Explore the concept of 'risk' and 'resilience' within the context of your group, consideration how barriers to full engagement in society affect the likelihood of their integration into community.

In sociological classifications of religious movements, a 'cult' is a social group, whom share the same common beliefs, behaviours and practices. According to Wallis (1984), cults differ from sects; Since they are individualised, have less organisation and make very few demands on their adherents. This is almost the opposite of what we tend to mean by 'cults' in popular culture. Wallis believed that cults did not claim to have found the truth, nor do they condemn those who are not part of their group. Today, cults are of often thought of as having a charismatic leader, who control or lead a religious or even utopian group. However, not all 'leaders' are charismatic, and in fact have caused damage to society. This can range from breaking up families to even horrific acts of ritual murder. Yet, it could be argued the most well-known cults have used mass suicide in order to fulfil their final wishes, for example Heaven's Gate and the Jonestown Massacre. There have been many others that have participated in these types of activities, and each time has sparked mass panic amongst the public. This has resulted in the public assuming every cult has sinister intentions, therefore society has put up barriers in order to prevent these things from happening. This results in an effect on the individuals of the 'cult', resulting in a difficult situation trying to integrate in society. In today's society, cults are now referred to as being 'New Religious Movements'. This assignment will focus on the concept of risk and resilience within New Religious Movements, better known as NRM's.

New Religious Movements (NRM's), is a term used for a religious or spiritual group that has origins and is peripheral to its societies dominant religious culture. NRM's have arisen simply to address the specific needs of those who are not satisfied through traditional religious organisations, or through modern secularism. NRM's are also the product and responses to pluralism, modernity, and the scientific world view. The influence of the east had a major part to play with regards to these New Religious Movements. Between 1893 and 1952, Paramahansa Yoganand, whom was a teacher of traditional Hindu teachings, founded the Self-Realization Fellowship in Los Angeles. From this he introduced the practice and philosophy of Yoga to Americans. He did this by using traditional Hindu teachings of mental, physical and spiritual discipline. However, it was not until the 1970's that NRM's based on eastern religions became highly attractive to many Americans and Europeans. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in 1959 founded the Spiritual Regeneration Movement, and therefore popularised the technique known as Transcendental Meditation, which is better known as 'TM'. TM was represented as a scientific" method for acquiring both personal and social harmony and peace. It mainly centred on the concentration and repetition of an individualized mantra imparted to the initiate by the guru. Due to the nature of this type of movement, at first it was seen as ludicrous, however, due to the popularity and influence from media stars; e.g. George Harrison from the Beatles, eastern influenced NRM's continue to grow. Organisations such as ISKCON, which is better known as The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, has over five hundred major centres and temples (ISKCON), and is still to this day one of the most popular NRM's to exist. However, many NRM's claim not to be religious, and this is where the integration into society

becomes a greater difficulty, and therefore risk and resilience is taken into place. These New Religious Movements are known as ‘scientific’ and are usually UFO or Scientology based.

Many NRM’s, whom claim to be scientific (especially developed in the west), have decided to use science in order to have self-proclaimed scientific validity. One manifestation of a ‘scientific’ NRM are ‘UFO groups’, which are sometimes called collectively the ‘contact movement’. Adapting on the religious stories of the descent of supernatural beings from the heavens, UFO groups have expanded on what has been known as a ‘myth’ of the arrival of space aliens; Who will present advanced knowledge and spiritual wisdom. The 1950’s saw groups such as Understanding Inc. The founder of Understanding Inc., Daniel Fry argued that UFO’s carried beings who will come to Earth to promote personal development and world peace. Other groups such as The Amalgamated Flying Saucer Clubs of America led, led by Gabriel Green, and the Aetherius Society, organised by George King, maintained and stuck with idea that space aliens held the key to salvation, to both the planet to every individual on Earth (Green,1959). With regards to popularity, Heaven’s Gate, which was the creation of Marshall Applewhite, will ultimately be the most well-known. Applewhite referred to himself as ‘Do’ and declared he and his female partner (‘Ti’) were representatives from another world. This world he referred to as the ‘evolutionary level above human’. Claiming to have visited Earth once before in the figure of Jesus, Applewhite asserted that the ‘kingdom of heaven’ was a real, physical place inhabited by evolved beings. Some members took to extreme measures in order reach the ‘kingdom of heaven’ and therefore castrated themselves due to Applewhite's belief that in order to evolve, one must systematically shed all vestiges of their humanity, including sexuality (Heaven’s Gate, 1974). Originally formed in the mid 1970s, the group settled in the San Diego area in 1996, where it supported itself creating a web page, in order to help promote the beliefs and teachings. In March 1997, Applewhite declared that the appearance of the comet ‘Hale- Bopp’ signalled the arrival of a spaceship sent to gather those in the group. The remaining 39 members of the group committed suicide in order to join the alien community in space.

UFO groups sometimes expand on traditional religious themes such as apocalypticism and heavenly intervention. They do this through the language of modern technology and biological evolutionary theory. Groups such as the Church of Scientology, tend to fashion spiritual teachings and mythology in the language of modern psychology. Scientology, which was founded by science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986), began as Dianetics. Dianetics was Hubbard’s term for a type of therapy that claimed to eliminate imprints of destructive past experiences, called ‘engrams’, which had been accumulated in a person's unconscious. Hubbard therefore devised a method which employed both discussion with an ‘author’ and the use of an electrical device called an ‘E-meter’. This would dissipate engrams and produce a state of liberation he termed as being ‘clear’. These were tests that happened over a long period of time, where the individual would have to pass through a variety of hierarchical levels (Hubbard). In addition to this, Hubbard developed a whole cosmology in which human beings were originally divine beings, known as ‘thetans’. ‘Thetans’ had fallen into and had been entrapped by material existence. The freedom of ‘being clear’ was equated with regaining one’s status as an omniscient, eternal, ‘omnipotent thetan’. It is known that scientology is currently

very popular, with over 8 million members across the world (The Church of Scientology). However, how do so many individuals make the transition into becoming a member? This is where the debate that NRM's can result in a difficulty in individuals integrating into society.

