

# Terror, love and brainwashing

This book explains how people can be radically manipulated by extreme groups and leaders to engage in incomprehensible and often dangerous acts through psychologically isolating situations of extreme social influence. These methods are used in totalitarian states, terrorists groups and cults, as well as in controlling personal relationships.

- Maintain open yet supportive personal networks
- Essential reading for professionals, policy makers, legal professionals, educators and cult survivors and their families themselves
- Charisma and authoritarianism of cult leaders:
  - ★ The followers love, worship and idealize the leader, endowing the leader with charisma.... At the same time, the leader's authoritarian nature leads to actions that generate a feeling of fear, terror or threat. Threat can be introduced in myriad ways, for example through threatening to end the relationship, or by inducing fear of the outside world through introducing or fanning apocalyptic fears, or it could be through creating conditions of physical threat such as extreme fatigue... Or the outright threat of violence.
- Purpose:
  - To exert total control over those who drift within their grasp. (closed doors)
    - *Coercive persuasion*
    - *Thought reform*
    - *Mind control*
    - *Brainwashing*
      - Systematic, orchestrated and deceptive process of grooming and recruitment
- ★ These survivors feel both a sense of responsibility to those they leave behind as well as a need to warn others of the dangers of these organizations
- Chronic terror and powerlessness of living in closed environments where the leader's control was absolute and where the group dictated often the most mundane details of life.
  - These cults and totalitarian systems - take control over people's lives to such an extreme extent that life itself ceases to belong to followers.

- ★ The people who find themselves in cults, extremist groups or even totalitarian nations are ordinary people who did not choose that situation. Rather, the situation - or the group - chose them.
      - ★ None of us are immune given the right come-on and the right situation, yet those who do become victims are demonized. This demonization prevents us from recognizing our own potential vulnerability.
  - An essential ingredient in this process of inner coercion is the attempt by the psychopathic leader to control the very *self*, the interior as well as the exterior world of the follower.

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### The overthrow of the rulers of the mind

- Systematic, orchestrated and deceptive process of grooming the recruitment.
  - *You were discouraged from seeing your family. The family was holding you down, the family unit was not encouraged.*
    - Families torn apart, women ordered to have abortions, money laundering and fraud. Propaganda.
    - Numerous sexual relationships, some involved breaking up couples in there.
- Almost total power and control over followers.
  - Loyalty, labor, money and sex flow up to Newman
    - Now it was Newman who ruled her mind
      - Retention
      - Indoctrination
- ★ The way a total eclipse utterly covers the light, so do totalist organizations attempt to block out any alternate relationships or beliefs, locking daylight out of the picture.
  - *"Totalitarian ideologies, they are "isms that pretend to have found the key explanation for all the mysteries of life and world": the ideologies of totalism claim to supply the answers to all possible questions for all time.*
- A cult is a group of people led and generally exploited by a charismatic and authoritarian leader, who holds an extreme (totalist) set of views. A cult employs brainwashing in its efforts to keep members under its control.
  - ★ Don't lump together religion and totalist groups

- Traumatic brainwashing processes take place to create extraordinarily high levels of control over followers
  - They allow autonomy, they are not totalistic
    - ★ A relationship rooted in creation of and experience of trauma
      - Disorganized attachment

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## The leader

- The engine
  - Drives the whole system
  - The system reflects the personality, the preferences and the whims of the leader.
    - Charisma
    - Authoritarianism
- Love worship and idealize the leader endowing the charismatic leader with "magical qualities"
- At the same time, the leader's authoritarian nature leads to actions that generate a feeling of fear, terror or threat.
  - Threatening to end the relationship
  - Inducing fear of the outside world (apocalyptic fears)
  - Creating conditions of physical threat such as extreme fatigue, hunger or the outright threat of violence.
    - Benevolence and despotism (charisma and authoritarianism) [both love and fear]
      - Their primary goal is to create a set of guaranteed attachments to others.
        - Outcome of his own attachment style.

