

the secret world
of manipulation
undue influence
and brainwashing

Manipulation
opens



jon atack

opening minds: the secret world of manipulation, undue influence and brainwashing

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this book is dedicated to the memory of Bobby Yang who was a daily source of good cheer throughout his short life

praise for Jon Atack's previous work:

'This incredible book made me want to track down the author, Jon Atack, in person – and so I did, and interviewed him for my latest documentary project. His incredible breadth and knowledge of religions and belief systems turned my three-hour interrogation into one of the most fascinating discussions I've ever had. I recommend you find Jon Atack and buy him a drink and get him talking, but in the meantime, start with this book.' Roger Nygard, Director, *The Nature of Existence*

'Throughout my professional life, I have seen so many victims of poisonous ideologies from communism and scientology to Saddam Hussein's "return to faith" and Al Qaeda's "martyrdom". In my attempts to help those sufferers, I applied a lesson learned from Jon Atack's writings that freedom cannot be delivered, granted, or enforced. The true and complete freedom comes only with the freedom of mind and Jon Atack's book is the best guide for all who want to achieve that freedom.' Professor Khapta Akhmedova, expert on terrorism

'I appreciate the staggering amount of research material that Mr. Atack had to assimilate and present. He demonstrated impeccable judgment concerning his sources, and similarly he showed artistic skill in his ability to present complex ... material in graceful and clear prose. Had his book been offered by a doctoral candidate ... it would far exceed necessary standards ... an unrivalled piece of superb scholarship. Quickly his book has become one of the classic studies of sectarianism and deviant belief systems. All future scholarship on Scientology will build upon his contribution.' Professor Stephen Kent, Head of Sociology and History of Religion, University of Alberta

'Nobody explains more clearly how a normal, rational person can succumb to the power of group thought and control. Luckily, Jon Atack also explains how to spot undue influence and escape from its clutches, wherever it may come from.' Jill Robinson, producer & director, *The Secret Life of L. Ron Hubbard*

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introduction

‘When you believe in things that you don’t understand, then you suffer.’

Stevie Wonder, *Superstition*.

We live in an age where unethical persuasion is applied every day, all day, to subvert reasoning through direct appeals to one’s emotions. Throughout history, people have been unwittingly influenced to act against their own better interests. But today, more sophisticated forms of influence have been devised, posing a significant threat to a free and open society. It is persuasion so sinister and subtle that it can derail critical thinking and overwhelm even the most intelligent of people, reducing them into unthinking compliance.

Manipulation, undue influence and brainwashing, or whatever one chooses to call such exploitive persuasion, challenges the very notion of human rights. The use of it by unscrupulous cults, totalitarian groups and abusive individuals is growing at an alarming rate. Yet, undue influence remains a well-kept secret in the media and for the general public. This book will show how the human mind is cajoled into submitting to unethical, uninvited external influence.

Nine years inside Scientology left me wondering how I had been so completely taken in by its bizarre belief system. After exiting and spending a dozen years helping former cult members, I gradually came to understand the intricate dynamics of undue influence and tactics of the manipulators.

Undue influence is rife in our society. It is used by terrorists to radicalise young Muslims; by paedophiles to groom innocent youngsters; by white supremacists and criminal gangs to lock in new recruits; by human traffickers to keep their workers enslaved; and to persuade millions of members of pseudo-religious groups to violate the basic human rights of even close family members.

Only by understanding the principles of undue influence can our society be made resistant to extremism. These principles are grounded firmly in scientific research, yet the writing of this book is the first time the components of this covert approach have been brought together in a single, accessible volume.

This work challenges the belief of some social scientists that we are the product of our environment, compelled by forces that we can neither control nor fully comprehend. While research demonstrates that people all too often act almost as a herd, there are ways to develop resistance to group influence and to increase both rationality and responsibility to the benefit of society.

We must offer some preventative medicine, because cult-like thinking is powerfully on the increase in our world. Hundreds of millions of people have given their allegiance to fanatical groups and even democratic governments at times use undue influence on the electorate. Only by exposing the tricks of undue influence can we slow down this pervasive expansion of mind-control techniques and create a far safer world.

Over 30 years ago, when I left Scientology, it became apparent to me that cults are a microcosm of the larger society, where powerful social forces are played out. According to eminent psychologist Margaret Singer, ‘cults are not at the fringe but at the very heart of our society.’ My investigation into the secret world of manipulation, undue influence and brainwashing has included every type of group from the interpersonal to the international. It has followed all of the branches of propaganda from product advertising to political spin-doctoring and outright lies, and many other methods of influence from hypnosis and psychotherapy to mass indoctrination.

I have considered belief systems from the emergence of human culture, tens of thousands of years ago, to the present vogue for art without object. I have studied the history of belief in some depth and followed the debates about fundamentalism and atheism. I have relied upon findings in the social sciences, primatology, neuroscience and traditional ideas from many different cultures and philosophies.

From this study come new suggestions about issues ranging from education to environmentalism, and positive proposals to curb both terrorism *and* the War on Terror. It is my aim to demonstrate conclusively that while evil is largely indoctrinated, true goodness comes about through personal decision. *We can only become truly ethical when we separate ourselves from the crowd, and think and choose as individuals.*



By writing this book I hope to begin a long-overdue conversation that will raise public awareness and lead to better research and education into this almost neglected subject. By recognising undue influence, we will greatly reduce conflict, better conserve our environment and lead more fulfilling lives. We have the tools to make a better world.

jon atack, nottingham, november 2015

‘Believe nothing on the faith of traditions, even though they have been held in honour for many generations, in many places. Do not believe a thing because many people speak it. Do not believe on the faith of the sages of the past. Do not believe what you yourself have imagined, persuading yourself that some god inspires you. Believe nothing on the sole authority of your masters or priests. After examination, believe what you yourself have tested and found to be rational, and conform your conduct thereto.’ The Buddha, *Kalama Sutta*

1 you are not a gentleman: the principles of influence

‘The saddest thing about any man, is that he be ignorant, and the most exciting thing is that he knows.’
King Alfred the Great

I was barely awake when the phone rang. The urgent voice at the other end of the line claimed that Microsoft had found a serious problem with my computer. The caller insisted that I log in, immediately: otherwise, the malware would destroy my machine and everything on it. He sounded deeply concerned.

I tapped in the letters as he dictated them. A list of over a thousand errors and warnings scrolled down the screen. Yes, I had noticed that the computer had been slowing down. Yes, so many error messages were indeed worrying. ‘You see,’ he said, ‘your computer is about to die.’ I was having a little difficulty making out his accent; I was concentrating on understanding, rather than on the significance of the call itself.

But I was beginning to wake up. ‘Did you say you’re with Microsoft?’ I asked.

‘No, we’re partners. We’re Microsoft certified. Look on your screen.’

Sure enough, there was a window with ‘Microsoft Gold Certified’ right there, on the screen. Again, he insisted that my computer would die, *today*, if I did not let him install software to quarantine the many infections. A new window flashed on the screen. For £149, he would save my computer, and the protection would last for a year, but for another hundred pounds, if I bought the software immediately, today, he would extend the protection to five years.

‘How do I know that you’re Microsoft certified?’ I asked, stifling a yawn.

‘Look at your screen,’ he responded.

‘Yes, but you can put whatever you want on the screen. Who can I contact at Microsoft, in the UK?’

The address for Microsoft in London flashed on the screen. ‘But the London office won’t know who we are,’ he said.

‘How did you get my number?’ I asked.

‘If you don’t do this, right now, your computer will die. What difference does it make to me? I’m paid my salary whether you take my advice or not. I don’t work for a commission. You’ll lose everything on your computer. It’s no skin off my nose.’

‘How did you get my number?’ I asked again.

‘You are not a gentleman,’ he said. ‘I’m trying to help you.’ He sounded genuinely frustrated.

‘Hang on a minute,’ I said. ‘I’m not going to let you call me names, just because I want to be sure that your offer is genuine.’

‘It’s no skin off my nose,’ he repeated.

‘I want to talk to your supervisor,’ I said.

The supervisor came on the line and apologised for the slur. He then repeated the assertion that my computer would die, and I would lose everything on it, if I didn’t act *right now*. ‘Listen. We’ll do the work for free. If you’re happy, you can pay us. If not, you can simply walk away without paying a penny.’

I put the phone down as my computer went through various changes before my eyes. I called my brother. ‘Switch your machine off, immediately,’ he urged. ‘It’s a scam. Several of my friends have been caught by it. They leave ransom-ware on the machine, so every few months, you have to buy new add-ons to repair it.’

I had already pulled the plug. The phone rang, again. It was the supervisor. ‘You’ve dropped your

internet connection. You are not a gentleman.'

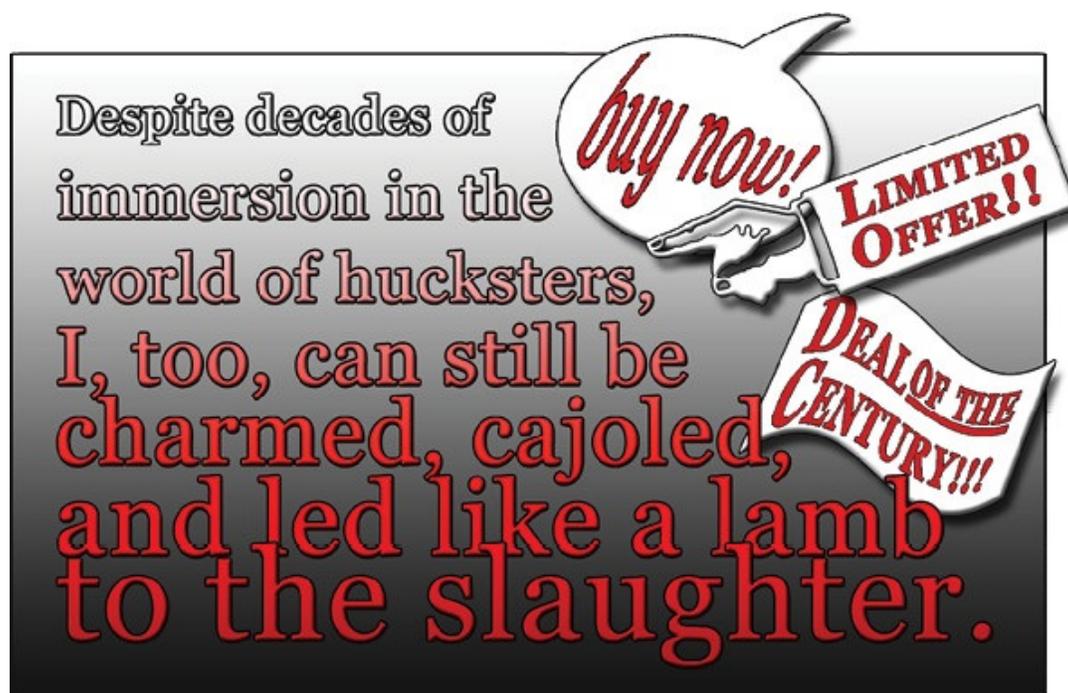
'I *am* a gentleman and *you* are a scam artist. A criminal.' He wanted to argue the point. I hung up.

Luckily, my son is a computer expert and later that day he cleaned the machine thoroughly. 'Watch out for any pop-ups,' he recommended.

I have spent a lifetime studying tricks and scams. I can recite the litany of names used by experts to describe these manipulative methods. And yet, I almost fell for this rather evident confidence trick. There are even web pages warning about this particular company.

I didn't buy the fake fix, and no ransom-ware was left in my computer. I've never sent money to a Nigerian with an inheritance offering to share his good fortune with me if I just provide him with a few dollars to collect. I have never sent a 'registration fee' to collect my winnings from the Dutch lottery. When a gorgeous Malaysian girl claimed to lust after my ageing body, I did realize it was a scam (though only after exchanging emails for a couple of hours).

It is not just the Internet that is rife with scams. Trickery is an aspect of human nature, and it reaches back long before the advent of the worldwide web. Indeed, some students of animal behaviour say that lying is the first stage in the evolution of intelligence. Californian jays have been observed pretending to bury food, and then quickly concealing their actual stash, while their rivals scabble about in the false hiding place.



Pride does indeed come before a fall. If there is one lesson that we should all learn, and relearn, as often as necessary, it is that no one is invulnerable to persuasion. Not even those of us who make it our life's work. Indeed, it is confidence in our invulnerability that makes us so vulnerable. *Despite decades of immersion in the world of hucksters, I, too, can still be charmed, cajoled, and led like a lamb to the slaughter.*

My special area of study has been the destructive cult groups that form around charismatic con artists. Years ago, I finished my interview with a teenager who had been in the leading body of a notorious cult only weeks before. He grinned and said, 'The great thing is, Jon, that we'll *never* be conned again.'

I shook my head, 'No, the great thing is that I realize I'm gullible. And that's my only defence. Whenever I'm caught up with enthusiasm and about to reach for my wallet, I try to stop myself and analyse the evidence. Sometimes that saves me money and embarrassment.'

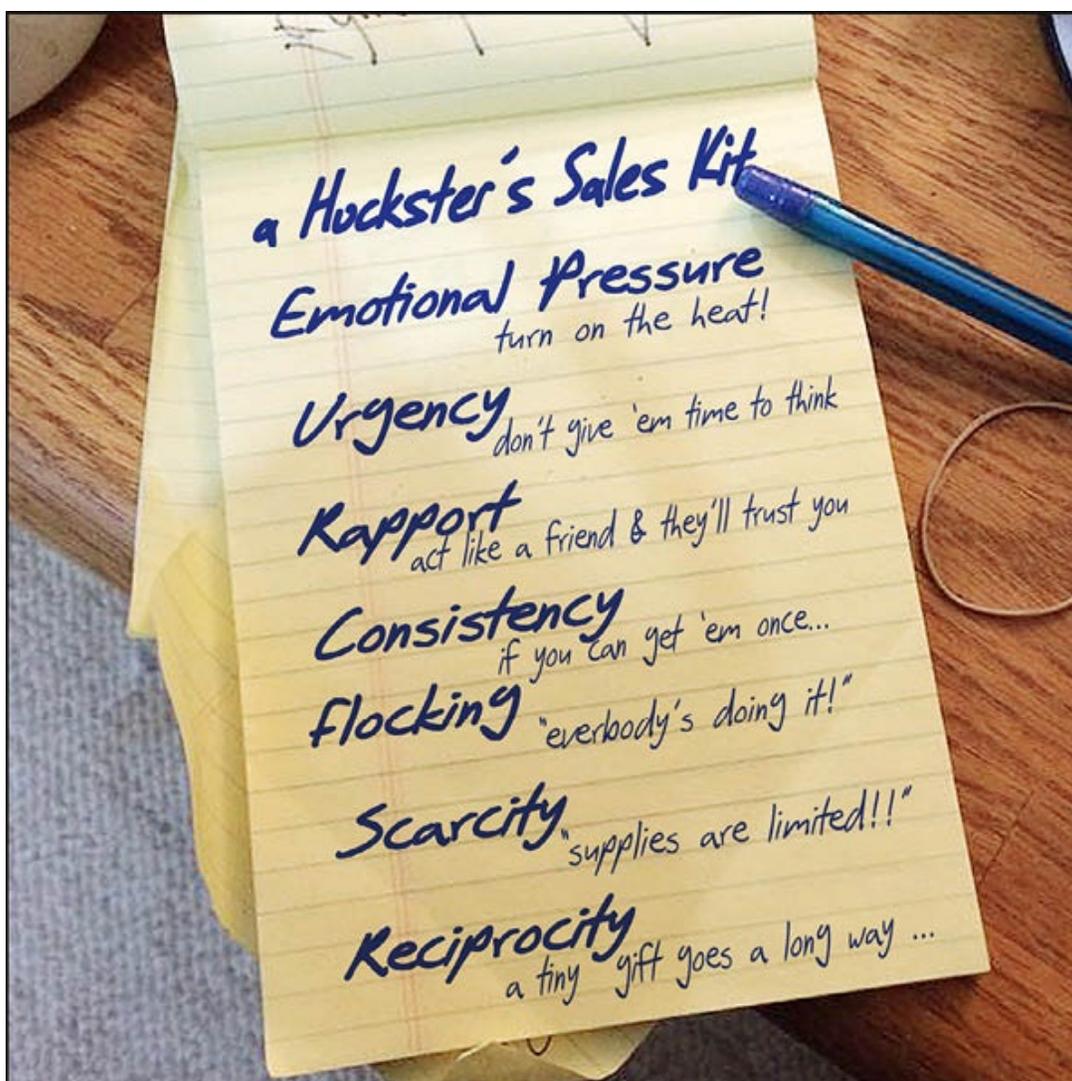
A few years ago, when Amazon contacted me to say I'd won a thousand pounds in their Wishlist lottery, I didn't believe it. And the disbelief did me no harm; it actually made it sweeter when the credit appeared in my account.

The phone huckster – and his colleagues in a boiler room somewhere in Kolkata or Delhi – went through a tried-and-tested script that exploited normal feelings and responses. First, he created fear: your machine will die. *Emotional pressure always reduces the capacity to reason.* Language can be crafted to direct you away from thinking: psychologists have found that certain words and phrases by-pass our reasoning processes altogether – ‘buy now’, ‘new and improved’, ‘every penny counts’, for instance.

Next, he created a sense of urgency: he wanted me to act immediately, so that I would not have time to think. This is the ‘buy now’ mechanism, which bypasses reasoning. If you are buying anything – from computer software or a second-hand car, to a business training programme, to a new religion – it is important to take your time. This mechanism is recognised legally in some countries, where there is a ‘cooling off’ period in which you can cancel a contract to fit double glazing or anything else you have been pressured into buying. If you must ‘buy now,’ don’t buy at all.

A good scam artist creates *rapport*. Here the phone scammer failed. He was too urgent, and he was rude. Often as not, when challenged, hucksters will protest too much. How could I doubt his word? This is actually a way of generating rapport in reverse. He was suggesting that we had made a connection and that I had violated it by distrusting him. Whenever I hear the phrase: ‘You can trust me,’ in my mind I whisper: ‘You can trust me; I’m a con artist.’

Rapport is an essential aspect of sales and recruitment. We are far more likely to buy from someone who has become a friend. Instant friendship is all too often a trap. Real friendship takes more than one meeting, just as love at first sight is often simply a matter of psychological projection. We find what we are searching for in the other person, whether it is there or not: *expectation conditions experience.*



a Hockster's Sales Kit

Emotional Pressure
turn on the heat!

Urgency don't give 'em time to think

Rapport act like a friend & they'll trust you

Consistency if you can get 'em once...

Flocking "everybody's doing it!"

Scarcity "supplies are limited!!"

Reciprocity a tiny gift goes a long way ...

From rapport comes *authority*. We believe our friends, but we also believe people who agree with us, and share our view of the world. Flattery usually works very well at creating rapport, and when someone has shown us that they have the discernment to appreciate our superior qualities, we are open to their opinions about other matters, too.

Once we have sent the first few dollars to the Nigerian heir, the Dutch lottery official or the gorgeous young Malaysian woman, the next tranche of cash comes more easily. Against the protests of her family, one seventy-year old squandered her every last cent – some \$300,000 – on a telephone scammer. She lost her home and ended her days on welfare, after alienating her whole family. The power of persuasion is far greater than we like to admit.¹

Once we have committed to a course of action, we tend to continue. It is the *inertia* of 'throwing good money after bad.' Somehow by continuing to fund the Nigerian's lifestyle, we believe that everything will work out. History is littered with such scams.



*The Headlong Fools Plunge into South Sea Waters.
But the Sly Long-heads Wade with Caution after.
The First are Drowning but the Wise Last—
Venture no Deeper than the Knees or Waist.*

*a contemporary illustration showing investors in the
South Sea Bubble falling like over-ripe fruit into the sea*

In the early eighteenth century, the Mississippi Company, owned by the French Royal Bank, offered investors the chance to make enormous rewards by buying shares in the new Louisiana Territories in America. French currency came to depend on the illusory trade of this company. Many French people lost everything they owned to the fraudulent Mississippi Company, and the French currency collapsed. At the same time, British investors were gulled into buying shares in the South Sea Bubble. The Panama Canal scam bankrupted investors in the Victorian era. Clever, wealthy and accomplished people lost everything.

Dishonest dealings also factored in the Wall Street Crash that precipitated the Great Depression in the 1930s. Share prices were inflated in an ever-increasing spiral. With the Crash, the banks, which had poured investors' money into this illusion, were forced to foreclose on mortgages; property prices collapsed. Later on, the same trickery happened on a grand scale with the banking crash at the beginning

of the twenty-first century. Bankers really believed that they could package up ‘sub-prime’ debts and so give them value. Two economists were awarded Nobel prizes for ‘proving’ that the economy would never collapse again. Trillions of dollars leached out of the economy because of this belief. Once the mind is convinced, it continues in the same direction – *inertia*, the commitment of consistency, bedevils human belief.

This highlights another innate problem of such scams: if other people flock to invest, we will be very tempted to follow suit. However, just because the majority of people believed that the world was flat, it did not mean that Columbus would actually sail off the edge. Any examination of history shows that people can be brought to believe almost anything. So, Germans voted away the right to vote and put all power in the hands of a scruffy, small, dark-haired, brown-eyed Austrian, who proclaimed the era of the neat, tall, blond, blue-eyed Aryan superman. Fifty million people died in the aftermath of this group delusion. There is *no safety in numbers* when it comes to belief, and following the crowd often leads to catastrophe.

Scarcity is another well-known aspect of confidence trickery. This can be the insistence that we ‘buy now’ (or the computer will die) or the precious rarity of a ‘limited edition’ of 10,000 coins, stamps or porcelain mice.

We also tend to feel obliged to offer something in return. Charities will send a free ballpoint pen, a couple of cardboard table coasters or some name-tags along with a request for donations. This is the *reciprocity principle*. The supervisor who almost managed to scam me said he would fix my computer for free, and I should only pay if I was satisfied. The truth is that most people will pay up, after this seemingly friendly gesture, which is another way of building rapport.

cults in our midst

The techniques of the scammer have been elevated to new heights in destructive or ‘totalist’ cults. The term ‘totalist’ means the same as ‘totalitarian’, and refers to dictatorial leadership which allows no disagreement. These groups have proliferated in our society. Experts list as many as three thousand destructive cults in the US alone. Some claim to be religious or philosophical, some are political or offer supposed therapy, others promise revelations leading to wealth or success in relationship, yet others promise eternal life. There are even more ‘family’ cults: abusive, high-demand groups that form around a group of relations, even a small nucleus of immediate family members. Such a group may consist of a single follower, and be regarded as a marriage, but the dynamics of manipulation are the same.

This definition of a ‘totalist cult’ was arrived at by a group of experts under the direction of Professor Louis Jolyon West, MD: ‘*A group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing, and employing unethical, manipulative or coercive techniques of persuasion and control designed to advance the goals of the group’s leaders, to the possible or actual detriment of members, their families or the community.*’²

There is a general belief that only weak people are taken in by these cults, but this simply isn’t true. Cult groups have no interest in recruiting incapable followers; they want the smartest and most capable. The majority of cult members are ‘fairly well educated’ and come from ‘normal, functioning families.’³ It is not uncommon to find scientists, doctors and lawyers in a cult group. *Susceptibility has nothing whatsoever to do with intelligence or education.*

Most people join a totalist group at a time of transition, such as after a bereavement or break-up, or a

move to a new town or a new job. Students in their first year away from home are particularly susceptible. When familiar habits and routines are disrupted, we become more open to new ways, and, when those ways come in a friendly, welcoming package, it is easy to accept them without sufficient reflection.

There is a very broad range of groups that create dependence among members. Some derive from traditional religions; others – such as the Teachers or the Sullivanians – are therapy-based. Some are simply business trainers, like est or The Forum, which also tout ‘self-realization.’ These groups have long since penetrated everyday life: today, almost every major corporation uses the training methods of such totalist groups. These may be called ‘team building’ or ‘assessment’, but, in reality, they derive from the control techniques developed by cult leaders, and are designed to over-ride critical thinking.

