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STUDIES

The anatomy of undue influence used by terrorist cults and traffickers to induce helplessness and trauma, so creating false identities



Anatomie de l'influence induite utilisée par les sectes et les trafiquants terroristes pour induire l'impuissance et le traumatisme, créant ainsi de fausses identités

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Mind control;
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Undue influence

Summary There is a need to update the legal system to recognize the use of hypnosis and undue influence occurring throughout the world. Extremist groups are deceptively recruiting and indoctrinating people to do terrorist attacks. Human traffickers are grooming and using hypnosis and social influence techniques to create labor and sex slaves. In this paper, a number of key concepts and models will be used to more fully define DSM-5's Dissociative Disorder 300.15: Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory, along with Robert Jay Lifton and Margaret Singer's work (1995) are the foundation of the BITE model of mind control (Hassan, 1988). Behavior, Information, Thought, and Emotional Control are the four overlapping components through which destructive groups bring people to be obedient and compliant to authority. A programmed cult identity is created through a complex social influence process. That false identity dominates real identity. The ethics and morality of undue influence are understood differently. In this paper, we analyze the techniques of breaking down the existing personality and creating a false or pseudo-identity. The Influence Continuum and BITE mind control model and Lifton's eight criteria for Thought Reform are discussed; Schefflin's Social Influence Model (2015) is presented as one tool for analyzing undue influence in a forensic and juridical context.

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To support the hypothesis presented here, an anonymous online research survey was conducted involving 1033 participants to gather data regarding specific variables of the BITE model, in an effort to develop an instrument that might be useful in determining key aspects of undue influence.

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MOTS CLÉS

Modèle BITE ;
Lavage de cerveau ;
Contrôle coercitif ;
Trouble de l'identité
dissociative ;
Continuum
d'influence ;
Contrôle mental ;
Réforme de la
pensée ;
Influence indue

Résumé Il est nécessaire d'actualiser le système juridique afin de reconnaître l'utilisation de l'hypnose et des influences indues dans le monde entier. Des groupes extrémistes recrutent des membres de manières trompeuses et les endoctrinent pour commettre des attaques terroristes. Les trafiquants d'êtres humains utilisent des techniques d'amadouement, d'hypnose et d'influence sociale pour créer des esclaves de travail et sexuels. Dans cet article, un certain nombre de concepts et modèles clés seront utilisés pour définir plus précisément le trouble dissociatif 300.15 : la théorie de la dissonance cognitive de Festinger, ainsi que de Lifton et de Singer, sont à la base du modèle BITE de contrôle mental. Le comportement, l'information, la pensée et le contrôle émotionnel sont les quatre éléments à travers lesquels les groupes destructeurs suscitent l'obéissance et la conformité à l'autorité chez les personnes. Une identité de culte est programmée par un processus complexe d'influence sociale. Cette fausse identité domine la véritable identité. L'éthique et la moralité de l'influence indue sont comprises différemment. Dans cet article, nous analysons les techniques utilisées dans la décomposition de la personnalité existante et la création d'une fausse identité ou pseudo-identité. Le modèle « Influence Continuum », le modèle de contrôle mental BITE et les huit critères de Lifton pour la réforme de la pensée sont discutés. Pour étayer l'hypothèse présentée ici, une enquête en ligne anonyme a été menée auprès de 1033 participants afin de recueillir des données sur les variables spécifiques du modèle BITE, dans le but de mettre au point un instrument susceptible d'être utile pour déterminer les aspects essentiels de l'influence indue.

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Introduction

How would you know if *you* had been "brainwashed" or were under "mind control"? How can anyone "reality-test" and reliably evaluate their own belief system and even their own personal identity? Politicians, news media, educators and academics use the terms "brainwashing" and "cult" frequently, all around the world. The news media run stories about terrorist cult groups like ISIS/Daesh, Boko Haram, and about White Supremacists, regularly. People recruited by ISIS who have defected, and who are looked at with suspicion are a serious problem, especially in Europe. Pimps and human trafficking are likewise often in the news. Human trafficking consists of both enslavements for labor as well as for sex. Pimps have published books and manuals explaining how to recruit, and their methods of "grooming", and how to indoctrinate individuals, many of whom are under age, into accepting bondage. Some Christian children abducted by Boko Haram and released have left their families and communities to return to that brutal group.

In the simplest terms, "undue influence" is an exploitative influence, where individuals surrender their own best interests to a dominant other. Those who rail about "brainwashing" are usually unaware that undue influence has been accepted in law for centuries. It is possible to exert

too much controlling influence on another, reducing them to childlike dependence.

In our society, it has become usual to blame the victim — overestimating personal variables and underestimating the context created by both every day and amplified social influence. In social psychology, this is referred to as the Fundamental Attribution Error and is a universal cognitive bias. This is the tendency to attribute cause to an individual rather than to the situation when considering others, but we blame others for their own responsibility in creating the situations they find themselves in. We criticize someone else for their own part in making a situation, though we feel justified that our own behavior is influenced by surrounding events, rather than personally determined. In short, we blame others for the harm that comes to them but justify harm to ourselves as externally generated. It is an error because it is normal human nature to adapt and conform to people in an environment and to obey authority figures that have power over them. As trauma psychiatrist Judith Herman writes, "It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander does nothing. The victim demands action, engagement and remembering" [1]. The Fundamental Attribution Error minimizes our understanding and compassion for the suffering of others.

