mere Christianity* convinced him that he had a choice to make about who Jesus was. The passage quoted by Collins, and often cited by Nicky Gumble of Holy Trinity Brompton in the *Alpha course*¹²⁶, argues that, based on Jesus’ claims to be God, he was either “a Liar, a Lunatic, or Lord”, and that considering him just a great moral teacher was not an option:

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son

¹²⁶ “The Alpha course is an evangelistic course which seeks to introduce the basics of the Christian faith through a series of talks and discussions” (Wikipedia, 2017).

of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to" (Lewis, 2002, p. 52).

Collins explains that this forced him to consider the possibility that Jesus was God, but that, after "many months of struggling", he had a "born-again experience" (Robert Rutger, 2014). In his book, he similarly describes how, after battling with his own pride, sinfulness, and selfishness (stress), and with a consequent desire for redemption (goal-attainment), he finally committed his life to Jesus:

"Lewis was right. I had to make a choice. A full year had passed since I decided to believe in some sort of God, and now I was being called to account. On a beautiful day, as I was hiking in the Cascade Mountains during my first trip west of the Mississippi, the majesty and beauty of God's creation overwhelmed my resistance. As I rounded a corner and saw a beautiful and unexpected frozen waterfall, hundreds of feet high, I knew the search was over. The next morning, I knelt in the dewy grass as the sun rose and surrendered to Jesus Christ" (Collins, 2006, p. 225).

Collins' conversion, as he describes it, was significantly influenced by Lewis' *Liar, Lunatic, or Lord* argument, and by seeing a waterfall. It should be clear that a waterfall is not evidence of God's existence, and I would argue that the *Liar, Lunatic, or Lord* argument is equally flawed. This primitive line of reasoning seemed reasonable to me when I was in my early twenties (and, in fact, I owned more than one copy of *Mere Christianity* when I lived in London), but a sophisticated understanding of mental illness exposes it as offensively simplistic. A more nuanced grasp of psychopathology reveals that it is quite possible for a person to behave like Jesus, think like Jesus, and believe that he is God, without being identified by all who see him as a "lunatic". I can comment on this with some authority, as I did spend time believing that I was the Son of God, and I was not running around biting the heads off chickens and masturbating in public. Instead, I felt incredible love, joy, and conviction; I felt connected to the universe, I gave all I had to the poor, I wanted to be of service to people I saw as struggling, and I grew frustrated with (and managed to challenge and frustrate) the church-goers and leaders I encountered. These were all things that Jesus did. While my friends found my behaviour curious, they saw me as full of joy and life, rather than unmistakably crazy; they were not concerned enough to call my parents, let alone stage an intervention. I was certainly irreverent, but it was far subtler than the word "lunatic" suggests. Given that my manic episode occurred in London in the 21st century, and my behaviour was seen as unusual rather than insane by people who had known me my whole life, the possibility that Jesus was manic, and that it was not expertly diagnosed by 1st century inhabitants of the Middle East, is something that Francis Collins should, perhaps, consider.

7.3 Final thought

“A wise person, in contrast, recognizes that there are two sides of every coin: A vantage point that makes some things easy to see can obscure considerations that would be obvious from another perspective” (Gilovich & Ross, 2016, p. 33).

As someone who has lived with bipolar disorder for fourteen years, I believe I am sensitive to the perspective that, without experiencing something personally, an understanding of it may be incomplete; however, it would be naïve to presume that there are not many non-bipolar researchers who know considerably more about the illness than I do. It is similarly possible, without experiencing an LGAT, to understand the physiology of stress, the role of dopamine in the brain, the relationship between acute stress and mesolimbic dopamine, the triggers for bipolar disorder, the conditions of the training, the symptoms of bipolar disorder, the nature of the post-training experience, and to note the parallels. Given what is known about social psychology, neuropsychology, and cognitive science, it is reasonable to contend that – while undeniably providing vital insights – participation is the most compromised perspective from which to understand other core aspects of LGAT “technology”.

It has been argued that the LGAT transformation, like hypomania/mania, is a function of elevated mesolimbic dopamine and that stress, punctuated with relaxation, and culminating in goal-attainment, is one effective way to generate these experiences. While I believe that these states can provide access to otherwise elusive insights, and that in the right context these insights may be nurtured and transformed into lasting breakthroughs, what hypomania does more commonly is provide a false, and fleeting, sense of enduring transformation. Having regularly been deceived by this state, I’ve given up insisting that I’m too intelligent, too learned, or too vigilant to be seduced, and it would be absurd to pass judgment on LGAT participants who experience it for the first time, while being provided with a convincing explanation for their new energy, euphoria, and outlook.

My view is that it is the characteristics which make us good people – empathy, integrity, concern, conscience, and the resulting capacity for guilt – which make us vulnerable to LGAT processes and, while I am anxious about openly challenging these organisations, it is these shared characteristics which have driven me to produce this research. There are few whose circumstances have forced them to acknowledge, and allowed them to intimately understand, the deceptive nature of mood, the fallibility of intuition, and the trickery of subjective experience. Because of what I have experienced and learned, I believe that I have a unique perspective, and I feel obligated to share it. My hope for LGAT proponents is that, if you have genuinely considered this information (and what acknowledging the validity of this information may mean for your sense of self), you shift your perspective accordingly, realise that you are not bound by past behaviour, and move – enlightened – onwards.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Landmark periodical sources summary

It is often argued that those without personal experience of the Landmark Forum cannot comment on the processes or the experience. While this is a flawed argument, this table illustrates that the majority of journalists used in the content analysis were Landmark Forum participants themselves. It should be noted that those who were not participants either described the first-hand experiences of others, or commented on Landmark's conduct regarding non-Forum related issues:

	Reference	Author	Periodical	Location	Participant	Year
1	(Alford, 2010)	Henry Alford	The New York Times	New York, USA	Yes	2010
2	(Badt, 2011)	Karin Badt	The Huffington Post	London, UK	Yes	2011
3	(Bourke, 2004)	Fionnuala Bourke	Sunday Mercury	Birmingham, UK	No	2004
4	(Braid, 2003)	Mary Braid	The Independent Digital	London, UK	No	2003
5	(Clancy, Professionals Fall Prey To New Age Gurus, 1992)	Ray Clancy 1	The London Times	London, UK	No	1992
6	(Clancy, Victims Lured Into Baring Their Souls By Mind Games, 1992)	Ray Clancy 2	The London Times	London, UK	Yes	1992
7	(Cohen, 2009)	Hagar Cohen	ABC Radio National	Australia	No	2009
8	(Di Matteo, 2000)	Enzo Di Matteo	Now Magazine	Canada	Yes	2000
9	(Faltermayer, 2001)	Charlotte Faltermayer	Time Magazine	New York, USA	Yes	2001
10	(Grigoriadis, 2001)	Vanessa Grigoriadis	New York Magazine	New York, USA	Yes	2001
11	(Hill, 2003)	Amelia Hill	The Guardian	London, UK	Yes	2003
12	(Howard, 2001)	Roland Howard	The Daily Mail	London, UK	Yes	2001
13	(Hukill, 1998)	Traci Hukill	Metro News	San Jose, USA	Yes	1998
14	(Jones, 2003)	Rachel Jones	Noseweek Magazine	Cape Town, SA	No	2003
15	(Lemonnier, 2005)	Marie Lemonnier	Le Nouvel Observateur	Paris, France	Yes	2005
16	(Libaw, 2002)	Oliver Libaw	ABC News	Unspecified	No	2002
17	(Mahoney, 1998)	Rosemary Mahoney	Elle Magazine	New York, USA	Yes	1998
18	(Martin, 1998)	Jana Martin	Swing Magazine	Unspecified	Yes	1998
19	(McClure, 2009)	Laura McClure	Mother Jones Magazine	New York, USA	Yes	2009
20	(O'Brien, 2012)	James O'Brien	GQ Magazine	Oakland, USA	Yes	2012
21	(Russell & Russell, 2014)	Charles Russell & Jennie Russell	CBC News	Alberta, Canada	No	2014
22	(Scioscia, 2000)	Amanda Scioscia	Phoenix New Times	Phoenix, USA	Yes	2000
23	(Silva, 2005)	Horacio Silva	The New York Times	New York, USA	No	2005
24	(Thornburgh, 2011)	Nathan Thornburgh	Time Magazine	New York, USA	Yes	2011
25	(Vandenber, 2000)	Marita Vandenber	Contact Magazine	New Zealand	No	2000
26	(Woodhouse & Vandenber, 2000)	Pita Woodhouse & Marita Vandenber	Contact Magazine	New Zealand	No	2000

Appendix 2: Raymond D. Fowler's endorsement of Landmark

Landmark frequently cites the endorsement of psychologist Raymond D. Fowler, PhD, who took part in the Landmark Forum in May 1999 and produced a report, arguing that Landmark:

- ... is not harmful.
- ... employs appropriate and sufficient screening processes.
- ... does not use the techniques of psychotherapy (and, thus, Landmark trainers need not be licensed mental health professionals).
- ... is not a cult, or anything like a cult (and that participants are, therefore, not at risk of “mind control”, “thought reform”, or “other forms of manipulation”).

According to Landmark, Fowler also stated that Landmark's programs are nothing like LGATs:

“Landmark's programs are totally distinct from LGATs in their methodology, structure, purpose, design and format” (Stellar, 2009).

Fowler was the executive vice president and CEO of the American Psychological Association (APA) between 1989 and 2003 so, while his report on the Forum did not necessarily reflect the views of the APA, his endorsement of Landmark (in 1999) occurred while he was the head of this prominent organisation. The evidence produced in this thesis stands in stark contrast to the perspectives of Fowler who, among other things, described the Forum environment as “pleasant”, the Forum leader as “pleasant” and “sensitive”, participants as “relaxed”, and the application form as “well designed to inform participants of the nature of the program”. He further argued that the Forum's processes were “nothing remotely like psychotherapy”, stated that the Forum does not cover the issues typical in psychotherapy, claimed that participants are not encouraged “to devote significant amounts of their time and resources” to the organisation, asserted that participants do not undergo “periods of social isolation”, and maintained that participants did not endure “peer pressure to conform”. In spite of significant evidence otherwise, Fowler also states that, in his opinion, “the Landmark Forum does not place individuals at risk of any kind of ‘mind control’, ‘brainwashing’, or ‘thought control’.”

The following pages reproduce Fowler's 1999 report on the Landmark Forum (Fowler, 1999) in full.

Raymond D. Fowler, Ph.D.
4020 Linnean Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Report on the Landmark Forum

The following report reflects my own professional opinions and does not in any way reflect the views of any university or organization with which I am or have been associated. I am not submitting this report as a representative of any organization.