In this new century, the most notorious form of cult is the terrorist group, but the dynamics of cult involvement are also found in gangs, paedophile rings, human traffickers and even in some of our institutions. The horrifying child abuse scandals that have recently rocked the UK show how authority and unethical influence have often been used to maintain criminal and immoral activities, within institutions directed by both the church and state. This is possible because the same dynamics apply to all human behaviour, and, until we are familiar with those dynamics, we will continue to fall prey to them.

recommended reading:

Robert Cialdini, *Influence*

Pratkanis and Shadel, *Weapons of Fraud*.

2 recruitment: the way to unhappiness

‘manipulate: to manage or influence skilfully, especially in an unfair manner.’ Dictionary.com

The process of undue influence follows a predictable series of steps. First comes *contact*. This will either happen in person or through some advertising approach. It comes in many forms: flyers, posters, mailings, books, media ads and articles are all used by cult groups. Many cults use street recruiters, and most have their own publications; some, including Scientology, have hired professional advertising agencies to refine their approach.⁴

The Moonies and, more recently, militant Islamists, approach college freshmen. Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons and Larouchies knock on doors. The Larouchies use obituary columns to target grieving widows and widowers.

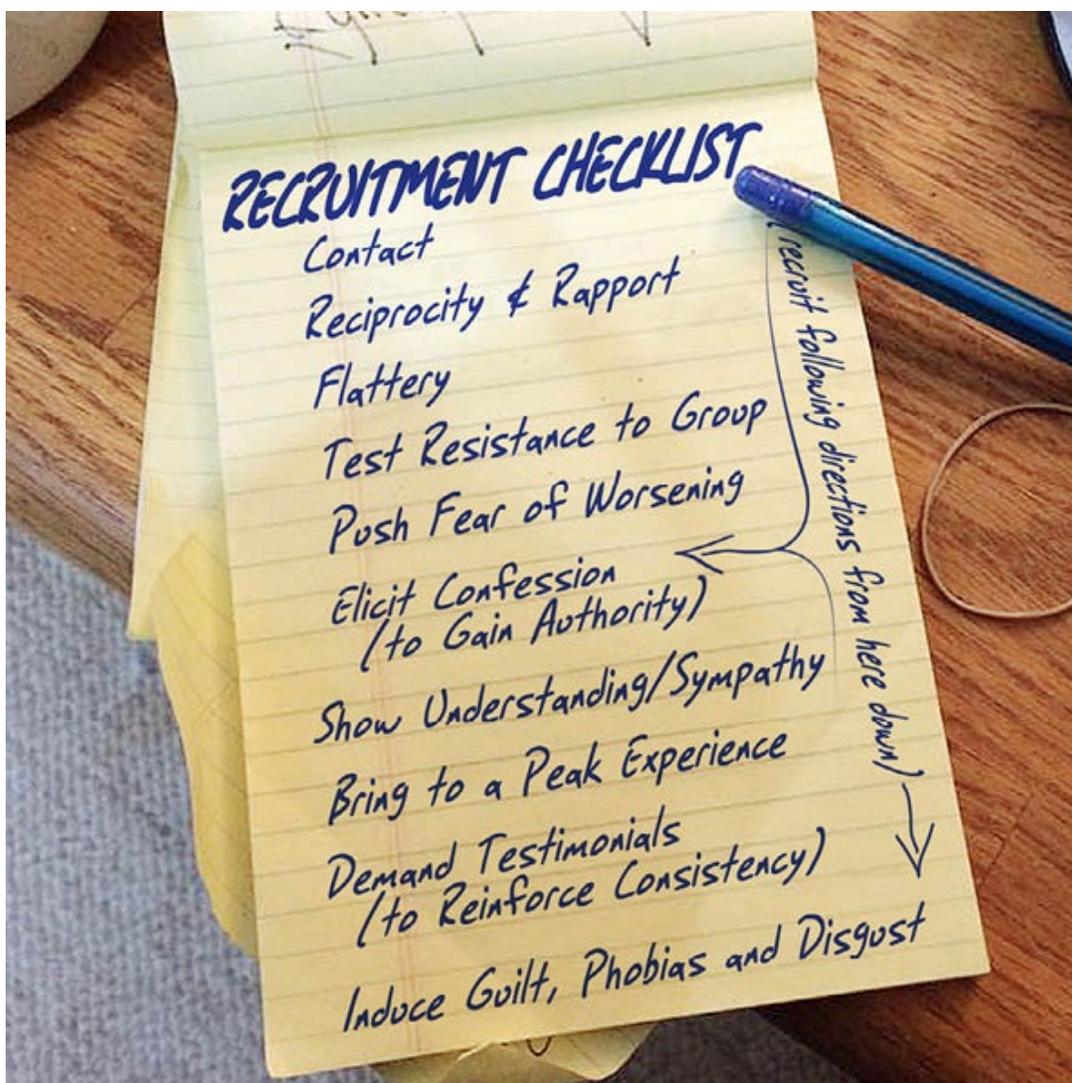
Cults do not want incompetent recruits. Anyone with significant physical or mental problems, including drug or alcohol addiction, will be weeded out at the beginning. There may also be certain groups that are not targeted – Scientology avoids gays, journalists, psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists, disabled people and communists.

People do not join extremist groups because they are stupid. No cult group would survive long with dim, ineffectual members. Many are idealists who believe they are working towards a better world. Studies show that cult members tend to be middle-class and fairly well-educated.⁵ They have higher than average IQs and perfectly normal personality profiles. Cult members do not present with any more emotional or psychiatric problems than the normal population. The same is true of terrorists. Detailed surveys of several terrorist groups have shown that their members are neither mentally ill nor abnormal, except for their adherence to the anti-social beliefs of the group.⁶

Once contact is made, *rapport* is developed. The recruiter looks for common ground, agreement on cultural, political or religious biases. In Scientology, this is called the ‘reality factor’. The intention is to create a friendly atmosphere.

The Krishnas used to hand out joss sticks and then ask for a donation, which follows the *principle of reciprocity*. One of my friends startled a Krishna recruiter by refusing either to make a donation or to return the recording of Temple songs he had just been given. Most people will simply reach into their pocket and pay up for the few pennies worth of ‘Spiritual Sky’ joss sticks. This will often lead to a conversation, which is the agenda hidden behind the approach.

Moonies sold candy and flowers on the street, at vastly exaggerated prices. Scientologists offer a free personality test. *There is no such thing as a free lunch; there is also no such thing as a free personality test*. By answering the two hundred question test, you volunteer private information, and grant authority to the tester. The test was actually written by Ray Kemp, a merchant seaman with no training in psychological testing. It is called the ‘Oxford Capacity Analysis’ to give it a ring of authority. Perhaps the author worked in one of Oxford’s car plants; he certainly didn’t attend the university.



RECRUITMENT CHECKLIST

Contact

Reciprocity & Rapport

Flattery

Test Resistance to Group

Push Fear of Worsening

Elicit Confession
(to Gain Authority)

Show Understanding/Sympathy

Bring to a Peak Experience

Demand Testimonials
(to Reinforce Consistency)

Induce Guilt, Phobias and Disgust

(recruit following directions from here down)

The prospective recruit will be *flattered* – called ‘love bombing’ by the Moonies. Your appearance, beliefs or talents will be praised to the skies. False friendship is created and rapport is built. Recruiters see nothing wrong in this deception, because it is believed to be for the greater good and it raises their own status in the group. For the recruiter, it is another statistic, which will lead to praise from the group, just like a salesperson selling another car. Recruits, however, feel as if they have made a new friend, someone who resonates with their existing beliefs. By the time they ever realise that the recruiter was simply agreeing to be agreeable it will be too late.

Any *resistance* to the cult is then tested, unless the cult represents itself under a false name (the Moonies have tens of front groups, and never admit to being a ‘church’ or religious at first contact). Scientologists are taught to dismiss media reports by saying that the media is untrustworthy: ‘You can’t believe anything you read in the papers’. Not one person *ever* disagreed with me when I used this line – such is the level of the public’s distrust of the media. Once rapport has been established, the recruiter will seek out the most significant difficulty in the recruit’s life. In Scientology, this is called the ‘ruin’. ‘What is ruining your life?’ If the preceding steps have been followed closely, *most* people will offer up even their most secret troubles. Unless they’ve been hurt before by exposing their secrets, most people welcome sympathy for their problems. It is surprising how willing people are to share their deepest longings with complete strangers, as if there is a need to confess; this deepens rapport.

Scientology recruiters then push the target into ‘*fear of worsening*’. The recruit is exploited to feel discouraged about the ‘ruin.’ ‘I’m sure you’ve tried everything, but nothing has worked.’ *Confession* of troubles usually shifts the recruiter into a position of authority. The recruit will be willing to follow directions from this point, almost like Pavlov’s dogs, which salivated when a bell was rung, because they

had learned to associate it with the offer of food.

Next, the recruiter will use the information from this confession to demonstrate how the recruit needs the group in order to make life better; Scientology recruiters call this step '*bringing to understanding*'. Sales manuals suggest that a story be made up to show sympathy: 'I know a guy who had exactly the same problem. He took a few of our courses and everything started to work out for him.' The '*understanding*' is that the cult can solve whatever problem is presented – whether it is romantic, financial, work-related or spiritual – anything and everything can be resolved by the offered course, counselling or study programme.

The first course, seminar, or workshop will continue the love-bombing, while using a hypnotic technique to *bring about a peak experience*. Any form of repetition, mimicry or fixation can lead to a euphoric altered state. Chanting, drumming, group singing, visual fixation – as in meditation – repetition of a word or phrase ('*mantra meditation*'), repeated movements, such as rocking, shaking, or walking meditations, all lead to an altered state.

Most people in western society are unfamiliar with the effects of eastern meditation, so they will be delighted and surprised by the euphoria that floods them. Almost every former member I've talked with had an initial peak experience, and spent the remainder of their time in the cult trying – and failing – to repeat it. It is likely that the peak experience is simply a release of dopamine or serotonin. These neurochemicals are the '*reward*' system of the brain, and are released during sex and by alcohol and drug use. In a group setting, surrounded by approving people, cult techniques can lead to a powerful high in the new recruit.

Testimonials are demanded for *reinforcement*. In Scientology these are called '*success stories*'. This *reinforces consistency*: the more publicly and loudly you commit to a technique or experience, the more difficult it will be to repudiate it later. People trying to give up smoking are advised to tell all of their friends that they have given up, because, under the consistency principle, it will make it harder to admit defeat and light another cigarette.

We all suffer from *confirmation bias*, where we will justify our actions and dismiss anything that disagrees with us. There is a quality of inertia to all human activity; we keep going in the direction we've chosen. Delivering a testimonial reinforces the sense of belonging. Often, members will be encouraged to confess their former sinful lives in front of the group. Members will often divide their lives into distinct categories; everything good is attributed to the group's practices, and everything bad is the fault of the individual.

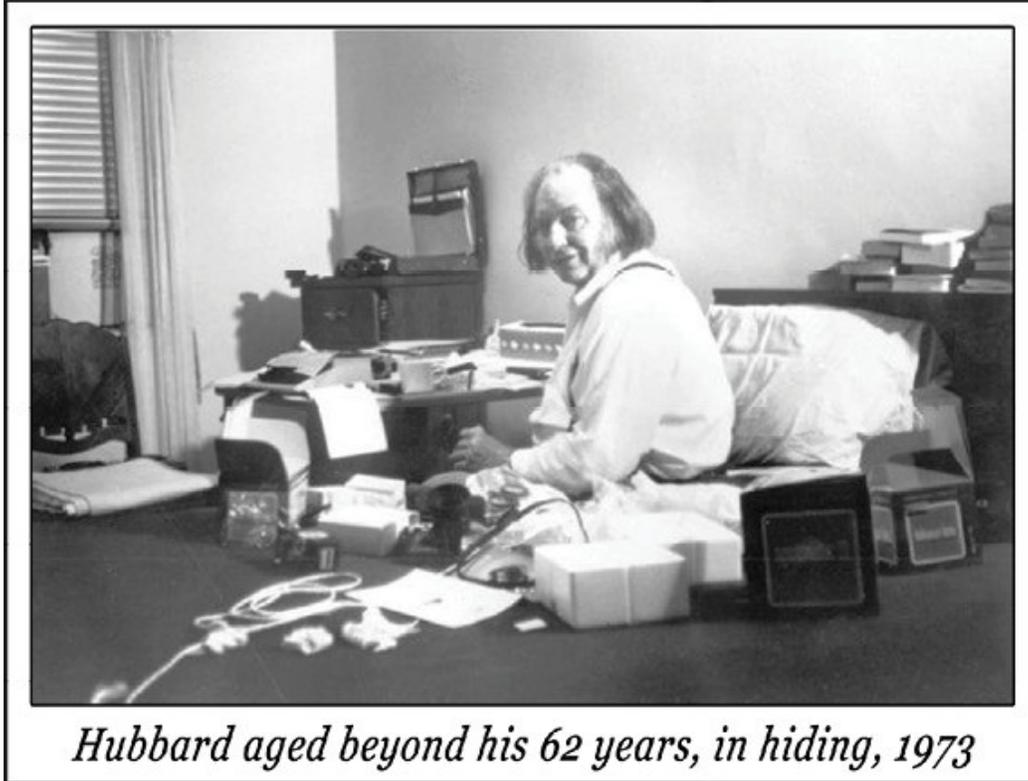
This brings us to *groupthink*, a normal aspect of human psychology. *Induction of guilt* is a part of this, but the group will also induce phobias and disgust towards out-groups and critics. *As Hitler said, create an enemy to bind a group together.*

hard sell

Hard sell is used shamelessly in Scientology. Talking about the extremely expensive exorcisms that constitute the secret '*upper levels*' of Scientology, cult leader Ron Hubbard said, '*Advanced Courses are the most valuable service on the planet. Life insurance, houses, cars, stocks, bonds, college savings, all are transitory and impermanent ... Advanced Courses ... last forever and give immortality. There is nothing to compare with Advanced Courses. They are infinitely valuable and transcend time itself.*' It costs around a half million dollars to complete Scientology's '*Bridge to Total Freedom.*'

In a dispatch called *What is Life Worth? - The Importance of Hard Sell*, Hubbard said, '*HARD SELL is ... a MUST in dissemination and selling of services and materials.*' He also said, '*You tell him that he*

is going to sign up right now and he is going to take it right now ... One does not describe something, one commands something. You will find that a lot of people are in a more or less hypnotic daze ... and they respond to direct commands in literature and ads. Hard Sell means insistence that people buy.' Further, 'You have to be willing to invade privacy, very definitely ... [recruits] don't have any rights!'



Scientology 'registrars' – the salespeople who sell 'courses' to the members – are trained using hard-sell expert Les Dane's book *Big League Sales Closing Techniques*. Sales interviews can last whole days. I'm happy to report that towards the end of my involvement with Scientology, I refused to accept a money-lender's cheque, even after a 13-hour interview. The demanded interest rate was 30%. Many others have not been so lucky, and have lost everything they owned, simply to pay for 'advanced courses.' Inheritances are quickly sucked into the cult leader's bank accounts. Former members may be saddled with debt for the rest of their lives.

Some cults will differentiate between inner and outer members (called 'staff' and 'public' in Scientology). Staff members are given the bare minimum of sleep and nourishment while working impossible hours; 'public' members are allowed to sleep and eat properly (even encouraged to do so). The core members, on the other hand, while often living in drastically worse living conditions, are led to believe that they are superior not only to the world at large, but also to the 'public' of the cult. This elitism is a vital aspect of membership.

We have the word 'mystery' from cults in the ancient world, where members were taken through a series of secret initiations, culminating in a false death and resurrection, which led them to believe that they would survive physical death. Initiates were called *mystes*. From these first *mystery* cults, almost 4,000 years ago, such groups have offered a sense of superiority to their members. Members of early Christian Gnostic sects called themselves the '*electoi*,' from which comes the word 'elect'. They were convinced that by passing through the seven gates of the planetary bodies, and reciting the right passwords, heaven would be theirs.

People take pride in the trappings of office: the uniforms and badges, the medals and titles. *We love to feel superior, and all too readily accept a hierarchy of membership.* Freemasons and Rosicrucians revel in their position in the hierarchy: such groups function as secret societies, and often

form networks in public office. In the UK, there are many Freemasons in the police and the judiciary. Mormons owe complete allegiance to their group, through their ‘Temple Endowments.’

By the time I left Scientology, I was at the end of the 25th of the then 27 available levels. The deference of other members was part and parcel of the experience. They believed that I could read minds, see into the future and move independently of my body. It is shocking to discover the amount of damage concealed by the many people who completed these levels before leaving the cult. No one has actually ever demonstrated the supposed paranormal abilities we were promised we would attain.

Scientology calls those who give money ‘Patrons’, and various titles are offered according to the amount ‘donated’ – so, for instance, Patrons Meritorious have given \$250,000. In return, their names are published in magazines and inscribed on plaques.

Elitism encourages an ‘us versus them’ mentality, as well as simple black and white thinking. The group is good and right; any critic is bad and wrong. Members of the group are the *elect*: they will become powerful and prosperous, irresistible to the opposite sex, achieve enlightenment or enter the kingdom of heaven - unless (and until) they realize that the emperor wears not a stitch of clothing.

Membership must be reinforced. Status is important, but there will also be a resolute conviction that the group is right and that doubt is wrong. The group’s beliefs are scientifically true and/or spiritually correct. This leads to the strange situation where believers will put aside their own beliefs in favour of the group’s dogma, which is the test of a true believer. So, a famous heart surgeon in Aum Shinrikyo murdered patients at the behest of the cult, in spite of the Hippocratic Oath’s provision to do no harm. A fanatic will believe that he must murder innocents to bring about the Caliphate or the End Days, perhaps putting aside years of compassionate behaviour. If the leader says that salt is sweet, the follower will taste that sweetness, just as those hypnotised will cheerfully eat an onion as if it were an apple – or, as followers of Lesego Daniel testify, believe that gasoline tastes like pineapple juice.⁷

Reinforcement is also behavioural. Each group has its own variations. Habits of dress, of speech, responses and rituals will all be readily adopted. Radical Islamists take up traditional dress, with men growing beards and women covering their hair, or even their faces. Scientologists make locked-on eye contact – which maintains a light trance and affects visual perception. There will be thought-stopping rituals – Krishnas chant the Hare Krishna mantra if they feel challenged. Slogans are implanted to keep thought at bay. Phobias are induced, so that opponents are viewed as if in the grip of Satan and unworthy of attention. Scientologists are urged to cease any communication with critics – Suppressive Persons – and such ‘shunning’ is commonplace in totalist groups; indeed, it is a defining factor when assessing the danger of a group.

groups that manipulate



*a victim of the aum shinrikyo
nerve gas attack, tokyo 1995*

Many groups use questionable techniques to maintain the loyalty or devotion of their followers. The popular term for these groups is 'cult'. Many sociologists speak of 'new religious movements', but this term is even less precise, as such groups often have no religious pretensions, nor are they all especially 'new'. For the sake of brevity, we will use the term *cult*, because the dictionary definition remains accurate. Our concern is for 'totalist cults', however, which control most aspects of their members' lives.

There is a continuum from relatively benign groups to the most extreme; from groups which merely have an unhealthy control of members' decision making, to those which send their members out to kill or cause their members' deaths.

In Japan, Aum Shinrikyo stockpiled enough nerve gas to kill four million people. The notorious Manson Family, in California, committed a series of vicious murders. The Indian Thuggees also committed murder as an aspect of their religious belief, giving us the word 'thug'.

Extreme political groups are also totalist in nature. The Bolsheviks and the Nazis systematically murdered millions of people out of doctrinal belief – the eradication of the Kulak peasant farmers by Stalin, or of Jews, Romany, Blacks and Communists by Hitler.

Major religions have been guilty of significant anti-social behaviour such as the murder of tens of thousands by the European Christian churches during the centuries of the witchcraft persecution. In very recent times, the Catholic Church systematically concealed widespread child sexual abuse. The Jehovah's Witnesses, an international movement with perhaps eight million members, has refused to report thousands of its followers to civil authorities for such child abuse. In the High Court in England, in June 2015, the Watchtower Society was fined £275,000 for failing to protect a girl from abuse by a known predator, who was a Jehovah's Witness.

Wherever a group denies its members the right to challenge doctrine, it has moved onto the spectrum of manipulation. In the Middle Ages, there were two popes who ordered excommunication – exclusion from heaven – for anyone who wore a beard. We believe ourselves more enlightened, but bizarre doctrines continue to be enforced by many groups in our 'free' society. For

instance, the savage beatings and ‘paddling’ of children in certain fundamentalist Christian groups in the US, which would be illegal in Europe.

A group of just two people can have the dynamics of a totalist cult, where one rigidly determines the behaviour of the other. Or, as with the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the cult may number many millions.

Totalist cults deny the right to freedom of opinion. There is nothing new here: traditionally, religions often exclude ‘heretics’. The very word *heresy*, in its origin, means ‘choice’ and applies to those who have chosen to disagree on some point of dogma. The word was long ago extended to mean *immorality* and even *sodomy*. With the advance of human rights, no mainstream religion would remove the right to doubt or question, as totalist cults do.

Some argue that even science is somehow a belief system, and it is true that scientists have often refused to believe evidence, instead favouring dogma; which makes their behaviour cultic. It is also true that cliques of scientists have acted as totalist cults – the group around Lysenko, whose foolish ideas led to famine in the Soviet Union, for instance. However, true science encourages disagreement and challenge, where totalist groups forbid either. This means that the word ‘scientist’ does not signify any belief system, rather a community of those who test reality, rather than simply believing whatever they are told.

With science, a hypothesis is tested and a theory created from a supporting – and independently replicated – experiment. Science is based upon theories that offer the most likely explanation, and can be challenged through new experiments, rather than a basis of dogmatic declarations about the nature of humanity and the universe that are written in stone. *Only if a precept or principle makes sense and can be tested should it be adopted.*

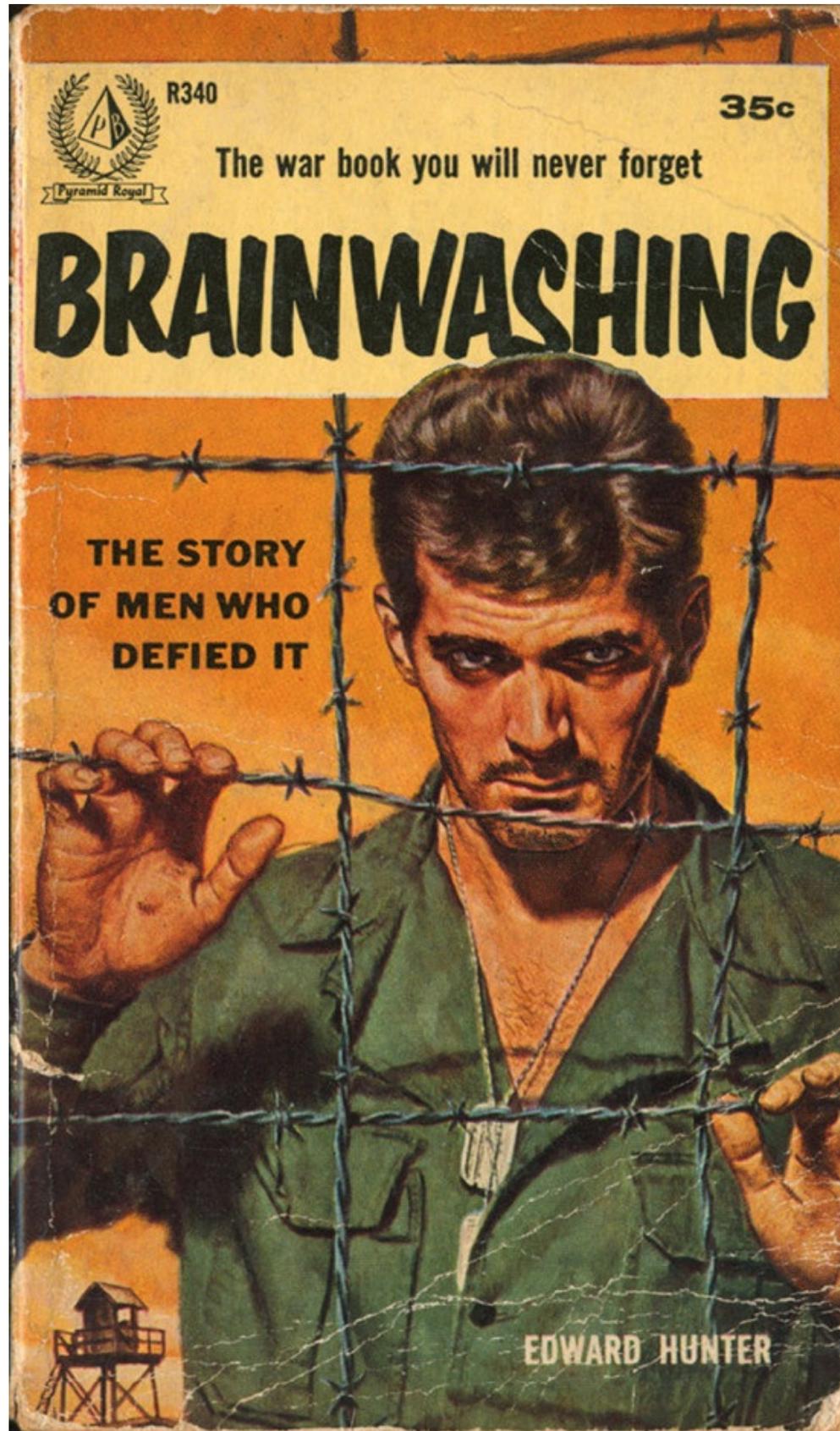
recommended reading:

Steven Hassan, *Combatting Cult Mind Control* (2015 edition)

Jon Atack, *Let’s sell these people A Piece of Blue Sky* (2013 edition).

