Open Your Class With This Tomorrow- *Cultish: The Language of Fanaticism*

Directions: Complete the practice free-response question below.

During the pandemic, Sarah found herself spending much of her time on websites advocating many types of conspiracy theories. Sarah's friends and family were aware of her entanglement with these extreme ideas but thought it was a way to get through the lockdown and that it would soon pass. One of the groups responsible for these posts began asking Sarah for money and wanted her to begin posting as well. She did both and eventually quit her job to spend more time investigating these "conspiracies". Her friends and family tried to reason with her but she was persistent in believing that these were truths that needed to come out. She began a relationship with another member of this group and even while others could see that this relationship was based on manipulation and fraud.

Part A
How could the following factors draw Sarah further into the beliefs of the group?
- Confirmation bias
- Out-group homogeneity
- Belief perseverance
- Loss aversion

Part B
How could the following factors work to influence Sarah to question her current beliefs and pull away from the group posing these conspiracies?
- Algorithms
- Mindfulness

Part C
Create a research hypothesis that would lead to an objective measure of the theories Sarah believes.

Key
Part A
Confirmation bias would draw Sarah further into the beliefs of the group because she would search for evidence that the group is right and ignore or dismiss any contradictory evidence.
Out-group homogeneity would apply to members who are not part of the group Sarah has joined and will likely be viewed as "all the same" and all against the group, which may cause the group to become closer to one another as they seek to fend off threats from the outside.

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Belief perseverance would draw Sarah further into the beliefs of the group because even after she was told that the group was harmful by her friends and family, she still continues to believe the group's truths needed to come out.

Loss aversion would draw Sarah further into the beliefs of the group because she will go to great lengths to not lose the money she has already invested in the group.

Part B

Algorithms could be used to influence Sarah to question her current beliefs and pull away by having her systematically question the group's truths one by one until she determines that the group is controlling her behavior and lying to her.

Mindfulness could be used to influence Sarah to question her current beliefs and pull away by having her observe her thoughts and emotions without judgement. This may give Sarah more clarity in her thoughts as she can live in the moment and view her situation more objectively.

Part C

Research Hypothesis would apply if Sarah were to systematically test each claim to determine if there was supporting data. If each claim was false, then the cult's motives should be questioned.