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## The structure

- Coercive persuasion (isolating environment)
  - Full time commitments (live together)
    - No time for non-group activities
      - ★ To keep them from external relationships and influences
        - Self-sealing system (closed structure)
- ★ The structure must also allow the transmission downwards of the leader's orders and ideological pronouncements while simultaneously funneling resources from followers back upward to the leader.
  - Levels of hierarchy may exist for this purpose.

- ★ Usually his hierarchy is fluid and fluctuating.
  - ★ Many totalist groups create front groups as the outer layer of their onion-like structure
    - These are the public face of the group and exist for purposes of recruitment, fundraising and other functions.
      - *Transmission belts from the group to and from the outside world.*

### The total ideology

- Not determined by its content but by its *structure* and *function*-
- ★ The key element of the total ideology is its focus on a single truth. This single truth, the sacred word, is the word of the leader, or sometimes, that of a deity to whom the leader is the only one to have a direct line. All knowledge comes from the leader.

### Process: brainwashing

- ★ The alternation of love and fear within an isolating environment resulting in dissociated, loyal and deployable follower who can now be instructed to act in the interests of the leader rather than in his or her own survival interests.
  - First the follower is glued in anxious dependency to the group.
  - Second, this seeking of contact with the source of threat causes cognitive collapse, or dissociation, in the mind of the follower.
    - I was sworn to secrecy after my first six-week stay with the group, leaving me with no one but those in the group with whom to try to understand what had been an extremely difficult experience.
      - ★ *It has felt like madness. I have been sinking into a world where I do not want to go.... In sleep someone is trying to kill me, my friends are dying. I wake up with a dead emptiness inside as if I've lost everything, even my ability to know*
      - Sense of chaos and loss is the prelude to the next step
        - ★ Turning more completely to the group - my only remaining source of comfort
- ★ Third step, the leadership can now take advantage of this cognitive collapse and introject their own agenda into the cognitive vacuum thus induced.

- Understand coercive persuasion by bringing in the evolutionary-based attachment theory as an explanatory factor in how this mechanism works.
  - The dissociation caused by a relationship of disorganized attachment (a relationship embedded in trauma) can help to explain this, and can show why cultive and terrorist groups predictably share the five elements described here.

Outcomes: exploitation and deployability of followers

- ★ **The key experience of membership in a totalist group is one of *isolation, not community or comradeship.***
  - The follower is isolated from the outside world; he or she is isolated from an authentic relationship to others within the group.
    - They'll believe anything and do anything.
- It's more about *how* they get recruited, not *why*
- Totalitarian internal structure
  - ★ Relies on slave labor for profit in the name of justice and empowerment
    - My self-esteem and judgment had been severely impaired
- Rigidly bounded, dense, hierarchical and isolating social system supported and represented by a total, exclusive ideology.
  - We must understand this process, and we must, as a society, learn to disarm it.

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Fear

- ★ ! Give the patients a powerful stimulus, yell at them "you're sick!", so the patients will have a fright and break out in an over-all sweat; then, they can be carefully treated.
  - First step of coercion, brainwashing
    - Fear and isolation
      - Coercion into coercive persuasion
- The leader positions themselves as the benevolent safe haven to which each follower will turn when afraid

- Isolate the follower from any other possible safe havens and the arouse fear in the follower
      - Frightened
      - Stressed
        - ★ *Run to someone*: to the leader or group
          - Disorganized attachment
- Central to brainwashing.
  - ★ Pushing aside of doubts and questions and beginning to passively accept the dogma of the leader
    - Giving in and ceasing to argue
- *Rewire attachment behavior*
  - Need for attachment is separate from physical needs
    - *Fright without solution*
      - Comfort and source of fear
        - Attempts to flee *from* and *to* the caregiver
- Panic if followed by giving up
  - Independent thinking
  - Emotional independence
    - Isolation and fear
      - Dissociated follower with anxiously dependent attachment bond to the group
- *Coerced* disorganized attachment
  - ★ Powerful combination of terror and love