I received my doctorate in clinical psychology from the Pennsylvania State University in 1957. My experience includes: 30 years as a professor of psychology and 18 years as a department head at the University of Alabama; 2 years as department head at the University of Tennessee; 30 years teaching psychotherapy and psychological assessment and a similar period as a consultant and expert witness on psychological and management matters. For the past ten years I have been the Executive Vice President and Chief Executive Officer of the American Psychological Association. I am a fellow of the American Psychological Association, the Division of Psychotherapy and the Society for Personality Assessment. I am past president of the Alabama, Southeastern and American Psychological Associations. I hold Psychology license #4 in the State of Alabama.

At the request of the Landmark Education Corporation, I undertook an evaluation of the effectiveness, safety and appropriateness of the procedures followed in conducting the Landmark Forum program. As background for my evaluation, I attended the Landmark Forum on May 7, 8, 9 and 11th, 1999. In addition, I reviewed all the materials used to screen participants, including the extensive application form which Landmark requires all participants to complete; the Policies and Procedures followed by staff in conducting the program; and the forms used to obtain information from health care professionals when such information is needed.

The report is in the form of several questions that might be raised about the Landmark Forum, followed by answers that reflect my experience and personal opinion.

Is the Landmark Forum harmful? I saw nothing in the Landmark Forum I attended to suggest that it would be harmful to any participant. The program is designed for reasonably healthy and effectively functioning individuals and participants are carefully screened to assure they are appropriate for the program. The Leader was pleasant and professional in his interactions with participants. At no time was he judgmental or hostile to any participant. On the contrary, he was sensitive and adept in handling the reactions of the participants to topics under discussion. Since some participants were frankly discussing unhappy or unsuccessful life experiences such as painful experiences or troubled relationships, some people expressed sadness, and there were some tears, but these were handled well by the leader, and there were no incidents of disruptive or dysfunctional emotionality.

Participants were informed that leaving the program at times other than scheduled breaks or otherwise missing parts of the seminar would detract from the experience, but there was no coercion to remain in the room, and it was not unusual for participants to leave and return. Participants were not pressed to give personal information, and some chose to speak rarely if at all, apparently preferring to listen and observe.

My informal observations of participants during the sessions and in informal conversations during breaks suggested to me that people felt interested and relaxed and challenged to think deeply about themselves. I did not experience any personal sense of harm, danger, threat, or intimidation at any time, and I saw no evidence that anyone else did. In my opinion, there was nothing in the Landmark Forum program I attended in its content or the way in which it was conducted, that could be considered as harmful to participants.

Many participants expressed the feeling that participation in the program had been beneficial to them in understanding themselves and their relationships. Some participants, who had attended other Landmark Forum programs in the past, said their lives had been improved by the experience, and many new participants came because it had been a beneficial experience for them.

Is the Landmark Education Corporation's policy and application of screening appropriate and sufficient? The Landmark Forum is designed for people who are mentally and physically healthy and who are handling their life situations effectively. The screening procedures are designed to prevent the participation of individuals whose coping skills are compromised by mental or physical illness or other causes. The screening procedures, which are extensive, range from a self-report questionnaire, through telephone interviews to face -to-face interviews with the Program Leader.

Application Questionnaire. The application questionnaire clearly informs potential participants that the Landmark Forum is intended for people who are well, that it is not intended as therapy or treatment for any disorder and that participants are responsible for determining whether they are physically, mentally or emotionally prepared for the experience. Individuals with a history of mental illness or severe emotional problems are instructed to consult with a mental health professional about their ability to handle stress. Those who have questions about their ability to handle stress are recommended not to participate in the program.

In addition to standard identifying data, the questionnaire requires the participant to describe any past or present mental health problems and hospitalization, treatment or medication for mental or emotional problems.

Screening Procedures. Any answers on the application form that suggest any current or past mental or emotional problems are the subject of a telephone interview by a staff member. For each of the questions involving mental health issues, the manual used by the staff includes highly detailed instructions for handling answers that might be given by the applicant. Any response indicating that the applicant has experienced mental health problems in the past or present triggers very specific questions on the part of the interviewer. If an individual has had difficulties and/or treatment in the past and is currently experiencing difficulties, or if the individual is taking psychoactive medications, the interviewer calls back for a second interview and recommends against participation in the Landmark Forum. Those who insist on participating despite the recommendations are required to get a signed consent from a licensed mental health professional. Landmark Forum staff members do not give medical or mental health advice to participants or prospective participants: staff members who do screening base their statements and questions on the advice of appropriate professionals and on the manuals developed with professional consultation.

Applicants not screened out by the above procedures are asked to inform the Landmark Forum of any changes in their mental and emotional condition. Staff members are provided with detailed procedures for handling any atypical events that might occur during the program, such as a sudden illness, although such events are apparently extremely rare.

Program leaders, who are well trained and highly experienced, provide the final level of screening. If there is any doubt on the part of any staff member about the appropriateness of an applicant to participate, if the applicant has been approved on a legal waiver or if any applicant or participant exhibits behavior that raises questions about his/her emotional wellbeing, the Program Leader is authorized to interview and, if necessary, reject the applicant as a participant.

In my opinion, the application form is well designed to inform applicants of the nature of the program and the requirements and responsibilities of a participant. The screening questions are well crafted to identify mental and emotional problems or other disqualifying conditions. Of necessity, the application form depends upon honest answers from the applicant. Although individuals who fail to disclose relevant information could pass through the screen, they would do so knowingly and would have to falsely sign an informed consent form stating that all of their responses were accurate and true.

The instructions to staff for telephone screening are very elaborate and thorough. Although some judgment is required on the part of the interviewer (judging the applicant's current effectiveness in dealing with life) most of the decisions are precisely programmed by the instructions and require little or no judgement on the part of the interviewer, and certainly no diagnostic skills or training. Again, assuming reasonable honesty on the part of the applicant, I believe the probability is very high that the existing procedures are appropriate and sufficient to screen out applicants who should not participate.

Is the Landmark Forum a form of psychotherapy? Does it use the techniques of psychotherapy? Do Landmark Forum Leaders need to be trained, licensed mental health professionals?

It is clear from the stated goals of the program and from my observations of how it operates that the Landmark Forum is nothing like psychotherapy. In my 40 years as a psychologist, I have studied psychotherapy extensively, have taught and supervised hundreds of students, and I am a Fellow of several organizations on psychotherapy. I consider myself very experienced in understanding what psychotherapy is about. What I experienced and observed in the Landmark Forum I attended was nothing remotely like psychotherapy as I know it. In general, I would consider the content of the program to be philosophical rather than psychological in nature: participants are challenged to examine their ways of thinking much as they might be in a philosophy course. Language, relationships and communication patterns are examined from that frame of reference and not from the point of view of psychopathology or mental dysfunction.

Landmark leaders are not, and do not need to be, psychotherapists or psychologists, and the program could in no sense be regarded as psychotherapy or as part of the discipline of psychology. What leaders are doing in their interactions with participants is more closely akin to the kind of sensitivity training given to educators and Peace Corps volunteers to help them become more aware of how they interact with others. It was not much different in depth, intensity and self-disclosure than the conversations among close friends or family members might be. The intense relationships that often develop as a part of psychotherapy (sometimes referred to as transference) were nowhere in evidence, and there hardly could be in such a large group with such distant and brief interactions with the leader.

It would be inappropriate and inaccurate to identify the Landmark Forum as a form of psychotherapy. Individuals in psychotherapy might find the Landmark Forum experience interesting and stimulating, but it would hardly cover the issues typical in psychotherapy. Since the Landmark Forum was neither designed nor intended to be psychotherapeutic in nature, and participants are clearly informed of that at the onset, individuals in need of psychotherapy should not expect to obtain psychotherapeutic benefits as a result of participating in the Landmark Forum. No one seeking psychotherapy should expect to find it in a Landmark Forum.

Psychotherapists and Landmark Forum leaders are different in training, orientation, techniques and skills. I suspect some psychotherapists would, with appropriate training, make good Landmark Forum leaders and that some Landmark Forum leaders would, with proper education and training, make good psychotherapists, but neither needs the training or skills of the other to do their respective jobs. Since mentally ill and emotionally disturbed individuals are screened out of the Landmark Forum programs and since techniques of Landmark Forum leaders are not those that would be likely to assist the mentally ill, I can see no reason for Landmark Forum Leaders to be licensed mental health professionals.

Is the Landmark Forum or the organization that delivers it, Landmark Education Corporation, a cult or anything like a cult? Are people at risk of “brain washing”, “mind control”, “thought reform”, or other forms of manipulation?

The Landmark Forum has none of the characteristics typical of a cult. Most cults have a charismatic leader who maintains, with their members, a strong relationship over a prolonged time period. Cult members become very emotionally attached to their leaders, even if they do not come in close contact with them. They are encouraged to follow the instructions of the cult leader and to devote significant amounts of their time and resources to activities directed by the cult leader. Typically, cult members remove themselves from their families and usual environments and undergo periods of social isolation, peer pressure to conform, and significant modification of their behaviour, lifestyle, dress, food and relationships. None of these characteristics are even possible in the relatively brief encounters that take place at a Landmark Forum; the level of intensity and duration are not sufficient to encourage the intense, addiction-like behaviour said to be exhibited by cult members.

In my opinion, “brain washing”, “mind control” or “thought reform” are very dubious concepts. There is little evidence to support that they ever take place except in situations in which extreme coercive pressure is put on a vulnerable person in circumstances of isolation, deprivation, and mistreatment such as a prisoner of war situation. The relatively brief encounters in a pleasant environment that characterizes the Landmark Forum program could never effect such extreme changes in personality and behavior as those attributed to the various form of “mind control”.

In my opinion, the Landmark Forum does not place individuals at risk of any form of “mind control” “brainwashing” or “thought control.”

In my opinion, the Landmark Forum is not a cult or anything like a cult, and I do not see how any reasonable, responsible person could say that it is.

Raymond D. Fowler, Ph.D.

November 30, 1999

Appendix 3: Verifying the degrees of “Doctor” Steven Johnson¹²⁷

“Hypocrites are those who apply to others the standards that they refuse to accept for themselves”
– Noam Chomsky¹²⁸

The research of Festinger, et al. (1956) into a flying saucer cult demonstrated how members of the cult’s convictions were strengthened, rather than diminished, when their central belief was clearly shown to be fallacious. Festinger (1957) explained that the degree to which individuals have personally invested in a belief, and the psychological cost of admitting that they are wrong, are key factors in determining whether they will ignore or reinterpret evidence which invalidates their conviction. It is also evident that people are far more capable of recognising the denial and rationalisation of others than the rationalisations they use to sustain their own beliefs (and self-esteem).