3 manufacturing fanatics

‘Cults are far from marginal, and those who join them are no different from you and me.’ Robert Jay Lifton.⁹



When Mao gained control of China in 1949, he instituted his cherished plan to enforce ideological conformity on every man, woman and child across that vast terrain. He wanted to root out capitalist ideas in a single generation. *The Chinese phrase hsi nao – an ancient, non-political term referring*

to the cleansing of the mind and heart – gave the world the word ‘brainwashing’. In China, millions were subjected to this systematic programme for years on end. Conditions were harsh, but most prisoners were not physically tortured. Far more subtle means were used to break the will and bring about compliance.

Psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton interviewed 40 returnees from these camps over a period of 17 months. All had signed confessions to immoral acts that conflicted with their own beliefs and were either severe exaggerations or plainly untrue. After escaping from China, these thought reform subjects were baffled by their own admissions. Most accepted that they had believed these absurd declarations at the time of signing, but did not understand *how* they had come to believe them.

Lifton delineated eight aspects of the Chinese thought reform, or undue influence, programme. Neither violence, nor even the threat of violence, had been needed to achieve extreme shifts of belief. Among the victims were Catholic priests, who had confessed their part in an entirely fictitious political spy network directed by the Vatican. On their release, they were overwhelmed by guilt as their former beliefs flooded back.

China exported thought reform techniques, along with other more tangible weapons, to communist North Korea, where they were applied to devastating effect on United Nations’ POWs during the Korean War, from 1950 to 1953. The North Koreans paraded UN POWs who made untrue, and at times bizarre, accusations against their own armed forces and western democracy. On their release, the POWs were mystified by their own statements.

There is strong evidence of a direct link between North Korean techniques and the world of cults through the Unification Church, or Moonies. Sun Myung Moon created Victory Over Communism in the early 1960s. He ran this organization in parallel with his already established Unification Church. Victory Over Communism was closely associated with the South Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) to politically re-educate communists. Former officers of the KCIA soon transferred their skills to the Moonies. The most significant convert was Bo Hi Pak, a colonel in the South Korean CIA before becoming Moon’s right hand man.¹⁰

Like Lifton, Berkeley psychology professor Margaret Singer studied returning POWs from Korea and over the decades counselled some three thousand cult members of many persuasions. She adopted the term ‘exploitative persuasion’ to describe the insidious process of manipulation.

radicalisation: a tragic example

In order to illustrate the full effect of what undue influence can achieve, let us first look at a specific example of extreme cult indoctrination, as viewed through the lens of Singer’s model of influence. While this young man’s story ended in a dramatically unusual way, the stages of his recruitment followed an all-too-recognisable path.

Omar was born in the heart of England, in Derby, the home of Rolls Royce. His father was an immigrant who had built a highly successful business through unremitting hard work. Omar was the youngest of six children, and his father had fond hopes that his son would become a physician. To this end, Omar was sent to Foremarke Hall, which prepares boys for Repton, a prestigious and expensive private school. After three years, Omar dropped out, going on to complete his secondary education at a local state school instead.

Like many cult members, Omar was intelligent, socially accepted and fairly well-adjusted. Paul Elliot, a friend at Foremarke Hall, remarked that Omar ‘was such a nice, jovial guy at school. He fitted in well and was a really friendly person ... My fondest memory of him is that he used to have a Rubik magic trick

– a flat thing with circles on it. He managed to break it during a religious instruction lesson. Everyone was laughing at him. He was definitely the class joker. We used to hang out as kids, doing everyday things like skateboarding. He was a great fan of football and we played together in the park at break time.’¹¹

During his teens, Omar’s parents separated. Omar and his five siblings all took their mother’s part. The separation did nothing to deter Omar from successfully completing his secondary education, and he was accepted as an undergraduate student in mathematics by King’s College, in London. As a child, he had little interest in religion, but at King’s he was approached by a recruiter for the UK chapter of an eastern religious group that was soon afterwards banned from campus.

His old-fashioned clothes set him apart. He put aside the normal social life of a young man at university, no longer visiting bars or going clubbing, and spending so much time studying his newfound belief that his degree work suffered badly. The changes in Omar’s appearance and bearing were commented upon by those who knew him back at home.

In an attempt to make up for lost time in lectures, Omar borrowed notes from a female student. From this encounter, a romance blossomed, and she followed him into the cult. By this time, Omar’s father had died. During his second year, against his mother’s wishes, Omar married the fellow student. Then he dropped out of university.

Omar’s wife finished her degree. She realised that Omar was so obsessed by his cult activism that she would have to support them both. She took a job as a school-teacher and, over the next few years, bravely managed to combine breadwinning with giving birth to their three children. The marriage was rocky. Omar took the family abroad, intending to stay away for a year, but soon cut the trip short. His second trip was taken alone. Soon afterwards, his wife read that his lifeless body had been washed up on a foreign beach. Their youngest child was barely two months old.

Omar’s immersion into a cult follows a sadly typical path, until we realise that the group he joined was far from typical. Omar Khan Sharif failed in a suicide bomb attack sponsored by Hamas in Tel Aviv, in April, 2003. His companion, Asif Hanif, blew himself up and killed four people at Mike’s Place, a popular bar.

Asif Hanif’s friends in England were incredulous. At first they thought that his identity must have been stolen. They could not believe that the ‘Teddy Bear’, a bright and considerate student with a passion for cricket, could have been involved in a suicide attack. He had even spoken out against suicide attacks as a violation of the Qur’an.

The steps of Omar’s induction reveal the path followed by most cult recruits. As psychologists Zimbardo and Lippé said, ‘...indoctrination into terrorist groups often resembles the Moonie system.’¹² This is relevant to all patterns of persuasion where the individual’s choice is over-ridden, but, as we shall see later, it is also relevant to those who willingly choose to join a destructive organization.

transition

The first step of any cult journey is dislocation through either physical or psychological disorientation. In one or more ways, the recruit is dislocated whether from the surrounding culture or from a familiar way of life. Most often, the recruit is at a point of transition – in an unfamiliar place or at a turning point – and feels disorientated and unsure.

Omar was the child of Kashmiri immigrants. Derby has a large Muslim Asian population, but they are displaced into a very different culture from their homeland. Omar’s father was penniless when he arrived in England in 1962. Starting from scratch, he created a business empire that included fast food restaurants, a launderette, a health club and an amusement arcade. But his enterprise left him little time for family life

or for the niceties of his religion. Although Omar's father made sizeable contributions to the establishment of a mosque, a fellow student said that when Omar arrived at university, he knew little more about Islam than the formula of prayer.

The children of immigrants who have a different religious culture to that of the host country suffer a particular disorientation with regard to beliefs. Most will integrate into the host culture reconciling the differences. However, a study of 165 Al-Qaeda members has shown that 129 of them – some 78% – were either the children of immigrants or were living abroad when recruited.¹³



In his important book, *The Islamist*, Ed Husain explains that most of the Muslim students at his college in London, 'had no real bond with mainstream Britain,' even when they had been born and raised in Britain, like Husain himself.¹⁴ Ed Husain attended state schools and his devout, moderate Muslim family celebrated Christmas and regularly bought cakes from the local Jewish baker.¹⁵

College campuses have long been recruiting grounds for cult groups. This is recognised by universities, which ban many such groups, including Hizb ut-Tahrir, the radical Islamist group that recruited Sharif. Hizb ut-Tahrir also picked off members of existing Muslim groups within universities. Ed Husain ran the radical Young Muslim Organisation at his college when he was recruited by the Hizb.¹⁶ Cults are especially successful with new students, who have been dislocated from their homes, families and friends and are busy trying to create a new adult identity.

That said, dislocation can happen at any time of life. Some groups scour the obituary columns to prey on the recently bereaved. The normal routines of a widow or widower have been irrevocably changed. *We are most vulnerable at turning points:* a new job, a new environment, or a lost relationship, for example.

In some instances, an entire society is dislocated by catastrophe, whether natural or man-made. This is the case with nationalist or separatist groups. In this case, the key is the stability of the society. Poverty, plague and conflict have a dislocating effect.

deception and the hidden agenda

Cult groups usually disguise their true intentions behind well-rehearsed claims. The Moonies have recruited on campus under a variety of names, including the Collegiate Association for Research into Principle. Recruits were not usually told that CARP was part of the Unification Church until they arrived at a Moonie camp. Moon's view that Christ was a failure and that he himself was the true Messiah would be held back for some time.

Like the Moonies, Hizb has a roster of alternative names; once one is banned on campus, they can simply shift to another. This makes it practically impossible to ban such groups: like the Hydra, they just sprout new heads.¹⁷

At first approach, some Islamist groups represent themselves as charities that support orphanages, schools and hospitals. A senior Hamas official has candidly admitted that charitable activities are used to swell good feeling, so that Hamas can gain new recruits and greater political sway.¹⁸ Hamas claimed both Omar Khan Sharif and his partner, Asif Hanif, as *martyrs* to their cause.

Sincere religious groups have an open agenda. If you want to become a monk or a nun, vows of poverty, chastity and obedience will be explained in advance. The hardships of the life will be explained, and the life itself will be experienced as a novice before vows are taken. A totalist cult group does not make the outcome of membership clear. Omar Khan Sharif was not approached with an offer to strap explosives to his body, so that he could blow himself and a group of innocents to kingdom come. Deception is fundamental to exploitative persuasion.

deliberate peer group pressure and the BITE model

Cults control the behaviour, information, thoughts and emotions of their members. Every society is a complex cultural web made up of commonly held beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. Only when displaced into an unfamiliar society do we fully realise the distinctive qualities of our own. Dropped into an alien culture – such as a cult group – it is surprising how quickly people adapt. Most people will slide into the beliefs of a new group with little questioning.

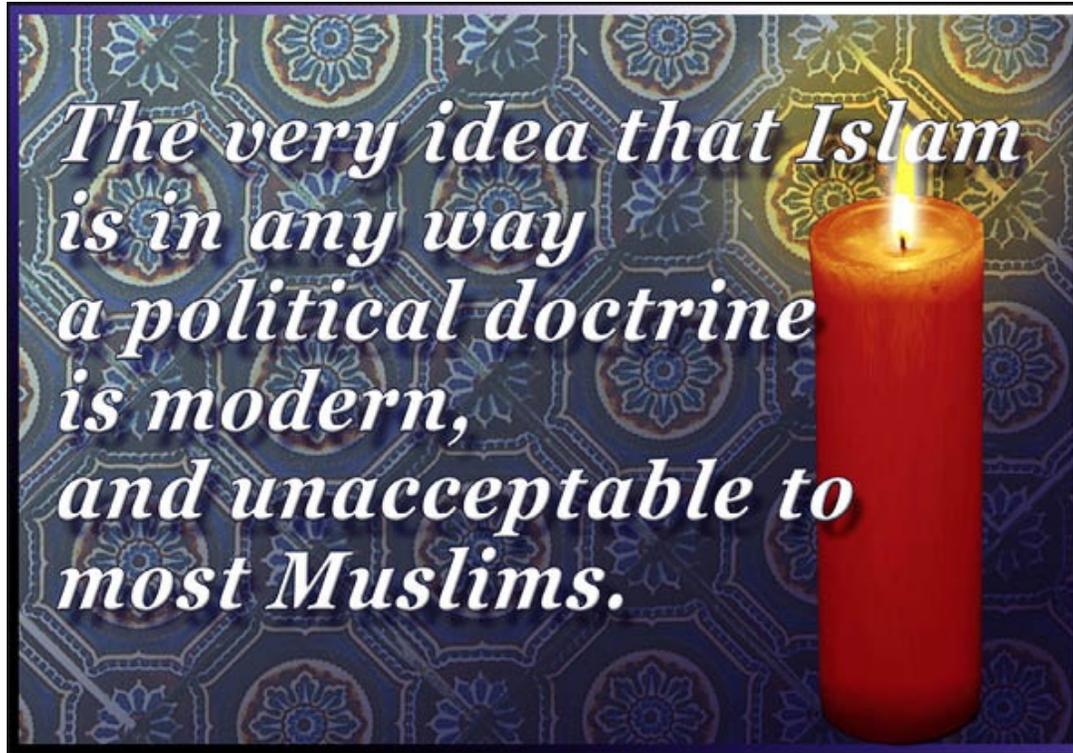
Cults and sects represent a foreign social environment, where beliefs, attitudes and practices are different from the surrounding society. Robert Jay Lifton explains: 'Through this milieu [social or peer group] control the totalist environment seeks to establish domain over not only the individual's communication with the outside (all that he sees and hears, reads and writes, experiences, and expresses), but also – in its penetration of his inner life – over what we may speak of as his communication with himself.'¹⁹

Psychologist Leon Festinger identified control of behaviour, thought and emotion as salient aspects of transformation. Cult expert Steven Hassan added *information* to Leon Festinger's original model, so creating the behaviour, information, thought and emotion – or BITE – model.²⁰

Changes in behaviour, information sources, the control of thought and emotion are the path from one social group to another. Authority that was formerly given to family, peers or the larger society and its establishments is transferred to the new group. The seed of fanaticism has been sown, and a new identity is being parasitically transplanted onto the old.

Omar Khan Sharif changed his behaviour by adopting traditional Muslim garb and growing his beard. His wife covered her hair with the *hijab*. When challenged about these changes by old friends, Omar just smiled, refusing to enter into dialogue. Omar soon accepted the Hizb as the primary source of information and the arbiter of other sources of information. So, the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*, the sayings of the Prophet, became central to his new understanding of the world. But Omar accepted the interpretation given to the

Qur'an and the Hadith by the leaders of Hizb ut-Tahrir. Of course, the vast majority of Islamic scholars do not interpret their scripture to encourage anti-social behaviour in host countries, or to alienate Muslims from non-believers. The very idea that Islam is in any way a political doctrine is modern, and unacceptable to most Muslims.



When Omar Bakri Muhammad, the head of the cult in Britain, fell out with its leaders in Lebanon, he funnelled members into his own group, the now notorious al-Muhajiroun. This means 'the emigrants', a direct expression of their sense of dislocation, which is particularly telling, because many of its members were, like Omar Khan Sharif and Ed Husain, not emigrants at all, but British citizens, born and bred. Omar Khan Sharif's time was so bound up in the group that he stopped attending university lectures. For the first time in his life, he performed *namaz* – the five times daily prayer. This normal Muslim practice was an aspect of his new life for Omar, not simply an expression of faith.

Cult members are urged to follow the behaviour of the group, often by changing their style of dress, their habits of speech and their demeanour. They ignore or ridicule sources of information that disagree with the group.

Groups often take complete control of a member's time, but they can also bring the member to set aside certain times each day to attend classes or meetings, or to read or distribute literature, meditate or pray. Those members who do not enter the group's environment will set up a private shrine at home, or put a picture of their leader in a prominent place. Thoughts and emotions are brought into line with the doctrine taught by the leaders. Guilt is instilled for thoughts or feelings in contradiction with the teaching and impossible standards are imposed: for example, a young man who feels desire for a woman is being sinful. Positive feelings for non-believers, even parents, siblings or children, are immoral. Behaviour, information, thoughts and emotions come under the control of the group.

While in the Young Muslim Organisation, Ed Husain was expected to ask permission before attending other group's meetings.²¹ Members filled out a 'routine sheet' each day, including the number of new recruits they had 'targeted' and had to report their contributions to YMO every week. Ed Husain says, 'those who underperformed were often subjected to strict questioning.'²² Interrogation is a usual aspect of totalist behaviour.

the ingredients of manipulation

authority – the leader as infallible guru

The leader is seen as the ultimate *authority*: the fount of knowledge on all matters. Such complete expertise is humanly impossible, so at times we all defer to others who are better qualified. In the complex, modern world, there are hundreds of specializations, from doctors, lawyers and therapists, to plumbers, electricians and boat-builders. It makes sense to question authority, until we understand what is being suggested, especially when our future depends upon it. However, *in a cult group, the leader, or leaders, become the sole authority on everything, regardless of qualification or experience.* And the right to question is highly restricted.

This authority can reach down to the most trivial detail: Scientology's leader, Ron Hubbard, even gave mandatory instructions on how to clean windows – using old newspapers – or even on how to put flowers into a vase. Members can be reduced to infantile dependence: Hubbard went so far as to explain that it is important not to knock the vase against the tap or faucet.²³

Submission to teachers is a tradition the world over. Obedience to the teacher is absolute, and the literature of eastern and western cultures alike is filled with tales of disciples who have given up the right to make even simple decisions. In the East, to this day, apprentices in crafts and arts commonly submit to this sort of discipline. In spiritual pursuits, the *guru* becomes a father figure, a representative of God on earth. With our modern liberal attitudes, we are aghast at such subservience.

Omar Khan Sharif came to view Omar Bakri as his guru, and his final actions accord with the path laid out by Bakri in public statements. Ed Husain describes him as a canny speaker, saying, 'there was not a non-Arab Muslim in the land who could argue with the wit and articulacy of Omar Bakri.'²⁴

The dependence upon the guru, or authority figure, is the principal relationship in manipulation. Although a talented and compassionate guru may help a pupil, most people who are treated as gurus just pass on their own shortcomings, as if they were virtues. In cult groups, the relationship is usually at arm's length, anyway, as the guru is often shielded from prolonged contact with members, if there is any contact at all. Gurus rarely, if ever, live up to the idealized expectations of their followers.

loaded language

Restrictions of language easily lead to restrictions of thought and feeling. Most of our thinking is wrapped up in words. Language is associated with the emotions it evokes, so that 'snarl' words and 'purr' words cause automatic responses. Politicians refer to 'fascism' and 'appeasement' to create a subconscious link between their opponents and the dictatorships of the 1930s. This method of associating ideas can be surprisingly effective. Slogans can circumvent analysis and fuel desire, as advertisers well know. *On the lips of the manipulator, language stifles thought, rather than encouraging it.*

Loaded language excludes outsiders, building a wall between the elitist in-crowd and the rest of the world. It is a private vocabulary with terms that are often difficult to translate, because they are made up of the group's own eccentric concepts. Having insisted that it is essential to understand every word exactly, Scientology has two 500-page dictionaries, so followers can decipher a phrase such as: 'Don't get reasonable with dev-T caused by downtone downstats and degraded beings.' Impenetrable jargon inevitably raises a barrier, but it gives the insider a sense of superiority, of special knowledge.

Unlike the technical language of the sciences, loaded language confuses rather than clarifies. Even

simple ideas are twisted and packed with esoteric overtones. Words can even come to signify the opposite of their common meaning, rendering cult conversations impenetrable to outsiders. To Scientologists, the word ‘reasonable’ in the sentence above means giving in to other people’s reasoning. So, Scientologists work hard to be ‘unreasonable’.

Omar Khan Sharif was introduced not only to the traditional religious language of Islam –necessary to understand the concepts of the faith – but also to new and loaded interpretations of traditional terms. So, he came to believe that he could become a *shahid*, a martyr for Islam, although the *Qur’an* clearly prohibits both suicide and the killing of innocents.²⁵ Omar wanted to become a holy warrior, a *mujahid*. He even spent three weeks training in Afghanistan. Non-believers were dismissed as *kaffirs*. To Islamists, the term *jihad* has come to mean a war on non-Muslims and Muslims of other sects alike, rather than the struggle against tyranny and oppression.²⁶ Omar had entered a new world sharply bounded by what Lifton called ‘thought terminating clichés’.²⁷



swastika on a statue of buddha

Language is not confined to words: symbols can also be loaded. The swastika, already an ancient symbol of creation and illumination when the Buddhists adopted it, was given a new and devastating meaning by the Nazis.²⁸ Symbols alone can trigger intense emotions, and emotions always cloud thought; the totalist leader wants to create a physical and psychological environment that keeps the emotions constantly aroused and reasoning subdued.

Gestures, when added to symbols and language, continue to reinforce membership of an exclusive group. Even the rituals of prayer can be perverted from their original meaning and used to arouse enmity towards *kaffirs*. Ed Husain speaks of the mechanical exactness with which members of one Islamist group pray.²⁹ Members may also recognise their fellows through secret signs, which bolster their sense of uniqueness.

An over-emphasis upon the meaning of words can hide the preposterous nature of a cult’s concepts. The recruit must absorb a large vocabulary, rather than carefully examining the concepts that underlie the words. Followers substitute pure unadulterated belief for understanding. If challenged, they insist that the leader’s text is logical, although they cannot explain it. *Confusion is the gateway to suggestibility,*

which can lead to submission to the authority of the creator of confusion.

the sense of powerlessness

Throughout the recruiting process, the individual's sense of *powerlessness* is emphasised. Personal problems, such as depression, ill health or familial conflict, are played upon. *Idealism becomes a vulnerability as idealistic people are eager to join a group that demands change, because they feel powerless to change a corrupt world on their own.*

The hidden fears of the recruit are exposed and the foundation for dependency laid, because the group offers to resolve those fears, whether in this life or a promised afterlife, or as a utopia, a heaven on earth, for future generations.

Omar Khan Sharif was told about the international Islamic community, or *ummah*, and the urgent need to protect this community from the depredations of the West. He was told about the Caliphate that once administered the religious life of Islam.³⁰

As an isolated individual, Omar was shown that he was completely powerless against the wealth and power of the West, and could do little to hinder the leaders in Islamic countries, who are reviled by Islamists. Then he was offered membership of a group that promised the triumph of the faith.

By adopting the views of the totalist group, Omar pushed his existing views into the background. He saw those views as part of the 'brainwashing' accepted by the broader society. This aspect of information control robbed him of any external comparison for his new-found views. Any news item that disagreed with the group's propaganda was rejected as biased, or even rigged. Dissent was constantly undermined. Free discussion was discouraged, or even prohibited. Rival ideas were dismissed out of hand, and critics were smeared without any consideration of their criticism. This strengthens and rigidifies the normal tendency to seek confirmation for beliefs and reject conflicting evidence.

Omar saw that all of his past attempts at resolving difficulties had failed. He had been opened up for indoctrination into the totalist group. In this final aspect of the control of the social environment, the peer group, the beliefs of the group have pierced the recruit's emotional core, so that behaviour changes to fit in with the group's demands. There is no need for rational persuasion to play any part in this process. When completely surrounded by group members, very few people have the power to resist.

the demand for purity

The group comes to represent the only island of purity in a world seen as toxic, treacherous and deceitful. Omar Bakri's followers lived by a strict code that put aside traditional Muslim practice in favour of radical political action. Bakri preached violent action and the overthrow of western governments. Although tolerated in Britain, Hizb ut-Tahrir was banned throughout the Middle East. Omar Bakri, the 'Tottenham Ayatollah', had taken political asylum in Britain, and lived on state hand-outs for years, but he openly promoted the murder of the British Prime Minister to advance his own cause.