We are social organisms with five senses, each of which can be tricked. We are hard-wired to take in information from others and from changes in the environment. Most of our perceptions never reach consciousness, so we are affected unconsciously as well as consciously. The Internet has developed into a new virtual terrain, so that we no longer need to go to rural workshop retreats to be isolated from society. We can be unduly influenced through our smartphones, our headphones and soon our virtual reality headsets. We can also sit in front of a computer in our rooms for days and be recruited or even radicalized by YouTube videos, texts, blogs, and discussion boards.

Leon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory [2–4] posits that we have thoughts, feelings, and behaviors attached to our beliefs and that it is human nature to demand that these are congruent: we want the world to fit together, and dislike disharmony. Festinger gave insight as to how people can adopt extreme beliefs when they are engaged in extreme behaviors, such as torture or beheading. Cognitive Dissonance theory is a powerful tool for understanding how we adopt destructive beliefs and how we can escape from them.

Events where political and religious cult activities have led to violence are reported every day. Daesh is a military-political cult that uses religion as a cloak of respectability; but the group demands power, money and control of sexual behavior, all within the nightmare scenario created in the Middle East. One sex trafficker and pimp published a book called *Pimpology: The 48 Laws of the Game* [5]. It is a systematic description that shows anyone how to become a pimp, and how to recruit and indoctrinate victims to become sex slaves. Unfortunately, the public has not been told the differences between ethical and unethical influence, nor how to safeguard themselves and others by being able to identify the elements of thought reform. This paper outlines some of the central concepts of thought reform and proposes some models that can be utilized to better understand and resist undue influence.

The global impact on international health care systems has yet to be determined by any epidemiological study. The Polaris Project estimates labor trafficking victims to be 40.3 million people and sex trafficking is 4.8 million people globally. Unfortunately, it is much harder to get statistics on the numbers of people involved in destructive cults. These include terrorist groups, religious/political groups, multi-level marketing groups and, pseudo therapy groups. However, the numbers are believed to be in the millions of people. Whenever a person enters the health care system, whether it is for psychosis, panic attacks, or a variety of disorders, if they are not properly diagnosed, they will most likely be a huge drain on resources and finances. Defectors from terrorist groups like ISIS and Boko Haram encounter no programs to deprogram them adequately to help them recover and to neutralize any threat of becoming involved again.

Models for understanding brainwashing, mind control, and undue influence

Robert Jay Lifton's book, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* [6] is widely considered the seminal

work on "brainwashing". Lifton was an Air Force psychiatrist engaged in military research. In the early 1950s, he was tasked to study the Chinese and North Korean Communist system of thought reform, commonly known as "brainwashing". He interviewed survivors of the notorious Chinese re-education camps and returning POWs from North Korea. He performed in-depth interviews of 25 Westerners and 15 Chinese.

In analyzing his research data, which he dubbed "psychohistories", Dr. Lifton posited an eight criteria model to evaluate any environment in terms of thought reform. He wrote that many group environments have some of these, but where all eight criteria are found, the group should be considered malevolent.

The first criterion he termed "Milieu Control", which he described as control of a person's environment, and the control of communication within that environment. Milieu control not only influences communication between people; but also control people's thoughts, feelings and behaviors. The second criterion he termed "Mystical Manipulation", and it involves the deliberate engineering of experiences which are staged to seem spontaneous, and even supernatural. The third criterion is the "Demand for Purity", where the group establishes impossible standards for performance, and creates an environment of guilt and shame.

Lifton's fourth criterion is the "Cult of Confession" which demands that members confess every thought, feeling or action — past or present — that deviates from the norms of the group, thereby lowering personal boundaries. This is the core method of Maoist "self-struggle".

The fifth criterion is "Sacred Science", which asserts that the group's dogma is both rigorously scientific and morally correct, and leaves no room for critical questions or evidence that challenges the ideology. The sixth criterion is "Loading the Language". The group's vocabulary is laden with words that have specialized meaning known only to the group, which constricts members' thinking into absolute, black-and-white buzzwords and slogans that shut down thinking. Lifton speaks of "thought-terminating clichés". The seventh criterion is "Doctrine Over Person", or "Ideology Over Experience", and essentially states that the beliefs of the group are more real than personal experience. Members must ignore their conscience and their experience, and suppress any thinking that challenges the policy or ideology. This smacks of George Orwell's "thoughtcrime", as described in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The final criterion is "Dispensing of Existence", and is perhaps the single most important criterion in that the group determines who has a right to exist and who does not. The most dangerous of cult groups, like Daesh or Aum Shinrikyo, actively murder or — "dispense of the existence" — of non-members.

Mind control groups tell their members that those who do not agree with them do not deserve to have equal human rights. They also label talkative former members and critics with pejorative names that equate to the "deadly demons" of the Hare Krishna group or the "Suppressive Person" of Scientology. In 1986, Lifton published his survey of the Nazi doctors who assisted in the Aktion T4 mass murder of patients [7]. In *The Nazi Doctors*, Lifton described the concept of doubling (elsewhere also known as "splitting"), where doctors had created

a pseudo-identity with very different beliefs, values, and behaviors from their normal personality. Later, Lifton studied the Japanese “sarin gas” cult Aum Shinrikyo, and used his eight criteria to describe mind control in that terrorist pseudo-religious cult, along with other apocalyptic cults [8]. Aum Shinrikyo stock-piled enough sarin gas to kill four million people, abusing the Buddhist doctrine of “*poa*”, or accelerated *karma-vipaka*, as a justification.