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- Attachment status is malleable, not fixed.
- ★ His distress was attributed to his own flaws, not the group
  - ★ **Comes to accept the group as the safe haven and thus forms a trauma bond.**
    - Feels like great relief this surrender to the group
      - *After two months of hell I finally agreed to the plan.*
- Effort to escape the source of the fear ceases
  - Now only seeks comfort with the fear inducing relationship

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Recruitment - the accidental extremist

- First get the person within their sphere of influence
  - Then the isolation project starts
    - Primary emotional and cognitive resource for the recruit
    - Becoming the new and eventually only safe haven

- Beginning to detach the recruit from prior attachments.
    - Propaganda is the ideological tool wielded to accomplish this.
  - ★ ! Terrorists don't fit particular profile (it's all about the manipulations of the group)
    - Pulled in
      - Usually by accident
      - Or born into
      - Living in totalitarian state
      - Kidnapped
      - Front groups
        - ★ PULLED IN BY ACCIDENT while on their way to other goals
  - Initiating a coordinated program of persuasion
  - Through their existing social networks
  - The others through cold contacts
    - Ads
    - Fliers
    - Recruiting in public
    - Phone book
    - Online recruiting
  - ★ ! Social therapy discouraged ties to anyone outside the group!
    - Her lover was inhibiting her development
      - Monopolizing of the recruit's time is typical of totalist groups
        - Monitored reporting on what they did

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#### Propaganda: Disabling critical thought

- Gradually introduced to the groups ideology and its use of political language
- Isolate
- Breakdown
- Indoctrinate
- ★ ! Overwhelm their critical thinking with superficial and emotionally arousing information and experiences

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#### Undue influence mechanisms in recruitment

- Obedience to authority

- Ingratiation techniques
  - Flattery
  - Similarity
  - Reciprocity
- Feelings of uneasiness turn into guilt
  - It was just this weird rollercoaster ride
    - ★ Cognitive dissonance (two opposing emotions)

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! ★ Who is vulnerable? It's situation, not personality

- *Situational* vulnerabilities not *personality*
  - Being in a normal life "blip"
    - Change in life situation
      - Move to attend uni
      - Divorce, breakup
      - Death in family
      - Change of job or housing
- We're social animals
  - Fundamental need to join with others to seek solutions to the problems of survival.
    - Danger arises if that effort encounters totalist groups
      - Seek to control and isolate its members
- What *is* a differentiating factor is what happens to a person after joining a group
  - Totalists further isolate the person
- ★ ! **Most of us could become vulnerable given the right conditions, the right group and the right time.**
  - Much more useful is understanding the dynamics and techniques of the *organizations*
- Pulled away from prior attachments
- Told they're holding them back
- Leader as sole source of comfort and knowledge, new safe haven
- Become engaged with their group and slowly their totalist propaganda
- Their independent thinking has been disrupted by persuasion pressures
  - Also loss of prior social sources of reality verification

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Totalist indoctrination



## Isolation in a crowded place

- ★ ! *Only isolated individuals can be dominated totally*
- Follower's life becomes almost totally swallowed up by the group
  - Group arouses threat, fear, stress to isolated follower
    - *Disorganized attachment*
    - Chronic dissociation that is at its heart
      - Isolation
      - Engulfment
      - Fear arousal
        - ★ ! Fundamental to brainwashing process
        - Then they become deployable
          - Lose their autonomy of thought and action

## Isolation and engulfment

- Group activities
  - Feeling of superiority over the outside group emerges
    - (important world saving work=
- Control followers
  - Time
  - Communication
  - Busy working and working, no time to think
  - No sleep
    - Exhaustion
- ★ ! Everything you needed was there
  - Large family
    - Safety net
    - New safe haven
      - *Always remember: the gun is your mother and father now*
        - *I looked at him. I had a family, a home again.*
- Early day start
- Never being left alone
- No outside contact possible (with her "flesh family")
- ! Check partners who monitor you and reinforce the commitment to the group
- Give a new name + new clothes
  - Distancing my prior identity and sense of self

- Freedom disappears
- ★ With only a single view, a single, a absolute "truth" allowed, then no conversation is needed..d..