Consider, in light of this theory, the cognitive dissonance which might be experienced by the founders, owners, and managers of *The Company*¹²⁹ (the company which required that I participate in an LGAT), who built their organisation around these trainings and have vigorously defended this “technology” for more than a decade. The courage that it would take to acknowledge the harm they may have inflicted on innocent people is significant (if they found out that these trainings were not what they believed them to be). According to Festinger (1957), it is likely that they would resist acknowledging evidence which indicated that they had been misled - that they would do what they could to avoid accepting it, to silence critics, and to put the evidence into a “context” that was more palatable.

On February 29th 2016 an article appeared in a local newspaper, describing two former employees who had sued *The Company* over the courses. The article contained statements from the employees, who claimed they were verbally abused, made to cross-dress, and humiliated, while representatives of *The Company* portrayed a very different picture. *The Company’s* executives praised New Beginnings and Reflections trainer, “Doctor” Steven Johnson, and claimed that participants were fully informed about the nature of the trainings before participating. While I understood that it would be impossible to counter their subjective experiences, and that the constructionist ideology taught in the courses would allow them to ignore evidence which could even remotely be considered open to interpretation, “Doctor” Johnson had claimed publicly, in writing, that he was a doctor. I did not believe this to be true.

“Sometimes indeed, you could put your finger on a definite lie. It was not true, for example, as was claimed in the Party history books, that the Party had invented aeroplanes” (Orwell, 1949, p. 38).

¹²⁷ This is not the trainer’s real name. His real name was, however, used when verifying his claimed qualifications.

¹²⁸ (Chomsky, 2002, p. 77).

¹²⁹ This is not the company’s real name. The real names of company employees have also not been used.

Having grown up around educated people, I was fairly certain that this person was not who he claimed to be and believed that if I could demonstrate that “*Doctor*” *Johnson* was dishonest about his qualifications, then perhaps *The Company* would have the courage to reconsider its position. The starting point was his LinkedIn profile (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/stevenjohnson>) which contained a number of useful pieces of information. Before addressing his claimed qualifications, it is relevant to consider the *public written* endorsement of *Steven Johnson*, provided by *The Company’s* CEO, and co-owner (this, as described by Robert Cialdini, would be a *public commitment*):

“We have been working with Steven and his team at TRANSFORMATIONS¹³⁰ since 2009. At *The Company*, we are deeply passionate about the growth and development of our people, and we take it extremely seriously. Over the past 10 years, we have tried many service providers, coaches and training courses with varying results. Steven’s two courses, *New Beginnings* and *Reflections* have, without a doubt, been the most impactful of everything. To date he has trained over 100 of our people and every new member of staff who joins our business attends at least 2 of Steven’s workshops within their first 3 months. I fully endorse and recommend Steven. He is an outstanding trainer, who is deeply passionate about his work, is inspirational by the example that he sets and who truly makes an enormous difference to everyone who has the privilege of attending one of his workshops” (January 26, 2011¹³¹).

According to *Johnson’s* profile on LinkedIn, he has a master’s degree and PhD from the University of Arizona (UA), obtained between 2001 and 2008¹³². He cannot argue that he obtained the degrees at a university with a similar sounding name (and that his LinkedIn profile is inaccurate) as there are links to UA and the UA emblem is clearly shown under the section labelled *Education*. Relevant work experience and education includes:

- Managing Director at [name removed] Health and Beauty (Pty) Ltd: 1993-2003
- Founding member of [marine life organisation]: 1994-2001
- Owner of TRANSFORMATIONS Training: 2003-present
- Interviewed on SABC several times including the screening of a full feature documentary, twice on Carte Blanche, interviewed on Radio 702. Magazines incl. Mens Health, Cosmopolitan, Fair Lady, Sunday Times, several travel papers and others.
- Worked in conjunction with University of Port Elizabeth, Centre for Cetacean Studies and the University of Maputo databasing dolphin populations in Southern Mozambique.
- **Ms. PhD, Psychological Counseling, Philosophy at UA: 2000-2008**

¹³⁰ Not the real name of his organisation.

¹³¹ Based on the provided figures, *Johnson* has likely now trained in excess of 500 employees at *The Company*.

¹³² “Many leaders, for example, inflate their curricula vitae...” (Singer, 2003, p. 73, in reference to cult leaders).

A cursory review of this information reveals that *Johnson* was working as the managing director at [name removed] Health and Beauty for the first three years that he studied his master's/PhD at the University of Arizona. For the next five years of his master's and PhD (which he was studying in Arizona) he was the owner of TRANSFORMATIONS Training¹³³. This appeared suspicious, and – having briefly investigated the issue in 2010 – I attempted to verify his degrees more formally. I wanted to ensure that I did not reach a conclusion without due diligence and was particularly thorough, consolidating my findings in a document written in the first few days of March 2016:

Is *The Company's* trusted “Doctor” *Steven Johnson* a fraud?

Having read the [newspaper] front-page article about employees suing *The Company* over work courses (February 29th, 2016) and, having considered the defence of these courses by senior *Company* executives, I feel obligated to provide certain vital information on the matter. I was briefly employed by *The Company*, but resigned after completing New Beginnings (the first of two compulsory courses), run by self-professed transformation expert, *Steven Johnson*. *Company* HR head 'Beth Smith' claims to “make sure they (employees) know the good, the bad and the ugly about them”, and that “all recruits were fully advised about the course so they could make conscious and informed decisions as to whether or not they wanted to join the company”. Director of group risk, 'William Jones' claims “We have a duty of care to our people and we take it seriously”. I believe that *The Company*, for whom investigating fraudulent claims should be a core competency¹³⁴, has let their employees down.

The type of training endorsed by *The Company*, while drawing zealous support from many, has been criticised heavily by certain mental health professionals and others. There have been reports by psychologists and psychiatrists of mental health issues resulting from participation in similar trainings (which *The Company* described as “internationally recognised and accepted methodology”), as expressed here by psychologist Dr Margaret Singer:

“Importantly, a certain number of participants will be seriously harmed as these stresses precipitate a handful of psychological conditions, such as brief psychotic episodes, posttraumatic stress disorder syndrome, a variety of dissociative disorders, relaxation-induced anxiety, and other miscellaneous reactions including phobias, cognitive difficulties, and stress-related illnesses” (Taken from the book 'Cults in Our Midst', p. 208).

¹³³ According to Brewer (1975) Werner Erhard's (est-provided) CV had similar inconsistencies; notably, that he was vice president of Parents Cultural Magazine Institute from 1967 to 1971 although the organisation “ceased to exist in 1969”. Instead, according to Brewer, between 1969 and 1971 Erhard sold encyclopaedias for Grolier Society, Inc - a company that was successfully sued for “fraudulent and deceptive sales techniques”.

¹³⁴ Insurance products are sold by *The Company*.

It seems that the least *The Company* could do is ensure that the person subjecting their employees to incredibly powerful, and controversial techniques is not a con artist. According to the [newspaper] article from February 29th, “*Doctor*” *Johnson*’s CV claims he is “one of South Africa’s most qualified transformational trainers”. On his LinkedIn profile he claims to have a master’s degree and a PhD (in “psychological counseling” and philosophy) from the University of Arizona, obtained between 2000 and 2008. A significant portion of “*Doctor*” *Johnson*’s training is dedicated to berating participants (who he refers to as “assholes”) about their lack of “integrity” – during our training he stood a few feet away from an elderly woman and screamed abuse at her for sitting in the wrong chair. I’ll let you decide whether “*Doctor*” *Johnson* has the right to question anyone else’s integrity. Because I do not just trust unconditionally, which “*Doctor*” *Johnson* (conveniently) advocates, and because I believed that these courses could harm certain people, I attempted to verify his claimed degrees. As “*Doctor*” *Johnson* claims postgraduate degrees in both philosophy and “psychological counseling”, I contacted both departments. Professor Michael B. Gill, head of the philosophy department, provided the following response:

“I have been a professor in the University of Arizona Philosophy Department since 2003, and I have never heard of *Steven Johnson*. When I return to the office tomorrow, I will check our records to see if he ever took classes with us. But my guess is that you’re almost certainly correct: his claim to have received a PhD in Philosophy from UA is fraudulent.”

The following day Professor Gill sent through the following email:

“I have checked the records. I can find absolutely no trace of *Steven Johnson*’s ever having been a graduate student in the Philosophy Department or anywhere else at the University of Arizona. Maybe some other unit on campus has a record of him I cannot locate, but he has certainly not been part of Philosophy.”

Professor John J.B. Allen of the psychology department stated the following:

“We do not offer a masters in Psychological counselling, and I have no recollection of any *Steven Johnson* being here during my 24 years here at the University of Arizona department of Psychology.”

There are other departments that offer Masters in variants of counselling:

<https://www.coe.arizona.edu/counselling/specialty>

<https://www.coe.arizona.edu/counseling>”

I then contacted Dr Ronald Marx, who is Professor of Educational Psychology and Dean of Education at the University of Arizona. His email stated the following:

“I asked my assistant dean, Dr. Susan Richards, to find out if a person with this name has attended any programs in the College of Education. Her reply was ‘There is nobody called *Steven Johnson* in the system – nowhere at the entire university either’.”

Dr Janet L. Sturman, Associate Dean of the graduate college, was not directly contacted, but became aware of the query and provided the following response:

“Your enquiry regarding *Mr. Steven Johnson* and whether he has earned graduate degrees from the University of Arizona has been brought to my attention.

We have no records of a student by this name in the University of Arizona Graduate College records. I understand that the registrar has confirmed the same.”

Degrees earned at the University of Arizona are held, for verification, by a body called “The National Student Clearinghouse”. For \$16.00 you can obtain verification of any degree. I requested verification of *Steven Johnson’s* degree, but they could not locate any such qualification. Additionally, a fellow student searched numerous international databases for any sign of a degree by this person. Again, no PhD could be found associated with his name.

I am just one person, with limited resources, so I find it troubling that I could easily obtain this information when a large company, with substantial resources, could not. One of my greatest concerns with these trainings is that they discourage critical thinking and urge participants to follow without questioning. By the end of the four days (almost) everyone has submitted to the trainer’s (illegitimate) authority – the fruits of this mentality can be vividly observed in the unquestioning, and often fanatical, support of this individual. Since these trainings place such high value on “taking responsibility”, I am eager to see whether *The Company* takes responsibility for years of subjecting their employees to this charlatan.

Appendix 4: Historical “transformations” - acknowledging the influence of stress

“THE SEQUENCE OF A PERIOD of distress followed by illumination is a characteristic human pattern which, while not necessarily amounting to illness, can be discerned in the process of creative discovery in the arts and the sciences, and also in religious conversion. It is striking that these different types of problem-solving cannot be deliberately willed. Creative discovery, religious conversion, and the formation of delusional systems ‘come to’ people as a result of unconscious processes over which they have little voluntary control” (Storr, 1997, p. 175).