Types of destructive cults

There are many types of destructive cults, including Political, Pseudo-Therapeutic, Pseudo-Religious/Spiritual, Commercial, Large Group Awareness Trainings and so forth. Political cults seek power, control and wealth. The Nazis and the North Korean regime of Kim exemplify authoritarian — or “totalist” — regimes that function as destructive cults; a mental health professional can exercise unethical control over a client or patient; there are thousands of pseudo-religious and spiritual cults throughout the world, varying in size from single families to multimillion member groups like the Watchtower Society and the Mormon Church which as of 2018, the Prophet said will only be using the name of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Pimps, traffickers and large Multi-level marketing groups function as commercial cults. Hotel ballrooms are hired to host “transformational workshops” which can exert undue influence on unwitting participants in the name of “team-building”. In addition, there are dysfunctional family cults as well as a micro-cult, where one individual dominates and controls another. English law recognizes the crime of “coercive control”, where one partner directs the other through psychological pressure.

Cult psychology

People are either raised in or recruited into destructive cults. Each group exhibits certain stereotypical psychological themes that need to be examined. These themes include an elitist mentality, where they are taught to think of themselves as “chosen” or superior to all “outsiders. So, followers feel special, grateful and appear content. However, in reality, they experience guilt and fear that undercuts any sense of healthy self-esteem or autonomy. In the mind of a cult member things appear black and white; all or nothing; us versus them; good versus evil. They are convinced that they have the “Truth.” The rest of the world is in the darkness of ignorance. The ends justify the means, so the group can do whatever is necessary to achieve the ultimate good, whether it is for Jehovah or Allah. There are Buddhist cults, and Hindu cults, and Christian cults, and Jewish cults which are destructive because they restrict the autonomy and violate the fundamental human rights of their members.

Cult psychology includes the belief that group doctrine is “reality” or the “Truth.” It is not seen as merely a model members have chosen to believe in. Members are indoctrinated to submit their individual will to the group. They are told to model themselves after and to be obedient to those in authority. Memories are often manipulated and sometimes

confabulated (Lifton’s “doctrine over person”). They are often kept too busy and too tired to rest, to think or to reflect, as Armageddon or some other calamity is imminent. Members are made to feel that if they perform well they are good people, especially when successfully recruiting new members or bringing in money. Of significant importance is that members are told that there is never a legitimate reason to leave, and made phobic of horrible consequences if they ever leave or are thrown out and shunned.

The effects of undue influence can be found in DSM 5

Very few mental health professionals are familiar with the DSM categorization of undue influence. This category has been included since the publication of DSM-III in 1980. It relates to cults where thought reform has been employed to bring about compliance.

Unfortunately, through a lack of proper training, mental health professionals around the world do not identify the millions of people who have been the victims of mind control. They present a wide array of symptoms, which include: suicidal ideation, depression, paranoia, undiagnosed schizophrenia or paranoid-schizophrenia, schizoaffective, borderline and bipolar disorders. It is rare for a proper background interview to be conducted that will identify cult programming or the complex post-traumatic stress disorder often occasioned by high-control groups. So, victims of such programming are usually misdiagnosed and medicated rather than receiving the counsel that they need, so are unfortunately harmed instead of being helped.

DSM-5: Otherwise Specified Dissociative Disorder 300.15 (F44.89)

“Individuals who have been subjected to intense coercive persuasion (e.g., brainwashing, thought reform, indoctrination while captive, torture, long-term political imprisonment, recruitment by sects/cults or by terror organizations) may present with prolonged changes in, or conscious questioning of, their identity.” The key to understanding undue influence is the creation of a dual identity, which can result in dissociative identity disorder. It is vital to understand that at any given moment, a victim of thought reform can snap back to their pre-existing personality formation, and then snap into the cult-identity, and back and forth. A professional dealing with traumatized clients must understand the nature of triggers, and teach the client how to neutralize those triggers.

Dual identity

Undue Influence does *not* erase the person’s existing personality but rather grafts a new identity that dominates the existing personality. We use the term “authentic identity” to distinguish the individuality of a person, as opposed to the enforced or coerced identity created in response to thought reform. Authentic identity can be found even in people