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- ★ ! Triple isolation:
  - From the outside world
  - From others in the group
  - From one's own self

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#### The creation of fright without solution

- Social life and time are under their control
- Must lock in their control that person's emotional and cognitive life
- ★ ! Threat is another ingredient
- Physical stress, deprivation or exhaustion
  - A world of constant threat
- Positioned as the only safe haven to whom to turn when fearful
- Sleep deprivation
  - Feeling of intense stress
    - ★ ! Inculcating of fear where the follower *cannot* resolve the threat.
      - Fear -> terror
        - Fright without solution
          - Creates a crisis
          - Malnourished, ill, exhausted
            - ★ ! Calculated acts of apparent kindness
- Momentary lifting of pressure results in feelings of gratitude
  - Also guilty about one's own rebellious behavior
    - Cycle of assault and leniency

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#### The emotional power of disorganized attachment bond

- Totalist isolation prevents alternate attachments
  - ★ Setting in place a feedback loop of unresolvable anxiety and need for proximity
    - ! This strengthens the bond to the group
      - This apparent kindness gives momentary comfort
- Unless there is another safe haven available, avoidance or leaving the group usually appears to the follower as the riskier option.

- Leaving feels even more terrifying than staying
    - Emotional glue, damaging and controlling relationship
      - This is the primary mechanism that traps people there
- ★ ! To create this *locking effect*, the totalitarian leader *must* remove or detach competing attachment figures, potential escape hatch safe havens.

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### The effect of disorganized attachment on cognition

- A passive, freeze response
  - ★ ! The escape where there is no escape
    - Hyperarousal eventually leads to dissociation
      - Psychological trauma
  - Passive defeat
  - Learned helplessness
    - Progressive impairment of the ability to:
      - Adjust
      - Take defensive action
      - Act on one's own behalf
      - Blocking of the capacity to register affect and pain
- ★ A way of playing dead
  - Loss of cognitive function
    - ★ ! Complex PTSD

- ★ ! Attribution error
  - ★ ! Fails to take into account the situational factors facing that person.
    - "this could never happen to me", a dangerous assumption

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### Controlling and deploying the disorganized follower

- Cognitive deficit is filled with group's ideology
  - ★ ! *Don't worry we'll do the thinking for you*
    - They'll explain all your questions, don't worry
      - Cognitive escape hatch
- People try to resolve what they feel is wrong
  - But under constraints of isolation, engulfment, and terror, they are unable to maintain a sense of right and effectively resist

- What counts is that the person eventually *breaks*
  - Eventual surrender
    - Must be maintained
      - ★ ! They must be kept in the isolated and terrorized state - their dissociation must be maintained

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The way out: fright *with* solution

- Think their way out
- Alternative safe haven opens up
- *In order for the follower to think clearly about the totalist relationship, an escape from the chronic terror is needed.*
  - Give in to exhaustion
  - See the repetition of failed promises.
  - Being temporarily out of reach of the group
    - Allows clearer thinking about it
- Literally, *i did not think!*
  - I obeyed
  - I didn't question anything
- ★ ! Psychological manipulation can happen to anyone, any time. If you're lucky, you end up with a timeshare. If you're unlucky you end up blowing yourself and innocent people up on the Tube.