The pattern of stress leading to a peak experience/enlightenment/breakthrough/revelation has been observed in the past, and so it is worthwhile considering the perspective of psychiatrist, Anthony Storr, who devoted a book (*Feet of Clay*) to the topic. The argument in this thesis is that a structured process of stress and stress removal results in hypomania/mania, and that this pattern can be observed in LGAT participants. Storr (1997) reviews “gurus” from history, who appear to have endured a period of significant distress immediately prior to their breakthroughs/enlightenment. Defining “gurus”, Storr (1997, p. xi) states:

“In this book, I am restricting the term to teachers who claim special knowledge of the meaning of life, and who therefore feel entitled to tell others how life should be lived.”

A core characteristic of gurus, according to Storr (1997), is:

“... claiming access to esoteric wisdom which the ordinary person cannot reach unaided” (p. xii).

Before quoting some of the former residents of Jonestown and members of the Branch Davidians, who spoke – in spite of clear evidence otherwise – about how wonderful and kind Jim Jones and David Koresh were, Storr (1997) notes:

“In the light of history, we may think it easy to distinguish the saints from the madmen and the crooks; but it is clear that those who seek a guru to give their lives meaning find it difficult to make this distinction” (p. xii).

Describing the general pattern of stress leading to breakthrough, Storr (1997) argues:

“It is frequently the case that the guru’s new insight follows a period of mental distress or physical illness, in which the guru has been fruitlessly searching for an answer to his own emotional problems” (p. xiv).

“As we shall see, the distress of chaos followed by the establishment of a new order is a typical course of events which takes place in all creative activity, whether in the arts or in the sciences. The *Eureka* pattern is also characteristic of religious revelation and the delusional systems of people we label insane” (p. xiv).

Storr (1997) discusses a number of gurus from the last few centuries, and crucially – for the purposes of the *allostatic manic-defence hypothesis* – the pattern of stress and revelation:

David Koresh

“... follows the pattern of stress or illness succeeded by a new vision which is characteristic of most gurus. His initial periods of depression were succeeded by an ever-mounting confidence that he had been specifically selected by God...” (p. 13).

George Gurdjieff

“He resembles other gurus in going through a period of doubt which was succeeded by the revelation which manifested itself in his new cosmogony and his teaching” (p. 24).

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh

“On March 21, 1953, when he was twenty-one years old, Rajneesh’s illness terminated with what he called ‘enlightenment’. This was the end-point of seven days during which he ceased to strive, seek, or struggle, but passively let go and waited. He entered an ecstatic state in which ‘everything became luminous, alive and beautiful,’ and he himself felt ‘mad with blissfulness’” (p. 49).

“It appears probable that Rajneesh suffered from a fairly severe depressive illness between the ages of nineteen and twenty-one which came to an end with a hypomanic state in the form of an ecstatic experience” (p. 50).

Rudolf Steiner

“From the autumn of 1890 until 1897 he was working at the Goethe and Schiller Archives in Weimar. He performed his task conscientiously, and met a number of distinguished people. But, according to his own account in letters, he became more and more isolated in Weimar, feeling that no one understood his motives or what went on in his mind. This stressful period was terminated by what Ellenberger calls ‘a deep-reaching psychological metamorphosis’ in 1896, at the age of thirty-five, which might equally be called a midlife crisis or creative illness. According to his own account, his perceptions of the material world and his relations with other people changed at this point” (p. 73).

Carl Jung

“Jung was a spiritual teacher as well as a physician. In many respects, he conformed to the pattern typical of gurus which I indicated in the introduction. He himself affirmed that all his most important insights originated from the long period of psychological disturbance which followed his parting from Freud. He emerged from this distressing mental illness toward the end of the First

World War with a new revelation. In his later writings he made overt claims to be a prophet, because he believed that he had been granted special insight" (p. 85).

Sigmund Freud

"It is insufficiently appreciated that some of the most fundamental hypotheses of psychoanalysis had nothing to do with the objective observation of clinical cases. As with the revelations of the gurus whom we have already examined, they had a purely subjective origin, and followed a period of mental and physical distress; Freud's 'creative illness'" (pp. 110-111).

Ignatius

"Inigo de Loyola's transformation into Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus, began with his enforced immobility and consequent depression: a creative illness imposed upon him by external misfortune, rather than originating spontaneously from within" (p. 131).

Gurus in general

"Although many gurus go through a period of intense mental stress followed by recovery which may resemble manic-depressive illness, their behaviour after the crisis is over cannot easily be explained as characteristic of this type of mental disorder. One of the generally accepted features of manic-depressive illness is that it is intermittent. Between the episodes, most patients return to normality, unless the episodes recur so frequently that there is no time for complete recovery. But when gurus emerge from their acute illness they do not revert to what they were before. They become permanently changed people with a new set of beliefs and a new view of themselves and the world" (pp. 154-155).

What is implicit in this statement is that a minority of people emerge from "a period of intense mental stress" forever changed. The more common result, according to Storr, is an unstable mood and only intermittent normality. If LGATs are able to safely achieve lasting transformations in almost all participants, then they truly have achieved a breakthrough.

Appendix 5: LGATs and Fight Club

“Two aspects of thinking in particular are pronounced in both creative and hypomanic thought: fluency, rapidity, and flexibility of thought on the one hand, and the ability to combine ideas or categories of thought in order to form new and original connections on the other” – Kay Jamison¹³⁵

I believe that the following “delusional” interpretation of a popular film (and book) is useful for analysis because it is relatively contained and because, having provided the essential background information, you will be able – while not necessarily agreeing with my thinking – to understand the “original connections” that I made. When hypomanic/manic, one has so many thoughts that associations are more likely to be formed, and one can grow to believe things without always being able to disentangle these thoughts and explain them with any clarity to a psychologist or psychiatrist. This delusion, if it can be considered a delusion, reveals the hypomanic mind at work – the ability to form loose associations and to possibly see things that others would not. It also potentially reveals the overinclusive nature of manic thinking, as described by Antonio Damasio (2006):

“... the cognitive mode which accompanies a feeling of elation permits the rapid generation of multiple images such that the associative process is richer and associations are made to a larger variety of cues available in the images under scrutiny. The images are not attended for long. The ensuing wealth promotes ease of inference, which may become overinclusive” (p. 164).

I do believe that there is a fine line between great wits and madness, but that thinking may often include elements of both enhanced ingenuity and delusion. In the example which follows, as with the core observation of this thesis, I believe that I noticed parallels which others, through no lack of effort, missed (this potentially suggests a delusion of grandeur). While it is conceded that some of these connections are more robust than others, if the more glaring associations are accepted as valid, then it would seem unlikely that other elements of this film were not part of a broader, and intended, metaphor. The core of what follows was written in 2012 and given to family members and friends, who I hoped would provide constructive feedback. The response was, perhaps in fear of fuelling my obsession, not encouraging, and my sense was that they thought I was somewhat delusional. While I am sure that my interpretation of this film is not flawless, I find it difficult to believe that the core of my observation is not rational, and feel that – with a grounding in stress, dopamine, bipolar disorder, LGATs, and those involved in the LGAT industry – this interpretation will make more sense to readers of this thesis. At the very least, this analysis allows a peek behind the curtain - the chance to glimpse the world through hypomanic eyes and to understand the curiosity, and confusion, this state can bring.

¹³⁵ (Jamison, 1993, p. 105).

Before arguing that there is a hidden message spliced into *Fight Club*, it is necessary to provide a basic understanding of the industry that I believe the book and film are based upon. The greater your understanding of these trainings, the greater your appreciation of the metaphor will be and – while reading this entire thesis is ideal preparation – hopefully the following provides the necessary context:

Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT) is the generic term for a type of “enlightenment training” that was popularised in San Francisco in the early 1970s. These trainings have some of their roots in Humanism, Zen, and Gestalt Therapy, and it is claimed by reliable sources that the first major LGAT incorporated techniques from Scientology. Four early LGATs were: est, or *Erhard Seminars Training*, (formed by Werner Erhard), Lifespring (formed by John Hanley and others), PSI Seminars (formed by Thomas and Jane Willhite) and Actualizations (formed by Stewart Emery). Werner Erhard (who I argue plays a central role in *Fight Club*) is generally considered “The Godfather” of these trainings and although est no longer exists, it changed its name to Werner Erhard and Associates (WE&A) in the early 1980s, and then became Landmark Education (“Landmark”) in 1991. Landmark currently has over 100 offices worldwide, a presence in 22 countries, and claims more than 2.4 million graduates since its inception. Of particular relevance is that Chuck Palahniuk (the author of *Fight Club*) took his trainings with *this organisation* in 1989. Because the trainings are highly scripted and structured, many spinoffs of the original trainings have occurred in the last forty years. There are now hundreds of these organisations, in almost every major city, and country, that you can think of (Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, and others).

Typically, LGATs run over three to five days and they are made up of long lectures, guided visualisation exercises, New Age philosophy, and brutal interactions between participants and the trainer. There can be anywhere from a few dozen to a few hundred people at these trainings and they tend to be in a closed-off room for the waking duration of the course. Most significantly the trainer – and the training – is highly confrontational, and the format of this confrontation is typically that two people (the trainer and one participant at a time) engage in a psychologically violent exchange while the rest of the participants watch. Frequently, people will talk about painful problems in their lives and they will be mocked and harassed by the trainer until they “take responsibility” for these experiences:

“It’s your own fault. Gradually, Tony moved on to another mainstay in the est body of knowledge, the idea of ‘taking responsibility for your life.’ It is basically the perception that your problems aren’t caused by sickness or fate or other people, they are caused by you, and until you accept that, you’ll never solve any of them. Not surprisingly, almost everyone in the room had an example of some exception in his own case, but Tony would have none of it. He wouldn’t have cared if you’d been gang-raped or born with a brain defect, it was no goddamn excuse” (Brewer, 1975).

The people who offer criticism of LGATs are often those familiar with indoctrination processes – former “Moonie” Steven Hassan mentions them in his book *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, Dr Margaret Singer dedicates chapter eight of her book *Cults in Our Midst* to LGATs, and the head of the International Cultic Studies Association, Dr Michael Langone, has expressed concern about their processes, and the lack of evidence for their claims. A highly unfavourable biography of Werner Erhard was also written by journalist Steven Pressman, for which he was sued by Landmark Education.

Why would people take part in these trainings? The trainings are described as experiential – as a result of significant stress applied for a few days and then suddenly removed, participants are pushed into a mild manic state. They feel confident, sociable, energised, enlightened, and euphoric – a state labelled “breakthrough” or “transformation” by the organisations. This tends to last for a few days to a few weeks and some become addicted to this state (the term “course junkie” is sometimes used).