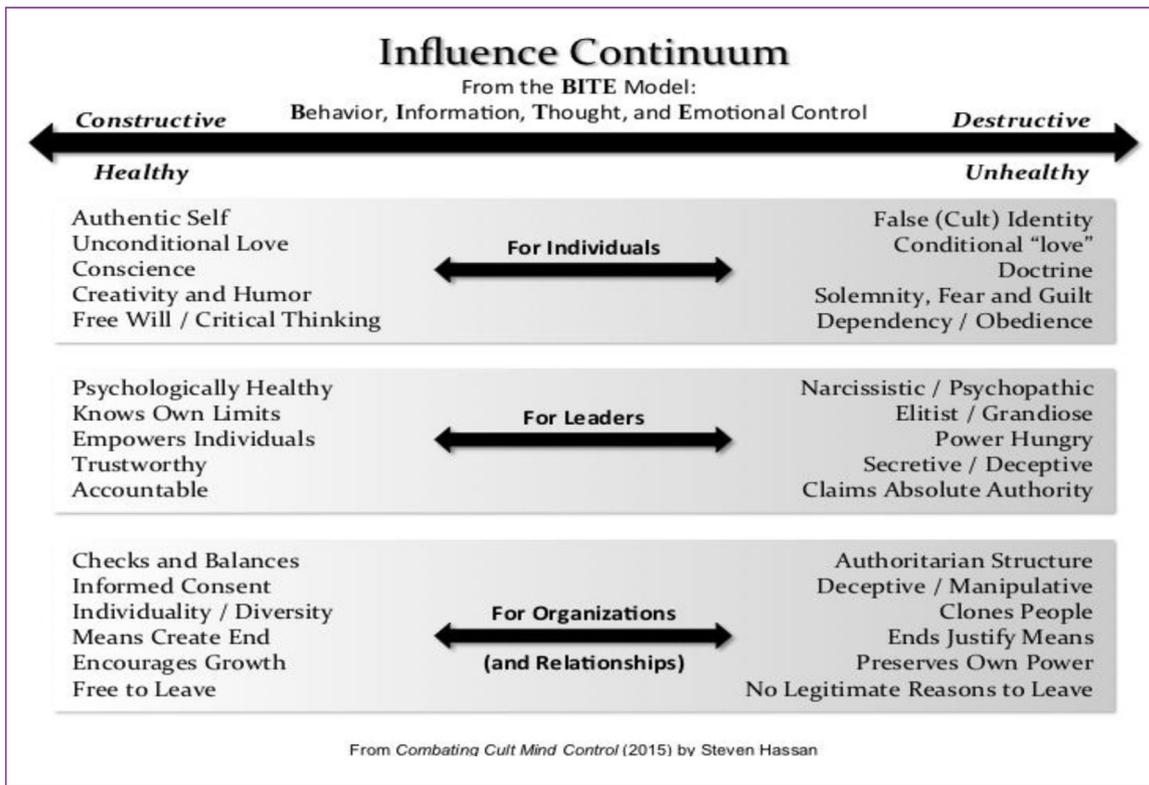


Figure 1. Influence continuum. *Continuum d'influence.*

raised in destructive cult groups. For example, people who are born gay but raised in a homophobic environment grow up with a "false self" and often force themselves to pretend to be heterosexual, and may even marry and have children. Destructive cult members learn to suppress thoughts, feelings, and behaviors for fear of punishment and potential ejection and ostracism. Many second-generation members of destructive cults never really identify with the group and leave as soon as they are old enough. Even convinced second-generation members (or "born-ins") can discover an identity that has never been fully subsumed by the group's doctrines or develop a healthy new identity.

The influence continuum

In Fig. 1, the main distinctions between ethical and unethical influence are shown. Ethical influence is about informed consent. It is a mistake to ask, "Why did you join the destructive cult?" No one gives informed consent to join a destructive cult (Fig. 2), because they have not been informed about the true nature of that cult. Members are deceptively recruited into a destructive cult. They are deceived by omission, by distortion or through outright lying. The recruit will only ever see the outside of the pyramid. The core practices and beliefs will remain hidden inside until the recruit has fully attached to the cult. The true nature of the group is deliberately withheld. The promise of liberation conceals the intent to enslave.

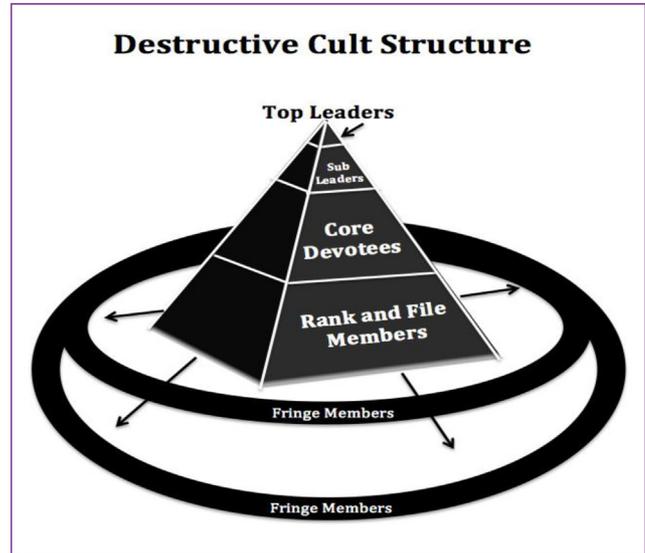


Figure 2. Destructive cult. *Culte destructif.*

With the advent of the Internet and the Worldwide Web, destructive cults have developed sophisticated processes of online recruiting. Al Qaeda and Daesh/ISIS videos use Hollywood movies, popular video games themes and music to recruit online. They exemplify the strategies used to create phobia, guilt, and aversion and to manipulate beliefs.

