

Family Shelter Service

605 EAST ROOSEVELT ROAD • WHEATON, ILLINOIS 60187 • HOTLINE: (630) 469-5650

★ **BATTERERS AND CULT LEADERS: THE SIMILARITIES** ★

by Steven Hassan

Revised to define a cultic one-on-one relationship from Combating Cult Mind Control

Destructive mind control can be understood in terms of four basic components, which form the acronym BITE:

- I. Behavior Control
- II. Information Control
- III. Thought Control
- IV. Emotional Control

These four components are guidelines. Not all cultic relationships will fit these components but what matters most is the overall impact on a person's free will and ability to make real choices. A person's uniqueness, talents, skills, creativity, and free will should be encouraged, not suppressed.

I. Behavior Control

1. Regulation of individual's physical reality a. Where, how and with whom the abused lives and associates with b. What clothes, colors, hairstyles the person wears c. What food the person eats, drinks, adopts, and rejects d. How much sleep the person is able to have e. Financial dependence f. Little or no time spent on leisure, entertainment, vacations
2. Major time commitment required towards the relationship
3. Need to ask permission for major decisions
4. Need to report thoughts, feelings and activities to the abuser
5. Rewards and punishments (behavior modification techniques- positive and negative)
6. Individualism discouraged
7. Rigid rules and regulations
8. Need for obedience and dependency

II. Information Control

1. Use of deception
 - Deliberately holding back information
 - Distorting information to make it acceptable
 - Outright lying
2. Access to non-cult sources of information minimized or discouraged
 - Books, articles, newspapers, magazines, TV, radio
 - Critical information
 - Former members
 - Keep abused so busy they don't have time to think
3. Compartmentalization of information; Outsider vs. Insider doctrines
 - Information is not freely accessible
 - Abuser decides who "needs to know" what
4. Spying on the abused is encouraged
 - Questioning co-workers and friends of the abused
 - Reporting deviant thoughts, feelings, and actions to abuser
5. Extensive use of abuser's generated information and propaganda
 - Newsletters, magazines, journals, audio tapes, videotapes, etc.
 - Misquotations, statements taken out of context from professional sources
6. Unethical use of confession
 - Misquotations, statements taken out of context from professional sources
 - Information about "sins" used to abolish identity boundaries
 - Past "sins" used to manipulate and control (this will be done in any legal matters initiated by the abused)

III. Thought Control

1. Need to internalize the abuser's doctrine as "Truth"
 - Map = Reality Black and White thinking

- Good vs. evil
 - Us vs. them (inside vs. outside)
2. Adopt "loaded" language (characterized by "thought-terminating clichés"). Words are the tools we use to think with. These "special" words constrict rather than expand understanding. They function to reduce complexities of experience into trite, platitudinous "buzz words". This can show up as using the cult's "loaded" language in the abusive relationship.
 3. Only "good" and "proper" thoughts are encouraged.
 4. Thought-stopping techniques (to shut down "reality testing" by stopping "negative" thoughts and allowing only "good" thoughts); rejection of rational analysis, critical thinking, constructive criticism.
 - Denial, rationalization, justification, wishful thinking
 5. No critical questions about abuser, their doctrine, or policy seen as legitimate. The abused will be told to come up "with one good reason" which will never fit the abuser's definition of a good enough reason.
 6. No alternative belief systems viewed as legitimate, good, or useful

IV. Emotional Control

1. Manipulate and narrow the range of a person's feelings.
2. Make the person feel like if there are ever any problems it is always their fault, never the abuser's.
3. Excessive use of guilt
 - Identity guilt
 - Who you are (not living up to your potential)
 - Your family
 - Your past
 - Your affiliations
 - Your thoughts, feelings, actions
 - Social guilt
 - Historical guilt
4. Excessive use of fear
 - Fear of thinking independently
 - Fear of the "outside" world
 - Fear of leaving the relationship
 - Fear of being shunned by friends and relatives
 - Fear of disapproval
5. Extremes of emotional highs and lows.
6. Ritual and often public confession of "sins".
7. Phobia indoctrination: programming of irrational fears of ever leaving the relationship or even questioning the abuser's authority.
 - The person under mind control cannot visualize a positive, fulfilled future without being in the relationship.
 - No happiness or fulfillment "outside" of the relationship
 - Terrible consequences will take place if you leave: no one will ever want you, you failed at this relationship after all that I did for you, no one wants someone that is divorced, etc.
 - Fear of being rejected by friends, peers, and family.
8. Never a legitimate reason to leave. From the abuser's perspective, people who leave are: "weak"; "uncommitted"; "brainwashed by family, counselors"; money hungry, home wreckers, greedy.