“Afterward, participants have attested to feeling ‘awesome’ and experiencing an emotional high that lasted for days. Some say they had to use special ‘grounding’ procedures just to carry on with normal life after this transcending experience” (Singer, 2003, p. 198).

It cannot be overstated just how pleasurable and empowering this state is for many. Few understand that their state of mind is related to altered neurotransmitter levels and that the “one-size-fits-all” approach used by LGATs inevitably causes serious psychological harm to a portion of the participants:

“Most of the people I’ve seen at our clinic – and they come in after the training in fairly substantial numbers – have suffered reactions that range from moderately bad to dreadful,’ the executive director of New York City’s Lincoln Institute for Psychotherapy reported in 1978. ‘They are confused and jarred, and the same pattern – elation, depression, feelings of omnipotence followed by feelings of helplessness – is repeated over and over again” (Pressman, 1993, p. 194, in reference the first major LGAT, “est”).

In Dr Singer’s book, she provides evidence of psychotic breakdowns, suicides, PTSD, phobias, cognitive difficulties and stress-related illnesses experienced by some LGAT participants:

“Although she had no history of psychiatric illness prior to the Lifespring training, afterward Jane underwent a period of growing depression that culminated in multiple suicide attempts. She was hospitalized for three years and remains on medication. Jane sued Lifespring and the case was settled for a large amount” (Singer, 2003, pp. 203-204).

What I believe happened with Chuck Palahniuk is that he was involved with “Landmark”, got something powerful out of it – enjoyed the perspective it provided on life – but, being an independent thinker, decided to do some research. In an interview with Sean O’Hagan of The Guardian in 2005,

Palahniuk explains how he participated in “Landmark”, and how it gave him the confidence to quit his job and face his fears (O'Hagan, 2005):

“A casual visit to a ‘group awareness’ seminar conducted by the Landmark Forum, an organisation that uses ideas based on controversial ‘est’ therapy, was, he says, his ‘big epiphany moment’.

‘I was 26 when I did the seminar, convinced the world was out to burn me at every turn. If it wasn’t for that seminar, I wouldn’t be a writer. They taught me to see how closed down I was, to face my fears.’

Armed with ‘est’ awareness, Chuck quit his job in journalism and set about confronting his fears big time.”

Palahniuk also explains that his books typically reflect his own experiences (O'Hagan, 2005):

“Oh, definitely. If they are satires, it is usually me satirising myself, the traps I fell into, the self-help groups I attended. It’s all me. I’m the guy who had the Ikea catalogue in my drawer at work.”

Likewise, Believer Magazine insists that his decision to write was inspired by the Landmark Forum:

“In 1989, a man named Chuck Palahniuk enrolled in a Landmark Forum workshop¹³⁶. He was twenty-six years old and, like many of his co-participants, struggling with his life and what to do with it. Despite his lack of vocational direction, Palahniuk had no problem navigating his way to the closest exit after the first forty-five minutes of the workshop, repelled by the program’s cultiness and rigidity. Later that day, however, he returned to complete the training, and that night began writing what would become his best-selling book, *Fight Club...*” (Snider, 2003).

Vanessa Grigoriadis of New York Magazine quotes Palahniuk with regards to his participation:

“Then, when I was walking out, it struck me that I was 26 years old and I was never going to take another risk in my life. I was the one being an asshole! So I went back and said, ‘Okay, I’d like to take a risk, where do I sign?’ After that, I bought a word processor. That was my first step to being a writer” (Grigoriadis, 2001).

My view is that, as a “Landmark” enthusiast, but independent thinker, Palahniuk later read two key books which compelled him to reconsider his support for the organisation:

1. *Outrageous Betrayal – The Dark Journey of Werner Erhard from est to Exile* by Steven Pressman (published in 1993).
2. *Cults in Our Midst* by Dr Margaret Singer (published in 1995).

¹³⁶ This would have been challenging, as Landmark was only formed in 1991. He initially attended *the Forum* (offered by WE&A), and may have been involved until 1991, when *the Landmark Forum* was first offered.

(*Fight Club* was first published in August 1996, soon after these two books, yet seven years after the training that supposedly kicked off Palahniuk's writing career; the film, directed by David Fincher, and starring Edward Norton, Brad Pitt, and Helena Bonham Carter, was released in 1999.)

In these books, he would have been confronted with a disturbing portrayal of Werner Erhard and evidence of those harmed by these trainings, and I believe that this caused him conflict. On one hand, he had these courses which presumably worked for him – impressive-sounding philosophy and a no-holds-barred attitude to life – and on the other hand he had evidence that, while these trainings might offer benefit to some, there are others who suffer enormously as a result of taking part:

“Importantly, a certain number of participants will be seriously harmed as these stresses precipitate a handful of psychological conditions, such as brief psychotic episodes, posttraumatic stress disorder syndrome, a variety of dissociative disorders, relaxation-induced anxiety, and other miscellaneous reactions including phobias, cognitive difficulties, and stress-related illnesses” (Singer, 2003, p. 208).

He would have read arguments, for example, that LGATs – instead of making people conscious of the real dangers of participation – pay off the few who are seriously harmed. I believe that these books were the flying saucer which did not arrive for Palahniuk¹³⁷ – the stimulus for him to really think about how they operate – and that *Fight Club* is about his wrestling between an emotional connection to these trainings (and their way of viewing the world) and the conscience-invoking perspective offered by Pressman and Singer. Perhaps he lost himself in these trainings, enjoyed the sense of enlightenment and community they provided, and merged his identity with a leader who gave his life meaning. My view is that *Fight Club* is about Palahniuk reclaiming himself and reclaiming his mind – about the difficulty of having to let “God” die so that he could be free.

What follows are some of my observations about the LGAT industry and *Fight Club*. Why, you might ask, have you never heard about LGATs before? The answer is simple and at the same time revealing. For the first few hours of any LGAT participants will be put in their place and explained the rules they must agree to for the duration of the training. These rules are repeated over and over again – most of which effectively hand all authority over to the trainer – but the most crucial and emphasised of all the rules is that “YOU DO NOT TALK ABOUT WHAT GOES ON IN THE LGAT”.

¹³⁷ “When Prophecy Fails”

The *Fight Club* metaphor – dissecting a “delusion”

“Horror is always creating a monster that stands for something that society can’t talk out loud about. The Frankenstein monster was about the industrial revolution...” – Chuck Palahniuk¹³⁸

1984 is not George Orwell’s only popular novel – another of his more prominent works is *Animal Farm*. The plot is not important for this discussion, but the use of metaphor is worth noting. While the book is at face value about a bunch of animals living on a farm, it is an allegory, representing the events which led to the 1917 Russian Revolution. Orwell described *Animal Farm* as a satirical tale against Stalin and stated that it was the first book in which he had tried, with full consciousness of what he was doing, “to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole”. As some of the more obvious examples of double-meanings, one can look at the main characters in the novel: Old Major was a combination of Marx and Lenin; Napoleon was an allegory of Stalin; Snowball was based chiefly on Trotsky; Squealer, in charge of propaganda, enjoyed a similar position to that of Molotov.

Orwell was not the first novelist, nor the last, to use satire to make his views on a veiled subject known. As I will demonstrate, Chuck Palahniuk, having been involved in WE&A/Landmark, felt it necessary to surreptitiously express his views on this industry through his most noted work. Unlike *Animal Farm*, where Orwell intended his audience to pick up on his message, in this novel the message has remained hidden for many years. Only through an in-depth understanding of LGATs and a careful review of the book and film can the allegory of *Fight Club* be understood.

If you Google “Landmark + Fight Club” you will find a link to a Landmark Education news webpage (Landmark, 2008). Here you will find an article by Landmark Education, proclaiming “*Fight Club* Author Discusses Creative Process; Credits Landmark Education”. This Landmark Education article refers to an article by Matt Thorne (Thorne, 2008), published in the UK newspaper, The Independent, which makes reference to Landmark Education with just the following words:

“Palahniuk began his career after attending a self-help course called Landmark, and he tells me that although he hasn’t attended a course in several years, it still informs his attitude to life.”

In spite of Landmark’s claims about Palahniuk, I will argue that *Fight Club* is anything but complimentary towards Landmark Education or LGATs as a whole. I believe that Palahniuk used *Fight Club* to satirise the industry, commenting on how recklessly it goes about providing enlightenment, while sweeping casualties indifferently under the rug. For the purposes of this document I will assume that you have seen the movie and will provide page numbers when I reference the book¹³⁹.

¹³⁸ (Mr. Blueberry, 2014).

¹³⁹ This document was created, based on watching the movie, in 2012. Any references to the book were inserted in 2016, after reading the book for the first time.

So, let's begin. Edward Norton (the protagonist) plays a "nameless" character who cannot sleep. He tries the traditional medical route, but is turned away by a doctor who suggests that he check out "real pain" by visiting the testicular cancer support group (some doctors do suggest that their patients attend LGATs). Norton goes to these groups, which involve putting on a name tag, sharing painful experiences, hugging, and – quite frequently – crying. Some of these groups use guided meditation (Norton is told to go to his cave and find his power animal, for example). Norton does not understand why but these groups provide him with relief. He comments "Every evening I died... and every evening I was born again... resurrected". They allow him to sleep so he does not question how they work.

I believe that Norton represents Palahniuk himself (they even resemble each other), or any person who takes LGAT trainings and becomes an LGAT volunteer. LGATs require name tags, they encourage sharing painful experiences, there is frequently crying, purging of emotions, hugging, and guided meditation. Norton's enjoyment of these groups comes to a halt when Marla Singer arrives. Norton, after explaining the benefits he gets from participation, narrates as Marla wanders into the group, "... UNTIL SHE... RUINED... EVERYTHING". Marla ruins the experience for him because he knows that she's faking, which reminds him that he's faking. Marla is a reality check for Norton – preventing him from simply enjoying the group without thinking about what is really going on around him. While she turns out to be the one person who really cares about him, he resents her at first, tries to avoid contact with her, and does all that he can to keep her out of his life. Marla Singer likely represents the gritty Dr Margaret Singer - the best-known critic of LGATs and author of *Cults in Our Midst*. Singer's full name is Margaret Thaler Singer: Mar-ler Singer. Perhaps I'm reading into things too much, but try to keep an open mind. I suspect that Palahniuk was involved with "Landmark" for a few years, and did initially gain value from participation – that he had a few peak experiences and that he wanted to believe that these experiences were uncorrupted – but that he came upon the work of Pressman and Singer, which made him reconsider whether he could support the organisation in good conscience.