Omar Bakri Muhammed

Essential to any guilt-manipulating code is the *demand for purity*. Developing guilt is essential so that members long to renounce every aspect of their former life. This is a key part of cult conditioning, because it is here that a new identity is created, separating the person from the old values. Complex issues are reduced by simplistic polarisation; everything is reduced to black or white. There is no place for shades of grey in an absolutist scheme. The teachings of the group are always right and opponents are always wrong. Totalist groups insist that if you are not with them, you are against them. There is no middle ground, nor any time for consideration. Not only are there no innocents, there are *only* combatants. Omar Bakri taught that Israeli children were ‘legitimate targets’, because, ‘if children are killed, the fault lies with the adult occupiers who brought them into a battlefield situation.’ According to Bakri, all of Israel is a ‘battlefield situation’.³¹

Hizb and other Islamist groups use the traditional terms *haram* – forbidden – and *halal* – permitted – to shape unthinking polarisation among followers. A welter of loaded language is added, often in Arabic, and usually redefined, so that the recruits – whose first language was usually either English or Urdu – would believe that they were being taught a coherent and long-established system of beliefs. In fact, the ideas of the Hizb stemmed from its founder, Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, who published his first book in 1950, and radically redefined traditional Islam, perverting it into a political philosophy.

Omar Khan Sharif felt ashamed of his life before the group. He had done a great deal that was *haram*. He had offended God by drinking alcohol, looking at pornography and indulging in the decadent lifestyle of contemporary British society. He longed to repent and make penance for his former sinful life. Omar could not spare time to make a living and support his children, because he had to devote himself to purging his old, sinful self, while learning to avoid the temptations of the debauched world around him. Otherwise, he had no hope of eternal paradise.

Like any Muslim, Omar longed to know the *Qur’an* in its original Arabic, indeed, he wished to commit the whole text to memory. At the same time, this subtle text was being given a twisted interpretation by his teachers. The world was not split into Muslim and non-Muslim, but Muslim and anti-Muslim. Where the

Prophet Muhammad had accepted the other 'religions of the book' – Judaism and Christianity – and gifted Islam a centuries-old tradition of tolerance, Omar was led to believe that Jews and Christians are locked in a crusade to destroy Islam. Omar was taught that any non-Muslim, whether man, woman or child, is a soldier of Iblis, the devil, so a legitimate target for *jihad* or holy war, in direct opposition to the teachings of the Prophet. Fellow Muslims who failed to accept the teaching of Nabhani were 'partial Muslims' or 'barking dogs'.³²

Normal urges toward pleasure can become a daily reminder of impurity and weakness. Purity easily becomes puritanical, with recruits even feeling guilt about their own health, happiness or good fortune, when compared to the misery of others. Omar Khan Sharif became obsessed with the belief that he could only truly purify himself through martyrdom, so that washing away all of his sins and the endless stream of sinful thoughts became inevitable in such a controlling and guilt-ridden environment. As Lifton observes, 'by defining and manipulating the criteria of purity, and then by conducting an all-out war upon impurity, the ideological totalists create a narrow world of guilt and shame. This is perpetuated by an ethos of continuous reform, a demand that one strive permanently and painfully for something which not only does not exist but is in fact alien to the human condition.'³³

Purity is accompanied by the insistence that the past is not only renounced, but painfully exposed to the light through *confession*. The recruit is kept in a state of remorse and vulnerability by reminders of past failure. The old personality is cast as the devil's dupe, a constant threat, able to regain power through a moment's lack of vigilance. Through confession, the recruit is kept in a constant state of humiliation and submission. And, every day brings new temptations, dark urges and impure thoughts, to the guilt-obsessed.

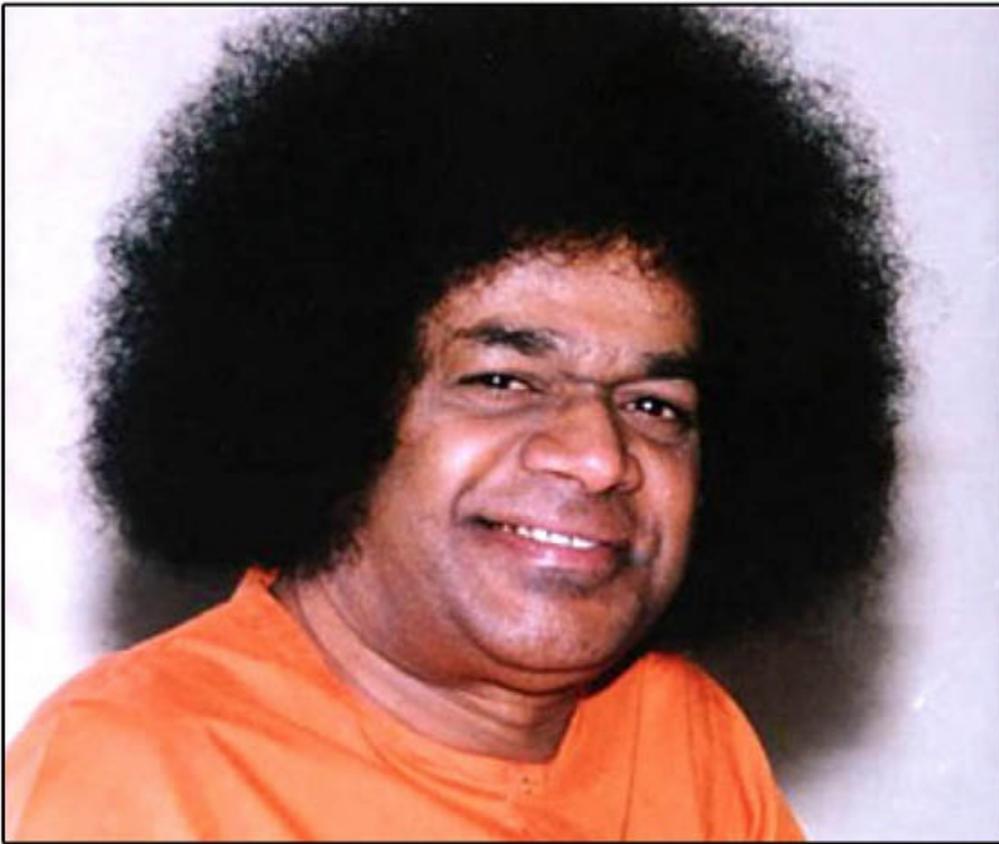
Of course, such guilt manipulation is a sour aspect of many relationships, where one partner constantly reminds the other of past failings. As with all manipulation, it leeches authority away from the individual, who loses self-trust and self-esteem, so becoming ever more dependent on the manipulator.

The recruit must believe that new attitudes, behaviour and emotions have arisen spontaneously. Techniques which alter normal behaviour – such as chanting, fasting, staring and other forms of perceptual fixation – may be used to create *induced states* of euphoria³⁴, which are attributed to mystical insight.

Those new to meditation are usually surprised by its results, and tend to attribute their experience to the guru rather than seeing it as the normal physiological response to stillness and perceptual fixation. There are many paths to euphoria, most of them perfectly acceptable in the proper setting. Traditional Muslim practice includes meditative prayer, repetition of the names of God, sleepless vigils and fasting. These methods can calm anxieties and heighten concentration, so relieving the tensions and pressures of the outside world, but they can also make a susceptible follower prone to direction. Students of the *Qur'an* are encouraged to memorise the entire text by chanting out loud and rocking back and forth, rhythmically. This method of committing information to memory is highly effective, but it relies upon creating an altered state, which can be easily abused.

Omar Khan Sharif was no doubt grateful to Omar Bakri for offering resolution to the turmoil that raged inside him. He received this teaching as a special, personal gift, without realizing that it is the normal practice of most Islamic believers. Egged on by Bakri's enthusiastic support for the 9/11 bombers, and his gleeful predictions of home-grown terrorism, Omar Khan Sharif was inspired to follow the twisted path of the suicide bomber.

mystical manipulation



sai baba

Expectation conditions experience, so in a cult potential ‘realisations’ are suggested before a technique is practised. The recruit will be surprised by a ‘spontaneous’ understanding that is exactly as predicted in the revelations of the leader’s teaching. Sometimes, this extends to conjuring tricks that are claimed as miracles. Kneeling before Indian guru Sai Baba, devotees would feel a surge of energy, which they believed emanated from the master. In fact, the kneeler before his throne was electrically charged, but the miraculous interpretation had been so strongly suggested that devotees never thought to question it. It took a sceptical Japanese TV crew to make the discovery.

Victims of such planned ‘spontaneous’ euphoric experiences believe that they have been initiated into a mystery and joined an élite. They are among the elite few who have understood the doctrine – whether it be Maoism, Nazism or the views of an exclusive religion, therapy group, or sales organization. There is a mystical dimension, because the doctrine supported by these experiences is beyond rational understanding and so available only to the initiated.

Typically, these experiences lead to a feeling of oneness with the group and its leader and separation from the rest of humanity. The recruits are now among the chosen few, the illuminated, possessed of a special and unique understanding that is beyond the grasp of less developed or ‘evolved’ people. The normal feeling of belonging to a family has been hi-jacked. The group is now the family and the family is, in turn, the greater self, to be supported at all costs, even unto death.

The recruit must come to exclude all doubts as sheer selfishness, and give absolute trust to the authority of the group and its leader. There is a ‘higher purpose’ than the demands of everyday life, whether it be devotion to God or party, leader or nation. By this time, recruits will sacrifice their own well-being, and that of anyone else, for the good of the cause. Decency and morality are bound up entirely in the teachings of the totalist group. Normal values can completely reverse. Followers of the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo cult believed that through murder they were releasing victims from karmic debt, so speeding them to

happier incarnations. With this absolute perversion of compassion at the centre of their doctrine, Aum Shinrikyo had stockpiled chemicals to produce enough nerve gas to kill four million people. They believed fervently that an earthly paradise would come to exist through the annihilation of some peoples and the enslavement of others.³⁵

the mystical imperative

Omar Khan Sharif took solace in the promise of a literal paradise. He was a highly intelligent young man, with a scientific education, who was completely alienated from the society around him. His only pleasure came in the thought of sacrifice to God. He had learned to surrender himself to the euphoria that came when he practised the ritual prayer or read the *Qur'an*. The rest of life was a chore, something to be endured on the way to paradise. *This sense that real life is in the future is common to totalist groups: members live not for today, but for tomorrow.*

The recruit is manipulated into believing that there is a *mystical imperative* in the cult's doctrines, and that magical results will be obtained through absolute devotion to that imperative; that direction or command. The imperative is expressed through the will of the leader, so it must be followed absolutely, as if it were an exact formula. Followers experience heightened states, which are perpetually rekindled through the symbols and the language of the cult. They may come to believe that they will achieve supernatural powers, or that their group will overcome insuperable obstacles, by following the leader's order to the letter.

Militant Islamists have come to believe that, by attacking the West, they will precipitate a full-scale Muslim war against the non-Muslim community, when all that has actually been achieved is a more divisive and dangerous world. Omar Khan Sharif believed that by killing a few tourists, and the brave ambulance staff trying to help the victims of Hanif's bomb, he would contribute to the overthrow of Israel and the western democracies. Thankfully, his bomb failed, and he had no effect whatsoever, except to leave behind three fatherless children and a grieving widow.

Inside the group, recruits long to join the ranks of veteran members, so they imitate their behaviour. Veterans, in turn, learn how to pretend to have achieved a superior state of being. The eager young Omar Khan Sharif wanted to be like the veterans of al-Muhajiroun. Eventually, he felt he had surpassed even the group's leader, and set out to join the activists. Omar Bakri talked about martyrdom to overthrow the unbelievers. Omar Khan Sharif decided that talk was not enough. He fulfilled his teacher's imperative and became a martyr - a *shahid*.

Both the committed cult member and the terrorist come to accept that the leader's insight is deeper than their own, and that the imperative of the leader must be followed without question. The ideology of the totalist group sweeps away the existing experience of the recruit. Where experience contradicts the view of the guru, that experience must be mistaken. Ed Husain challenged the poor religious practice of many members of the Hizb, and was surprised when Omar Bakri simply expressed agreement, but made no move to teach the proper formula of prayer, or encourage Arabic studies, in order to gain a better understanding of the *Qur'an*.³⁶

ideology over experience – doctrine over person

Through the imperative of *ideology above experience*, the recruit sheds attitudes and beliefs achieved through direct personal experience, and even rigorous professional training, in exchange for the attitudes and beliefs of the thought-reforming group. Contradictions dwell side by side, apparently unnoticed, in the recruit's mind. When interviewed, a former US Marine said a trainee, who had *threatened* to strike a

Drill Instructor, was forced to stand through the night holding a 70-pound kitbag above his head. Whenever he fell, he was beaten with swagger sticks, until he resumed his stance. Yet, in the same interview, the former Marine claimed that he never saw any ‘unnecessary brutality’ in the Marines. For him, there was no contradiction in these statements. He had been taught that there was no brutality, and he believed this sufficiently strongly to discount his own experience to the contrary.³⁷

As Lifton said, ‘Rather than modify the myth in accordance with experience, the will to orthodoxy requires instead that men be modified in order to reaffirm the myth.’³⁸ So, Omar Khan Sharif set about recasting his relatively normal English childhood as degenerate, and his family and friends as deluded sinners. He listened as Omar Bakri gave his one-sided history of the enemies of Islam. He came to see any act of charity by a *kaffir* as a diabolic lure.

Lifton explained that a totalist group makes the demand that ‘character and identity be reshaped, not in accordance with one’s special nature or potentialities, but rather to fit the rigid contours of the doctrinal mold.’³⁹ This *doctrine over person* can lead to the rewriting of personal history to underplay, or even exclude, memories of dissonant experiences or reasoning. Often this consists of simply emphasising or ignoring certain aspects of life before the cult, but some groups employ supposed therapy systems that review the individual’s past, and steadily construct false memories that reinforce the cult doctrine. Cults that believe in reincarnation can easily displace or reconstruct believers’ memories. Believers can imagine links in former lives with the leader, and ‘remember’ lives that are consistent with the mystical imperative of the group.

Followers come to believe the new life histories – the confessions – they have helped to construct. One former cult member told Margaret Singer that he had been a ‘drug addict’ prior to his recruitment. Close questioning revealed that he had accepted this group interpretation of his pre-cult drug experience: three tokes from a marijuana spliff.⁴⁰

Any evidence which conflicts with the belief system is rejected without inspection. In dismissing any criticism, the recruit’s rationalization will be as fabulous as it needs to be in order to justify the leader. The scientific application of Occam’s razor is of no interest to the totalist victim: the simple explanation is by no means the most likely.⁴¹ No matter how far-fetched and labyrinthine the leader’s ideas are, they are true, because they stem from a deeper perception of reality. Where the accumulated weight of scientific evidence disagrees with the leader, then, as far as the follower is concerned, the scientists are plainly wrong.

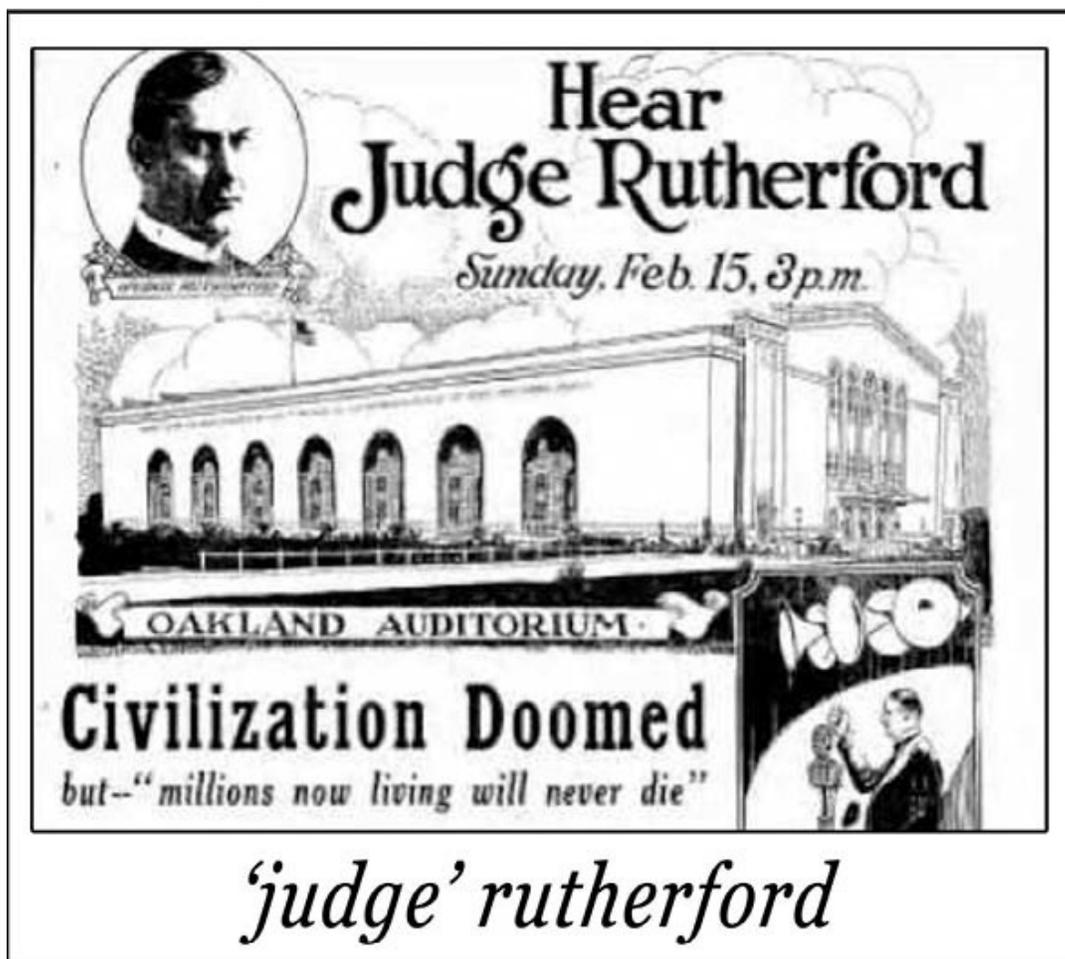
Omar Khan Sharif came to see himself as a sinner who could only be forgiven and allowed the key to paradise through radical action. He became a terrorist, because he was absolutely convinced that it was the only way to save his soul.

These processes transform the individual into a follower, but to create a case-hardened True Believer, the new beliefs must be tempered to make them impervious to change. Otherwise, whenever followers leave the environment controlled by the cult, they may float back into the pre-cult identity. The follower carries the cult everywhere, just as a tortoise carries its shell. And just like a tortoise, the follower will retreat into that shell when attacked.

sacred science

Whether the cult is religious in nature or not, it becomes *sacred* to the follower. The leader is seen as an exemplary, archetypal hero who has overcome immense challenges, and exhibited astounding courage and insight to develop the teaching. Neither the teaching nor the teacher can be questioned, precisely because they are sacred. Through the *sacred science* of the teachings, the world shall be reformed.

Paradoxically, the teachings are also claimed to be rationally and scientifically valid. In Lifton's words, 'Thus the ultimate moral vision becomes an ultimate science; and the man who dares to criticize it, or to harbor even unspoken alternative ideas, becomes not only immoral and irreverent, but also "unscientific."'42 To the follower, the will of the leader is the measure of rationality. Anything that disagrees with it is irrational, preposterous, even.



Totalist leaders associate themselves with accepted authorities, and often claim academic qualifications that they do not actually possess. Such figures also assume titles to promote their importance. The second president of the Watchtower Society adopted the title 'Judge' Rutherford, to elevate himself. The Indian guru, Rajneesh, called himself *Bhagwan* or God (Rajneeshis now call him Osho the Buddha). Sun Myung Moon is called True Father by his followers. The founder of Transcendental Meditation is usually known by the title he immodestly bestowed upon himself: *Maharishi* or 'great teacher.' Maharaji has an even more bloated self-promotion: he is *the* greatest living teacher.

If the rationality of a supposedly scientific doctrine is questioned, then it may be quickly relabelled a *sacred* doctrine, understood only by the leader, so beyond dispute.

Sacred science not only pretends scientific thinking, it often employs supposedly scientific apparatus. A long-term Scientologist told me that he had laughed out loud, when he first read the cult's secret OT 3 materials. But the cult's lie detector – or E-meter – confirmed their accuracy for him. He had never questioned the lie detector, itself. He simply believed it to be a scientific instrument.

Many groups make exaggerated claims for their practices. Followers of Transcendental Meditation were told that they had brought down the Berlin Wall through meditation. The Kabbalah Center claims that the Zohar saved the lives of Jews who studied it under Nazi occupation (suggesting that the millions who died were 'impure'). Such claims give an aura of miraculous, scientific power to the techniques, devices and texts of the group. Of course, that which cannot be tested cannot by definition be considered

scientific, but this does nothing to stem the claims.

Members of the Hizb put aside centuries of scholarly interpretation of the *Qur'an*. All other realities must be shaped to the received word of God, as interpreted by their own leadership. This means that the subtlety of the text is easily lost, especially where it refers to customs that existed only at the time it was written, which may be easily displaced into modern times; for example, the necessity of military resistance to the assault of the Meccans after the flight to Medina. Islamists associate whoever does not belong to their number with those Meccans who tried to kill the Prophet.

The various Islamist groups are also at war with one another. So, Hizb members revile Al-Qaeda, even though both are aberrant sects of the Sunni aspect of Islam. *To see the Hizb as representing conventional Muslim belief is akin to seeing all Christians as members of David Koresh's Branch Davidians at Waco.*

dispensing of existence – the route to genocide

The final and most terrible part of involvement in a totalist cult is the sense of superiority that leads to individuation from the rest of humanity. Once such a belief is accepted, only members of the group have the right to live. Opponents and even uncommitted non-members stand in the way of progress. Fortunately, in most groups this belief is never acted upon; the members simply hold themselves smugly aloof from outsiders, who are considered deluded, stupid or sinful.

A few cults try to destroy anyone who is not 'advanced' enough to join them. Shoko Asahara taught members of Aum Shinrikyo to murder opponents, claiming that it would annul their victims' bad karma. He called this supposed cleansing *poa*. In the words of one follower, 'when your guru orders you to take someone else's life ... you are killing that person exactly at the right time and therefore letting that person have his *poa*.'⁴³ Ed Husain pulled away from the Hizb when one of its members murdered a non-Muslim outside his London college.⁴⁴

Ed Husain evaded the final point of closure, where opposition to the group is so sinful that opponents have no right to exist, and even genocide seems rational to the impassioned follower. The elements of undue influence merge to grant a group the right to destroy opponents. *Loaded language* is used to dismiss critics, who are believed to be demon-possessed, by many groups. Identity Christians, for example, regard Jews as the descendants of Satan, and dismiss African Americans as 'mud people.' The use of the term 'imperialist' by communists or of 'commie' by capitalists exemplifies this thought-stopping use of labels. With these labels, critics rescind the humanity of their opponents. After all, the only good commie (or imperialist, depending on the extremist's point of view) is one that's dead.

One member cheerfully told me that his group – which was seeking charitable status at the time – had to be 'fascistic' and to eradicate opposition, because otherwise the human race would die out. Time was too short to behave in an ethical way, and the law had to be disregarded, so that critics (like me) could be harassed into silence. Otherwise, so he believed, the planet would perish.

Opponents are dehumanized, so Omar Khan Sharif walked up to Mike's Place in Tel Aviv wearing an explosive belt, just a few hours after sympathising with Israeli children maimed by earlier suicide bombers.

Omar Khan Sharif's sheikh, Omar Bakri Muhammad, openly declared that 'all non-Muslims are rebel criminals against God.'⁴⁵ Interviewed after Omar Sharif's death, Bakri asserted, 'We don't make a distinction between civilians and non-civilians, innocents and non-innocents. Only between Muslims and unbelievers. And the life of an unbeliever has no value. It has no sanctity.'⁴⁶ This is utterly incompatible with the respect for other beliefs taught by the Prophet.

