

## *Behaviour Control*

Behaviour control is the regulation of an individual's physical reality. It includes the control of their environment – where they live, what clothes they wear, what food they eat, how much sleep they get, and what jobs, rituals and other actions they perform.

This need for behaviour control is the reason most cults prescribe a very rigid schedule for their members. Each day a significant amount of time is devoted to cult rituals and indoctrination activities. Members are also typically assigned to accomplish specific goals and tasks, thus restricting their free time – and their behaviour. In destructive cults there is always something to do.

In some of the more restrictive groups, members have to ask permission from leaders to do almost anything. In other groups, a person is made so financially dependent that their choices of behaviour are narrowed automatically. A member must ask for a bus fare, clothing money or permission to seek health care – things most of us take for granted. Often the person must ask permission to call a friend or relative not in the group. Every hour of the cult member's day has to be accounted for. In these ways the group can keep a tight rein on the member's behaviour – and on their thoughts and feelings as well.

Behaviour is often controlled by the requirement that everyone act as a group. In many cults, people eat together, work together, have group meetings and sometimes sleep together in the same dormitory. Individualism is fiercely discouraged. People may be assigned a constant "buddy" or be placed in a small unit of a half dozen members.

The chain of command in cults is usually authoritarian, flowing from the leader, through their lieutenants, to their sub-leaders, down to the rank and file. In such a well-regulated environment, all behaviours can be either awarded or punished. If a person performs well, they will be given public praise from higher-ups, and sometimes gifts or a promotion. If the person performs poorly, they may be publicly singled out and criticized, or forced to do manual labour such as cleaning toilets or polishing other members' shoes. Other forms of punishment may include prescribed fasting, cold showers, staying up for an all-night vigil or doing remedial work. Those who actively participate in their own punishment will eventually come to believe they deserve it.

Each particular group has its own distinctive set of ritual behaviours that help bind it together. These typically include mannerisms of speech, specific posture and facial expressions, as well as the more traditional ways of representing group belief. In the Moonies, for instance, we followed many Asian customs, such as taking off our shoes when entering a Moonie centre, kneeling and bowing when greeting older members. Doing these little things helped make us feel we were special and superior. Psychologists call this "social proof."

If a member is not behaving sufficiently enthusiastically, they may be confronted by a leader and accused of being selfish or impure, or of not trying hard enough. They will be urged to become like an older group member, even to the extent of mimicking that person's tone of voice.

Obedience to a leader's command is the most important lesson to learn. A cult's leaders cannot command someone's inner thoughts, but they know that if they command behaviour, hearts and minds will follow.

## *Information Control*

Information control is the second component of mind control. Information provides the tools with which we think and understand reality. Without accurate, up-to-date information, we can easily be manipulated and controlled. Deny a person the information they require to make sound judgments and they will become incapable of doing so.

Deception is the biggest tool of information control, because it robs people of the ability to make informed decisions. Outright lying, withholding information and distorting information all become essential strategies, especially when recruiting new members. By using deception, cults rob their victims of “informed consent” and in the case of religious cults, this lack of honest disclosure most certainly violates people’s individual religious rights.

In many totalistic cults, people have minimal access to non-cult newspapers, magazines, TV, radio and online information. Certain information may be forbidden and labelled as unhealthy: apostate literature, enthera (negative information), satanic, bourgeoisie propaganda, and so on. Members are also kept so busy that they don’t have free time to think and seek outside answers to questions. When they do read, it’s primarily cult-generated propaganda or material that has been censored to keep members focused.

Information control also extends across all relationships. People are not allowed to talk to each other about anything critical of the leader, doctrine, or organization. Members must spy on each other and report improper activities or comments to leaders, often in the form of written reports (a technique pioneered by the Nazis, with the Hitler Youth). New converts are discouraged from sharing doubts with anyone other than a superior. Newbies are typically chaperoned, until they prove their devotion and loyalty. Most importantly, people are told to avoid contact with ex-members and critics. Those people who could provide the most outside – that is, real – information are to be completely shunned. Some groups even go so far as to screen members’ letters and phone calls.

