

Cults In Our Midst

Psychological manipulation is at the heart of the matter, with or without the use of physical violence.

Totalistic groups transcend any professional discipline and has to do with larger social and historical forces.

Totalism is likely to emerge during periods of historical - or psychohistorical - dislocation, in which there is a breakdown of the symbols and structures that guide the human life cycle. Contributing to this dislocation is the mass media revolution.

Worldwide epidemic of fundamentalism.

★ What we call cults represent an important expression of fundamentalism.

Make careful distinctions, one person's cult is another man's religion.

First, all cults have a charismatic leader, who himself or herself increasingly becomes the object of worship, and in many cases, the dispenser of immortality.

Second, in cults there occurs a series of psychological processes that can be associated with what has been called "coercive persuasion" or "thought reform".

Third, there is a pattern of manipulation and exploitation from above (by leaders and ruling coterie) and idealism from below (on the part of the supplicants and recruits).

★ The protean self, in contrast to the fundamentalist or cult self, is open and many-sided; rather than narrowly prescribed, it calls forth odd combinations, and includes important elements of humor and mockery.

- You are not defective, you are normal, you were *lured* into the cult!

- Often feel dissatisfaction in life and are vulnerable to false promises of ideology and cult
 - To give them what they are missing: purpose, community, "safety", belief, etc
- Powerful and dangerous social problem, take away freedom, money, family,
- ★ More ppl than ever are joining, now more relevant than ever!

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- Use words to persuade, control and even damage ppl
- ★ *Cult* tends to imply something weird, different from me.
 - They are far from marginal and people who join them are much ppl like you and me
 - ★ = a group that forms around a person who claims he or she has a special mission or knowledge, which will be shared with those who turn over most of their decision making to that self-appointed leader.
 - Not always easy to recognize at first glance
 - Cults are truly *personality cults*
 - Once caught up in it, it starts showing its real face
- ★ We are all more vulnerable to flattery, deception, lures, and enticements when we are lonely, sad, and feelings needy.
 - Manipulable, more suggestible, and more likely to be deceived by the flattery and inducement of designing persons.
- ★ The cults' lure is, if you just come along, all will be fine, and everyone will live happily ever after.
- ★ Contrary to the myth those who join cults are seekers, it is the cults that go out and actively and aggressively find followers. Eventually, these groups subject their followers to mind-numbing treatments that block critical and evaluative thinking and subjugate independent choice in a context of a strictly enforced hierarchy.
 - ★ There are cults in our midst, more than the average citizen realizes. And these powerful groups infiltrate many areas of our lives.

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Part One

What Are Cults?

1 Defining Cults

- Thought-reform techniques in recruiting, changing, and exploiting followers.
- ★ Many cultic groups are disguised as legitimate enterprises - as restaurants, self-help groups, business training workshops, prosperity cults, psychotherapy clinics,.....
- A cultic relationship is one in which a person intentionally induces others to become totally or nearly totally dependent on him or her for almost all major life decisions, and inculcate in these followers a belief that he or she has some special talent, gift, or knowledge.
- The origin of the group and role of the leader
- The power structure, or relationship between the leader (or leaders) and the followers
- The use of a coordinated program of persuasion (which is called thought reform, or more commonly, brainwashing)

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- One person is typically the founder and the top on hierarchy, most are male
 - *Cult leaders are self-appointed, persuasive persons who claim to have a special mission in life or to have special knowledge.*
 - *Cult leaders tend to be determined and domineering and are often described as charismatic.*
 - *Cult leaders center attention on themselves.*

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- *Cults are authoritarian in structure.*
- *Cults appear to be innovative and exclusive.*
- *Cults tend to have a double set of ethics.*
- *Cults tend to be totalistic, or all-encompassing, in controlling their members' behavior and also ideologically totalistic, exhibiting zealotry and extremism in their worldview.*
- *Cults tend to require members to undergo a major disruption or change in life-style.*

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- There is a spectrum
 - Live-in and live-out groups
 - Live together and every detail of life come under group scrutiny
- Cults basically have only two purposes: recruiting new members and fund-raising.