Then we get to Tyler Durden, played by Brad Pitt. Tyler is ultimately a figment of Norton's imagination, and he represents a more impulsive, risk-seeking, philosophical, confident, and "enlightened" version of Norton. Tyler represents the person that Norton wants to be, the person he aspires to be. In short Tyler represents an LGAT trainer or, more specifically, he represents Werner Erhard (the "Godfather" of LGATs) himself. At the end of the movie Tyler explains to Norton:

"You were looking for a way to change your life. You could not do this on your own. All the ways you wish you were – that's me. I look like you want to look, I fuck like you want to fuck, I am smart, I am capable and I am free in all of the ways that you are not."

From a psychological perspective, this is not as radical an idea as you may think:

“Identification refers to learning which occurs as the result of modeling behavior upon others. Glass and associates (1977) and Kirsch & Glass (1977), in reports of est casualties (described above), suggest that ‘identification with the aggressor’ is a central dynamic in all est outcomes. They argue that est trainees exposed to a regimen of sleep deprivation and an attacking charismatic leader attempt to master the situation by unconsciously identifying with, or merging with, the trainer” (Finkelstein, et al., 1982, p. 534).

Notably, Pressman (1993) quotes these authors, who say of est:

“... an authoritarian, confrontational, aggressive leadership style coupled with physiologic deprivation fosters an identification with the aggressor. The inability of this defense mechanism to contain overwhelming anxiety aroused by the process may lead to fusion with the leader, ego fragmentation and psychotic decompensation” (p. 193).

Describing the way that Landmark volunteers look up to the trainer, Hukill (1998) states:

“The volunteers, some of them Forum leader hopefuls, watch the way he sits in his director’s chair, relaxed but energized, the person everyone wants to be.”

After watching the movie a few times, I Googled “Landmark + Fight Club” and found that, while a few articles mentioned Palahniuk’s participation, only one compared a *Fight Club* character to a key figure from the LGAT industry. In a 1999 film review by Roger Ebert, Tyler Durden was described as:

“... a bully – Werner Erhard plus S&M, a leather club operator without the décor” (Ebert, 1999).

Commenting on those who follow Tyler, Ebert (1999) continues:

“None of the fight club members grow stronger or freer because of their membership; they’re reduced to pathetic cultists.”

Looking back at the movie, Tyler Durden is a charismatic, alpha male sociopath. He represents freedom from all of the rules and a new and exciting way of looking at the world. When you consider the three jobs that Tyler has, the metaphor begins to gain clarity. Norton explains early on in the film that Tyler works as “a banquet waiter at the luxurious Pressman Hotel”. Steven Pressman was the journalist who wrote the damning biography on Werner Erhard, entitled *“Outrageous Betrayal – The Dark Journey of Werner Erhard from est to Exile”* (1993). Later in the film Norton comments, “Tyler was now involved in a class action lawsuit with the Pressman Hotel over the urine content of their soup”. In 1998 Landmark Education sued Steven Pressman and attempted to force him to reveal his sources. Since there was a reference to the Pressman Hotel, but not to a lawsuit, in the book (1996), it is telling that the movie (1999) makes reference to a lawsuit which – if the analogy is valid – only took place after the book was published.

Tyler's second job is as a projectionist. He takes this job, we are told, because it affords him the opportunity to splice single frames of pornography into family films. "Nobody knows that they saw it, but they have..." Norton explains. LGATs have frequently been accused during the nearly half-century they've been around of using deceptive methods of indoctrination – of furtively manipulating participants to work as unpaid salesmen (servants) through trainings which are marketed as transformative and empowering. An interesting YouTube video (David Barron aka Dantalion Jones, 2011) looks at one specific example where Landmark surreptitiously uses the word "enrol" obsessively - trying to get Landmark Forum participants to associate their own success with enrolling others. Of course, Landmark denies that it does any such thing.

Tyler's final job is making soap. "In order to make soap", Tyler tells Norton, "we need fat, and the best fat for making soap comes from humans". Consider what LGATs do. As well as visualisation exercises and obscure philosophical lectures, they get participants to reveal their deepest, darkest secrets – the problems, the concerns and the things which are troubling them. What they then do is they take what participants say and twist it around (so that they can "take responsibility") and then they give it back to them. For this they charge hundreds of dollars. Fat may represent the bad/painful parts of people that are revealed, repackaged, and returned to participants. Norton comments while Tyler sells the soap, "It was beautiful - we were selling rich women their own fat asses back to them".

The greatest conflict during the movie is between Tyler, who I believe represents hedonism and doing things without conscience, and Marla, who represents compassion, reason, and restraint. Norton at one point comments, "Other than when they were fucking, Tyler and Marla were never in the same room together". This may represent the cognitive dissonance that would occur if the "no logic" philosophy and practices of LGATs had to be in the same person's head as the facts provided by Singer. Before Norton tries to send Marla away on a bus he exclaims, "They think you're some kind of threat – I can't explain it right now". Margaret Singer, also sued by Landmark, was certainly seen as a threat.

The protagonist's Tuesday night meetings in *Fight Club* also bear a close resemblance to the Tuesday night graduation evenings Landmark uses to enrol new participants. During these evenings, which occur five days into the training, Landmark graduates tell their guests how the training has changed their lives for the better, in an effort to recruit them. Palahniuk (2006) explains what occurs at the *Above and Beyond* "Catch-Up Rap", how attending these weekly meetings made him feel, and then how Marla "watching him" prevented him from enjoying them:

"Everybody is always getting better. Oh, this new medication. Everyone's always just turned the corner. Still, everywhere, there's the squint of a five-day headache. A woman wipes at involuntary

tears. Everyone gets a name tag, and people you've met every Tuesday night for a year, they come at you, handshake ready and their eyes on your name tag" (p. 34).

"Walking home after a support group, I felt more alive than I'd ever felt" (p. 22).

Margaret Singer, I believe, would be a reality check to supporters of Landmark – anyone who read, and honestly engaged with, the information in her book would find it difficult to support the way that LGATs operate. In *Fight Club* Marla prevents the protagonist from enjoying his group and adopting the hedonistic, and "enlightened" perspective advocated by Tyler:

"I can't cry with this woman watching me" (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 22).

"Tyler just doesn't come out when Marla's around" (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 65).

A number of overlapping metaphors seem to represent different aspects of the organisations. The support groups provide insight into certain elements; the fight clubs are probably a reference to the particularly confrontational elements; while *Project Mayhem* may reflect life as a volunteer for the company. Tyler, who represents the trainer and ideology with whom participants merge, explains that he takes over whenever the protagonist "falls asleep", suggesting that Erhard (est/WE&A/Landmark) takes control as soon as participants stop questioning and start acting intuitively:

"Every time you fall asleep," Tyler says, "I run off and do something wild, something crazy, something completely out of my mind" (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 163).

"We're not two separate men. Long story short, when you're awake, you have the control, and you can call yourself anything you want, but the second you fall asleep, I take over, and you become Tyler Durden" (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 167).

Palahniuk (2006) explains that the only way for the protagonist to "stay awake" was with Marla's help - that only Marla's influence could prevent Tyler from completely taking over:

"And if I went to bed earlier every night and I slept later every morning, eventually I'd be gone altogether. I'd just go to sleep and never wake up [...] I would never wake up and Tyler would take over" (p. 174).

"So Tyler can't take complete control, I need Marla to keep me awake. All the time" (p. 174).

In the film, Tyler tries to keep Norton away from Marla. At one point he asks, "You're not into her, are you?" Norton insists that he's not. Tyler then attempts to portray Marla as the enemy: "That's good, because she's a predator posing as a house pet. Stay away from her". He later sits down next to Norton and says, "Now I can't have you talking to her about me. You say anything about me and about what goes on in this house and we're over..." He then makes Norton promise three times that he would not

talk to Marla about him. This type of promising is reminiscent of LGAT agreements to never talk about what happens in them. It may also represent the way that trainers ask participants to disengage from reason during the trainings. Participants are mocked for using logic and rewarded for “just going with it”. Tyler represents “just going with it” and Marla represents evidence and logic:

“... For the first several hours of the training, Erhard and his other trainers kept up a non-stop barrage of verbal insults, taunting the participants in the straight-backed chairs, insisting they were all worthless human beings who clung to beliefs about themselves and their own lives that were rooted in ridiculous notions about reason, logic, and understanding” (Pressman, 1993, p. 71).

So, there are three main characters in the film, all of whom may represent key figures in the LGAT industry:

- Norton, representing a typical LGAT participant/volunteer, or Palahniuk himself.
- Marla Singer, representing Dr Margaret Singer.
- Tyler Durden, representing an LGAT trainer, or Werner Erhard himself.

I believe that Norton may actually represent a few people, based upon interactions he has during the film. I referred earlier to the fact that Tyler is a freer and “re-invented” version of Norton. If Tyler represents Werner Erhard and he is the invention of Norton, then who would Norton also be? Werner Erhard was actually born as Jack Rosenberg, but he left his wife and four children, moved to a new city, changed his name and started a new family:

“Nobody back in Philadelphia, he thought to himself, would ever imagine that Jack Rosenberg would change his name to Werner Hans Erhard” (Pressman, 1993, p. 2).

It is, therefore, interesting to note what Norton’s nameless character was called in the screenplay, and on the set, while making *Fight Club*. Norton’s character was referred to as “Jack”. You may also remember from the movie that Norton finds a strange book in Tyler’s house:

TYLER: Hey man. What are you reading?

NORTON: Listen to this. It’s an article written by an organ in the first person. I am Jack’s medulla oblongata. Without me Jack could not regulate his heat-rate, blood pressure, or breathing. There’s a whole series of these... I am Jack’s colon...

TYLER: Yeah... I get cancer. I kill Jack.

Throughout the movie there are more “I am Jack’s...” comments¹⁴⁰ such as:

¹⁴⁰ In the book, Palahniuk specifically refers to Reader’s Digest and the “I am Joe’s...” articles. Sapolsky (2004) also referred to the “I am Joe’s...” articles in the Reader’s Digest in his book on stress.

- I am Jack's raging bile duct
- I am Jack's cold sweat
- I am Jack's complete lack of surprise
- I am Jack's wasted life
- I am Jack's inflamed sense of rejection
- I am Jack's broken heart
- I am Jack's smirking revenge

Additionally, during one scene, where Norton sits on the floor and Tyler sits in the bath, Norton says:

"I don't know my dad... I mean I know him but he left when I was like six years old... married this other woman, had some other kids... He did this every few years – he goes to a new city and starts a new family."

Consider Werner Erhard's story in light of Norton's comments:

"On May 25th, 1960, Rosenberg picked up June from her real estate office and drove to the Newark airport, where they left the car in the parking lot and boarded a flight to Indianapolis. More than a dozen years would pass before Rosenberg's family would hear from him again. By the time they landed a few hours later, Jack Rosenberg and June Bryde were ready to begin new lives as Werner and Ellen Erhard" (Pressman 1993, p. 6).