Bakri was eventually expelled from Britain, but not long afterwards another member of the Hizb, Dr. Bilal Abdulla, was charged as the prime suspect in the car-bombing of Glasgow Airport.⁴⁷

the terrorist cult

Most cult members turn away from the outside world, but a few turn upon it, and become terrorists, like Omar Khan Sharif and Asif Hanif. The conditions described here can be employed by a cynical manipulator to create fanatics, but they can also arise spontaneously, as we shall see in the next chapter. Cult membership is to some extent a collaboration between the group and the member, because of the natural dynamics of human behaviour and the conformity demanded by normal society.

Omar Khan Sharif’s case seems to prove that through subtle techniques an unwitting victim can be gulled, step by Machiavellian step, into full-blown fanaticism. It is easy to believe that victims are cajoled entirely against their will, but the collaborative aspect of the process is vital to our understanding, if we are to immunise society. As social scientists have demonstrated, the techniques only work because the target is susceptible. The victim is often tricked into participation, but, once invoked, the dynamics of extremism are participatory. Fanaticism has biological roots that are mistakenly nurtured by society, priming the individual to collaborate with the manipulator. Both nature and nurture are inseparably involved.

The time has come to re-examine the criteria for thought reform – systematic manipulation – in the light of normal group dynamics.

(Please note: See endnote 8)

recommended reading:

Singer and Lalich, *Cults in Our Midst*

Ed Husain, *The Islamist*

Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of ‘Brainwashing’ in China.*

4 groupthink

‘For ye were as sheep going astray’ I Peter 2:25

In the final months of 2005, a fearful epidemic swept through schools in Chechnya. More than a hundred people, mostly teenagers, from different parts of the country, were rushed to hospital with seizures, respiratory problems and fainting. Some patients were comatose; others had as many as four fits a day. Parents watched as their children writhed in agony, their complexions flushing from ghostly white to deep crimson, as they screamed in terror. Following the diagnosis of local doctors, a municipal governor went on television to insist that the Russians were poisoning Chechen children.

Toxicological analyses failed to reveal poison and not one of the patients responded to treatment for toxins. A Russian psychiatrist arrived with a coterie of toxicologists, and after examining the patients said they were suffering from ‘conversion disorder’, more commonly known as hysteria.

Chechen clinical psychologist Professor Khapta Akhmedova, who had followed the Russian psychiatrist on his rounds, disagreed with the consensus of her medical colleagues, and diagnosed ‘mass sociogenic illness’ or mass hysteria. She reasoned that it was extremely improbable that so many people so far apart would spontaneously develop identical symptoms, unless the condition was sociogenic – an illness that affects a group.

Mothers stayed at the bedsides of their hospitalised children, determined to protect them. When one started screaming, throughout the hospital the others would follow suit, maintaining the frenzy at fever pitch. To make matters worse, a mullah told one of the girls that she was clairvoyant, and she then scared other sufferers with dire predictions. One was told that she must stab the other girls to save herself from being murdered. Another was told she would commit suicide, and, sure enough, she tried to jump from a balcony, making a second attempt soon afterwards.

Khapta Akhmedova had to calm the panic. She went from ward to ward asking the girls and their mothers to describe the events leading up to their illness. Realising that talking was over-exciting the patients, she asked them to represent their illness in drawings, and then explain to her what they had drawn. The patients began to calm down. As soon as possible, patients were sent home to stop the contaminating effect of the group.

Professor Akhmedova enlisted the aid of her former students, and they spent months working their way through all of the patients. As Khapta Akhmedova was the only psychologist in Chechnya qualified to give cognitive behavioural therapy, she had to finish every case herself, with hours of individual attention. Through this therapy, all of the patients were eventually able to understand the true nature of their sickness. By the end of 2007, every patient had recovered. Khapta Akhmedova is convinced that at the root of the problem is the stress caused by more than a decade of warfare.⁴⁹

Mass hysteria is the most extreme expression of group dynamics. It lies at the root of witch-hunts and the wholesale persecution of minorities.⁵⁰ It is important to note that even without an external authority consciously directing their perceptions and emotions through deliberate influence, entire communities can share the same psychosomatic, but physically very real, afflictions. Simply by belonging to a community that shares the same culture and environment, individuals can be possessed by the same irrational fears. At its worst extreme, such group delusion creates the conditions for genocide.

In an excellent review of the literature, Robert Bartholomew and Simon Wessely concluded: ‘It seems clear that there is no particular predisposition to mass sociogenic illness and it is a behavioural reaction that anyone can show in the right circumstances ... No one is immune from mass sociogenic illness because humans continually construct reality and the perceived danger needs only to be plausible in order to gain acceptance within a particular group and generate anxiety.’⁵¹

belonging and the susceptibility to undue influence

We are not by nature lone creatures. From the moment of birth, we are shaped by our society's traditions and conventions, from the language we speak to our beliefs and biases. To be outside society is to be a loner, an outcast or at best an eccentric. We are certainly at our happiest when we feel that we belong to a group. We are sociable creatures and thrive on interaction, cooperation and competition.

Exploitative persuasion or undue influence draws upon our sociable and cooperative nature. It is vital to understand both the inborn and the social drives that prepare us for collaboration with the exploiters, if we are to undo manipulation and proof society against it.



gustave le bon

Exploitation takes the raw material of the normal human psyche and amplifies the existing need to

belong. Founding father of social science Gustave Le Bon said: ‘By the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian...’⁵² Cult leaders reduce individuality to crowd membership, as Hitler proved. Many studies show that this is a natural process.

the robbers cave experiment

William Golding’s chilling *Lord of the Flies* was published in 1954. That same year, 22 Oklahoma City schoolboys holidayed in the idyllic 200-acre Robbers Cave State Park.⁵³ Golding surmised that without adult supervision, schoolboys would revert to vicious tribalism. Pioneering psychologist Muzafer Sherif always held the boys back from causing bodily harm, but there are fascinating parallels between Golding’s story and this seminal experiment.

The Oklahoma City boys all came from similar backgrounds – they were Protestant and middle-class, aged between 10 and 12 years. None were considered problem children. None came from broken homes. They had a similar educational level. They were separated into two groups before they met, so there was a balance according to height, weight, skill at sports, popularity, musical and performance skills, cooking and swimming. None of the boys had met before the experiment.

During the first week, the groups were kept apart – not even knowing of the other group’s existence. Observers acting as camp guides watched as the separate groups formed and adjusted hierarchies. All the boys wanted to seem ‘tough’, so minor injuries were not reported until well after the event. Both groups chose a name and made a flag, labelling T-shirts and caps of their own accord. They called themselves the Eagles and the Rattlers.

On the evening of the seventh day, the Rattlers were allowed to overhear the Eagles playing baseball. One boy from the Rattlers suggested they ‘run off’ these strangers. The atmosphere changed: boys who had been picked on were now given sympathetic treatment – a boy who cried was comforted rather than teased; a non-swimmer was encouraged and taught how to swim. Belief in an enemy group made the boys bond.

A series of contests was proposed, including tent-pitching. Earlier disinterest towards this activity now transformed into enthusiastic practice. By offering goals that required team effort, the experimenters had seen their hypothesis of group formation confirmed.

The groups laid claim to territories – such as the swimming holes and the baseball diamond – and questioned the right of the other group to use these facilities. They were eager for combat.

A day was set aside before the groups met. As expected, each demonized the opposing team. Jeers and challenges began as soon as the boys caught sight of each other. Through subtle adjustments, the observers managed to keep the scores neck and neck throughout the contests. Hostility between the groups grew with each new activity. One Rattler called the adversaries ‘communists’, to the hearty agreement of his friends.

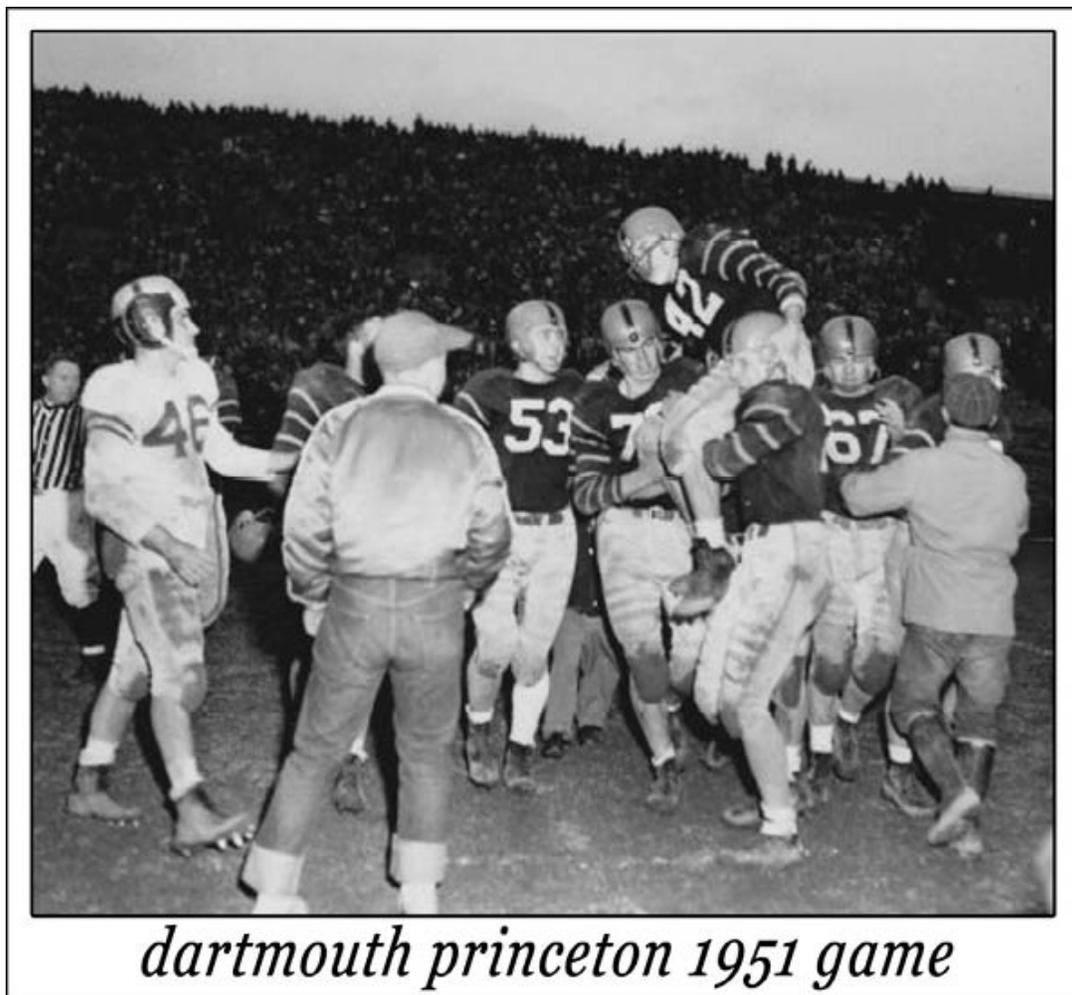
The Eagles thought their luck depended on their prayers and their sense of fair play. Although they jibed as much as the Rattlers, they scorned their unsportsmanlike opponents. This did not stop them from tearing down and burning the enemy flag, after the Rattlers had left the baseball pitch. The next morning, the Rattlers retaliated by grabbing the Eagles’ flag, and the ensuing fist fight had to be broken up by the adult observers.

The Rattlers raided the Eagles’ cabin at night, overturning beds and challenging the Eagles to battle. The conflict raged through the second week. Then, the experimenters set up mutual activities, to see if this would quiet the resentment. It did not, until an external threat was proposed: the boys were told that vandals had blocked the camp’s water supply. They worked together to repair the water tank. They helped

each other to start a stalled truck. They divided tasks at a picnic. These activities continued, until group lines blurred, and, at the end of the third week, the boys voted to travel back home together, on a shared bus, with their new friends.⁵⁴

The groups had formed spontaneously and turned outsiders into enemies without discussion. Simply putting the groups together did nothing to relieve tensions, but fusing them in a common cause did the trick. Muzafer Sherif revealed the simple dynamics of group involvement. These dynamics operate in groups of every type, from kindergartens to gangs and terrorist groups. A similar approach ended the dreadful gang wars in British cities towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the birth of the youth club movement.⁵⁵ It has implications for the runaway growth of US gangs – like the Crips and Bloods or the Hells’ Angels – which now have tens of thousands of members working as organized crime rings, because the lessons of Robbers Cave have been largely ignored.

The Oklahoma City boys clearly showed a normal bias known as ‘cognitive distortion’. *Loyalty often slants perception*. For instance, a 1951 football game between Dartmouth and Princeton was called the ‘roughest and dirtiest in the history of either school.’ It led to fist fights and broken bones. When students from the two colleges were shown footage of the game, each group sided strongly with their own team. Princeton students counted twice as many fouls by Dartmouth players as were seen by Dartmouth students.⁵⁶ More recently, a study of news reports in the US and Britain in the days leading up to the Iraq War shows a startling difference in orientation. This aligned with massive protest in Britain and a fervour for war in the US. Many Americans still believe that Iraq was implicated in 9/11, because of false media reports.⁵⁷ *We all distort evidence to suit our bias.*



the Stanford Prison Experiment

Membership in a group can transform highly intelligent people overnight; even when all concerned

know they are part of an experiment. During the summer recess of 1971, Professor Philip Zimbardo staged the Stanford prison experiment. Fifteen student volunteers became jailors and nine prisoners, serving in a specifically built facility set up in the basement of Stanford University. Not one of the students asked to be a jailor, but, despite the flowering of peace and love in California, all took readily to the task.⁵⁸ Participants were carefully screened to be ‘normal, healthy and average on all the psychological dimensions we measured ... generally representative of middle-class, educated youth.’⁵⁹

The students slipped straight into their assigned roles. Prisoners were given numbers. They had to ask permission to smoke. Their jibes were punished. The guards on night-shift woke the prisoners every two hours for a roll-call. Prisoners had to answer with their numbers.

The guards – normal college students, every one of them initially reluctant to act as guards – enforced their rule physically, pushing and even striking their charges.⁶⁰ The guards force-fed a prisoner who refused to eat, and met rebellion by stripping the prisoners naked and depriving them of mattresses.⁶¹ They used a fire extinguisher to spray dissenters, and ordered the prisoners to perform humiliating sexual pantomimes during roll call. The prisoners soon gave up their protest, and their initial good humour faded into sullen subservience.⁶²

The first prisoner was released within 36 hours. As an anti-Vietnam protester, he had taken part in aggressive demonstrations, so his rapid psychological collapse confounded the experimenters.⁶³ A second young man cracked on day four.⁶⁴

The whole experiment was cut short after just a week, because the psychological changes in both guards and prisoners had escalated to alarming proportions. Even Professor Zimbardo had become so engrossed in the experiment that he had to be argued into ending it.

Milgram’s obedience study

Philip Zimbardo was building on the work of his colleague, Stanley Milgram, whose compliance study at Yale had undermined conventional beliefs about our capacity for independent decision. Before his study, psychiatrists confidently assured Stanley Milgram that very few people – averaging 1.2% – would readily give powerful electric shocks to a complete stranger. According to these experts, normal people were incapable of this subservience. In fact, *everyone* in Milgram’s studies pressed the lever, believing they were giving a stranger an electric shock as part of a ‘learning experiment’. Sixty-five percent went on to administer what was clearly labelled a dangerous dose of 450 volts when a wrong answer was given. The experts’ estimate was turned on its head: only a tiny percentage of people did *not* comply.

No threats were made to Milgram’s subjects. A man in a white coat simply assured them that they would cause no ‘permanent tissue damage’ to the victim and said he accepted responsibility for the consequences.⁶⁵ Film of the experiment shows that many subjects agonised before pushing the button, but push the button they surely did.⁶⁶



the milgram experiment

As Milgram said, ‘The behavior revealed in the experiments reported here is normal human behavior but revealed under conditions that show with particular clarity the danger to human survival inherent in our make-up. And what is it that we have seen? Not aggression, for there is no anger, vindictiveness or hatred in those who shocked the victim ... Something far more dangerous is revealed: the capacity for man to abandon his humanity ... as he merges his unique personality into larger institutional structures ... It is ironic that the virtues of loyalty, discipline and self-sacrifice that we value so highly in the individual are the very properties that create destructive organizational engines of war and bind men to malevolent systems of authority.’⁶⁷

cognitive dissonance

In the 1950s, Leon Festinger theorised that clear disproof often strengthens rather than weakens entrenched beliefs. Disagreement with a belief causes discomfort – or dissonance – which is all too often resolved by rejecting the new evidence rather than changing the belief. Left to reflect, individuals may accept disproof, but a group often bends information to harden existing opinions.

To test cognitive dissonance, Festinger and his collaborators soon found – and infiltrated – a group ready-made for their research. Marian Keech had dabbled in New Age practices from Theosophy to the I Am movement for years. Her Scientology counsellor had even moved in with her. One morning, in 1954, she woke at dawn and felt impelled to write, but the writing that appeared on the page was not her own. She recognised her departed father’s hand. She channelled enthusiastically, but was frustrated that the messages were garbled. Then one day, an impatient spirit shoved her father aside.

Sananda claimed to hail from the planetary system of Cerus and Clarion. In his last incarnation on earth, he revealed, he had been known as Jesus. Over the following months, Sananda urged Keech to gather her friends, to protect them from an impending cataclysm that would cleave the American continent in two and submerge much of the world beneath flood waters.⁶⁸

Marian Keech’s group, including Festinger’s participant observers, waited for Sananda to come and

rescue them from the doomed earth. When his mothership failed to appear, the group acted in line with Festinger's prediction. Rather than accepting the clear evidence that Sananda was a figment of Keech's over-active imagination, they were convinced that their activities in the run up to the aborted rescue attempt had averted disaster. As Festinger had predicted, members who were not in direct contact with the core group fell away.⁶⁹

The leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses have repeatedly updated their prophecies for the end of the world, as one date after another has passed without catastrophe, the next expected Armageddon coming sometime in 2033⁷⁰. It is surprising that perhaps eight million people belong to this sect, given the many failures, but *cognitive dissonance usually causes fervent believers to believe even more fervently when shown disproving evidence.*

Cognitive dissonance is one of the most thoroughly researched theories in psychology.⁷¹ It is deeply written into human behaviour. For instance, two groups of female students were put through either a frivolous or an embarrassing initiation to join what turned out to be a rather boring sorority group. Those who had undergone the harsher, embarrassing ritual had a higher opinion of the group. The harder it is to achieve a benefit, the more the benefit is appreciated, so it seems. When children are ordered not to play with an attractive toy, those who are threatened with a harsher punishment will think the toy more valuable.⁷²

social proof and group decisions

Agreement with a group is called *social proof*. It is supported by the simple and frequently replicated Asch experiment. A subject, who is unaware that the rest of the group are collaborating with the experimenter, joins a panel where the participants are asked to determine which two lines on a board are the same in length. Sometimes, the collaborators all agree on a false comparison. Although the line differences are obvious, some subjects change their opinion to agree with the group. Even those who stick to their disagreement will admit to self-doubt, when interviewed later.⁷³ Because this compliance is automatic and unthinking, it is hard to overcome.⁷⁴

Similarly, a long-term study of smokers underlines the group nature of many decisions – even those which seem personal and individual. Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler reviewed detailed records of over five thousand smokers and non-smokers between 1971 and 2003, focusing on their networks of relatives, neighbours, work colleagues, friends and even friends of friends. They found that stopping smoking was rarely an individual decision. Smokers tend to quit in groups, and those who do not stop find themselves marginalized. Christakis and Fowler found a similar effect in a study of obesity.⁷⁵ Presumably, any significant belief or behaviour will follow a similar trend. Birds of a feather will, indeed, flock together.

the ingredients of groupthink



*invaders taken prisoner
at the bay of pigs*

Irving Janis applied the term ‘groupthink’ to behaviour that leads to catastrophes such as the Bay of Pigs fiasco.⁷⁶ In 1961, ninety days after John F Kennedy became President, a force of 1400 landed on Cuba to seize power back from Fidel Castro’s communist regime. They faced an army of 200,000 with the single most popular leader in the world (according to a US Intelligence survey). This half-baked attack risked intervention by the Soviet Union and a potential Third World War, yet JFK’s close advisors later told Janis they had kept alarming details from the President, to avoid upsetting him. They seemed to believe that Kennedy’s luck alone could carry them through this crazy escapade.

Of groupthink, Janis said, ‘Each individual in the group feels himself to be under an injunction to avoid making penetrating criticisms that might bring on a clash with fellow members and destroy the unity of the group ... Each member avoids interfering with an emerging consensus by assuring himself that the opposing arguments he had in mind must be erroneous or that his misgivings are too unimportant to be worth mentioning.’⁷⁷

Imitation is an important learning skill, but unthinking imitation turns to *copycat behaviour*. David Phillips showed that the suicide rate increases after sensational reports of a suicide. Both the World Health Organization and the American Psychiatric Association have supported his findings. There are many recorded examples. For instance, after the 9/11 attacks, there was a spate of plane crashes into buildings around the world.⁷⁸

Dislocation or transition paves the way for thought reform. As we have seen, psychiatrist Marc Sageman’s study of 165 Al-Qaeda members showed that 78% were emigrants or living away from home when they became terrorists.⁷⁹ The process of dislocation predisposes people to changes in belief and lifestyle. Rigid habits melt into a flux, just as a caterpillar melts and reforms in the cocoon.⁸⁰ Even in the second generation, immigrants can feel that they do not belong, so they search restlessly for an identity. Adolescents are most vulnerable, because they are in a between-world of rapid change, heightened sensitivity and rejection of childhood values. This is exaggerated in a complex, multicultural society, because traditional paths to adulthood are either no longer followed or no longer valued.

Like Omar Sharif’s father, many immigrant Muslims become less involved with their religion, and their

children's fanaticism is a rebellion rather than the continuation of an invasive foreign culture, as is often believed. Some adolescents fail to find a niche. They feel adrift, desperately seeking a deeper meaning than the greedy grab-it-now consumerism that seems to dominate our society.

The need to belong leads us to step into the manipulator's lair. That first step is often freely made, because the true intention of the manipulator is carefully concealed. No one joins a cult begging to be exploited and demeaned. They join because they want to belong, because they have been flattered – often 'love-bombed' – and because inflated promises have been made, whether of earthly success or heavenly illumination.

milieu control – peer group pressure – control of the social environment

Robert Jay Lifton defined milieu control as 'the control of human communication', saying that the totalist individual seeks to control not only communication with the outside world but 'over what we may speak of as his communication with himself.'⁸¹ This is the information control aspect of Steven Hassan's BITE model taken to its last extreme.

Removed from their daily environment, the boys in the Robbers Cave study immediately conformed their behaviour to the group. The same is true for the students in the Stanford Prison Experiment. No indoctrination or additional pressure was needed. Students slipped into the uniforms of either guard or prisoner and instantly fitted the role they had been assigned.

As Asch's *social proof* experiment shows, individual certainty may quietly crumple in a group of strangers. Omar Khan Sharif was caught up entirely with al-Mujahiroun. His outside interests faded, including his university study, employment and, eventually, even his own small children, whom he abandoned to become a 'martyr'.

the BITE model

Control of behaviour, information, thought and emotion can also occur informally. In the environment provided, the Stanford students adopted what they believed to be the behaviour of guards and prisoners.

