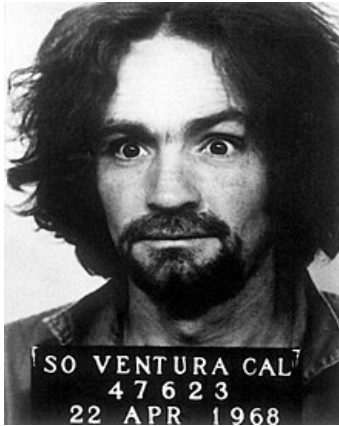


The Secrets Of Cult Indoctrination

Description



Charles Manson

Why Do People Join Cults?

There are three models that seek to explain why people join cults. First is the **Deliberative Model** which says people join cults because of what they think about the group. Under this model individuals join because they agree with the group's theories and ideas. Second is the **Psychodynamic Model** which says people join because of how the cult fulfills missing psychological needs. The third model called the **Thought Reform Model** says people join because their needs are manipulated. We will focus primarily on the second and third models.

First the **Psychodynamic model**. There are a few reasons why people join cults but they all tend to center on coping with feelings of emptiness and dissatisfaction with their current life. [Specifically they report](#) feelings of alienation like isolation, meaningless, normlessness (lack of shared common values), powerlessness, demoralization, discomfort, dissatisfaction, ambiguity, pessimistic or futile thoughts, general vulnerability, and identity diffusion. This is frequently coupled with a feeling that they don't measure up to others leads them to not respect themselves.

[Studies](#) have shown that cults actually do "significantly reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, confusion." These cults take what are typically seen as society's rejects and give them shelter and treatment. Interestingly enough, people run from the pressure to conform in normal society and find relief in a cult that in many ways is more rigid than an open society. This rigidity comes from an omniscient figure at the helm of the cult that provides security, confidence, a belief system, and comfort to the members. These feelings help them deal with their psychological issues and desires and explain why many people stay in cults.

It should also be noted that another model of why people join cults is the **Thought Reform Model**. Under this model people join and stay because of psychological manipulation that exploits their needs. Symbols of success, power, and happiness often draw people in, and are typically combined with

innocent looking fronts like charities and social groups. Then those who buy into the ideas of the front group are moved to the next level. People might then be taught that they can't [trust their feelings](#) because those feelings cause them to remain attached to the world and not get enlightened. Then that seed of manipulation disempowers the person and leads to the next manipulative step.

A few important notes. First cults can increase in number when the notions of family and community start to crumble in a society. Membership can come from younger people who feel they don't belong in the world as it is. Second it should be noted that obviously not all cults have a net positive effect on people. There are many more examples of extremely negative effects of cults on individuals. See the section below on examples. Third it should be noted that all three models could be true in different situations. Finally keep in mind that many cults use fronts to cover up the fact that they are cults. It could be as benign as a yoga studio that teaches certain ideas and then funnels certain personalities to the next step. Understanding this is important because it means lack of intelligence isn't always what causes people to join. **Sometimes they are just tricked into it by people who spend more time practicing deception.**

Why Do Cults Use Deception?

Cults use deceptive techniques simply because they are effective. Techniques from psychology, sociology, propaganda, persuasion, and other areas of study actually work, which is why mass media companies, governments, and individuals use them. They are employed on their members and potential members either on accident or on purpose.

Deception involves representing something in a way that it actually isn't. **Cults in particular have an interest in deception for two reasons.** First it could be because sometimes they don't have much to offer. They promise security, connection, and purpose but those promises are often fronts for leaders to accumulate and use power. Deceptive techniques help to cover this up and keep people hoping for their utopian desires to be fulfilled. Second it could be because of the stark difference between the cult's way of life and the surrounding culture's way of life. Many times if cults revealed their full operations, no one would join. Instead they use the foot in the door technique to slowly escalate people's commitment level.

There are more benign reasons cults deceive. In some situations cults use deceptive techniques because of trauma experienced by the leader. Humans often pass along treatment they experience. They could legitimately think the way they are treating people is normal because that is how they were treated as a child. The leader could legitimately believe they are doing good, and just be wrong. See confirmation bias for more information on how our brain over weights evidence that supports what we already think.