NRM's such as eastern influences (mentioned before), are not seen as being as 'bad' or 'damaging' compared to the 'UFO groups' or 'scientific' movements. Eastern Influenced movements has belief systems and rules just like any 'scientific' group. However, NRM's such as Scientology automatically known for being a 'brainwashing cult'. Various documentaries have been made exploring the world of Scientology, and it is clear to see how they obtain members. In 2010, a reporter for BBC's Panorama, John Sweeney made a documentary titled 'The Secrets of Scientology'. This resulted in an 'explosive confrontation'(BBC,2010) with the Church of Scientology Officials. It was seen that scientology targets vulnerable individuals, whom seek to find belonging. By joining the church, the individuals were cut off from any contact with their families and friends. Yet, it could be argued that any religion could target individuals who seek belonging, an example being Christianity, we are all 'children of God'. However, the Church of Scientology insists that you must pay in order to become a member. By doing this, you move up higher in the tiers of the church; It is also important to remember in order to leave the church, you must pay an additional fee. The stigma that members receive from the public shows to be a risk to some of the members involved within the movement. The majority of society are not aware with how Scientology works internally, therefore they are quick to make judgements on those who are members, this is the same for many NRM's.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas investigated risk, in reference to her earlier work on purity and danger, in which she explored cultures and their reactions to dangers. In opposition to psychological approaches, Douglas (1982) argued that culture and surrounding society play a massive part in influencing attitudes and reactions towards risks. Douglas saw an analogy which saw attitudes towards society and the body. A culture or society, just like a person's body, has clearly marked boundaries, and outside bodies and influences are seen as being dangers. Just like our bodies, we are very cautious with what we ingest, or even inject. Societies react analogously with dealing with outside influences. Society has symbolisms concerning impurity e.g. Scientology is not seen as being the norm in many societies. Therefore, anyone who is considered as being impure to the society will almost definitely be stigmatised. An example of this would be Heaven's Gate. The way in which they conducted their thinking and rituals, has meant the movement is not seen as being 'normal'. The mass suicide that took place meant that there was no way of escaping the media's attention, therefore meaning the general public would have a negative view on what happened (even if they were not aware of how they conducted themselves on an everyday basis). The same premises go for Scientology also. The beliefs that they have, and how they conduct themselves with regards to separation and isolation from those who are not members of the movement is seen as being 'not right', and therefore is instantly demonised. As well as risk, members of NRM's must become resilient.

Many members of NRM's may decide to leave. Some of these movements or cults may have had experience regarding manipulation or abuse, therefore resilience is key. A real-life example of resilience being put into practice is the Carli McConkey case. The 21-year-old university graduate attended a festival in Australia, in which she came across a stand entitled 'Life Integration Programmes'. McConkey (2017), thought that this programme sounding perfect in order to help her focus on getting her life on track after university, however she did

not expect that this encounter was the start of a 13-year ordeal. This led to her being estranged from her family, having financial stress, a victim and perpetrator of physical assault, and eventually being medically sterilised. When McConkey finaly escaped from this cult, she said that she was lucky to have her parents whom were attending Cult Information and Family Support meetings for when the time came that she left. Having resilience meant that McConkey was able to rebuild her life after being part of the cult. However, this does not mean that every person who has the resilience, can have full integration for society. Singer (1995), stated that many members who had been associated with cults experience many symptoms. Some examples include, the member appearing to be emotionally 'flatter' and less vital than before. Their feelings are repressed, and therefore show a blunt side to their personality which may not have been presented beforehand. Another characteristic is the fact that the member regresses to the behaviour of a child. The member has become so dependent on the cult leader, that they are unable to make decisions for themselves, this is known as 'de-programming'. This often results in members with information about the cult and showing them how their own decision-making power has been taken away from them. From Singers studies, she discovered that previous members of cults have had to have psychological therapy in order to try and help rehabilitate them. Members who rely on the use of dissociative techniques such as meditation, trance states etc, tended to exhibit aftereffects such as panic attacks, anxiety, tics and the worry over the reality of their past selves. Eastern based cults and New Age movements usually fall into this category. Former members of groups who used to experience intense aversive emotional techniques such as guilt and fear, strict discipline and punishments have tended to experience guilt, shame, self-blaming attitudes and paranoia. However, it is important to remember that the general effects of any previous member of a cult, no matter what type of situations they were exposed to are depression, isolation, the fear of joining groups e.g. friendships groups. These are just some of the things that can affect a previous member from having full integration into society. Many members feel like they cannot form social bonds anymore, due to the fact they have been used to one group for so long, with the same set of rules. They now face the challenge of re-entering society and becoming rejected. This causes fear and paranoia for the individual. However, Singer stated that in order to overcome these fears the individual must try and address the practical issues related to daily living. This will therefore help them improve their everyday life. She also stated that trying to create a new social network (if possible) would majorly help the individual.

To conclude, NRM's or Cults have many issues when it comes to risk and resilience, however, hopefully with the right support networks, life after being exposed in the movements will therefore help those individuals who have been affected.