Large, international destructive cults are not homogeneous. The experience of membership may well vary according to geographical location, but it will always be affected by the member's position within the hierarchal structure. The experience of control can vary widely within a destructive group. There are a number of variables. For example, a cult member who signs a billion-year contract, must wear a uniform, and sleeps and eats with the group, with only \$50 a month in salary, will have a much more controlled experience than a part-time "public member" who attends periodic indoctrination sessions. Such a person can be devoted and indoctrinated thoroughly, but still have an outside job, live separately, and be under much less intense scrutiny. Celebrity members tend to have a very different — and more comfortable — experience of the group. Live-in members will keep quiet about the privations of their arduous daily lives, so as not to discourage "public" members, but also to avoid punishment if they do so. Different worlds exist side by side in many destructive cults.

The BITE Model as a guide to evaluating groups and situations

Control of: behavior, information, thought, emotion

Festinger, [2–4] in his ground-breaking Cognitive Dissonance Theory described how beliefs have a cognitive, an affective, and a behavioral component. In his study and his book [3,4], Festinger infiltrated students into a UFO cult. He predicted that those who traveled to the hilltop to be picked up by a UFO would be more likely to continue to believe than those who did not make the journey. His prediction proved to be true — those who experienced disconfirming evidence on the hilltop were strengthened in their belief. Those who did not travel to the hilltop tended to leave the group. Festinger realized that we are made uneasy if our sense of consistency or congruency is challenged. It is the basis for all cognitive, behavioral therapy. The BITE model uses these three components — cognitive, affective and behavioral — and adds information a fourth and overlapping component. In ethical therapy, the client is always encouraged to develop an internal locus of control within their authentic — or autonomous — personality. With undue influence, the cult-identity controls the real personality and control is exerted from the outside, so the locus of control is with the cult, through the cult-identity.

BITE Model—Behavior Control

The most important criterion of behavior control is the demand for dependency and obedience to the group, its ideology, and its leadership. All major life decisions must be approved by the group. For a "total convert" [9] the group's dogma determines every aspect of behavior; there is no personal choice involved. So, a member must receive permission or face punishment. Freedom of movement is often limited, and permission demanded before any visit to a non-member. Individualism is discouraged and putting "God" or the group first is the norm (in this case, "God" often proves

to be the leader). Rigid rules and regulations are mandated and enforced. Prohibited or censured thoughts, feelings and activities (of self or others) must be reported to superiors. There will be narrow conformities in clothing, scent and/or hairstyle. Where people live and with whom they can live is highly significant, because members of destructive cults violate the human right of free association by ordering or shaming members into ostracizing, shunning or disconnecting from non-believers.

Behavior control usually often include a limited diet. This might involve high carbohydrate food for live-in members — and some groups encourage fasting for days on end. Of course, sexuality is strictly defined and the full range of sexual practice exists: from enforced celibacy to enforced group sex with strangers (as happened in the Rajneesh devotees). Typically, members are not limited to the normal working day. Members are often financially exploited, manipulated or have become totally dependent. Typically, a significant amount of time must be allotted to group indoctrination and rituals and/or self-indoctrination, including online study.

Time away from the group is unusual, save to start up a new node for the cult in another location. There is little non-group leisure time or vacation time. Leisure time within the group is often simply a transition from work to study or rigid interpersonal communication, (framed as counseling or healing). "Leisure activity" is redefined within the cult as having time away from work to be allowed to study or participate in the communication or rituals of the group. Time to meditate can also be seen as a reward that has more value than spending time with family and friends. Rewards for "good" behavior and punishments for "bad" are the norm: always through support or violation of one or other of the cult's policies. "Morality" and "immorality" are redefined as conforming to the leader's often-eccentric beliefs. This is the criterion of thought reform that Lifton identified as the "demand for purity". The group sets an impossible standard, to reinforce the guilty subservience of the follower.

BITE Model—Information Control

A predatory group or individual will not use information ethically. Differentiating ethical from unethical use of information is essential. An ethical group will tell a newcomer upfront who they are, what they believe and what is expected of a member. If you join the military, you know that you may see combat. If you join a religion, you know in advance a variety of cultural restrictions — not eating pork or beef, or vegetarianism, for instance. An unethical group or individual uses outright, indefensible lies, withholding vital information, or distorting information to make it appear more acceptable and often all three of these tactics. Members of the Children of God were taught to use "heavenly deception". Scientology staff are trained in telling "shore stories" along with "training routine lying" [10,11].

At each level of the pyramid, and in the circles emanating from its base, information varies widely. The top leadership decides who "needs to know" what and there is a sharp distinction between what members are told and what "outsiders" are told. Groups often have numerous "fronts"

concealing the corporate monolith that is the parent organization. Followers are assigned to manipulate Wikipedia and search engine results, encouraged (or ordered) to increase positive information and bury anything critical of the group. Search engines can no longer be expected to point to the best information. We can expect Internet-based cults to adopt the use of bots and every trick used by scammers and hackers. The leader's books will have five thousand five-star reviews on Amazon — all produced by followers.

Only leadership decides who needs to know what and when they need to know it. Members are indoctrinated into spying on all around, including family and friends. Deviant thoughts, feelings, and actions must be reported to leadership, otherwise, the member will be in trouble too. Many groups use a "buddy" or "twin" system to monitor and control, especially when out recruiting. Group control is maintained through information about a member's past, gained either through formal confessionals or through other members' reports. This includes coached — and imaginary or exaggerated — confessions of childhood, "remembered" through highly-suggestive supposed counseling or group self-abasement (a central technique of Maoist thought reform). If a member shows signs of wishing to leave the group, they will be aware that the leadership has this information, and the threat of disclosure may be used to bring the member back into line or to keep them silent.