- ★ The term *cult* is merely descriptive, not pejorative. It refers to the origins, social structure, and power structure of a group. The conduct of certain cults, however - especially groups that tend to overtly exploit and abuse people and engage in deceptive, unethical, and illegal conduct - does provoke the surrounding society into a critical stance.

Cult types

- Political, religion, commerce, selfhelp, health fads,
- ★ Today mostly New Age thinking and personal improvement training, life styles and prosperity programs.
- All cults are a variation on a single theme.
 - ★ **In cultic groups, the belief system ends up being a tool to serve the leader's desires, whims, and hidden agendas. The ideology is a double-edged sword: it is glue that binds the member to the group, and it is a tool exploited by the leader to achieve his goals.**

Who joins cults?

- We instinctively try to separate ourselves from those persons. It seems a point of valor and self-esteem to insist that "no one could get *me* to do such things"
 - Most people tend to believe that their own minds and thought processes are invulnerable. "Other people can be manipulated, but not me."
- ★ People like to think that their opinions, values, and ideas are inviolate and totally self-regulated.
 - The average person looks down on those who get involved in cults, get taken in a scam by some operator who bilks people, or remain in abusive relationships for long periods.
 - Few, if any countries around the world are without cults.

Yes, you

- Cults offer instant, simplistic, and focused solutions to life's problems.
 - ★ **The group sounded like a dream come true: it seemed to have a sense of purpose, meaningfulness, paths to follow, and things that were agreed upon as good and bad. She**

later realized that at the time she met the guru group she was an easy subject to recruit into their ways.

- ★ Lack social or familial stability to fend off the seductive lure of simple answers and whose susceptibility to cults recruitment increases as their view of the world around them becomes unsettled.
 - Many adults today are overwhelmed by the confusion and apparent coldness of our society.
 - What does this create but ripe recruits for the multitude of manipulators and swindlers?
 - *Any person who is in a vulnerable state, seeking companionship and a sense of meaning or in a period of transition or time of loss, is a good prospect for cult recruitment.*
 - Improved state of mind, expanded state of being, a moral, spiritual, or political state of righteous certainty.
 - ★ Must surrender his or her critical mind, must have childlike trust and faith, must yield to the flow of force.

Why do they join?

- Depressed
- Being between important affiliations
- ★ Not engaged in a meaningful personal relationship, job, educational or training program, or some other life involvement.
- Unsettling personal occurrences are commonplace
- Free from losing a job
- Feeling overwhelmed about how things have been going
- Life transitions
 - ★ At such times, we are all more open to persuasion, more suggestible, more willing to take something offered us without thinking there might be strings attached
 - Each cult has its own lures and tactics for getting new members and recruiting its type of person.
 - Courses used to lure people into cults have a wide range....

- How to... Scientificall reduce stress in lyourlife, become a millionaire, get control in your life, become a yoga teacher....
- ★ You usually do not learn the full story (and real purpose) of the cult until long after becoming embedded in the group. One of the most central criticisms of the curren crop of cults hingers on their deceptive recruiting methods.

Myth of the seeker

- Seeker theorists fail to study cult actions, the persuasion and influence techniques used.
 - I have not been told by one of them that they went out looking for a guru to scam them...
 - ★ They were looking for companionship or the chance to do something to benefit themselves and mankind.
 - ★ They were active or deceptively pressured to join, soon found themselves enmeshed in the group, were slowly cut off from their pasts and their families, and became totally dependent on the group.

Blaming the victim

- *The just world concept*
 - ★ Widely held belief that if a person obeys the rules of society, nothing bad will happen to him or her.
 - ★ Rule-breakers, on the other hand, get punished.
- *Blaming the victim*
 - Women who get raped are often blamed.
 - ★ An almost universal response to misfortune happening to others.
 - There must be some personal defect, stupid, crazy, and weak-minded.
 - Also, blame family, relatives, must have failed in some way.
 - "We parents are made to look like the abusers and the menace."
 - ★ **The actions of the cult are overlooked in the appraisal.**

- **Enforced dependency** as a consequence of having been subjected to thought-reform processes.
 - We are all being influenced all the time.