Norton's profession also hints at a major criticism of LGATs. He works as a "recall coordinator" and his job is to "apply the formula":

NORTON: I'm a recall coordinator. My job was to apply the formula. It's simple arithmetic. It's a story problem. A new car built by my company leaves Boston traveling at 60 miles per hour. The rear differential locks up. The car crashes and burns with everyone trapped inside. Now: do we initiate a recall? You take the number of vehicles in the field (A) and multiply it by the probable rate of failure (B), multiply the result by the average out-of-court settlement (C). A times B times C equals X. If X is less than the cost of a recall, we don't do one.

(Norton is explaining this to a woman next to him on a plane.)

WOMAN: Does this sort of accident happen often?

NORTON: You wouldn't believe...

WOMAN: Which... car company do you work for?

NORTON: A major one.

What Palahniuk may be alluding to here is the argument that LGATs are well aware that a portion of their participants are seriously harmed, but that they aren't willing to stop running the trainings because the revenue from satisfied participants exceeds their costs of out-of-court settlements. Chapter eight of Margaret Singer's book *Cults in Our Midst* speaks of the numerous out-of-court settlements paid out by LGATs over the years. Like the protagonist's car company, LGATs may prefer to pay people off in the event of disaster, rather than warning people of the real risks, because from a business perspective this is a more profitable route to take. If this analogy is valid, the book suggests that, as a "Landmark" volunteer/employee, Palahniuk witnessed numerous people being harmed, but noted that casualties were covered up and that Landmark accepted no responsibility:

"I know about the air-conditioning rheostat that gets so hot it sets fire to the maps in your glove compartment. I know how many people burn alive because of fuel-injector flashback. I've seen people's legs cut off at the knee when turbochargers start exploding and send their vanes through the firewall and into the passenger compartment. I've been out in the field and seen the burned-up cars and seen the reports where CAUSE OF FAILURE is recorded as 'unknown'" (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 99).

"If you know where to look, there are bodies buried everywhere" (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 126).

I imagine that you may still be sceptical that Palahniuk and Fincher were using the movie as a metaphor, so here are a couple of other "coincidences". While running east, Werner Erhard's mansion in San Francisco was in Franklin Street. In *Outrageous Betrayal* Steven Pressman refers to it constantly and chapter eleven is entitled "Nightmare on Franklin Street":

"Inside the Franklin House, from which Erhard directed his minions, nothing escaped the attention and demands of the master" (Pressman, 1993, p. 123).

The final scene in *Fight Club* – the building from which Norton and Marla eventually watch the other buildings collapsing – is in... wait for it... Franklin Street. This name comes up twice in the movie – firstly, when Norton checks a number that he called while "asleep" he is told that the address is "1888 Franklin Street" and later, after he escapes from the cops who are in on the plot (after running in his boxers down the road), he reaches a road with a bus shelter on it. He briefly looks up to the name on the bus shelter and it says "FRANKLIN STREET". This seems incredibly specific to be just another coincidence. Just prior to all of this is the scene where Norton tries to turn himself in. He approaches the counter at the police station and confesses to being responsible for "multiple acts of vandalism..." and just before the movie moves on to the discussion with the policemen there is a brief changeover where a couple of things flash on the screen. One of the things which flashes is a green sign which says "6868 EMERY PL.". Anyone who has read *Outrageous Betrayal*, or is familiar with the origins of LGATs,

knows that Stewart Emery played a significant role in the LGAT movement. Emery worked closely with Erhard for a number of years, and was actually the first CEO of est, before breaking away to form his own LGAT, Actualizations. Another coincidence?¹⁴¹

“That began to change in the summer of 1973 when Erhard conferred upon Stewart Emery the new title of chief executive officer...” (Pressman, 1993, p. 85).

Onto more general comparisons. LGATs involve psychologically brutal interactions between the trainer and participants – two people at a time – which continue until the participant submits, and which lead to euphoria/breakthroughs/enlightenment of some sort. *Fight Club* is effectively about physically brutal interactions – two people at a time – which continue until one person submits, and which lead to euphoria/breakthroughs/enlightenment of some sort:

“Only two guys to a fight. One fight at a time. They fight without shirts or shoes. The fights go on as long as they have to” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 49).

“That’s the third rule in fight club, when someone says stop, or goes limp, even if he’s faking it, the fight is over” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 49).

Referring to the breakthroughs, confidence, and euphoria brought about by fighting, Norton says:

- “After fight club, we all started seeing things differently.”
- “After a fight, you could deal with anything.”
- “Afterwards we all felt saved.”

The back cover of the DVD possibly makes the most explicit reference to fight-induced euphoria (while overtly referring to Norton’s character as “Jack”), stating, “Before long, Jack and Tyler are beating each other to a pulp in a bar parking lot, a cathartic slugfest that delivers the ultimate high” (Fincher, 1999). Without personal experience of an LGAT it may be difficult to see the parallel between the psychological brutality of engaging one-on-one with an LGAT trainer and getting beaten to a pulp, but the similarities are greater than they may appear:

“A core part of Landmark technology is the grand moment of confession on a microphone. It’s a public unloading that can suddenly turn into psychological rape if the coach decides to exert his authority by challenging someone. Today, the victim will be Danielle¹⁴², a mother who talks about her problems with her daughter. The scene is chilling...” (Lemonnier, 2005).

¹⁴¹ It is plausible that Emery, who played a key role in the formation of est, but received little credit (much like Norton) and later criticised it (like Norton), is also represented by Norton.

¹⁴² This is the woman who was filmed in the France 3 documentary. As at 8 August 2017, the full video can be accessed at http://www.culthelp.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1243&Itemid=12

The highs referred to in *Fight Club* are also consistently remarked on by LGAT graduates:

“I was shaken by the power of the weekend. As I got the midnight train out of London, I realised that well over 100 people had experienced a transformation in three days. The sense of euphoria that such an experience of accelerated community brings was remarkable” (Howard, 2001).

Landmark’s core constructionist philosophy – that everything is a “story” and that we need to free ourselves from our pasts – is also mirrored in Tyler’s philosophy:

“Because everything up until now is a story,” Tyler says, “and everything after now is a story” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 75).

“What Tyler says about being the crap and the slaves of history, that’s how I felt” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 123).

“We wanted to blast the world free of history” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 124).

Even Landmark’s grandiose claims of changing the world are mirrored in Tyler’s statements:

“It’s Project Mayhem that’s going to save the world” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 125).

Palahniuk possibly provides another hint at the Landmark Forum, when he describes the “hysterical shouting” at fight club, and how members feel “saved” by Sunday afternoon:

“There’s grunting and noise at fight club like at the gym, but fight club isn’t about looking good. There’s hysterical shouting in tongues like at church, and when you wake up Sunday afternoon you feel saved” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 51).

Landmark involves hysterical shouting (in the fear exercise, if nowhere else), and participants are promised that they will achieve “transformation” by Sunday afternoon:

“Next day, the leader asked us to sit with our eyes closed and conjure up a painful memory. He then asked us to imagine that we were in a packed London Tube and everyone was looking at us and was out to get us. I can remember feeling terrified. All around the room I could hear these terrible screaming sobs; I realised that I was crying too” (Braid, 2003).

There is also maybe a hint at how Landmark graduates are often seen by non-graduates. Numerous sources state that graduates unwittingly come across as overly-assertive about the training, the benefits of it, how you should enrol, and how – by speaking with new-age jargon – they are now somehow enlightened. In *Fight Club*, Palahniuk (2006) alludes to how this may make others feel:

“Me, with my punched out eyes and dried blood in big black crusty stains on my pants, I’m saying HELLO to everybody at work. HELLO! Look at me. HELLO! I am so ZEN. This is BLOOD. This is NOTHING. Hello. Everything is nothing, and it’s so cool to be ENLIGHTENED. Like me” (p. 64).

Fight club is also incredibly rule oriented. There is a major focus on the rules during the film and the first and second rules of fight club are “YOU DO NOT TALK ABOUT FIGHT CLUB”. LGATs do exactly the same thing, heavily stressing and enforcing rules – the most crucial and emphasised of which is that you do not reveal any detail about what goes on in the LGAT:

“Est graduates for years were admonished never to tell others about what occurred inside est training sessions” (Pressman, 1993, p. 20).

“We have all signed a confidentiality agreement as well as an agreement not to violate Landmark’s copyright claims” (Mahoney, 1998).

As the movie progresses the fight clubs start to develop into something that Tyler calls “Project Mayhem”. Acceptance into Project Mayhem requires that recruits pass through a process that is curiously similar to Landmark’s introductory program, the Forum, and the “leadership training” which follows. The Forum could plausibly be summarised as three days of being told that you are not good enough by the leader after which, if you do not leave, you are accepted as a graduate (and asked to volunteer). Describing how Project Mayhem recruits were treated, Palahniuk (2006, pp. 128-129) says:

“If the applicant is young, we tell him he’s too young. If he’s fat, he’s too fat. If he’s old, he’s too old. Thin, he’s too thin. White, he’s too white. Black, he’s too black [...] You tell the participant to go away, and if his resolve is so strong that he waits at the entrance without food or water or shelter or encouragement for three days, then and only then can he enter and begin the training.”

Referring to the tendency of most participants to stay for the whole training, Palahniuk (2006) states:

“... sometimes the applicants will leave, but most times the applicants stick it out until the third day...” (p. 130).

Tyler and Norton end up living in a house with scores of volunteers, who cook, clean, and perform every conceivable menial task that is requested of them. This group of live-in servants mimics the setup which has been observed in LGAT headquarters such as Landmark Education (as revealed in the 2004 French documentary). A common criticism of LGATs is that an inordinately high proportion of administration and sales work is performed not by paid employees of the organisations, but by volunteers who believe they are doing the world a service, and are gaining free “enlightenment”. Pressman (1993) describes how this occurred at est:

“Around the country, a growing army of enthusiastic est volunteers (called ‘assistants’ in est jargon) contributed free labor – sometimes up to forty hours per week – to the organization, filling every conceivable task from handling the phones in est centers around the country to cleaning out the toilets and scrubbing the pots and pans at Franklin House” (p. 86).

“Within the est culture, enthusiastic staff members and volunteers cheerfully spent hours scrubbing toilets and windows until they shined, convinced that such mundane service was part of a Zen-like philosophy offering Erhard’s version of the path toward enlightenment” (p. 136).

Palahniuk (2006) similarly describes the mundane tasks performed by volunteers at Project Mayhem, while the protagonist questions what the space monkeys think they are getting for their servitude:

“So what brainless little honor has Tyler assigned him, I ask. There are guys whose job it is to just boil rice all day or wash out eating bowls or clean the crapper. All day. Has Tyler promised Bob enlightenment if he spends sixteen hours a day wrapping bars of soap?” (p. 131).