Information is usually compartmentalized, to keep members from knowing the big picture. In larger groups, people are told only as much as they “need to know” in order to perform their jobs. A member in one city therefore does not necessarily know about an important legal decision, media story, or internal dispute that is creating turmoil in the group somewhere else. Cult members naturally feel they know more about what’s going on in their group than outsiders, but in counselling ex-members, I have found that they often know far less than almost anyone else. Moonies are often ignorant of their cult’s involvement in arms manufacture, and Scientologists of the imprisonment of eleven leaders for the largest infiltration of government agencies even undertaken.

Destructive organisations also control information by having many levels of “truth.” Cult ideologies often have “outsider” doctrines and “insider” doctrines. The outsider material is relatively bland stuff for the general public or new converts. The inner doctrines are gradually

unveiled, as the person is more deeply involved and only when the person is deemed “ready” by superiors.

For example, Moonies always said publicly that they were pro-American, pro-democracy and pro-family. The Moonies were pro-American, in that they wanted what they thought was best for America, which was to become a theocracy under Moon’s rule. They believed democracy was instituted by God to allow the Unification Church the space to organize a theocratic dictatorship. They were pro-family in believing that every human being’s true family was Moon, his wife and his spiritual children. Yet the inner doctrine was – and still is – that America is inferior to Korea and must become subservient to it; that democracy is a foolish system that “God is phasing out”; and that people must be cut off from the “physical” (as opposed to “spiritual”) families if they are at all critical of the cult.

A member can sincerely believe that the outer doctrines are not lies, but just a different level of truth. By creating an environment where truth is multileveled, cult directors make it nearly impossible for a member to make definitive, objective assessments. If they have problems, they are told that they are not mature or advanced enough to know the whole truth yet. But they are assured that all will become clear shortly. If they work hard, they’ll earn the right to understand the higher levels of truth.

But often there are many inner levels or layers of belief. Often an advanced member who thinks they know a cult’s complete doctrine is still several layers away from what the higher ups know. Questioners who insist on knowing too much too fast, of course, are redirected toward an external goal until they forget their objectives or they object too loudly and are kicked out and vilified.

## *Thought Control*

Thought control, the third major component of mind control, includes indoctrinating members so thoroughly that they internalize the group doctrine, incorporate a new language system, and use thought-stopping techniques to keep their mind “centred.” In order to be a good member, a person must learn to manipulate their own thought processes.

In totalistic cults, the ideology is internalized as “the truth,” the only map of reality. The doctrine not only serves to filter incoming information, but also regulates how the information can be thought about. Usually, the doctrine is absolutist, dividing everything into black versus white, or us versus them. All that is good is embodied in the leader and the group. All that is bad is on the outside. The doctrine claims to answer all questions to all problems and situations. Members need not think for themselves because the doctrine does the thinking for them. The more totalistic groups claim that their doctrine is scientific, but that is never truly the case.

A destructive cult inevitably has its own “loaded language” of unique words and expressions. Since language provides the symbols we use for thinking, using only certain words serves to control thoughts. Cult language is totalistic and therefore condenses complex situations, labels them, and reduces them to cult clichés. This simplistic label then governs how members think in any situation. In the Moonies, for example, whenever a member had difficulty relating to someone who was either above or below them in status, it was called a Cain-Abel problem. It didn’t matter who was involved or what the problem was – it was simply a Cain-Abel problem. The term itself dictated how the problem had to be resolved. Cain needed to obey Abel and follow him, rather than kill him (as Cain killed Abel in the Old Testament). Case closed. To think otherwise would be to obey Satan’s wish that evil Cain should prevail over righteous Abel. Clearly, a critical thought about a leader’s misconduct cannot get past this roadblock in a devout member’s mind.