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Family and friends

Not as close chairman mao

*Father is close, mother is close, but neither is as close as chairman mao.*

- *Popular song from mao's china*

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- To call their parents dogs, only he was to be called father
- New members are predictably called away from family
  - Clear difference
    - Changes in personality
    - Habits
    - Rejection of contact

- Within ISIS the kids are told to go back and kill their parents because they're unbelievers
  - Removes a fundamental source of support for people
    - Emotional
    - Practical
    - Reality-checking
      - Fiction:
        - The distorting hall of mirrors that is totalist ideology
- Romantic relationships are also monitored closely
- Cult of confession
  - You have to expose your inner thoughts

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The will of the führer is the party's law

Totalist leaders and the structures they create

*Totalitarian movements are mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals. Compared with all other parties and movements, their most conspicuous external characteristic is the demand for total, unrestricted, unconditional and unalterable loyalty of the individual member. This demand is made by the leaders of totalitarian movements even before they seize power.*

- *Hannah arendt*

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- *Totalist system is driven by its leader*
  - Closed and hierarchical system
    - Implements its ideology
      - Isolating
      - Top-heavy structure
        - Disorganized attachment
          - Terror and love

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- Authoritarians are bullies who threaten to punish
- Totalist leader seeks *total* control
  - Mass loyalty
  - "willing victims"
    - Constant fear arousal

- Leader or group as only safe haven
      - Charisma is necessary
  - Caregivers who display a hostile interaction pattern appear to be attempting to master unbearable feelings of vulnerability by denying their own feelings of fear and helplessness.
    - Physical abuse of Hitler's early years
      - They pick it up and pass it on to next gen
  - Icy self-control is characteristic of the disorganized
    - Highly predictive of bullying
    - Relational violence
    - Controlling behavior in adulthood
      - Coercive and violent acts
        - Lack of empathy
  - ★ ! **So skillful a disavower of (his own) dependency and inadequacy that is so shameful to him, that he creates a delusional world in which he is a superior being in need of nothing he cannot provide for himself. To remain persuaded of his own perfection, he uses significant others who he can subjugate.**
    - ★ Carrot and stick approach (page 136)
      - The need to control others as a means of guaranteeing attachment is the one consistent feature of cult leaders
        - It was out of loneliness, pure and simple
    - ★ ! Often they have had experience in other cultic groups and have then split off and formed their own organizations.
  - ★ An important characteristic of totalism is that it is made up of an unstable, fluctuating hierarchy rather than the more stable, rule-bound hierarchies typical of bureaucratic institutions.
  - Trauma bond:
    - Followers are conditioned to internalize a terror of the outside world -followers should reject entirely and forever the prior reality and the outside world.

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### The duplication of societal functions

- Seeming safety net
  - Contain all societal functions within it
    - No reason to associate with outside world
  - ★ ! While resources flow up to the leader, orders and ideology flow down to the followers.
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- ★ ! The totalist structure is set in place to isolate, engulf and create ongoing stress in order to keep followers in a state of fear without solution, thus trapping them within a disorganized and guaranteed attachment to the disorganized leader.#

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Secrets and lies

Ideology and language in totalist systems

*"The aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions,*

*But to destroy the capacity to form any."*

- *Hannah Arendt*

- First purpose is to reflect and justify the absolute control and single point of power of the leader and the isolating structure he or she creates.
  - Sheeps clothing that disguises the wolf
- Second purpose of totalist ideologies is to maintain dissociation
  - These ideologies aim to prevent the integration of feeling with thinking
    - ! ★ Destroy our sense of reality
      - Deployable followers
- ★ ! Propaganda and indoctrination

- Must present the leader as the only safe haven
- Must label all other potential safe havens dangerous / obstacles
- Broadcast elements of fear, stress or threat to trigger the traumatic disorganized bond of the follower to the group

- One truth, one leader
  - The structure that the totalist ideology Justifies is a steeply hierarchical one led by an allpowerful leader

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- One "safe haven" attachment
  - The ideology portrays the leader as the one true safe haven
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- One truth, one conversation
  - Talking with others is overtly controlled
  - Only Mojahedin thought was allowed
  - No info from outside world
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- Total ideology demands total transformation
  - Permanent revoution of the self
  - Fundamentally flawed an must change
  - No one can ever attain their perfection
- 
- The ideology of fear
  - Keeping alive fear stimulus
  - The only remaining source of "comfort"
  - You will not live long after leaving
  - You will drown
  - Exposed to gore images
  - Unbelievers as the enemy
  - Public executions
- 
- Total ideology as a dissociating barrier to critical thought
  - Prevent members from thinking about their feelings about their situation
  - ★ ! Since they are actually the source of threat
  - Dissociation (disorganized attachment)
  - Ideology supports dissociatino in several ways
    - Exhorting members not to think, or not to feel
    - Prevented from reality checks with others
- 
- Disconnecting thinking from feeling
  - No valid feelings
  - Thinking too much
    - Have their convos be about nothing
  - Blame the victim