A study of news reports in the US and Britain in the lead up to the Iraq War shows a startling difference in orientation. This aligned with massive protest in Britain and a fervour for war in the US. Many Americans still believe that Iraq was implicated in 9/11, because of false media reports.⁸²

In an extremist group, time can be completely controlled, so controlling behaviour, but even slight restrictions on time can have a significant effect. Three groups of students were told they were either running late, just on time or had time to spare before setting off to give a talk. On the way, they passed a man slumped in a doorway who moaned and coughed twice. The majority of those with time to spare spoke to the man, almost half of those who were just on time spoke to him, but only a tenth of those who were late stopped. Several of this last group actually stepped over the man to get to their talk. The participants were Christian seminary students, and the talk they were rushing to give was about the Good Samaritan.⁸³

authority

Stanley Milgram showed how easily *authority* can be projected onto a man in a white coat. Most of his subjects simply followed orders and accepted that the responsibility for their actions belonged to the experimenter. The War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremburg rejected this notion – *befehl ist befehl*, or 'orders are orders'. According to this precedent in international law, even if we commit an immoral act in support

of our nation's law, we are still fully responsible for that act.



hermann goering and fellow nazis on trial at nuremberg

Reflecting on his study, Milgram said, 'Even Eichmann was sickened when he toured the concentration camps, but he had only to sit at a desk and shuffle papers. At the same time the man in the camp who actually dropped Cyclon-b into the gas chambers was able to justify *his* behaviour on the ground that he was only following orders from above ... the person who assumes responsibility has evaporated. Perhaps this is the most common characteristic of socially organized evil in modern society.'⁸⁴

The essential aspect of Robert Jay Lifton's *loaded language* is that it stops thought and prevents discussion through 'thought terminating clichés.'⁸⁵ *Loaded language*, indeed, any esoteric language, conveys authority, because we are not taught to be sceptical of the special knowledge it implies, and, typically, authority-figures are impatient with questions. Language is shaken free of its definition to imply unspoken connotations. There is justification for the use of precise technical terms, but mere pretence of science is usually buttressed by elaborate language.

Subjects in the Milgram experiment volunteered for a 'study' where each became a 'teacher' giving electric shocks to a 'learner' under the supervision of an 'experimenter'. The language alone prepared them for obedience in the name of science.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell suggested that language could be restructured to prevent the possibility of negative feeling toward the state, because words for such *thoughtcrime* would no longer exist.⁸⁶

Abstract notions such as 'freedom' are loaded with emotion in our society and it becomes almost blasphemous to question their definition. Hitler fired up his followers by packaging complex historical themes into simple expressions, such as 'blood and soil', circumventing the possibility of discussion.

Robert Jay Lifton readily admitted that loaded language 'exists to some degree within any cultural or organizational group, and all systems of belief depend upon it. It is part of an expression of unity and exclusiveness,' but added, 'The loading is much more extreme in ideological totalism, however, since the jargon expresses the claimed certitudes of the sacred science.'⁸⁷ Even so, thought-terminating clichés are

part and parcel of contemporary life, especially in war. Allies are killed by 'friendly fire' and innocent victims become 'collateral damage.' In this way, they are deprived of humanity and transformed into objects that can be turned into statistics without emotional concern.

In both Stanley Milgram's study and the Stanford Prison Experiment, adults gave up their power without reservation. Margaret Singer rightly comments on the deliberate removal of power, but the first part of that process is often an *abdication* of power, because of habitual submission to authority, or, in some cases, a habitual opposition to authority. In this last case, people join a group because of that opposition, without realizing that they are now actually submitting to a new authority.

Only a sociopath is without shame. The rest of us feel relief when we admit our mistakes. Religions and psychotherapies alike encourage *confession*. In stressful situations, or under the influence of alcohol, some people make spontaneous admissions to virtual strangers. The bad cop/good cop method of interrogation often leads to spontaneous confession, too. It is not necessary to encourage some people to 'confess;' I have often heard intimate details from strangers while travelling on a plane or train. And, in spite of 'client confidentiality,' many lawyers, doctors and therapists tell their clients' stories, believing that they have not violated confidentiality, simply because they do not name the client. The ground is well prepared for an exploiter to abuse the trust placed in confession.

Lifton's *demand for purity* is inbuilt. We feel guilty when we break the rules of our particular society. Guilt manipulation is easy, once you know those societal rules, and once invoked it is self-enforced. According to Lifton, 'Each person is made vulnerable through his profound inner sensitivities to his own limitations and to his unfulfilled potential...' ⁸⁸ That sensitivity exists as an aspect of normal enculturation. Everyone is raised within a moral framework that will in some ways be different to other groups. Prohibitions against criminal and immoral acts are part of the fabric of any society. Some words are considered rude or profane, and their use can induce guilt in the speaker or, conversely, an urge to correct the speaker. Many people have an involuntary response to 'swear' words, which can be measured in a brain scan. There are conventions for both behaviour and appearance.

The boys at Robbers Cave kept minor injuries to themselves, because their upbringing made them feel that it was cowardly to complain. Kennedy's advisers kept reservations to themselves, as if to maintain the unsullied purity of the Camelot ethos.

The demand for purity builds upon simple conditioned conventions, but, as Lifton says, puts them beyond reach. If these conventions were not taken so seriously, the demand for purity would have nowhere to lodge.

Through centuries of religious intolerance in Europe, whole nations shared the same inflexible culture. Dissent in even a small detail led to torture and even execution as a heretic or a witch. Nations waged war over doctrinal differences. In these days of pluralism, we tolerate a broad range of practices, but certain values distinguish contemporary western culture. *There is an old adage that in the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king, but as H.G.Wells pointed out, in the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is more likely a despised outcast.* ⁸⁹

The demand for purity extends to the *mystical imperative*. Only through purification will the individual become worthy of the profound insights that the group promises. Until that insight dawns, the follower must obey the higher authority of the group and persuade others to accept that authority. Whether we grant authority beyond our own understanding to supernatural forces, or to the superior information of scientists, or to political leaders, is not the issue. When they rely on higher authority, people sometimes do not even understand what they preach, but the sense of community can induce a wonderful emotional experience for all concerned.

Under the mystical imperative, a goal is set to achieve utopia in this world or the next, or to achieve a harmony with the universe through 'enlightenment', or simply to resolve the pain or distress of everyday life.

Participants in the Robbers Cave, Yale and Stanford experiments all showed a readiness to accept an imperative set by a higher authority. Membership of a group inclines people towards groupthink. Once a leader has gained our support, we will follow him to hell and back. So it was that the overthrow of Castro became a mystical imperative for the Kennedy administration, which cast reason to the winds to pursue this impossible goal.

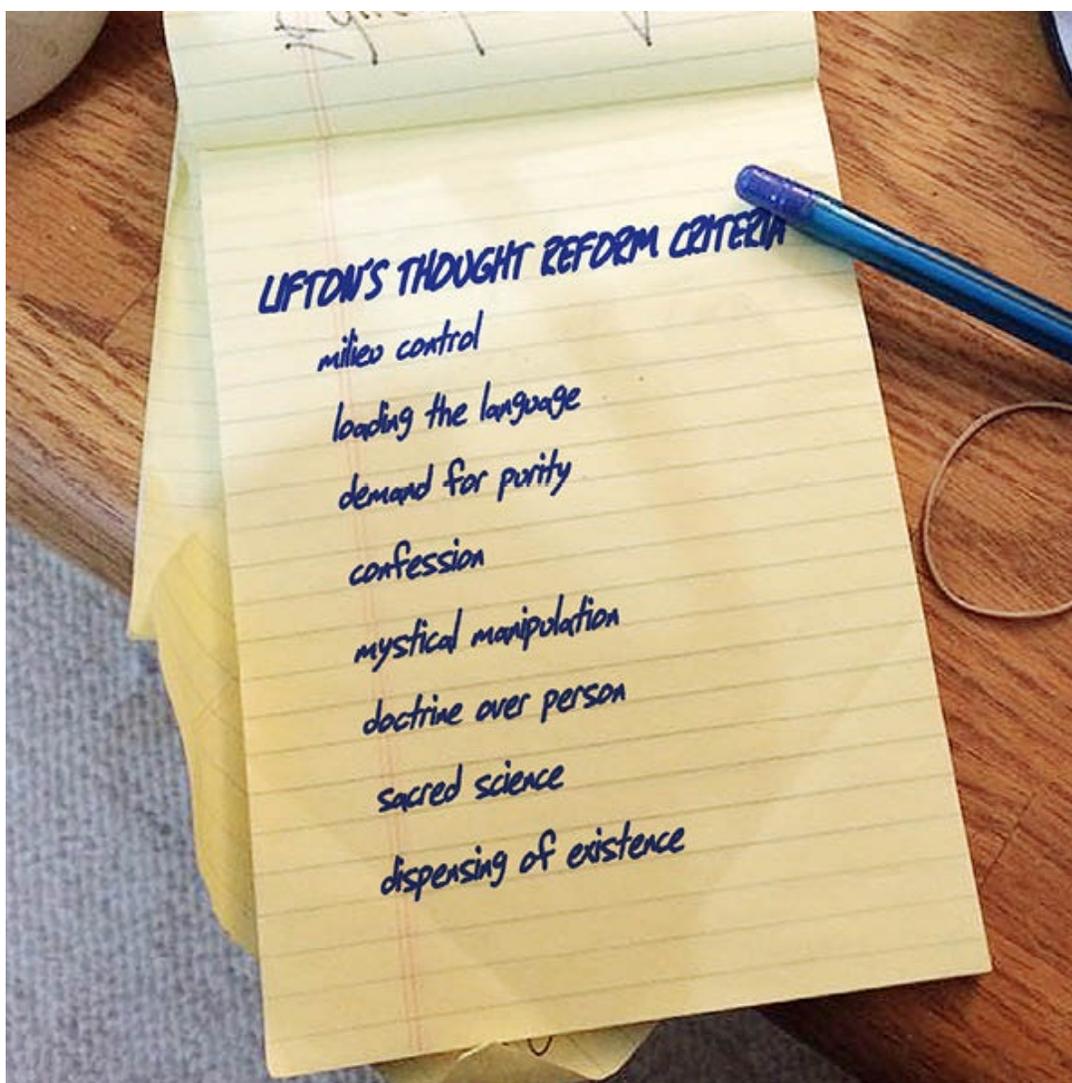
Lifton defines the exaggeration of normal loyalty in his *psychology of the pawn*: 'Feeling himself unable to escape from forces more powerful than himself, he subordinates everything to adapting himself to them ... his psychological energies merge with the tide rather than turn painfully against himself. This requires that he participate actively in the manipulation of others ... he has been deprived of the opportunity to exercise his capacities for self-expression and independent action.'⁹⁰

This pawn psychology is found in everyday religious and patriotic fervour. The qualities of faith and trust necessary for submission to a mystical imperative already exist in the majority of people.

The capacity to reframe experienced events to suit the ideas of experts – doctors, lawyers, scientists or religious leaders – can be very alarming. Many of Milgram's participants left their experience and their compassion at the door, deferring to the 'expert' experimenter. The students turned jailers at Stanford easily swept aside their hippie ethos of peace and love to brutalise their prisoners; they needed no outsider to manipulate their guilt. It became a matter of conscience to conform to their *own* internal expectations. As one guard put it: 'My enjoyment in harassing and punishing prisoners was quite unnatural for me because I tend to think of myself as being sympathetic to the injured, especially animals.'⁹¹

In his analysis of the Nazi doctors, who willingly murdered a third of a million disabled patients, Lifton pointed to the 'doubling' of identity, where an otherwise caring individual will create a separate identity to commit atrocious acts.⁹²

As the theory of cognitive dissonance shows, self-justification prompts people to shape the world to their opinions. Confirming evidence is promoted, and contradicting evidence dismissed; even if fact has to be altered and memories changed to maintain certainty.



The uncomfortable feeling of cognitive dissonance can be calmed by conforming behaviour to belief. Past behaviour becomes too important to renounce. There is a feeling of inertia in convinced belief that makes it very hard to alter a committed course. Commitment is consistent with the resources already invested and the loss of face in changing the belief. The belief is specific enough for real world events to stand in contradiction to it – Lifton's *ideology over experience*.

When a believer is then confronted with disconfirming evidence, a lone individual will often change the belief, but a group member will fall back upon the group to dismiss even the hardest of evidence. So, against reason, cultic and irrational beliefs are often strengthened by contradicting evidence⁹³ (unless the contradiction comes from the leader's own pronouncements, when it *sometimes* undermines faith in the leader). When the mothership did not come, Sananda's handful of earthly followers convinced themselves that they had somehow saved humanity without even knowing it.

Doctrine over person reduces outsiders to bloodless stereotypes. The Stanford guards numbered the prisoners, taking away their individuality along with their names. The first inclination of the Rattlers was to run the Eagles off, rather than befriend them. Most of Milgram's participants stripped the subject of his humanity, because of the importance of an 'experiment'.

The record is altered to fit the doctrine – the *experience* to fit the *ideology*. Under the Stalinist regime, heroes of the revolution who had fallen foul of the dictator were removed from history. Librarians systematically rubbed their faces out of publications.⁹⁴ Anyone who mentioned their achievements was scorned, so they were lost to public memory: the doctrine of communism was more important than the truth. Even the great composer Dmitri Shostakovich was publicly humiliated for failing to write music in the proper socialist form. He might easily have lost his life to Stalin's caprice.⁹⁵

Lifton, speaking of the Chinese Communist thought reform programme, said: ‘The totalist milieu [peer group] maintains an aura of sacredness around its basic dogma, holding it out as an ultimate moral vision for the ordering of existence. This sacredness is evident in the prohibition ... against the questioning of basic assumptions, and in the reverence which is demanded for the originators of the Word, the present bearers of the Word, and the Word itself. While thus transcending ordinary concerns of logic, however, the milieu at the same time makes an exaggerated claim of airtight logic, of absolute “scientific” precision.’⁹⁶

With *sacred science* comes a refusal even to consider evidence, because of an existing unshakeable, dogmatic belief. Opinions are held on to as tenaciously as addictions.⁹⁷ Doctrine is beyond question, because it is seen as either holy writ or scientific fact – or both. Even in the ‘normal’ world, people often accept information without proof, because it comes from a religious authority or a qualified scientist.

The contemporary misinterpretation of *jihad* – literally ‘struggle’ – fuels terrorist fanaticism. Religious belief has all too often led to inhumanity; similarly, claims to scientific authority can also derail good sense. The scientific method is invaluable, precisely because it demands scepticism rather than slavish devotion, even towards those with the best scientific credentials. Yet even scientists can base opinions on accepted dogma, or ideology, rather than on the evaluation of evidence, or experience.

As recently as the 1980s, medical scientists the world over dismissed Dr Barry Marshall’s claim that stomach ulcers are caused by a bacterium, because ‘scientific’ textbooks said that bacteria *cannot* live in the stomach. It took a decade before his empirical proofs were accepted and doctors began to treat ulcers – very successfully – according to those proofs, putting aside the unquestionable assumptions of a sacred science. In fact, some ninety-five per cent of stomach ulcers are caused by *helicobacter pylori*.

There is an alarming tendency for even the mostly highly intelligent people to hold tight to the conventions they learned in their earlier years. When Harvey reasoned that the blood flows through the body, pumped by the heart, in the 17th century, dismissing the first century physician Galen’s notion that the blood flows in tides, the expression ‘it is better to err with Galen than to be right with Harvey’ came into use. We are creatures of habit, even the brightest of us, so it often takes a generation for a dearly held belief to move. This change of deeply held belief is called ‘paradigm shift.’⁹⁸

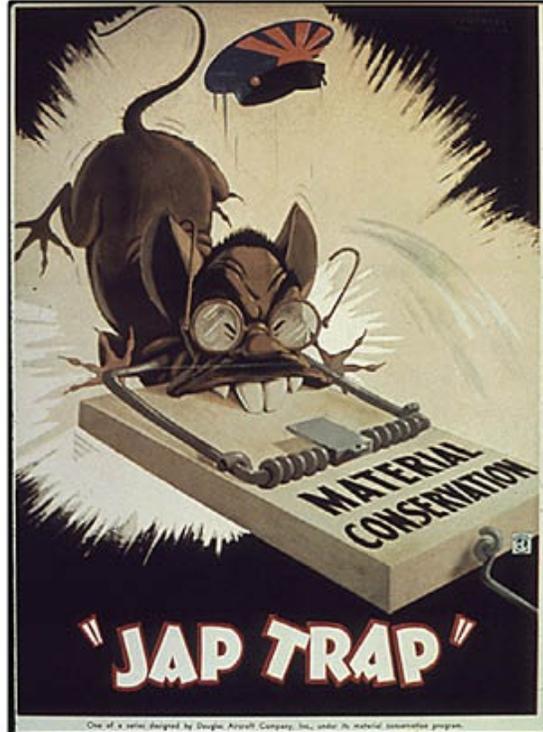
The Bay of Pigs exemplifies the attitude of inviolable doctrine that characterises sacred science. The invasion was beyond question, because it rested upon a moral assumption – President Woodrow Wilson’s oft-repeated doctrine that the US must make the world ‘safe for democracy’. The means could not be questioned, because the cause was holy.

Once predisposition to manipulation is added, Lifton’s model becomes a flow chart of the interaction between thought reformer and subject. At the bleak final stage of this dynamic process comes contempt for all outsiders, and the willingness to dispense with their existence, which at its most extreme becomes genocidal. A group of fanatics, such as the Japanese cult group Aum Shinrikyo or the Nazis, transmutes its hatred into mass murder. However, there is no need for an elaborate thought reform programme to convince soldiers to kill the enemy in times of war.

the dispensing of existence through propaganda



*interwar french
anti-semitic propaganda*



us wwII propaganda poster

Whole societies have been driven into the *dispensing of existence*, through their contempt for other cultures and their belief in their own racial superiority. Perpetrators say that their victims are *less than human*. A Japanese officer who participated in the massacre of more than a quarter of a million Chinese at Nanking said it was a mistake to think of the Chinese as people, because they were actually 'swine'. Allied commander General Sir Thomas Blamey told his troops that they need have no compunction in killing the Japanese because they were 'subhuman beasts ... a cross between humans and apes.'⁹⁹

It is possible to analyse the Nazi Holocaust, the Stalinist purges, or any of the many historically accessible mass murders through the lens of Lifton's thought reform criteria, but it is important to understand that even supposedly civilised people have supported mass murder, without either external pressure or any programme of undue influence.



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Hitler's determination to sterilise or murder his way to a 'pure' society was common to the intellectuals of his generation. In a 1908 letter, D.H. Lawrence said, 'If I had my way, I'd build a lethal chamber as big as the Crystal Palace with a military band playing softly and a cinematograph working brightly. Then I'd go out in the back streets and the main streets and bring them in – all the sick, the halt and the maimed. I would lead them gently and they would smile me a weary thanks, and the band would softly bubble out the Hallelujah Chorus.'

Playwright George Bernard Shaw believed that the socialist society of which he dreamed could only be achieved through active eugenics: 'Extermination must be put on a scientific basis if it is to be done humanely as well as thoroughly. If we want a certain type of civilization and culture, we must exterminate the people who don't fit in.'¹⁰⁰

Such a chilling thought: 'we must exterminate the people who don't fit in.' But who is wise enough to make such a determination, and do we not lose our humanity, just as Shaw did his, if we are arrogant enough to judge whole classes of our fellow humans 'unfit' and 'exterminate' them?

Hitler was so devastatingly successful because he reached into the depths of the *normal* human psyche. He realised that society does not simply contain cults, but is almost always a cult of itself. In the midst of crisis, his dehumanizing message appealed to both high and low. Throughout Germany, medical doctors carried out a programme of extermination on almost a third of a million disabled citizens. More than 70,000 were murdered before Hitler launched his military campaign, and long before the death camps. Forty-five percent of German medical doctors – some 38,000 – joined the Nazi Party. They were more highly represented in the party and in the SS than any other profession.¹⁰¹ However, this programme was based upon mass sterilisation that had already occurred in California, with the approval of Christian and Jewish religious leaders.¹⁰²

milieu control, peer group pressure, and control of the social environment

Robert Jay Lifton defined milieu control as ‘the control of human communication’, saying that the totalist seeks to control not only communication with the outside world, but ‘over what we may speak of as his communication with himself.’¹⁰³ This is the information control aspect of Steven Hassan’s BITE model taken to its last extreme.

Control of behaviour, information, thought and emotion can also occur informally. Removed from their daily environment, the boys in the Robbers Cave study immediately conformed their behaviour to the group. The same is true for the students in the Stanford Prison Experiment, who, in the provided environment, adopted what they believed to be the behaviour of guards and prisoners. No indoctrination or additional pressure was needed. Students slipped into the uniforms of either guard or prisoner and instantly fitted the role they had been assigned.

As Asch’s social proof experiment shows, individual certainty may quietly crumple in a group of strangers. Omar Khan Sharif was caught up entirely with al-Mujahiroun. His outside interests faded, including his university study, employment and, eventually, even his own small children, whom he abandoned to become a ‘martyr’.

The methods of undue influence activate reciprocal behaviours that lie dormant in almost everyone. Perhaps in *everyone*, even thee and me. Lifton’s model helps us to understand how morality and reasoning may be swamped by dark emotional forces. The manipulator exploits the biological group instinct and an obedience to authority, conditioned since infancy. The individual feels a sense of community and an elevated emotional state, which in a cult group is heightened through a mix of sleep deprivation, inadequate nutrition, persistent emotional arousal and hypnotic fixation.

Individual responsibility is subsumed into a ravaging group psyche under the direction of a manipulative totalist, but it is because of an existing susceptibility. Fortunately, education can greatly reduce that susceptibility.

text as guru

A study of extreme groups can leave the impression that they transform innocent, vulnerable people into predators. Some individuals need no cult; an ideology suffices. Timothy McVeigh, who killed 168 people in the Oklahoma City bombing, is a graphic example. Although McVeigh shared the views of racist, right-wing groups and stayed in touch with them, he remained an outsider. He was so strongly motivated by a single book that he sold boxfuls, for cost-price, at gun fairs. But the book did not pretend to be a scripture or even a treatise. It was a novel, *The Turner Diaries*, based on the bizarre idea that the US is secretly run by Zionists. Cultic convictions have no need for a charismatic leader. A text can fill the place of a guru.¹⁰⁴ This seems to be especially the case with Al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda means simply ‘the base’. It was only after 9/11 that the name came to represent four loosely connected groups, which did not actually share central command. The world’s media created the image of an enormous international conspiracy.¹⁰⁵ In fact, the four groups within Al-Qaeda had less than five hundred members when the World Trade Center was so viciously attacked. The massive military response, in Afghanistan and Iraq, created a backlash of support for Al-Qaeda that spread its extreme beliefs to a multitude, and is directly responsible for the rise of ISIS or Daesh.

Even now, Al-Qaeda remains a loose association of collaborating groups rather than a monolithic organization. It draws power from this structure. Like the Internet, it is a scale-free network¹⁰⁶ – it has no centre and can continue to exist as long as any of its separate cells (or *hubs*, in net terminology) survives. It also recruits without direct contact: *charisma is in the mind of the beholder*. In Al-Qaeda, as in any

other cult group, few followers have any significant contact with the leader, who can thus fulfil a fantasy of the perfect hero.

Young, alienated Muslims are drawn by the idea of sacrificing their lives for their religion. They are easily fired up by the preaching of fanatics, and abandon reason for the usual cultish polarised, black-and-white view of the world. They see their critics either as naive or evil. The pre-conditions for cult recruitment are rife in contemporary society, so much so that many people seek out a group to join. Almost all Al-Qaeda members found the group, rather than being actively recruited. In fact, Al-Qaeda turns away most of those who wish to join – including Omar Khan Sharif. *A cult only has to amplify the normal conformist processes of society.* These processes in turn depend upon our inborn social nature.

As the saying goes, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter: at the end of the 18th century, the British saw the American revolutionaries as rebels who refused to pay their share for the war that had protected them against the French, and then joined forces with that enemy. The revolutionaries insisted that they should be represented in the government of their own affairs. Young Islamists see themselves in a similar light to those revolutionaries. Causes differ, but the passionate intensity is the same.¹⁰⁷

Group dynamics provide a basis for exploitation. As we shall see, there are positive methods that powerfully reduce the impact of exploitation, but without an understanding of our clannish and tribal behaviour those methods have little effect.

While everyday experience prepares the way for manipulation, the final catalysing event often fails to occur. People do not normally spontaneously generate a new inner identity – a transformed sense of self, or a sense of the self transformed. And what exactly is 'inner identity'? Is it simply an amalgam of genetic predisposition and social conditioning? The inner identity – the self or ego – is a gradually evolving continuum. Even the religious view of a 'soul' is not of an unchanging self: transformation can occur. The inner identity can be significantly redirected by trauma or revelation, but to what extent is the self simply a shape formed by external pressures, rather than a self-constructing, individual, thoughtful being?