The cult’s clichés and loaded language also put up an invisible wall between believers and outsiders. The language helps to make members feel special, and separates them from the general public. It also serves to confuse newcomers, who want to understand what the members are talking about. The newbies think they merely have to study harder in order to understand the truth, which they believe is precisely expressed in this new language. In reality, though, loaded language helps them learn how not to think or understand. They learn that “understanding” means accepting and believing.

Another key aspect of thought control involves training members to block out any information that is critical of the group. A member’s normal defence mechanisms often become so twisted that they defend their own new cult identity against their old, former self. The first line of defence includes denial – “What you say isn’t happening at all”; rationalisation – “This is happening for a good reason”; justification – “This is happening because it ought to”; and wishful thinking – “I’d like it to be true so maybe it really is.”

If information transmitted to a cult member is perceived as an attack on either the leader, the doctrine, or the group, a defensive wall goes up. Members are trained to disbelieve any criticism. Critical words have been explained away in advance – for instance, as “the lies about us that Satan puts in people’s minds” or “the lies that the World Conspiracy prints in the news media to discredit us, because they know we’re onto them.” Paradoxically, criticism of the group is used to confirm that the cult’s view of the world is correct. Because of thought control, factual information that challenges the cult worldview does not register properly.

Perhaps the most widely used, and most effective, technique for controlling cult members’ thoughts is thought-stopping. Members are taught to use thought-stopping on themselves. They are told it will help them grow, stay “pure and true” or be more effective. Whenever cult members experience a “bad” thought, they use thought-stopping to halt the “negativity” and centre themselves, thus shutting out anything that threatens or challenges the cult’s version of reality.

Different groups use different thought-stopping techniques, which can include concentrated praying, chanting aloud or silently, meditating, speaking in tongues, singing or humming. These actions, at times useful and valuable, thus become perverted in destructive cults. They also become quite mechanical, because the person is programmed to activate them at the first sign of doubt, anxiety or uncertainty. In a matter of weeks, the technique becomes ingrained. It becomes so automatic, in fact, that the person is usually not even aware that they just had a “bad” thought. They are only aware that they are suddenly chanting or ritualizing.

Through the use of thought-stopping, members think they are growing, when in reality they are just turning themselves into thought-stopping addicts. After leaving a cult that employs extensive thought-stopping techniques, a person normally goes through a difficult withdrawal process before they can overcome this addiction.

Thought-stopping is the most direct way to short-circuit a person’s ability to test reality. Indeed, if people are able to think only positive thoughts about their involvement with the group, they are most certainly stuck. Since the doctrine is perfect and the leader is perfect, any problem that crops up is assumed to be the fault of the individual member. They learn to always to blame themselves and simply work harder.

Thought control can effectively block out any feelings that do not correspond with the group doctrine. It can also serve to keep a cult member working as an obedient slave. In any event, when thought is controlled, feelings and behaviours are usually controlled as well.

## *Emotional Control*

Emotional control, the fourth component of the BITE model, attempts to manipulate and narrow the range of a person's feelings. All or nothing. Either you feel wonderful as a "chosen" member of the elite, someone really special and loved and part of a wonderful movement; or you are broken, unspiritual, have bad karma, are guilty of overts, are sinful and need to repent, try harder and become a better, more devoted member. Guilt and fear figure mightily. However, most cult members can't see that guilt and fear are being used to control them. They are both essential tools to keep people under control.

Guilt comes in many forms. Historic guilt (for instance, the fact that the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima), identity guilt (a thought such as "I'm not living up to my potential"), guilt over past actions ("I cheated on a test") and social guilt ("People are dying of starvation") can all be exploited by destructive cult leaders. Members are conditioned to always take the blame, so that they respond gratefully whenever a leader points out one of their "shortcomings."