See this article for an [interview](#) about cults.

How Do You Know If Something Is A Cult?

Some try to list a defining difference between cults and normal organizations. We think it is easier to just talk about cults on a spectrum. **The more cult like behaviors an organization does, the more it is like a cult.** Stay away from groups of any kind that employ multiple cult techniques, regardless of

whether they meet a cult definition or not.

1. Be suspicious if the group claims they are the only way you can achieve some goal or end state. This can be riches, salvation, happiness, or success. Do they claim to be the true or only X?
2. Be suspicious of groups that restrict, shame, or disincentivize critical thinking. This could be shaming you for asking questions, attacking you for disagreeing with leaders, or punishing you for having nuanced or different points of view. Does this group want you to fully accept their way of looking at the world and reject all others?
3. Be suspicious of groups that make you [feel shame](#) for being independent. This could mean they shame your desires to develop job or employment skills. They could discourage saving money up or developing a network of other friends.
4. Be suspicious of gaslighting. Gaslighting is a technique used by many types of manipulative people. If you know something happened and the person is trying to convince you it didn't, write the experience down and get away.
5. Be suspicious of people who are instantly your friend. Love bombing is when a person or group overwhelms you with words, actions, or other behavior. Cults use this technique to draw you in and then they threaten to take away these emotional connections if you don't comply. Real friendships take time to develop.

Steps To Cult Indoctrination & Control

There are a few methods used by cults to capture and retain people. See this article for more [examples](#) of real life indoctrination. As you read the processes below, look for overlap. So how do cults actually maintain control over their members?

The 8 Steps Of Thought Reform (Psychological Totalism)

This is a [book](#) written after interviewing people who were "brainwashed" in China after the Korean War. See also this [site](#).

1. Milieu Control. Control information, communication, and eventually the individual by isolating them.
2. Mystical Manipulation. Leaders orchestrate experiences that prove divine authority. Followers are taught to think of coincidences as evidence of the divine.
3. Purity Demands. The world is turned into an out group and shamed.
4. Confession. Sins against the group are confessed and exploited.
5. Sacred Science. The group's narrative of the world and life is considered sacred and the ultimate truth. It is above criticism.
6. Loading The Language. Words and phrases are created or reinterpreted to reinforce conformity and in group out group bias.
7. Doctrine Over Person. Personal experience and identity are subordinated to the group and its teachings. Anything contrary must be dismissed or minimized.
8. Dispensing Of Existence. Those who do not follow are rejected, dismissed, or ignored in some form or another. This makes the outside world lose credibility and creates a fear of leaving the group.

The DDD Technique

The [DDD technique](#) stands for Deception Dependency Dread.

First the cult must deceive its potential members. This can be as simple as presenting a benign or innocent looking front. For example a charity, a yoga studio, or a social group can be used. When people come to the group the recruiter teaches or acts in a certain way as to gain the trust of potential members. They also can display happiness and a fulfilled or successful life. This draws people in and they want to know more. This step includes hiding of illegal or more alternative behaviors. The group is presented as pure and elite in comparison to the rest of the world. After this initial step, the people are slowly escalated into more intense situations as the cult slowly reveals its more strange beliefs and practices.

Second comes dependency. Cults gradually isolate members from their outer connections. Isolation can be enhanced by not allowing new people to talk to each other. They can also require no contact with the outer world. Cults often dictate much of the person's day so they don't have time to critically think. This is also done by creating an us versus them environment. People are taught that they are special, a member of an exclusive group, or different in some way. This is the stage where love bombing happens (Assigned or immediate friends who love you as long as you follow the group's teachings). Maybe the only way to be saved or successful is to be part of their group. They are taught that others don't understand what they are trying to accomplish. Members are taught ideas that attack their ability to critically think. They are punished when they get out of line, and forced to comply with outward expressions of support, community, and love. These things together create a state a dependency as the person becomes more isolated physically, mentally, and socially. Once isolation is complete they are dependent on the cult.

Finally is the dread stage. This stage only comes once the isolation is complete. Because the person is isolated from any support that isn't connected to the cult, they begin to feel fearful of losing the group. This can be exasperated by seeing how the cult treats and talks about former members, and how it punishes people on a smaller scale for non compliance.