Mind control cults use propaganda extensively. Internet web sites, public and private video is available 24/7, and meetings are often live-streamed. Bigger groups have publication departments that churn out newsletters, magazines, journals, CDs, DVDs, podcasts, blogs, apps, and other media. Famous people are quoted, often without their permission and out of context, but in a way that supports the credibility of the group. The Moonies were able to boast that former British Prime Minister Ted Heath had attended their conferences, although it seems that he treated these as paid holidays.

To be independent thinkers, we need information from reputable sources, and the right to choose those sources for ourselves. Mind control groups systematically indoctrinate members to distrust critics, former members, and all and any negative media reports. Some groups tell members to avoid newspapers, books, articles, TV, radio and any academic, science-based information. In addition, some leaders keep believers so busy they have no time to think or check anything, let alone make outside relationships through which they might gather information about the world. Some groups control believers through their cell phone with GPS tracking, and frequent texting or calls. Others hand out programs that include net nannies so that members will be blocked from critical sites. At the far end of the spectrum is total authority over information, or totalitarianism.

BITE Model—Thought Control

Hypnotic and suggestive techniques to induce "altered state of consciousness" are often used to transform or "reprogram" people's thoughts and memories. These techniques to induce thought control can vary widely. Some groups use hours of tedious lectures several times a week, demanding that members memorize and regurgitate the correct answers in tests. Other groups use audible prayers,

chanting, speaking in tongues, davening (rocking backward and forward) or meditation to induce altered states in which people are less capable of analytical thinking or evaluation. Critical skills can be over-ridden through repetition, fixation or constant mimicry, or through techniques that induce euphoria. Hypnosis can be defined simply as "guided imagination". Eyes-closed visualizations and "guided meditation" techniques can heighten suggestibility, making it easier to insert thoughts and beliefs into members.

The ideology of authoritarian groups is typically all or nothing, black and white, us versus them and good versus evil; there are no shades of gray. The dogma is regarded as the ultimate "Truth" that is considered both sacred and scientific [6]. Members are taught "thought-stopping" techniques to maintain their "pure" state and to resist "evil" thoughts. The language system of closed groups can be a unique actual dialect, impenetrable to outsiders. It is also filled with "thought-terminating clichés" [6], and convolute buzzwords that become platitudes among group members. Some groups rename the member as part of an initiation, which is a powerful technique because it moves the foundation of the recruit's sense of identity.

Critical questions about the leader, the doctrine or the organization's policies are avoided or even forbidden. Rational analysis, critical thinking, even constructive criticism is viewed as a weakness of character and of devotion. All other groups and their belief systems are seen as illegitimate, evil, or "dangerous". There is no room for doubt.

BITE Model—Emotional Control

When people are first recruited they are often flattered or "love-bombed" and made to feel loved and special. But cult "love" is conditional upon being a good cult member and is quickly withdrawn if the member makes "trouble" by asking difficult questions. Members are told that they should always be grateful and happy, as they are part of the "chosen" people who know the "Truth", and have the key to salvation, whether in this world or the next. Members often sing songs about the leader, the doctrine or the group to maintain a "happy" atmosphere. Engaging with music and especially joining in group singing helps to generate euphoria, which diminishes perception and critical thinking.

Members are also taught emotion-stopping techniques — especially to block feelings of homesickness, frustration towards leadership, illness, distress, and doubts. Whenever a person is feeling depressed, or anxious or fearful, they are exhorted to believe and surrender more to the leader or group. Whenever there is a problem, the group and the leader are *always* right, and it is *always* the member's fault. If they feel normal emotions, for instance, sexual attraction, they are made to feel evil and sinful, or led to believe that Satan is tempting them. Likewise, jealousy, greed or envy are labeled as negative, and members are taught to suppress and deny them. Sometimes, members are coerced into repenting publicly and confessing these negative emotions. They are made to feel guilty, selfish, unworthy and even unspiritual. The group can try to make them feel guilty for their religion of origin, race, country, or some aspect of their personal history. Cult membership is designed to keep people permanently frustrated and dependent. Cult leaders want members to feel positive self-esteem through being a

part of the group, not through individual accomplishments. Guilt, fear and aversion or disgust [12] are the three most frequently used emotional control techniques.

Phobia indoctrination is a universal destructive mind control technique [13–17]. Mental health professionals know how devastating phobias can be, and how they can disrupt a person's ability to function. Destructive cult leaders can both piggyback their programming onto existing phobias, and induce phobias in members' minds to such an extent that they cannot imagine a happy and fulfilled life beyond the boundaries of the group. In a cult member's mind, leaving the group equates to loss of existence [6]. Phobias can relate to any aspect of wellbeing: spiritual health (going to hell, being possessed by demons, losing your soul or immortality); physical health (infection with cancer or AIDS, traffic accidents); psychological health (going insane); or social health (fear of not finding a partner, or being able to create a family, or belong to a friendly community, or, indeed, be a success in any way) [15].