Fear is used to bind the group members together in several ways. The first is the creation of an outside enemy, who is persecuting the group and its members. For example, the FBI will jail or kill you; Satan will carry you off to Hell; psychiatrists will give you electroshock therapy; armed members of rival sects will shoot or torture you; and, of course, ex-members and critics will try to persecute you. Second is the terror of discovery and punishment by cult members and leaders. Fear of what can happen to you if you don't do your job well can be very potent. Some groups claim that nuclear holocaust or other disasters will result if members are lax in their commitment.

In order to control someone through their emotions, feelings themselves often have to be redefined. For example, everyone wants happiness. However, if happiness is redefined as being closer to God, and God is unhappy (as He apparently is in many religious cults), then the way to be happy is to be unhappy. Happiness, therefore, consists of suffering so you can grow closer to God. This idea also appears in some non-cult theologies, but in a cult it is a tool for exploitation and control.

In some groups, happiness simply means following the leader's directions, recruiting a lot of new members, or bringing in a lot of money. Or, happiness is defined as a sense of community provided by the cult to those who enjoy high status within it.

Loyalty and devotion are the most highly respected emotions of all. Members are not allowed to feel or express negative emotions, except toward outsiders. They are taught never to feel for themselves or their own needs, but always to think of the group and never to complain. They are never to criticize a leader, but to criticize themselves instead.

Many groups exercise complete control over interpersonal relationships. Leaders can and do tell people to avoid certain members or spend time with others. Some even tell

members whom they can marry, and control the entire relationship, including their sex lives. Some groups require members to deny or suppress sexual feelings, which become a source of bottled-up frustration that can be channelled into other outlets such as harder work. Other groups require sexuality, and a member who hangs back is made to feel selfish. Either way, the group is exercising emotional control.

People are often kept off balance, praised one minute and tongue-lashed the next. In some groups, one day you'll be doing public relations before TV cameras in a suit and tie; the next, you'll be in another state doing manual labour as a punishment for some imagined sin. This misuse of reward and punishment fosters dependency and helplessness. Such double-bind behaviour is a commonplace in cults.

Confession of past sins or wrong attitudes is also a powerful device for emotional control. Of course, once someone has publicly confessed, rarely is their old sin truly forgiven or forgotten. The minute they get out of line, it will be hauled out and used to manipulate them into obeying. Anyone who finds themselves in a cult confession session needs to remember this warning: Anything you say can and will be used against you. This device can even extend to blackmail, if you leave the cult. Even when it does not, former members are often scared to speak out, just in case their embarrassing secrets are made public.

The most powerful technique for emotional control is phobia indoctrination, which was described in Chapter 3. Members will have a panic reaction at the thought of leaving the group. They are told that if they leave they will be lost and defenceless in the face of dark horrors. They'll go insane, be killed, become drug addicts or commit suicide. Such tales are repeated often, both in lectures and in hushed tones through informal gossip. It becomes nearly impossible for indoctrinated cult members to feel they can have any happiness, security or fulfilment outside the group.

When cult leaders tell the public, "Members are free to leave any time they want; the door is open," they give the impression that members have free will and are simply choosing to stay. Actually, members may not have a real choice, because they have been indoctrinated to fear the outside world. If a person's emotions are successfully brought under the group's control, their thoughts and behaviour will follow.

Each component of the BITE model: behaviour control, information control, thought control, emotional control – has great influence on the human mind. Together, they form a totalistic web, one that can be used to manipulate even the most intelligent, creative, ambitious and strong-willed person. In fact, it is often the strongest-minded individuals who make the most involved and enthusiastic cult members.

I have attempted to cover only the broadest and most common practices within each compartment of mind control. No one group does everything described in this section. Other practices are used by certain cults but are not included here.



Some practices could fall into more than one of these categories. For example, some groups change people's names in order to hasten the formation of the new "cult" identity. This technique could fall under all four categories. There are many variations between groups. For example, some groups are overt in their phobia indoctrination; others are extremely subtle. What matters most is the overall impact on the individual. Are they truly in control of their life choices? The only way to tell is to give them the opportunity to reflect, to gain free access to all information and to know that they are free to leave the group if they choose.