The Cult Mind Control Techniques

This section of techniques is taken from a [journal](#) article on mind control techniques.

1. First Contact. This step happens when a friend or family member introduces a person to the cult. It can also happen as part of a recruitment exercise. Love bombing where members become instant friends happens in this step. The new person feels loved or understood. The group is presented as [pure and elite](#) in comparison to the rest of the world.
2. Loosening. This is when the person is isolated from their existing way of living. This usually involves shaming and finding flaws with a person's existing support system. Sowing seeds of doubt about the person's existing leaders or idols is part of this step. This step also includes making the person feel inferior, guilty, anxious, and exploiting dependency needs. The cult has all the correct answers to their issues.
3. Change. As people become more committed to the group, techniques are used to fully transform the person. This involves confession sessions where a person reveals past behavior to unburden

themselves. The information can be used to further connect the person to the group or to stop them from leaving through fear of punishment, shame, or guilt. The person is told contact with the outside world will pollute them. Next comes group pressure, where the person looks around them and tries to fit in. Deviant or unique behavior is shamed and conforming behavior is praised. After that is sensory deprivation, which can involve dietary changes, sleep loss, or intense work levels. Elements of this can reduce intellectual functioning and make it harder to resist. Negative feelings are explained away as battling with the impure. Another trick used is called information overload or purposeful confusion. When the brain is presented too much information it reverts to more emotional decision making. It stops being critical.

The BITE Model

The [BITE Model](#) is based on research from cognitive dissonance theory and brainwashing in Maoist China. B stands for Behavior, I for Information, T for Thought, and E for emotional control. All are used in powerful brainwashing instances.

Behavior

- Regulate their physical actions by dictating how they associate or are isolated from people. Regulate private decisions like dress, style, or sexual expression. Regulate their actions by requiring permission for important decisions. Compel people to perform rituals.
- Punish disobedience, discourage individualism, reward group thing and conformity.

Information

- Control information by withholding information, lying, minimizing access to non cult information tools.
- Create an in group out group dynamic. Encourage spying and reporting of these who consume not cult info. Consume cult information and propaganda.
- Use confession to shame or blackmail. Withhold absolution.

Thought Control

- Instill black and white thinking. Cause age regression. Eliminate critical thinking.
- Create false memories.
- Teach thought stopping tricks to eliminate 'negative' thoughts like chanting, meditating, praying, singing, denial, rationalization, justification, wishful thinking.

Emotional Control

- Fractionation. This is where you combine love bombing with breaking rapport. This creates a need that goes unfulfilled unless the person complies. This technique is sometimes used by narcissists.
- Promote feelings of insecurity and guilt. Identity, social, lack of achieving potential, historical guilt.
- Promote fear of different ways of living or thinking or of the in group's disapproval. Promote phobias of challenging the leader like demon possession or accidents.

The New York Cult Pattern

The [Newyorkcult](#) is a site that covers a specific brand of cult called Aesthetic Realism. Here is their way of describing how cults obtain control.

1. Invite the person to a non threatening event. This can include attractive recruiters and an innocent front.
2. Love bombing where the person is praised and given excessive attention is step two.
3. Prize Dangling. If you join the cult you can attain something special like happiness, answers to deep questions, or wealth. See, these people have it and are members! You will hear anecdotes and other success stories.
4. Extracting a statement that you want the prize they are dangling. This can be as simple as a statement that you are interested or a simple action that shows membership. Most importantly they get you to say you want it.
5. They Shut Down Dissent by threatening to withhold the prize if you don't comply with their special recipe. When you question them they will ask why you are resisting obtaining the prize.
6. Guilt Establishment comes next. They dig up shame and threaten and control people with it. Confessions get them the information and then they can reveal that private information if you don't comply.
7. Carrots And Sticks are used to reinforce conforming behavior and to eliminate bad behavior.
8. Control identity, information, and environment. This involves disassociating the person from external connections.

More Techniques

See this [article](#) for more brainwashing techniques similar to those used by cults.

[The True Believer By Eric Hoffer \(Review & Detailed Summary\)](#)

Category

1. Manipulation

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