- Ideology twists reality and the follower's understanding of their abuse
    - Power becomes lopsided and unequal
- 
- Enforcing a unanimous majority to prevent critical thought
  - Dissociation is also maintained by preventing reality checking with others
  - ★ ! 'we are not as solidly independent as we would like to think
  - *It's not something you can understand. You just stop asking.*
  - Disallowing questions, doubts or dissent
  - Doubts and questions were deflected by followers being told "struggle with the practice"
    - More chanting. Prayer, labor, courses...
- 
- The secrets and lies of the fictitious ideology
  - Erases ppl from reality
  - Secrets and lies cover up the reality
    - Prevents followers from thinking clearly about their condition
      - Seek alternate, real safe havens and escape
        - Justified by "protecting them from evil outside"
          - Parents are the "enemy"
  - ★ ! The biggest secret of all is that the ideology is a lie
- 
- Loaded language
  - Used to deliver the fictions of total ideology
    - Group jargon
      - Strangely repetitive
      - Mechanical (deja vu feeling)
        - ★ ! Constriction
          - Capacities for feeling and thinking are extremely narrowed
            - Feels scripted
  - Total loyalty is possible only when fidelity is emptied of all concrete content
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- Total ideology disengages central route thinking

- Its singular nature as the only Truth allowed, the lack of dissent, its fictional quality, and loaded language and lack of concrete content, all work together
  - ★ ! Quantity rather than quality
  - Excessive repetition
  - Complex language
  - Fear arousal
  - Rapid delivery
    - Sleep deprivation
    - Overstimulation
    - Distraction
    - Fear
    - Lack of privacy time
    - Malnourishment
  - ★ ! *Ideas that normally would not stand up to careful scrutiny*

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- Doubling: the creation of a segregated self
  - Segregated and exists under a kind of shadow
    - Shoved away
      - Totalist self sits "on top of" the self that is still able to engage

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8

From the inside out

- *You would more or less die if you actually ever became outside of it.*
  - ★ ! I didn't even think that was possible to leave.
- We assume false immunity
  - It could never happen to myth
    - People have no prior cult-seeking or self-victimizing tendencies
      - Blame and shame victims
        - This doesn't help with understanding the actual dynamics at work
- Secure attachment isn't enough
  - No one is immune

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### Getting out of totalist systems

- Given the strength of the disorganized attachment bond, leaving a totalist group presents extraordinary challenges.
  - Not being a member seems like death, impossible possibility
- Emotional obstacle
- Reintegration
- Fear arousal
- Only safe haven
- Cognitive obstacle
  - Isolation from alternative sources of information

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- Will they chase me down?
- Threaten me?
- Silence me?

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### Power of alternate safe haven attachments

- Islands of resistance within group
  - They start talking about problems in the leadership
- More common is ppl reaching to ppl inside to help the follower to escape
  - Planned interventions
    - Exit counseling
- Illness and hospitalization


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### Deployable, but not Manchurian

- Cult-shopping
  - Hard to adjust, goes to another cult
  - The loss of relationships in there is hard
    - Presumed safe haven
    - Fear or threat to arouse the attachment behaviors of members
    - Eliminating alternate attachments which may terminate attachment behavior caused by fear arousal
    - Structural creation of material dependency, preventing alternate safe havens

- Cognitive isolation, preventing alternate sources of information

## Complex trauma

 [Complex PTSD: From Surviving To Thriving by Pete Walker \(Audiobook\)](#)