The philosopher Nietzsche argued that 'consciousness is really only a net of communication between human beings ... consciousness does not really belong to man's individual existence but rather to his social or herd nature.'

Studies in psychology and discoveries in neuroscience have had a profound effect on the understanding of the mind and the nature of compliance. We must now explore the human mind and the nature of consciousness more deeply, to better understand our susceptibility to manipulation.

(Please note: See endnote 48)

recommended reading:

Sherif and Sherif, Harvey, White and Hood, *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robbers Cave Experiment*

Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: How good people turn evil*

Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*

Festinger, Riecken, Schacter, *When Prophecy Fails.*

5 the mind's I: consciousness and identity

‘Although many of us may think of ourselves as *thinking creatures that feel*, biologically we are *feeling creatures that think*.’ Professor Jill Bolte Taylor, neuroscientist.¹⁰⁹

‘Personality is the supreme realization of the innate idiosyncrasy of a living being. It is an act of courage flung in the face of life, the absolute affirmation of all that constitutes the individual, the most successful adaptation to the universal conditions of existence, coupled with the greatest possible freedom of self-determination.’ Carl Gustav Jung.¹¹⁰

In 1985, the Boston Church of Christ asked Flavil Yeakley, a personality test expert, to make a study of its members. Critics insisted that the group caused unhealthy transformations of personality in its members. The Boston Church of Christ was accused of being a cult that was brainwashing its members.

Over 900 members filled in extensive questionnaires. Yeakley also administered the Meyers-Briggs’ Type Indicator to 30 members each of six groups generally regarded as ‘manipulative sects’ – Yeakley’s expression – including Scientology, The Way, the Unification Church (or Moonies), the Hare Krishna Society, Maranatha and the Children of God, and to 30 members each in five mainstream churches: Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran and Presbyterian. The same personality test was filled out three times by most of the subjects – as if it were five years earlier; from their present perspective; and how they anticipated they would answer five years into the future.

In Yeakley’s words, ‘Changes in psychological type do not indicate normal healthy growth. Such changes indicate some pressure in the environment that causes people to deny their true type and try to become like someone else.’¹¹¹ There were no significant deviations in personality type over time among members of the five mainstream churches, but *all* of the ‘manipulative sects’ showed significant movement, *including* the Boston Church of Christ, in direct opposition to its leader’s conviction that his group was not a cult.

Yeakley found that there was a convergence towards a particular personality type within each manipulative sect, but that the type varied from group to group. In other words, the ‘manipulative sects’ were changing the personalities of their members each towards its own specific type. The effect has come to be known as ‘cloning’ and is a substantial proof that thought reform occurs in some groups.¹¹²

This work is supported by a study made by Paul Martin and Rod Dubrow-Marshall, who sampled 567 former members and demonstrated significant effects relating to depression, dissociation and anxiety induced by cult membership.¹¹³

The term *personality* comes from a word meaning ‘mask’. There is significant disagreement about the nature of personality. A few experts are convinced that the individual is naturally a multiplicity of personalities, but it is easy to mistake changing moods for discontinuous personalities. When they are sad, people find it hard to recollect happy memories, where happy people have difficulty remembering sad memories. This does not mean that their personalities have changed, only the mood through which personality is expressed.

The personality is made up of many identities, which are adopted according to mood and to context. Who you are speaking to – a parent, a child, an employer, an employee, a waiter or a celebrity, for instance – all these factors colour identity. But these identities are strands of the continuum that makes up personality. In a cult group, all of these identities are subsumed within the mood and behaviour demanded of the member.

In one experiment, two groups were shown how to cook a particular recipe. The first group was sober, the second drunk. When again sober, the drunken group spoiled the recipe, but they were able to cook it

when they were drunk again. This amusing experiment reveals ‘state dependence’, the extent to which behaviour relies upon a particular state of mind; a particular identity. It reveals the continuum of identities that form different and quite normal states of mind.

What is it about our nature that makes us so susceptible to influence? Systematic manipulation subverts the normal pattern and implants a synthetic identity. Subjected to overpowering influence, priests will criticise their religion, soldiers disavow their homeland and formerly loving family members reject their families, through the creation of a different state of mind, a *pseudo-identity*.

I like to think that I’m relatively smart – as do we all. Since I read Oliver Sacks’ seminal *The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat* 30 years ago, I’ve probably averaged a book a year about the brain, but I still find the mass of terminology and the complex architecture of this magnificent organ somewhat overwhelming.

I have some slight grasp of the major areas of the brain and the functions within it, but I would still have difficulty differentiating the anterior cingulate cortex from the periaqueductal grey on a three-dimensional model. Or, indeed, on a two-dimensional diagram.

Let us begin with a simple idea. If the unconscious mind is Mount Everest, then consciousness is about the size of a pebble on the top. The ‘awareness’ or ‘working memory’ is about two to three seconds in capacity.¹¹⁴ At most, it contains seven channels of information, each the equivalent of three digits wide – and only the brightest and most awake among us have seven channels available.

It is worth starting out with the usual platitudes: our brain is by far the most complex mechanism known to human study. It contains about 90 billion individual cells, each of which can receive up to a thousand signals at a time. It is probably necessary to read that passage several times to even begin realize just how astonishing the potential combinations are.

I reject comparisons between computers and brains, because a digital computer has a switching system that can receive a single signal at each cell and that signal will be either a zero or a one. A brain cell can not only receive up to a *thousand* signals, but these signals can be mechanical, electrical or chemical – and a multitude of chemicals from simple elements to complex neurochemicals are involved in the signalling. Almost any human brain has more cells than there are leaves in the Amazon rain forest and more signalling possibilities than there are atoms in the universe – and it is a very, very big universe.¹¹⁵ My endeavour is to present a useful picture of this complexity, without drowning in scientific jargon and complex notions.

The two halves of the self

In the early 1960s, epileptics who lived in the half-world of almost constant seizures were subjected to radical surgery. The *corpus callosum*, which connects the two halves of the brain, was severed. To the delight of the patients, the seizures stopped. To the astonishment of the doctors, however, the patients at times responded as if they were now two separate people sharing a single body.

If the eyes were shielded, one from the other, and one shown an apple and the other an orange, the patient would *say* an apple had been seen, but *write* that it was an orange. This had led to the view that the two halves of the brain maintain different functions.

Once the *corpus callosum* is cut, the integration between the two hemispheres ends. The left hemisphere – which controls the right side of the body – is usually the reasoning part, and the right side is the emotional and intuitive part (this reverses in left-handed people). One hemisphere tends to dominate. Where the balance weighs too heavily, an individual can become either too emotional to be able to reason, or too calculating to understand the inevitable emotional consequences of their calculation. This

reflects the heat of passion and the coldness of reasoning, in common parlance. It allows crimes of passion and crimes where passion has been completely suspended: cold-blooded murders.

The picture is further complicated by the distinct areas of the brain. The old brain, or limbic system, is the same in mammals as it is in reptiles. Wrapped around this is a mammalian brain and on top of this is a thin layer of tissue called the *neo-cortex*, or new brain, which is exclusive to humans. A popular adage among psychotherapists is that every client is a crocodile, a horse and a human, because of these three distinct brain regions.

Our habits, our addictions and our beliefs all form 'neural pathways' in the brain. A pattern of neurons will fire in a particular sequence in response to the environment. Particular neural pathways are stimulated in response to certain situations. Nobel prize winner Gerald Edelman has pointed out that in the brain 'what fires, wires', so neural pathways are laid down with any new activity, and will then be followed habitually when that activity is repeated.¹¹⁶

First impressions are usually the strongest, and we find it very hard to over-ride them; even when we know they are wrong. This explains the difficulty even highly intelligent and knowledgeable people have in accepting new evidence. The original belief has 'wired' into the brain, in Edelman's terms.

When choosing a new location for the hive, honey bees exhibit a strange and exact form of democracy. Scouts return and attract others to their cause by the vigour of their dance; this dance will show how to navigate to their chosen spot. Other bees make their reconnaissance and will vary from apathy to enthusiasm in their own directional dance. This enthusiasm is cumulative. Some locations will attract more voters than others. Eventually, a large enough group will carry the election and the colony will move on to pastures new. Far from being a slave society, answering to the demands of the queen, bees are actually far more democratic than we humans.



bee dance

It is only a metaphor, but individual bees can be compared to individual neurons in the brain and factions to groups of neurons that begin to fire together. Eventually, the colony of brain cells in a particular decision-making area will fire together, with stragglers joining the majority. Perhaps human anxiety is a state where renegade cells continue to agitate against the majority, and madness a state where no consensus can be maintained.

The traditional idea that the mind contains thoughts viewed by the self – called Cartesian duality – is in retreat. Psychologists now recognise that there is no distinction between the self, the mind and the thought. The traditional terms are deceptive. Just as it is factually wrong to say that the sun ‘rises’, so it is wrong to believe that the ‘self’ *has* a ‘mind’ which *contains* ‘thoughts’. In Buddhism, it is said that the ‘knower and the known are one.’

The ancient Buddhist view of *anatta*, which says there is no self, but an ever-changing process, is taking hold in the sciences of the mind. The novelist Herman Hesse elaborated on this theme in his remarkable novel, *Steppenwolf*: ‘every ego, so far from being a unity is in the highest degree a manifold world, a constellated heaven, a chaos of forms, of states and stages, of inheritances and potentialities. It appears to be a necessity as imperative as eating and breathing for everyone to be forced to regard this chaos as a unity and to speak of his ego as though it were one-fold and clearly detached and fixed phenomenon. The delusion rests simply upon a false analogy. As a body everyone is single, as a soul never.’¹¹⁷

Alan Watts put forward the idea that the self is comparable to a whirlpool, which retains its shape, even though the energy – the water – that creates that shape is ever-changing.¹¹⁸

There is even some suggestion that normal personality consists of interacting and distinct hierarchies in the brain. Seven hierarchies, suggested by eminent neurologist Jaak Panksepp, have been named by psychologist John Gottman – the commander-in-chief, the nest-builder, the jester, the sensualist, the explorer, the energy czar and the sentry. In Gottman’s view, one or two of these characteristic behaviours dominates in an individual.¹¹⁹

Exploitive persuasion interferes with the organic development and expression of the interacting facets of individuality. Because of the intricacy of the brain, it is relatively easy to divert the normal process. A successful manipulator fosters a new identity, a *pseudo-identity*, within the victim of undue influence.

When they leave a manipulative sect, it is usual for members to move back towards their earlier personality and behaviour. Through specific techniques, fanatical groups create a false identity in the member. The identity is grafted onto the existing or ‘authentic’ personality and constitutes a ‘pseudo-identity.’¹²⁰ This pseudo-identity is noticeable in ordinary conversation, when the glib enthusiasm of a cult member slips and the more natural self emerges. The emergence of the true personality is easily prompted by focusing the member on pre-cult activities. When a member looks at photographs that precede membership or talks about childhood holidays, colour returns to the skin, the fixed grin is replaced by a natural smile and a sparkle comes back to the eyes – which will now be part of a natural, or *duchenne*, smile.

This difference between identities can be very striking: on the second day of an intervention, the previously convinced cult member (an athletic young man, whose cultic convictions had only begun to seep away), held out his arms in front of him as he descended the stairs and said excitedly, ‘My skin is pink. Yesterday it was grey!’

The pallid complexion is blushed once more with life, and the glittering, gimlet eyes often lose their urgency when a cult member speaks about life before membership. The skin flushes with colour and the pent up, anxious energy of permanent fight-or-flight subsides. Similar effects have often been observed as subjects come out of the altered state commonly known as hypnotic trance.

The cloned pseudo-identity draws its energy from the more complete self that formed naturally before the undue influence programme began. After leaving a high pressure group into which individuality was subsumed, the former member may *float* back into the world-saving urgency instilled by the group. One woman told me that when she visited a supermarket in her first week away from a cult group in almost

two decades, she felt a surge of pity for the blindly ignorant trolley pushers, accompanied by a dreadful fear of her separation from the group.

Another former member told me that after he left the group, he realised that his basic emotion had been anxiety verging on terror for decades, even though, for some time after leaving, he too felt superior to the purposeless and unilluminated folk all around him.



the reptilian brain in action

It can take years to reintegrate the synthetic pseudo-identity. The normal response is an attempt to wall it off, because of the helplessness associated with it, rather than accepting and embracing the lessons to be learned. For this reason, former members often live in a prolonged adolescence. Something similar can happen to those who have been forcibly interned in prisons or concentration camps. The power of decision has been overwhelmed. Members no longer believe in their own capacity to make choices, so seek direction from an authority figure.

The simple route to subverting individual control is through confusion induced during a heightened emotional state. Reasoning is clouded by all extreme emotions, whether rage, terror, grief or elation. These strong feelings belong to the oldest part of the brain, which bypasses deliberate thought to generate rapid response to potential dangers.

Such reactions are often a matter of life or death. The amygdalae take signals from the eyes and ears before they have travelled to the prefrontal lobes of the brain for analysis. This is the fight-or-flight response that hits or runs before there is time for reflection. In some circumstances, this is quite simply life-saving. Without it, humanity would not have survived to evolve. But once aroused, people are more controllable and less capable of rational thought. They react rather than considering. They will afterwards use the full weight of their intellect to justify their reaction, rather than candidly examining that reaction. It is hard to change a behaviour if you *cannot* see that it needs changing, so the *stupid* reaction will become habitual, and be defended by a whole edifice of 'reasoning'.

Constant pressure keeps the old, reptilian brain active. Heightened emotion reduces human beings to a reptilian state, where they will respond to the chemical drench of adrenaline, cortisol and opioids caused

by the fight or flight response. This has a significant effect upon mood and health. Fanatics alternate between the pumped state of adrenaline and the chilled-out state of endorphin release. They are simultaneously anxious *and* delirious. The new, more rational mammalian brain is chemically coshed into submission by these endorphins.

Groups often use methods that heighten emotional susceptibility. *The common denominator is conformity, where everyone in the group acts in the same way – singing, chanting or dancing together. This type of euphoria can be generated at football matches or at rock or rap concerts.*

Individuals briefly fuse their identity with the group and march in lock step. The wielders of manipulation want this fusion to extend into every moment of life. Release from the anxieties of individuality into the group experience can be highly beneficial, unless it becomes the sole activity of the individual – being subsumed into the greater identity of the cult, gang, paedophile ring, terrorist group or ‘firm’ of sports hooligans. At worst, armies of individuals give up their judgment and morality to commit genocide.

When drenched by intense emotion, we become more compliant, less sophisticated in our thinking, and more given to unthinking compliance. We ‘go with the flow’ more readily. The fervent rallies staged by the Nazis enlivened a nation with belief in its superiority and its thousand-year rule over other supposedly lesser peoples. The endorphins released by both panic and high levels of activity have *exactly* the same effect as heroin.

Although the high of endorphins feels wonderful, it has a negative effect on the sharpness of reasoning. Athletes and fanatics can become addicted to endorphins in the same way that junkies are addicted to heroin. An injured athlete will often experience withdrawal symptoms, including depression, if no longer able to exercise. Withdrawal from cultic practices can have the same effect, leading the fanatic to believe that stopping such practices is harmful, because of the low they feel.



hooligan in training

Worse yet, when the reasoning mind is stunned by endorphin release, it is also subject to other happy

chemicals – such as dopamine and serotonin – that will reinforce the rightness they feel. All is well with the world, as long as they keep chanting, selling, and generally dancing to the leader’s tune; complying, of course, with the ethos – the prejudices – of the group.

Psychological studies have repeatedly shown how easily rational thinking is bypassed. Our perceptions are limited, and we interpret the meaning of those perceptions automatically. We ‘fill in’ reasons for events that are hard to understand. We focus on what we expect to see, or what we are *prepared* to see. This opens the door to sleight of hand tricks by magicians, hypnotists and street con artists, as well as the hocus-pocus of demagogues, whether political or religious in their claims.

In one celebrated experiment, participants are asked to count the number of points scored in a basketball video. Focused on the score, the majority – about 80% of participants – fail to notice the man in a gorilla suit who walks across the court. This phenomenon is dubbed ‘inattention blindness.’ It shows how highly selective our normal perception can be.

There is a boundary between what we actually see and what we fill in. If a red card is held at the periphery of vision – the back of an ordinary playing card will do – people are generally surprised that they cannot discern its colour, because colour vision does not extend to the edge of the visual field. The card can be clearly seen, and once its colour is known it will then be seen in the right colour. It is a surprising truth that we all live in a world that is partially imagined. This is well-known to stage magicians, whose art depends upon directing the imaginative power of an audience.

Police in Moscow were baffled by a new crime where a grifter requested directions from a stranger before asking for his wallet. About *two thirds* of people handed over their wallet without reflection. The problem for the police is whether a crime has been committed. The problem for us all is our inborn compliance with authority: Derren Brown demonstrated this behaviour in one of his TV shows. He walked up to a subject and asked for directions, at the same time asking them to take a bottle of water he is holding. This creates a moment of confusion, into which Brown inserted the request for the subject’s wallet, keys and phone. The victim of this hoax will usually take several steps before the penny drops. *Our attention is far more controllable than we like to believe.*

The dream state which exists in the background of the mind is vital to understanding altered states of consciousness. In dreams, we do not question the accuracy of our perception, even though objects can change from one moment to the next. A baby becomes a briefcase, without any perplexity on the part of the dreamer. The sense of judgment is suspended, and we believe that our nonsensical ideas are real. This innocent belief carries over into the waking state, so that beliefs are asserted as ‘knowledge’ without any need for evidence.

We are bombarded by a constant flow of data, from our environment and from within our own bodies and minds. We can only focus on a fraction of it, so we are never fully aware of everything that *does* register. This is the simple basis for positive suggestion. As we saw in chapter two, confusion, repetition, fixation and mimicry will all bring about hypnotic states. The hypnotist uses these techniques to control attention and brings about a collaboration where the subject ‘fills in’ the context. This can create experiences that are every bit as believable as dreams. And we live in a world where people are eager to suspend belief.

We fine-tune our perception all the time: if you record a family meal, you will notice the sound of cutlery on playback, which we normally tune out while eating. This automatic capacity to focus occurs beneath perception. In the same way, the great (and the small) unwashed do not notice their own reek. We tune out our own bodily smell, so that we can better notice any foreign odour in our environment.

Our ancestors survived for two million years on the African savannah because of such fine-tuning. We notice change, so any loud noise or sudden movement will attract our attention, and, perhaps, save us from

the attack of a predator.

Psychologists speak of the *fundamental attribution error*, where we naturally emphasise our self-perception over our perception of others. If *I* am late, it is because of circumstances beyond my control, but if *you* are late, it is a deliberate slight. My self-perception favours me and suspects you. This sense is easily manipulated if a group takes over the self. Where members protect the group over themselves, they will make the fundamental attribution error with regard to any criticism or threat to the group. Critics are presumed to be immoral, so any evidence they offer should be ignored.

As we have seen, personality does not consist of a single identity. We present different identities in different circumstances. So, there is not just a drunk or a sober identity, but many identities that relate to different people and environments. We behave in different ways according to our status and our mood.

Talking to a close friend, we will use different language and different gestures than when we are talking to an employer or a celebrity. One test for depression is to ask for five happy memories. The truly depressed person cannot find any happy memories. This does not mean that they have never experienced happiness, but that their current state of mind – the dominant identity within their personality – is unhappy.

Fanatics tend to have a restricted expression of identities. They will quite likely adopt the same language, the same tone of voice and the same gestures no matter who they are talking to. All too often, these will reflect the cult's leader or follow the leader's demand. Scientology, for example, was created by a 100-cigarette a day smoker; it has a far higher proportion of smokers than in the general population (Hubbard said that it was a fear of volcanoes in previous lives that caused smoking, though he only managed to quit at the very end of his life, when his health was in severe decline).

The normal personality is a continuum of identities, which change according to circumstance. The fanatical personality exists along a far simpler continuum, and, as Flavil Yeakley found, tends to be almost *identical* in members of a particular fanatical group. The subtleties of the continuum of identities that create personality are reduced to relationship to superiors, peers and inferiors. All non-members are seen as inferiors to be recruited or shunned.

Brain disorders show the variations in identity that can occur in otherwise sane people. For instance, in Capgras Syndrome, the individual believes that friends and relations have been replaced by imposters. Otherwise, their beliefs and behaviours are quite normal.

Alcoholism can lead to Korsakoff's syndrome, where vitamin B1 deficiency has led to the inability to form new memories. The individual will still remember everything up to a certain day. They will be confused that relatives and friends have aged, because they can only remember then as they were on that day, sometimes decades before. If anyone leaves the room, the Korsakoff victim will have to be reintroduced to them when they re-enter – anyone at all that the sufferer did not know before the last moment of functioning memory.

In another condition, sufferers will reject one of their own limbs, and hurl themselves out of bed, horrified that a foreign limb has been placed right next to them. In yet another, people see only the left-hand side of the world before them. There are many such conditions, which are all traceable to lesions in a specific brain area (a blow for those groups that teach that the brain plays no part in cognition). It is vital to understand that these people are not mad, but are using their intelligence to justify their incapacity. This gives a clue to the extremes of belief found in otherwise sensible people. It is the certainty we feel in dream, no matter how crazy the events all around.

All experiments with medical drugs have to take into account the *placebo effect*. A high proportion of people – perhaps a third – will respond to any treatment, even a sugar pill. This is not actually a deficiency. If we could fully understand such suggestibility, we could perhaps help more people to plug into their ability to heal themselves. It has been shown that there is also a *nocebo effect*: where people

are given morphine and told that it was a saline solution, they may not respond to it (for ‘organicists’ – who believe that all behaviour is purely physiological – this poses problems).¹²¹ This sheds light on a powerful ability of the mind and leads directly to the study of hypnosis or altered states of consciousness.

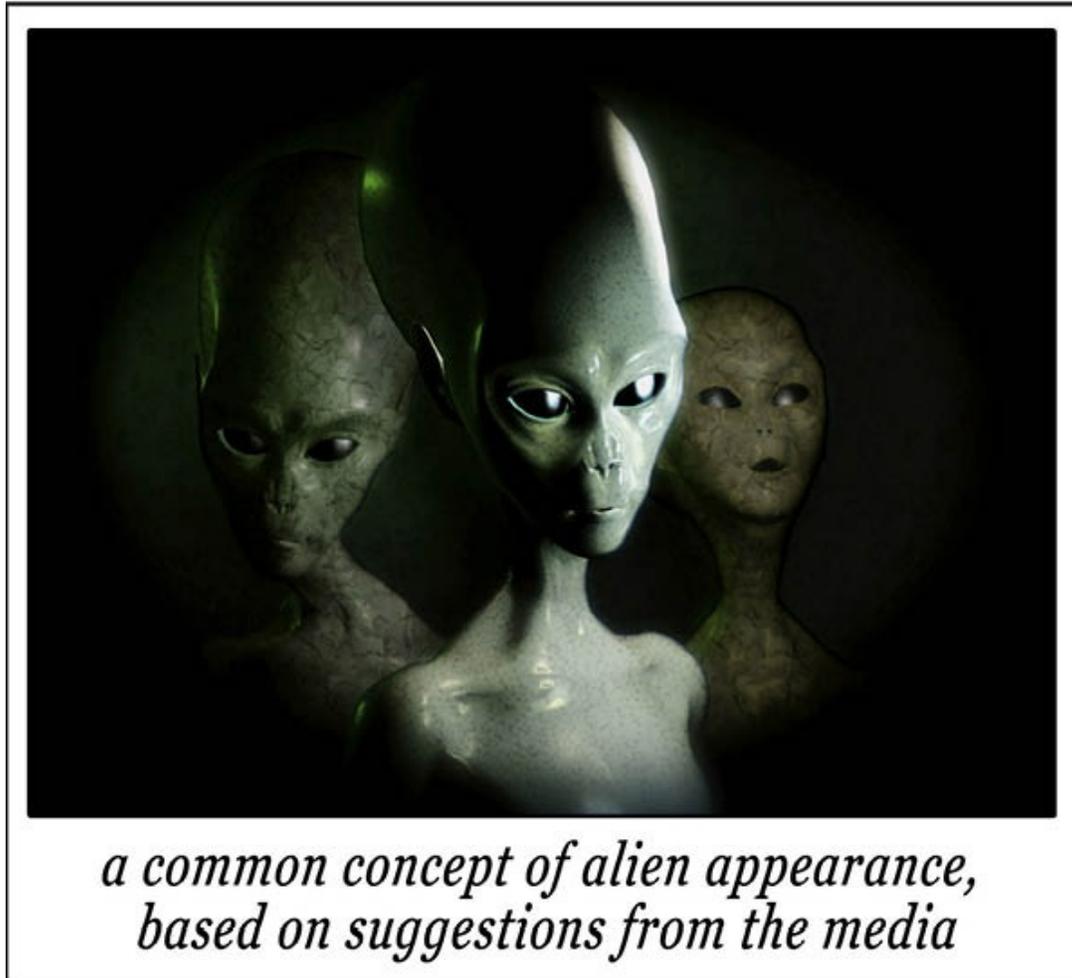
(Please note: See endnote 108)

recommended reading:

V.S. Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain: Unlocking the Mystery of Human Nature*.