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A brief history of cults

- Unusual social or political turbulence or breakdowns in the structure and rules of the prevailing society. Such are the times when cults flourish.
 - They claim they have the only and sure way of life.
 - Touting a special mission and special knowledge.
- The cults offered father or divinelike figures to youth needing models and identification

- Cults are established by strong or charismatic leaders who control power hierarchies and material resources.
- Cults possess some doctrine
- Cults create fortified boundaries, in and out group
 - Communes are peaceful and looser and have no hierarchy

- Large group awareness training
- Spiritual
- Transformational
- Political
- Psychological
- Occult
- Prosperity

Cause for concern

- Have little idea how to cope with real life now
- They have a changing use of language
 - They're con-artists and opportunists
 - Constantly watch for the new buzz words that might be used to entice the unsuspecting.

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The process of brainwashing, psychological coercion, and thought reform

- ★ The key to successful thought reform is to keep the subjects unaware that they are being manipulated and controlled - and especially that they're going down a dark path.
 - Change attitudes by attacking essential aspects of a person's sense of self.
 - Designed to destabilize an individual's sense of self.
 - Induced dependency
- An invisible social adaptation (not aware what's happening)
 - Destablize sense of self
 - Reinterpret his life's history and worldview and accpet new version of reality
 - Develop depence on the org = new deployable agent for them

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Singer's six conditions

- Keep the person unaware that there is an agenda to control or change the person
 - Non-informed consent
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- Control time and physical environment
 - Constantly keep you busy
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- Create a sense of powerlessness, fear, and dependency
 - Stripping you of your support system and ability to be independent
 - Previous worldviews are attacked
 - Self-esteem erodes.
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- Suppress old behavior and attitudes
 - Old self is suppressed
 - The vacuum left is filled with the group's ways of thinking and doing.

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- Instill new behavior and attitudes
 - Approval comes from having your behaviors and thought patterns conform to the models put forth by the group
 - Inhibit display of doubt, simply agree
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- Put forth a closed system of logic
 - Made to feel that you are wrong.
 - The individual is always wrong, and the system is always right.
 - Conversion and molding
 - "heavenly depection" and "transcendental trickery" (lying and deceptive fundrasing)
 - "do not talk to the systemites" a way to isolate members from the rest of the world.
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- One step at a time, and you dont even notice it.
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Lifton's eight themes

- Milieu control
 - No gossip, no doubts, no outside contact
- Loading the language
 - Group jargon, shutting down critical thinking abilities
- Demand for purity
 - Us vs them orientation
 - End justifies the means
- Confession
 - Purge and merge
 - Feel guilty and powerless
- Mystical manipulation
 - You have chose to come here
 - Social pressure
 - Myths of voluntarism
- Doctrine over person
 - Rewriting of personal history
- Sacred science
 - Pretentding to be scientific
 - Connected to higher powers
- Dispensing of existence
 - Elitist movement

- Out group are lesser beings
- Dependence on the group

Schein's three stages

- Unfreezing
 - How the world works is destabilized (identity crisis)
 - Uncertainty about what is right, what to do, what choices to make
 - Hot seat technique (lose confidence in yourself by false accusations)
- Changing
 - Begin to emulate their ways
 - The solutions put forth seem like a way forward
 - Committing to be "pure"
 - Now unfrozen, you change
- Refreezing
 - Punishes unwanted attitudes and rewards wanted ones

Producing a new identity

- The changes are not permanent and are reversible once extricated from the cult
 - Called "doubling", superimposed identity on old one

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What's wrong with cults?

- Damaging families
- Persuasion tactics to retain and recruit
- Threats of legal action against critics
- Authoritarian
- Cults threaten legitimate institutions
 - Can take over local government
- Using free or underpaid labor
 - Compete unfairly in the marketplace.