Finally, on this point, people can be emotionally threatened or coerced into remaining a member even if they no longer actually believe. This comes from their fear of being labeled sinful or immoral by the leadership. Destructive cults are characterized by control of association. Dissenting or disobedient members know that their dearest friends and even their families may be forced to dissociate from them, unless they repent and return, and toe the line. Often, members are dependent upon the group for their livelihood. They may also be many miles from the nearest non-cult friend or family member, be without funds, and, because of the cult's indoctrination, believe that there is no one they can trust. Emotional coercion is especially powerful for those raised in the group, and indoctrinated to avoid the outside world as evil; so they have no contact with anyone who can help them to exit the cult. Some groups threaten physical violence, harassment, blackmail, and even extortion if they try to leave a totalistic group. These threats may not only be directed at the member, but also their loved ones. In extreme cases, anyone associated with a former member may be harassed. After the initial honeymoon phase, members may become aware of the cult's anti-social practices — which is a legitimate fear, and not a phobia.

Guilt is used to keep the members' attention focused inward, and avoid criticism of the group. Tiny infractions are amplified. Singer's mention a former member who believed himself to be a "drug addict" because he had taken a single toke on a marijuana cigarette.

Aversion is fundamental in the conditioning of a high-demand group member — and leads to dispensing of existence [6] — every genocide on record has the perpetrators referring to their victims as sub-human, or as vermin. Aversion to the out-group is vital to create a barrier protecting the gulled member from any criticism of the group. Indeed, criticism of the group triggers aversion, so raising a thought-stopping barrier.

Schefflin's Social Influence Model

Social Influence Model [18] was created to analyze any relationship between the influencer and the influencee where predatory or undue influence takes place. It is a framework

designed for use in the legal system. The Social Influence model is a systematic approach that allows expert witnesses to analyze and evaluate the elements of any specific case in terms of the degree of undue influence. The model clearly demonstrates the predator-prey relationship, and fleshes out the key elements that can help judges and juries to better understand the dynamics of an influence relationship.

Description of Pilot Influence Study

Method

Questions were framed out of the four elements of the Hassan BITE model: Behavior Control, Information Control, Thought control and Emotional Control. The options for answers ranged from 1 = never to 6 = always. An online anonymous survey was conducted using Survey Monkey in June 2018. It was made available for 11 days. By that time, there had been 1033 respondents. Subjects were recruited through a blog at freedomofmind.com. A link to the survey was also placed on the freedomfromundueinfluence.org site. The link was also posted on four accompanying Facebook pages, LinkedIn, Twitter, as well as on ex-member Reddit groups which included ex-Mormons and ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, ex-Scientologists, and former practitioners of Multi-Level Marketing.

Extensive demographic information for respondents was collected. 79% were from the United States, 90% were White Caucasian, 71% were employed and 11% were not employed and not looking for work. Only 5% were looking for work and the rest were retired, or disabled. 26% were High School graduates, 41% were college graduates, and 17% were graduate students. 13% had advanced degrees in the fields of medicine or business. 67% of respondents were female.

Eighty-three percent (864 of 1033) described themselves as members of a "high-control group". 11% (116) answered they were not. We added non-high control groups like the Girls Scouts. Eighty percent said they were no longer in a high-control group, and more than 14% said they were still somewhat involved. Eighty-two percent said they had been involved with a group for 10–14 years or more. Eleven percent said they were involved for 1 year to 10 years. Seventy percent said they were raised as a child in the group. Twenty-six percent answered they were not raised in the group. Sixty percent said they were between birth and 4 years of age when they were in the group. Forty percent said they exited the group because they became disillusioned. Twenty-eight percent said they left after looking at information on the Internet. Less than 2% left the group through counseling intervention. Approximately 7% were thrown out of the group. Five percent ran away without telling anyone in the group. Seven percent left the group through influence from people who were not members. Six percent left through the influence of former members. Only 5% left by reading a book.

Fifty-eight percent belong to an ex-member support group, while 41% do not. Forty-seven percent say they have helped others to exit the group, and 53% said they have not. When asked how long they have been a part of healthy groups 35% said 1–4 years, and 20% said 10–14 years or more.

Table 1 Dependent variables.
Variables dépendantes.

Independent variable	Dependent variables				
	Are you a former member of a high control group	Are you currently a member of high control group	How long were you involved in the group	Do you belong to any ex-member support group	Have you helped others to exit the group
Behavioral Control	r = .209 r ² = .044 t = 6.094 .000 sig	.030 sig	r = .373 r ² = .139 t = 11.370 .000 sig	r = .240 r ² = .057 t = 6.993 .000 sig	r = .207 r ² = .043 t = 5.965 .000 sig
Information Control	r = .219 r ² = .048 t = 6.043 .000 sig	.264 sig	r = .411 r ² = .169 t = 12.037 .000 sig	r = .261 r ² = .068 t = 7.230 .000 sig	r = .199 r ² = .040 t = 5.438 .000 sig
Thought Control	r = .255 r ² = .065 t = 6.939 .000 sig	.912 sig	r = .510 r ² = .260 t = 15.514 .000 sig	r = .250 r ² = .063 t = 6.773 .000 sig	r = .212 r ² = .045 t = 5.673 .000 sig
Emotional Control	r = .188 r ² = .035 t = 5.124 .000 sig	.346 sig	r = .513 r ² = .264 t = 15.852 .000 sig	r = .290 r ² = .084 t = 8.061 .000 sig	r = .191 r ² = .036 t = 5.151 .000 sig

Interestingly, nearly 20% said they had left after 1–7 days, while 15% said they have/had been involved for 4–7 years. Three hundred and sixty three said they had left the Mormons (Latter Day Saints) and 255 said they left the Jehovah's Witnesses. Two hundred and sixty-five said from a Christian group, 226 from Humanist/Atheist groups, 131 from Multi-level marketing groups (MLMs), 126 from Girl Scouts, 156 said they were in the Boy Scouts, 161 from Graduate School, 118 from the Roman Catholic Church, 98 from Alcoholics Anonymous.

