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| The increase in **popularity/growth/influence** of NRMs:  LEARNING TABLE 8 – THE POPULARITY/GROWTH OF NRMS  *NRMs become popular/grow/have influence because they perform important functions that churches do not* | | |
| Marginality | Social change | Spiritual void |
| * Inequality, immigration and racism may marginalise some groups. The popularity of NRMs can be related to people using religion as a defence, to make sense of these injustices. * This is called the “**Theodicy of disprivledge**” * For example insurgents in Iraq join **fundamentalist** movements and commit terrorist acts because they believe that they have been marginalised by America, within their own country. Their escape is into heaven using the norms and values provided by the fundamentalist sects. | * People are likely to join NRMs where there is large or rapid social change. * **Durkheim** argues that social change leads to **anomie** (normlessness) meaning there is no set way of behaving in society. * Sects become popular because they are seen to provide strict codes of law in times of uncertainty. * For example the increase in numbers of NRMs in Britain during the 60s can be attributed to the large amount of social change that occurred in this period. | * People join NRMs because their postmodern lives lack magic. * There is secularisation occurring in Britain and people no longer look to **churches** for the answer to spiritual questions. * Postmodernists believe that people are much more likely to fill a spiritual void with a more personalised religion that is close to their views. * For example scientology talks of increasing IQ by releasing negative memories. In this respect the members are directly benefiting by improving their IQ and spiritually benefiting as scientology helps alleviate problems. |
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| Wallis (1984) argues **World rejecting** movements, such as the **Moonies,** are popular because:   * Individuals have more choice and have become more free in modern societies; some people become disillusioned with this upheaval and seek concrete norms and values | Wallis (1984) argues **World affirming** movements, such as **Transcendental meditation,** are popular because:   * Is that modern society is characterised by confusion of identity. World affirming groups seek to help people by unlocking their potential to answer their own questions. | Wallis (1984) argues World **accommodating** movements such as **Pentecostalism** is popular because:   * It appeals to those dissatisfied with mainstream religions but still allows them to follow similar beliefs. |
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| **New age movements** have increased in popularity/grown/have influence because:   1. People aren’t expected to be traditionally religious to be part of a new age movement therefore it feels authentically new. 2. People are expected to find the answers within themselves so being part of a New age movement only takes a little commitment. 3. In postmodern societies New age movements reflect the pick and mix nature of belief and identity. | | |
| **Evaluation** – for arguments against NRMs growing/gaining popularity/being influential take elements from the secularisation debate. Mainstream religions are not necessarily decreasing and NRMs still remain a small percentage of religious membership | | |
| LEARNING TABLE 7 – THE LENGTH OF TIME A NRM WILL LAST | LEARNING TABLE 7 – THE POPULARITY/GROWTH/LONGEVITY OF NRMS |  |
| Are NRMs short lived?  *Niebuhr (1929) argues that NRMs* ***are*** *short lived because:* | | |
| * Interest is linked to the changing nature of modern culture. For example Scientology has increased in popularity as it is practised by a number of Hollywood celebrities. John Travolta made a film Battlefield Earth in tribute to the leader L. Ron Hubbard. * Some people only join at times of crises and leave when that crisis is over. For example women are far more likely to join sects and cults at times of organismic tension such as depression and anorexia. * Commitment often depends on the leadership groups have. For example the Branch Davidians had a highly charismatic leader in David Koresh. His presence meant that members were highly committed, rejected society and unlikely to leave. * Some New Religious Movements are of their time, but quickly date and fade. For example the number of apocalyptic sects that sprung up around the millennium has diminished in popularity and influence. * Some groups fail to recruit beyond their original members. | | |
| **Wilson (1970)** argues that some NRMs can last. | | |
| * Sects can easily turn into denominations if their message does not reject societal norms and values to strongly. * Some sects such as the Mennonites manage to keep a number of their children in the faith therefore reducing the chance of the sect dying out. * NRMs who manage to get celebrity endorsement have a much greater chance of lasting as popularity and membership numbers are maintained. Scientology is a good example of this. | | |
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| Contrast – there are a number of problems with investigating NRMs | | |
| * A problem with using the definition of religious organisations is the **ideal type** creates a problem of **typology**. Churches and sects do not fall into neat categories. The definition of sects was created in 1921 and was taken from mainly Christian sects therefore does not translate to non Christian cultures. Using Weber’s ideal type makes it very difficult to distinguish between a denomination, a cult and, a sect and therefore understanding the role these NRMs is subjective and places too much power with the sociologist. It is debatable whether these definitions could be applied cross culturally to sects from other religions. This suggests that the definitions of religious organisations only provide a partial view of the way collective worship is organised. * A problem with using the definitions of new religious movements is that they do not add anything new to the understanding of religion**.** Sociologists argue that the growth of sects and cults has accelerated but the definitions have remained the same. Hadden (2003) argues that the definition of World-rejecting NRMs is so close to that of Sects that it makes no difference which term is used. This suggests that much of the work done into religion is too concerned with typology. * A problem with methodology. New religious movements are notoriously difficult to investigate. Both cults and sects are contemporary and therefore change very quickly meaning that any data collected goes out of date quickly. Also if they are world rejecting there is the problem of contact and the ethical issue of exposing a world rejecting organisation to research. This suggests that any research into NRMs lacks validity and reliability. | | |