- Evading taxes
- Taking advantage of a curious public and an openminded business world eager for self-improvement
- Harm children and tear apart families
- ★ Cults are diverting some of society's best minds away from education and rational thought.
 - Only to the power and comfort of the cult leader
- Turn members against their families
 - Outsiders are Satan and to be avoided at all costs
- Cults are violent
 - Abusive and destructive
 - Some members some outward
- Cults engage in conspiracy and fraud
 - Spying
 - Fraud
- Small cults can be just as harmful as large
 - If they left the group they would be stricke with cancer
- *Undue influence = coercive persuasion, typically to gain financial advantage*
- Cults take away our freedom
 - Total commitment required
 - ★ Harm our democratic way of life
 - Inteninoally disrupt educatinoal and career goals,
 - Break up families, stifle personal relatinoships
 - "I lost myself, they told me i had to surrender my fake self. I felt more and more empty, became more and more depressed.
 - Therapy helped restore her true self
- ★ Cults take away our possessions
 - Get wealthy followers to turn over large amounts of money
 - Everyone treats you special and flatters you
 - Then they stress total obedience to the special leader
- Cults escape scrutiny
 - *The fallacy of one similarity*
 - AA doesnt recruit deceptively
 - It focuses on helping people grow
 - They search the lonely and vulnerable
- ★ Great numbers of people have regarded cults as momentary fads that would soon fade. Taht is not the situation. We have to overcome the massive denial of those who have not bothere to learn about cults and of those who hide behind the myths. Some people tend to think that if they ignore a problem, it will go away.

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Part Two

How do they work?

Recruiting new members

- All of us are vulnerable to cult recruitment.
- Rampant deceptions are involved in recruiting
- Four main stages

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First approach

- Members are trained in persuasive methods of approaching potential recruits.
 - We are social creatures and prone to listen to nice-looking ppl
- Ppl don't seek them, they get caught in the trap

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Whom do cults recruit?

- Key vulnerabilities
 - Being in between importnt affiliations
 - Being depressed or lonely
 - ★ These ppl are less likely to see through the deceit
 - Target friendly, obedient, altruistic, and malleable persons
 - Easy to persuade and manage

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Where do cults recruit?

- Everywhere
 - Lectures, seminars, retreats, revivals, meetings, door to door.
 - ★ Schools and university campuses have been a fertile ground for all types of recruitment
 - ★ You don't even notice what happens, it seems so positive

- Charm and flattery are very seductive

Invitation

- Appear non-threatening, seem alike, share commonalities
- Feel resonance by showing personal care and interest
- Mirrors interests and attitudes of potential recruit
 - -> verbal invitation to an event
 - ★ *A front group* is an organization that serves as a false front for another operation that remains behind the scenes.
 - To appeal to a range of interests
- Street recruitment
- ★ That first fatal step
 - Often they're pressured to attend an event right away! (no time to reflect)

First cult Contact

- They are jack-in-the-box
 - What you first see is not what's inside
- They bring you far away from your environment to cut off from family
 - There few resist the pull to fit in
 - *Love bombing*:
love bombing is a coordinated effort, usually under the direction of leadership, that involves long-term member's flooding recruits and newer members with flattery, verbal seduction
 - You will never be alone
 - ★ Isolated from others who have doubts and questions, recruits are left with the impression that everyone else agrees with what is going on.
 - Heavy schedule
 - So you don't think

Follow-up

- ★ Calculated persuasion procedures.
 - You change very gradually, you don't notice
 - Sleep deprived

- Meditating
 - Chanting
- Cults control the information flow for all members

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Manipulation and deception

- New dresses
- New names
- New diet
- In and out group definitions
- Trance states
- Program anxiety connected to critical thoughts about the cult

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Inducing guilt

- Personal connections are deemed Satanic or evil by the cults, against the chosen way
- You were bad before joining
 - Guilt is crucial
- Self-doubt, guilt and anxiety
- No contact to ppl outside
- Busy all the time

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Young and old alike are vulnerable

- "gold is with the old"
- Inherit possessions from the trusting old followers
 - Often lonely and vulnerable with their saved up money.
 - Want security and companionship (widdows)
- Physical immortality
- Invitations to new locations and free lectures

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The double agenda

- They wanna chain you to them by changing your identity

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Physiological persuasion techniques

- Physiological
- Psychological
 - *Proof through reframing*
- Hyperventilation
 - ★ They then immediately reframe the experience!
- Repetitive motion
 - Swaying, clapping and chanting
 - Spinning
- Change in diet, sleep and stress
 - Cheap diets
 - Vegetarianism
 - Save money
 - Modify behavior
 - ★ Predictable symptoms
 - Ignore important of individual differences
 - The techniques don't work well for everybody.