Design

In this study, we used a Regression analysis. The independent variables were the 4 dimensions of the Hassan BITE model: Behavior, Information, Thought, and Emotional control. These will be the predictors. Dependent Variables will be the duration of time they stayed in the group, at what age they entered the group, and if they currently belonged to the group.

Results

A descriptive analysis was performed to produce a mean and standard deviation on each item in the data (Table 1). A factor analysis on the independent variables in the survey was done to reveal the significant factors. Each category in the BITE model was used to make a scale out of those items. A regression analysis was performed on the dependent variables and the scales scores as independent variables were performed to see the relationship between the scale score predictors and the 4 dependent variables. The most

significant dependent variable was time spent in the high control group. Significance was .373 for Behavior Control, .411 for Information Control, .510 for Thought Control and .513 for Emotional Control.

Discussion

The principal result was that control is a major factor. The one dependent variable was involvement in a high-demand group. The more control that the high-demand group exerted the longer the member will stay in the group. Most respondents were raised in cults (from birth to 4 years of age) and stayed for more than 10 years. Control of all four factors (Behavior, Information, Thought and Emotional) was predictive. More research needs to be done to evaluate what factors might make a person more vulnerable to recruitment. These factors might include attachment style, high hypnotizability, suggestibility, and magical thinking. There should also be testing for personality difficulties, such as social phobia and dependent personality disorder. It would be valuable to learn more about how people were recruited whether it was in person — through a friend or a street recruiter, for instance — or online through a website or YouTube, or a discussion group. Future research would be useful to determine the long-term psychological issues faced after exiting a cult or high-demand group, and what the factors were that most helped people to cope and gain autonomy.

The bioethics system in the USA would be positively influenced both in prevention and treatment. Further research must be conducted. Training programs must be developed and put into place for a wide variety of health

care practitioners. In addition, educators, attorneys, judges, law enforcement professionals, politicians as well as citizens would benefit from understanding the difference factors identifiable as an ethical influence as well as unethical influence. The “rational agent” model presumes that people make rational choices, once they reach the age of majority (typically eighteen or twenty-one). Indeed, it uses an inaccurate 19th century understanding of the human mind that is the foundation for most global legal systems. It presumes human beings make conscious rational decisions. Psychologist Daniel Kahneman [19] won a Nobel Prize for behavioral economics for his work that scientifically demonstrates that human beings have two ways of thinking: fast and slow as described in his award-winning book, *Thinking: Fast and Slow*. Essentially Kahneman and Tversky did many rigorous experiments which showed that humans characteristically use unconscious heuristics to make decisions, and only occasionally stop, look at hard data and do analytical evaluation. These unconscious mental models are often irrational and based on past experience. These outliers work does not include the science of social psychological influence. Human beings are hard wired to adapt and conform to people in their environment and to authority figures that they assume to be legitimate. Predators can systematically use techniques known to them to exert undue influence and subvert an adult’s capacity to give informed consent.

Conclusion

Breaking down people’s identities, disorienting them, creating pseudo-identities are found in all high-control groups, including terrorist groups, human trafficker’s pedophile grooming rings, gangs and all forms of pseudo-religious, commercial, therapy and political cults. Cult mind control can create a dissociative disorder. It does not erase the existing personality but grafts a parasitic and dominant pseudo-identity onto the personality. Using the Influence Continuum, and applying the eight Lifton criteria and the BITE model criteria, an understanding of cult programming is offered. The pyramid graphic that radiates influences throughout its base is useful to understand wide variations in the extremity of undue influence within a specific organization.

A pilot study was conducted with 1033 respondents that offered preliminary validation of the fact that the four components of control named in the BITE model exist in people who represent themselves as former members of high-control groups. At some time in the future, by utilizing the developing science of social influence, mental health professionals and forensic experts will be able to clarify and update the legal system’s understanding of destructive predatory influence. This is a paradigm shift that will affect all aspects of society from education and jurisprudence to mental health and correction and rehabilitation, as well as the military.

The models presented in the paper might be useful to begin to frame how the legal system should be looking at Undue Influence. Schefflin’s Social Influence Model [18] offers an overall framework to evaluate the degree of undue influence in a particular case. The Influence Continuum which

has an ethical, healthy influence on one end to unethical destructive mind control on the other end. The BITE model of unethical mind control uses four overlapping components: Behavior Control, Information Control, Thought Control, and Emotional Control to begin to evaluate where on the continuum any particular case may be. The eight Lifton criteria will also provide an additional model to help make a more accurate assessment.

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Disclosure of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

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