Project Mayhem’s rules also closely mirror the rules at LGATs, where participants are discouraged from questioning, no excuses are accepted by the trainer, and participants are expected to uncritically trust the trainer. Describing the rules, Palahniuk (2006) says:

“You don’t ask questions is the first rule in Project Mayhem” (p. 122).

“... but the second rule of Project Mayhem is you don’t ask questions” (p. 122).

“The third rule in Project Mayhem is no excuses” (p. 122).

“The fifth rule about Project Mayhem is that you have to trust Tyler” (p. 125).

If the LGAT metaphor is valid, then Palahniuk’s view of Erhard is clear:

“... Tyler said the goal of Project Mayhem had nothing to do with other people. Tyler didn’t care if other people got hurt or not. The goal was to teach man in the project that he had the power to control history. We, each of us, can take control of the world” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 122).

Another likely parallel with the tactics of LGATs is when the space monkeys infiltrate the dinner where a high-ranking official is promising to catch the underground group responsible for “many recent acts of vandalism”. When this high-ranking official takes a bathroom break he opens the door to find Tyler, who grabs him, throws him to the ground, and punches him in the face. The space monkeys then all gather around this terrified man, they place tape over his mouth and they pull his trousers to his knees. Tyler then menacingly tells this high-ranking official:

“Hi. You're going to call off your rigorous investigation... you're going to *publicly state* that there is no underground group... or... these guys are going to take your balls” (one of the space monkeys flashes a knife at the frightened man).

Tyler then leans in right close to the man and says, “Do not fuck with us!”

Like est before it, Landmark has been accused of using its vast legal resources to intimidate those who question its processes and draw attention to the negative experiences of some participants. It was only because of a pro bono defence by New York legal firm *Lowenstein Sandler* that Rick Ross (founder of www.culteducation.com) was able to fight off a cynical Landmark lawsuit in 2004; Margaret Singer was one of many individuals and organisations who were less fortunate. As a result of the significant financial pressure created by Landmark's litigation, she was forced to remove references to Landmark from her book and *publicly state* that it was not a cult (Scioscia, 2000; Skolnik & Norwick, 2006):

"I do not believe that either Landmark Education or the Landmark Forum is a cult or sect or meets the definition of a cult or sect" (Schreiber, 1999).

Most LGATs have exercises which force participants to acknowledge the inherent meaninglessness of life. In accepting this meaninglessness, they are told that they are the source of all meaning. Consider the following statement by Werner Erhard which reflects this philosophy (cheriele, 2008):

"People began to realise that not only was it meaningless and empty, but it was empty and meaningless that it was empty and meaningless... and in that there is an enormous freedom..."

The final revelation provided in the Landmark Forum – two decades after Erhard's departure – remains exactly the same:

"Life is empty and meaningless" (O'Brien, 2012).

The following statements, the first by Norton and the second by Tyler, reflect the idea that it is only when we realise that it's all empty and meaningless that we can begin to create:

"When the fight was over nothing was solved, but nothing mattered."

"First, you have to know that someday, you are going to die. Until you know that, you will be useless... It's only when we have lost everything that we are free to do anything."

Then there is the way that est grew from San Francisco to have a presence in nearly every major city. Est was spread throughout the USA by Erhard, but very soon – because the courses were highly scripted – former est trainers and participants began starting up their own LGATs under various different names. In the film this is represented as follows:

NORTON: Did you know that there's a fight club up in Delaware City?

TYLER: Yeah, I heard...

NORTON: There's one in Penns Grove too. Bob's even found one up in Newcastle...

TYLER: Yeah, did you start that one?

NORTON: No, I thought you did...

TYLER: No...

In the book, Palahniuk (2006) states:

“And this is how Tyler was free to start a fight club every night of the week. After this there were seven fight clubs, and after that there were fifteen fight clubs, and after that there were twenty-three fight clubs, and Tyler wanted more. There was always money coming in” (p. 117).

Later in the book, Palahniuk explains that fight club went from being centred around Tyler to not having a central figure. Considering Palahniuk reportedly became involved with WE&A in 1989 (when Erhard was at the centre of the organisation) and Landmark Education was formed in early 1991 (at which point Erhard was no longer officially at the centre of the organisation), this change would have occurred very near to the time of Palahniuk’s participation:

“The new rule is that nobody should be the center of fight club...” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 142).

Perhaps Palahniuk comments on how new leaders, carefully following scripts, continued with Erhard’s training as follows:

“In every new fight club, someone I’ve never met is standing under the one light in the center of the darkness, surrounded by men, and reading Tyler’s words” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 134).

It’s also interesting how, as in LGATs, there is an emphasis on homework in *Fight Club*. LGATs arguably use homework to generate stress, minimise sleep, and maximise the amount of time that participants are effectively in the LGAT environment. The more time participants are thinking about the doctrine being advocated, the less time they have for sleep, reflection, and influence from the outside world. Likewise, in *Fight Club*, homework is a key part of the process...

TYLER: Each one of you has a homework assignment...

NORTON: Tyler dreamed up new homework assignments. He handed them out in sealed envelopes...

Possibly commenting on how LGAT participants are isolated during the trainings, Norton remarks, “At night we were alone for half a mile in every direction” (while they’re hitting golf balls). According to Dr Robert Jay Lifton “environment control” is the most crucial aspect of thought reform. Isolating a person from any perspective other than your own increases the chances that they will believe that perspective, and during LGATS the only opinion that participants are exposed to is that of the trainer. Perhaps referring to the way that participants accept the extreme LGAT conditions, Norton comments on how even the most bizarre conditions appeared normal after a while. Wading through ankle deep water to switch on the electricity, he says “... by the end of the first month I didn’t miss TV”.

It seems that LGATs manufacture a transient dopamine high in participants – by applying extraordinary stress for a sustained period (which causes the brain to produce excess dopamine) and then suddenly removing the stress they trigger a high (e.g. the fear exercise). Because participants’ brains will

temporarily be in a state of psychological hypervigilance, there will be a period of a few days to a few weeks during which there will be a dopamine excess (a bit like one would experience when taking cocaine, or when in love). A scene from *Fight Club* provides a clear example of this. This scene is the “human sacrifice” scene. Tyler pulls Raymond K. Hessel out from a convenience store, puts him on his knees and tells him, “Raymond! You are going to die!” (while pointing a gun at the back of his head). Raymond is beside himself with fear, shaking, begging and crying as Tyler taunts him about his sad life and how he needs to sort it out. In the book (Palahniuk, 2006), Tyler specifically mocks his self-pity:

“Finally, you were listening and coming out of the little tragedy in your head” (p. 153).

Mocking participants for their self-pity is something that LGAT trainers frequently do:

“Sure. That’s the game Marie’s probably used to having people play when she creates a sickness: ‘Poor Marie! Has to puke. Poor baby!’” (Rhinehart, 2010, p. 17).

“... people had been raped, or abused, or one person had killed their father by mistake. And the leader would shout back at them, and ridicule them for their self-pity or hypocrisy or whatever, until eventually they accepted the leader’s point of view, had a ‘breakthrough’, and converted to a new way of seeing reality” (Evans, 2010).

Eventually Tyler lets Raymond go and he sprints into the darkness, having just been “given back his life” (stress removal). Norton is frustrated with Tyler and says, “What was the point of that?!... I feel sick...”, to which Tyler responds, “Imagine how he feels. Tomorrow will be the most beautiful day of Raymond K. Hessel’s life. His breakfast will taste better than any meal you or I have ever tasted...”¹⁴³

Palahniuk’s commentary on the harm resulting from LGATs is seen again when Bob is shot. The space monkeys bring his body back to the house and argue that, because he was killed serving Project Mayhem, they should just bury him in the garden (destroy the evidence). One of the space monkeys exclaims, “Those mother fuckers!”, placing all liability on the police; Norton immediately responds, “You morons! You’re running around in ski masks trying to blow things up – what did you think was going to happen?” The space monkeys appear numb to the tragedy, concerned solely with protecting their group and its misguided revolution, while Norton – who seems the only one willing to acknowledge responsibility – is disgusted with their denial, and for wanting to cover it up:

NORTON: What are you talking about? This isn’t a fucking piece of evidence! This is a person! He’s a friend of mine, and you’re not going to bury him in the fucking garden! [...] This is a man and he’s dead now because of us, all right? Do you understand that?

¹⁴³ “Their food tastes better...” (Di Matteo, 2000, in reference to a claimed benefit of the Landmark Forum).

Right near the end of the movie this attitude of LGATs is referred to once more. Norton arrives at the parking lot in Franklin Street and finds the bomb, placed in the van by Tyler. Tyler stands outside the van while Norton attempts to disarm the bomb.

TYLER: We're not killing anyone. We're setting them free!

NORTON: Bob is dead! They shot him in the head!

TYLER (shrugging): You want to make an omelette you gotta break some eggs...

To me, this comment captures the attitude of LGATs to those hurt. It also reflects the attitudes of those who support LGATs, knowing the harm that they cause. Like Palahniuk, I have looked into this industry and considered the evidence. People should be free to risk their mental health, but what is crucial is that their decision to participate is based upon an accurate depiction of the training, a grasp of how the “transformations” are generated, and a real understanding of the risks for themselves *and for others*. In addition to understanding the nature of the trainings, participants need to understand the complexity of their resilience to unknown psychological stressors, and that a myriad of influence techniques will be used to modify their beliefs and behaviour, often coercing them *and others* to work (unpaid) for these organisations. There are those, I'm certain, who will want to experience this “enlightenment” and who believe that they are too strong to be damaged and too intelligent to be influenced, but it is a strange enlightenment that elicits a mentality of, “All that I care about is if it works for me”. If a personal development course makes you less empathetic and more inwardly focused, then you have regressed, not grown, and if you callously discard those who will inevitably be harmed then you are one step further from Gandhi and one step closer to Bundy.

In order to escape from Tyler's influence, Norton puts a gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger¹⁴⁴. In doing so, it might be said that he had to let a part of himself die in order to be free. The film ends with The Pixies' *Where is my Mind?* playing and Norton and Marla watching as buildings collapse all around them. They are holding hands as his world falls apart and this, to me, represents a reconciliation with reality under difficult circumstances. Perhaps it was not easy for Palahniuk to accept information that undermined his involvement with this organisation, but in the end his conscience prevailed and he chose evidence, rationality, and morality. I like to think that *Fight Club* is more than the story of men beating each other into submission, or – as other “experts” have suggested – a simple commentary on consumerism and masculinity. To me, it is primarily about experience-based beliefs, the worlds we build around those beliefs, and the courage it takes to dispassionately review them.

¹⁴⁴ “My eyes are open...”

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