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Psychological persuasion techniques

- Trance and hypno
 - Revision of personal history
 - How bad they were before joining
 - Peer pressure and modeling
 - Disconnect letters
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- ★ **Their *content* differs, but their *structure* is the same**
 - Unfreeze, change, and refreeze
 - These techniques decrease critical, reflective, evaluative thinking.
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Intruding into the Workplace

- New age training programs
- Alienation
- Instability
 - Urged to give up old norms, goals, ideals
 - Lack of informed consent
 - Use of hidden agendas
 - Coercions
 - Buyer, beware

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The threat of intimidation

- Scare off critics
 - Harassment
- Recruit professionals
 - Health professionals
 - academics
- Gain footholds in government

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Part three

How can we help survivors to escape and recover?

★ Each cult regards itself as above the laws of the land, as a sovereign state with its own superior rules, and in many cults, children are treated as though they were expendable. The cult leader may not want to "waste" money on children.

- Physical abuse
- Inadequate schooling
- Poor health care
- Emotional and psychological abuse

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★ Since the structure of all is authoritarian, children are socialized that world, not the mainstream democratic society.

A cult is a mirror of what is inside the cult leader. He has no restraints on him.

- He is all-powerful and makes his fantasy come alive.
 - Teaches not to be attached to children
 - Extraordinary adjustment problems
 - Our responsibility is to give them support, love, and understanding

Leaving the Cult

There is a psychological bond that becomes most difficult to sever.

Why it's hard to leave

- *Deception* in the recruitment process and throughout membership
- *Debilitation*, because of the hours, the degree of commitment, psychological pressures,
- *Dependency*, as a result of being cut off from the outside world in many ways
- ★ *Dread*, because of beliefs instilled by the cult that a person who leaves will find no real life on the outside
- *Desensitization*, so that things that would have troubled them no longer do (lying for fundraising)

- Belief
- Decency and loyalty
- Authority figures
- Peer pressure and lack of information
- Exhaustion and confusion
- Separation from the past
- Fear
- Guilt over participation

Ways of leaving the cult

- ★ Eventually most cult members leave their cults
 - Fed up

- Disillusioned
- Burnt out
- Contradictions
 - *Walkaways*
 - *Castaways*
 - *Exit counseling*

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★ Recovery: Coming out of the pseudopersonality

- Recovering from cult aftereffects
 - Pseudopersona
 - Practical issues
 - Money
 - Education and health care
 - Explaining time spent in the cult
 - Psychological emotinoa
 - Guilt and shame
 - Panic attacks
 - Fear of retribution
 - Fear of self
 - Conflicts over those left behind
 - Lack of understanding in the outside world
 - Conginitive inefficiencies
 - Uncritical passivity
 - Leftover cult language
 - Memory loss and altered memories
 - Triggers, flashbacks, and floating
 - Develop new social newtwork and repair old if possible
 - Building a new social network
 - Loneliness
 - Dating and sexuality
 - Marital issues
 - Trust
 - The "fishbowl" effect
 - Fear of commitment
 - Examine philosophical and attitudinal content
 - Aversions and hypercritical attitudes
 - No longer a world saver

Helpful tasks for individuals leaving cults

- Others before you have experienced these symptoms
 - You're not hopeless or crazy
 - It will subside
 - Learn about what happened and was done to you
- Floating happens when you're stressed, it's dissociation

Coming out of the cult pseudopersona is about reeducation and growth. Selfhelp through reading can be invaluable for those who live far from exit counselors