6 the imitation game: from mimicry to hypnosis

‘Hypnosis is a process in which one person, designated the hypnotist, offers suggestions to another person, designated the subject, for imaginative experiences entailing alterations in perception, memory and action. In the classic case, these experiences are associated with a degree of subjective conviction bordering on delusion, and an experienced involuntariness bordering on compulsion. As such, the phenomena of hypnosis reflect alterations in consciousness that take place in the context of a social interaction.’ John F Kihlstrom¹²²



Our perception is easily directed. As we have seen, four out of five participants do not notice the gorilla-suited man who crosses the court during a basketball game, due to ‘inattention blindness.’ We tend to focus on the task in hand to the exclusion of everything else.

It is highly relevant that in accounts of alien abduction, the subject is usually on the verge of sleep. The dream nature of such experiences is apparent, because the aliens look different from one country to another – in line with local media descriptions. Indeed, the first ‘flying saucer’ was seen after a media description of a ‘cigar shaped’ object that skimmed across the water like a ‘flying saucer’.¹²³

The dream state, which exists in the background of the mind, is vital in understanding all altered states of consciousness. We are bombarded by a constant flow of data, from our environment and from within our own bodies and minds. We can only focus on a fraction of it, so we are never fully aware of everything that *does* register. This is the simple basis for positive suggestion. The hypnotist controls attention; the subject ‘fills in’ the context. Eager to suspend belief, we create experiences that are believed as readily as dreams.

Hypnosis has been a contentious subject, since Anton Mesmer introduced it to the West, in the 18th century. It has been contentious for much longer in the East, where it has been practised for centuries by

both Hindu *fakirs* and Islamic Sufis. By the 1970s, only half a dozen out of 90 US universities included any material about hypnosis in psychology courses.¹²⁴ Hypnosis was considered a form of conjuring, not worthy of inclusion in a ‘scientific’ syllabus. The view has changed markedly, although many still assert that hypnosis is no more than ‘compliance’, rejecting any physiological component.

‘Hypnosis’ has become such an emotionally charged term that I hesitate to even use it. The same is true for trance or altered state. However, better words do not as yet exist, but we must proceed with caution and without bias if we are to understand the very real experiences and behaviours that these terms connote.

Along with ‘fire-walking,’ many of the effects associated with hypnosis have been shown to be quite possible in un hypnotised subjects – it is possible to lie rigidly between two chairs or to eat an onion without any trance state being invoked. But despite frequent assertions that an individual will not do anything under hypnosis that they would not otherwise do, it has been shown by such hypnotists as Derren Brown that individuals can be persuaded to commit armed robbery and even murder (thankfully, with blanks in the gun) under hypnosis.¹²⁵

Contrary to popular belief, hypnotic states are not induced only under special circumstances. The truth is that we all have different and special states of awareness in normal life. While reading a book, we typically separate ourselves from the world around us. It can be startling when someone comes into the room, because we are ‘lost’ in a story or an idea. Films can be thoroughly engaging emotionally. In a horror film, the audience will gasp at the startling moment, although we all know that the event is only happening on the screen and was contrived by actors and special effects. This participation in a false reality – a dream – is an important aspect of hypnotic or altered states.

As children, we learn our times tables by repetition. The same is true for musical scales or drum rudiments. This is a positive use of the natural hypnotic aspect of the human mind. Neural pathways are formed and strengthened through repetition. After a lifetime of playing the drums, I don’t have to think to play an alternating stroke paradiddle: my hands simply play it. Asked what seven times seven is, I will answer ‘49’ without reflection (and then carefully check, to ensure I am right). We learn to drive, to swim, even to walk, through repetition, until the deliberate behaviour becomes spontaneous. If we try to think about those complex behaviours, we will likely crash the car or play a bum note or beat.

The problem is that we can easily be brought to adopt behaviours that are against our own interests. An army squad or a cult group can insert the direction of the leader over the individual’s will. In the emergencies of war, reaction rather than reason may save lives, because hesitation can be catastrophic, but it can also lead to unthinking sacrifice and to atrocities – whether for the benefit of our fellows or because of the caprice of a totalist leader.

Returning to the two to three seconds of ‘awareness’ – or *working memory* – that is consciousness, and remembering that we can hold in mind, at best, seven chunks of information – each only three digits in width – a mechanism for hypnosis becomes apparent. These seven chunks form seven ever-changing channels. While thousands of processes continue below consciousness – breathing, the flow of blood and the many muscular movements that enable us to live, for instance – there are only, at best, seven channels of awareness to deal with both the outside *and* the inner worlds. In hypnotism, all but one channel is turned inward. The only outward channel is in the control of the hypnotist.

It is a mistake to believe that a ‘hypnotist’ is a specific personality, a Svengali with a swinging watch and a goatee beard. As the cult leader, Ron Hubbard, explained (on one of his more honest days), anyone who has authority wields hypnotic power: if we believe anyone without questioning and testing their ideas, we are to some extent hypnotized. Nothing to do with Svengali, swinging watches or feeling sleepy. Indeed, most hypnosis takes place while the subject seems wide awake. But the seven channels have been

narrowed, so there is no 'width' to the awakesness. In psychological terms, outward directed perception – or *exteroception* – has been closed down, apart from communication from the hypnotist who then directs *interoception*: the inward directed perception.

We perceive much more than we actually recognise. It is often the case that hours after a conversation the penny will drop and we will realize what was actually said (sometimes with embarrassment). The perception and the processing of information are separate, and most of the hundred thousand words of advertising received each day by a normal westerner remain unevaluated.

Hypnotists have demonstrated the 'priming' effect of the environment. We tend to accumulate information from our immediate surroundings. We will pick up unusual words from a conversation, and use them ourselves, later, without noticing that we have been 'primed'. Images will lead us to certain thoughts. In 'remote viewing' an image is drawn in a different room and a 'psychic' will be able to draw a similar image. However, in the conversation leading up to the event, the 'psychic' will have placed an idea in the subject's mind.¹²⁶ It is clear that the remote viewer has not seen the actual picture, because, in most cases, there will be discrepancies between the images.

However, this 'priming' effect is happening all the time. A hypnotist or 'psychic' simply takes advantage of a natural process. Without an ability to gather up impressions from the world, artists and writers would often be without inspiration. The imagination is stimulated by the surrounding world, and those with vivid imaginations also tend to be easy subjects for formal hypnosis. They have a hypnotic 'ability', as long as they control it, rather than some unscrupulous outsider, because then, it becomes a disability.

It is very beneficial to take control of our own hypnotic ability. It helps us to be more imaginative and to resist the tricks of the manipulators – from advertisers and spin doctors to confidence tricksters and cult leaders.

Robert Jay Lifton lists the extremes of hypnotic condition in his thought reform model, where ideas are adopted from an authority that is in conflict with personal experience. As we have seen, he called this 'ideology over experience' or 'doctrine over person'.

In Scientology, I was told that all psychiatrists are part of an age-old, universe-wide conspiracy to control humanity. As a teenager, I had a friend who was a psychiatrist. I spent a lot of time with her – largely giving her relief from the disturbed people with whom she spent her days. She was as opposed to drug treatments as Scientology was. She was a kindly and humanitarian person. She was not part of any conspiracy to destroy humanity. I somehow managed to retain my good opinion of her and belong to a cult that was fervently opposed to psychiatry.

I later found that Hubbard's paranoia about psychiatry (and psychology and psychotherapy) extended to the ridiculous notion that mankind was being controlled by this supposed conspiracy through scented products. His own laundry had to be rinsed as many as 17 times to ensure that he would not fall under the spell of the 'psychs'. Former high-ranking Scientology official Jesse Prince has revealed that Hubbard believed that his assistants were using pens with rose perfume in the ink to sign despatches sent to him.¹²⁷ This is just one of many extreme and irrational beliefs foisted on Scientologists by their paranoid master.

Our awareness – that two to three-second bubble – is linked to our startle response. Until a meditator proved otherwise, it was believed that the startle response is completely involuntary.¹²⁸ In post-traumatic stress disorder the startle response is exaggerated.

Those who have been subjected to bombardment will dive to the ground, at the slightest noise. In normal life, the startle response pulls attention towards a potential threat. On our ancestral home of African savannah, it was necessary to take notice of any noise, movement or smell that was out of the ordinary. A hypnotic state relaxes that boundary perception.

Any exercise that encourages people to trust strangers in an unusual environment can switch off this boundary perception, and thus make us more susceptible to control. As our parents warned us in infancy, it is a bad idea to trust strangers automatically, so ‘team building’ exercises – used by so many institutions – should be approached with caution.

Hypnotic or altered states can be separated into several types. All lead to relaxed, euphoric states, where control is readily given over to an outsider.

Perhaps the first obvious altered state is hallucination. If attention is fixed – by staring, chanting or singing a word or phrase, marching in step or playing or dancing to the same beat – perception can change.

Meditators report seeing colours shifting in front of their eyes. In the traditional Hindu *tratak*, meditators stare at an object. In Scientology’s ‘training routine zero’ two people look fixedly at each other. Lurid hallucinations will occur. This is perhaps because when nothing is happening, the mind fills something in on the blank backdrop. In the dark, people will sense movement. In silence, people will hear noises.

These are forms of positive hallucination – where something appears which is not there – but negative hallucination is also possible – where real objects vanish from perception. A hypnotized subject can become blind to any aspect of the environment, often to the amusement of onlookers.

Alterations of time are also aspects of altered states. Age regression is commonly used by hypnotherapists. When age regressed, people behave as if they were the age that has been suggested to them. Sometimes, they may be able to access real memories from an earlier age, but it is common for such subjects to create imaginary events. These false memories become progressively more real with hour upon hour of investigation with a ‘past lives’ counsellor.

Many people have believed that they have found memories of past lives – this was routine when I was in Scientology: one friend insisted that he had been Judas Iscariot and my vanity allowed me to believe that I had been Henri Matisse – but there is little to support these claims and it seems far more likely that they are wishful thinking. Such dreams of glory are far more appealing than the daily grind, so can displace reality.

‘Psychic’ claims so often prove to be fraudulent, that only with the most rigorous investigation into their veracity should they even *begin* to be believed. James Randi and Derren Brown have both managed to replicate most ‘psychic phenomena’ from spoon-bending and remote viewing to table-turning.

Age progression is just as possible as age regression. Here, people will really believe that they are predicting future events. Age progression is also involved in visualization, a common practice among athletes, who believe that by imagining a positive future outcome they can create it (the practice also fires the neurons responsible for the desired action).

Amnesia is another common altered state. It is easy to suggest to someone that they will forget. We have all experienced this when unable to find a word that is on the tip of the tongue. It is possible to create a state of confusion over a word, so that it will be difficult to access. For some reason, I spent months unable to remember the Japanese word *kamikaze*, for suicide pilots. I had no difficulty in remembering the meaning of the term – spirit wind – but this somehow blocked my access to the word it defined. Such amnesia is a common occurrence, in part because of the enormous demands upon memory made by everyday life in a complex civilization.

At the opposite to amnesia is a hyper-vigilant memory – or hypermnesia – which can become burdensome. Some people remember accurately every day of their lives. They will often have difficulty remembering facts from their education, however (I have an unusual memory for facts, but my personal

memory is not so unusual. Different abilities and perhaps different parts of the brain are involved).

Hypnosis can be used to reduce the sensation of pain; many doctors and dentists use hypnosis in their practice as an analgesic. Changes of sensation are a commonplace. We have all found ourselves more or less sensitive to our perceptions. On some days, food has more taste, on others, it has hardly any taste at all. Heightened perception is at the opposite end of the scale to analgesia. Typically, hypnotic subjects will declare that colours are brighter, or that they feel physically larger. These changes in perception overlap with hallucination, so that some subjects will feel invisible – which is simply negative hallucination.

The capacity to remember does not form fully until we have passed the infant stage, and even then memory is replayed on the same screen as imagination. Many childhood memories have been coloured both by retelling and because they are family legends, often repeated. Yet, before memory forms properly, we have learned to interpret the world around us. Many of our conceptions about that world are formed in childhood, before we have the capacity to interpret such conceptions properly.

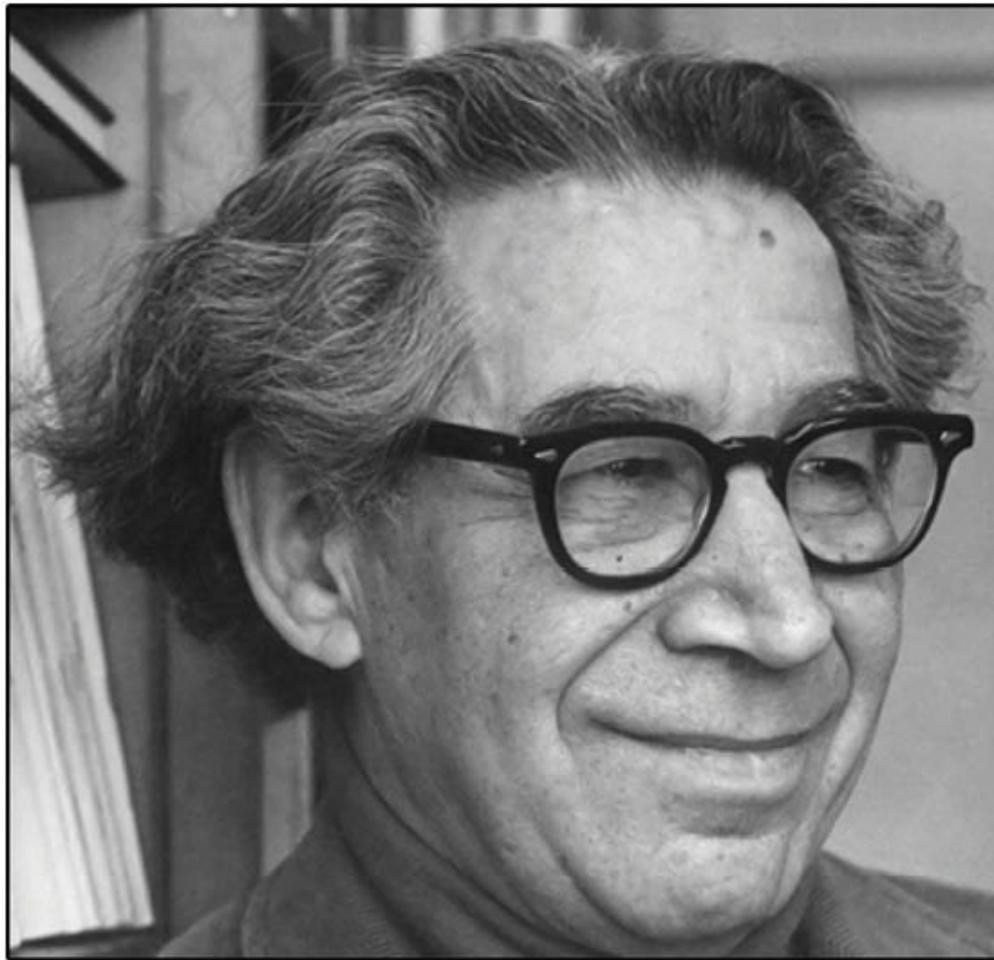
It is as if we wake up in the river of consciousness, only years after we were thrown into it. We do not consciously form our beliefs, at the earliest age. We have a simple sense of right and wrong, much of it taken from our parents and those around us. While Freud was too confident in his assertions about the human psyche, he was perhaps right to assert that our relationships in life will be determined by how we attached to the care-givers of childhood.

The evidence supports the idea that those who grew up in an unsafe environment will rely on the reactive part of the brain – the old brain – and be less considered (and more aggressive or fearful) in their response to the world. In other words, they will either run away or thump you, rather than continuing a discussion. This panicked activity is the greatest obstacle to critical thinking, because such people will also run away from ideas and evidence.

cognitive dissonance, revisited

Cognitive dissonance is perhaps the most fundamental concept for an understanding of undue influence or exploitative persuasion. Every now and then, a great genius lights up the world and creates a new perspective. Leon Festinger was such a one, and his cognitive dissonance is one of the most important ideas of the last century.

New ideas take time to root and are usually ignored or opposed before they can be accepted. Darwin and Wallace's natural selection or the acceptance of the unconscious mind are examples of hard-fought 'paradigm shifts'. Indeed, 'intelligent design' and notions of a discarnate soul continue to fight a rearguard action against these well-demonstrated concepts.



leon festinger

Festinger's work has transformed psychology – but his name has not entered Microsoft's spell checker, more than 60 years after his profound discovery. Festinger realized that reason does not usually inform our decision-making. Instead, we hold on to our beliefs and adapt the facts to suit them. Any conflict between behaviour, emotion and thought creates an unpleasant sensation, much like the grating dissonance between two or more inharmonious musical notes. To end this uncomfortable feeling, we will tend to reject the source – even when that source is very hard evidence indeed.

Prejudices are basic to paradigms – sets of beliefs that govern our view of the world. In Ken Burns' wonderful *Jazz* documentaries, a white aficionado explains that as a child, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the Deep South, he was led to believe that black people were inferior to whites and incapable of intelligence. He suffered overwhelming cognitive dissonance when he first saw Louis Armstrong perform. Armstrong was quite evidently a genius. His creativity is fundamental to the development of jazz and his virtuosity transformed trumpet playing and singing in all genres of popular music. The young white man understood that he had been fed false information. He was able to resolve the cognitive dissonance by rejecting that information. His ability to change his perspective is a lesson we should all take to heart.

There is no doubt that the paradigm shift that ended racial segregation in the United States was driven by the genius of black performers. Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Teddy Wilson, Nina Simone, Ray Charles, Nat King Cole, Harry Belafonte and a host of others showed that black people could burst with talent.

Incidentally, prejudices against Jews were challenged at the same time, through the likes of Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw and the many composers of jazz standards and musicals (most of whom were Jewish). Many of the most talented comedians have also been Jewish. While idiotic prejudices continue, they are far less prevalent and are no longer supported by law, as they were, well into the 20th century.

If we can be patient with our feelings of unease, and learn to question our assumptions, no matter how rigid they have become, and no matter the reverence we feel for the authority figures who taught us these assumptions, then we can transform ourselves and our society.

As prejudice is the foundation of human conflict, understanding how to resolve conflicts within ourselves, rather than on the battlefield, is probably the most important paradigm shift that we can achieve. By learning to calm our emotional responses to evidence, we can create a safer world.

In recent times, we have been subjected to the War on Terror. It is always dangerous to solidify an abstract concept – to reify thoughts or emotions into concrete realities. Roosevelt said that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself, but now we are fighting a war against fear, which is the very opposite of Roosevelt’s dictum. We have been deftly moved from the fear of nuclear annihilation to the fear of terrorism.

This war has led to immense and irrational prejudices against Muslims. The terrorists belong to tiny factions, yet the media continues to call the few militant Wahhabis of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State ‘Sunnis’. While the Sunnis make up the majority of Muslims, the fundamentalist Wahhabis represent perhaps one per cent. Similarly, only a fraction of Shi’ites – the other major branch of Islam – are involved in terrorist activity. But all of Islam is seen as threatening, through media manipulation or simple ignorance.

After the 7/7 bombing in London, one of my friends insisted that ‘Muslims’ should apologise for this crime. This is like saying that Christians should apologise for the Branch Davidians’ actions at Waco. However, cognitive dissonance tends towards generalisation.

It is only by recognizing our frailty that we can become strong. The unconscious mind is easily directed. Thoughts can be led. By understanding this, we can improve our ability to learn and strengthen our defences against the manipulation that forms the core of modern life.

We now turn to the most pervasive use of influence in human society: the use of propaganda, public relations and advertising.

recommended reading:

Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*

Derren Brown, *Tricks of the Mind*.

7 life is a pitch (and then you buy)

‘Our strategy ... is to destroy the enemy from within to conquer him through himself.’ Adolf Hitler

Manipulation has become far more pervasive with the introduction of each new form of communication. Writing, printing, radio, film, television and the Internet have all extended the reach of both educators and manipulators. All manner of organisations – from the most beneficial manufacturer of essential items, to the very worst totalist groups – advertise their wares using every conceivable medium. By these means, influence has become institutionalised in both government and business.

Influence only becomes unethical when there is a hidden agenda and deliberate deception. There is nothing wrong with open and honest communication, but advertising is not necessarily ‘legal, decent, honest and truthful,’ to use the UK Advertising Standards Authority’s catch-phrase. Totalist groups have no compunction about using any available method to increase their ability to recruit and retain followers.

Advertising, in the form of branding, reaches back at least to Sumeria, the cradle of civilization where writing was first discovered. Beer bottle caps made there predate the crown cap by over 4000 years. This is a positive use of influence: remember our brand so that you can buy it again. By the fifth century BCE, in ancient Greece, the Sophists sold their skills of argument and oratory. Similar skills were developed at around the same time in China. In both places, at the same time, these skills were also honed to create the basis of rational philosophies.

There is no clear dividing line between art, advertising and propaganda. For many centuries, European artists illustrated Bible stories for an illiterate population. In the Renaissance, art became a demonstration of wealth and influence, and a tool of propaganda utilised by the ruling class to maintain authority over the masses, as artists were paid to add images of their patrons to religious pictures.

In an early example of political spin, Queen Elizabeth I ordered all existing portraits of her to be destroyed. They were replaced with approved images, depicting her as a beautiful Virgin Queen. These approved images bore little resemblance to the reality.

By this time, advertising had been spurred on with the introduction of the printing press, which also heralded a new age of *propaganda* (originally the Catholic Church’s term for the department that lured defectors back into the fold, during the Reformation).

modern advertising

Modern advertising, however, began after the American Civil War, in the 1860s: the first modern conflict, which left a mass of physically and psychologically traumatised combatants. The pharmaceutical companies were born at this time, selling patent medicines that would be illegal today, because along with alcohol, they contained opium and cannabis. Cocaine was added to the mix at the end of the nineteenth century, and enthusiastically endorsed by Pope Leo XIII – on billboards for Mariani wine – and by Sigmund Freud, in his first published paper, *Uber Coca*.

Pope Leo went so far as to award a gold medal to the hard drug concoction ‘bearing his august effigy.’¹²⁹ Many celebrated figures endorsed the wine, including Thomas Edison, Jules Verne, the Russian Empress, Emile Zola, Alexandre Dumas and Henrik Ibsen.¹³⁰ As with celebrities in contemporary advertising, it was hoped that endorsements by prominent figures would persuade the public at large that they would benefit from these products.

MARIANI WINE

MARIANI WINE Quickly Restores
**HEALTH, STRENGTH,
ENERGY & VITALITY.**

MARIANI WINE
**FORTIFIES, STRENGTHENS,
STIMULATES & REFRESHES
THE BODY & BRAIN.**

**HASTENS
CONVALESCENCE**
especially after
INFLUENZA.

—♦♦♦—
**His Holiness
THE POPE**

writes that he has fully appreciated the beneficent effects of this Tonic Wine and has forwarded to Mr. Mariani as a token of his gratitude a gold medal bearing his august effigy.



MARIANI WINE

is delivered free to all parts of the United Kingdom by WILCOX & CO.,
83, Mortimer Street, London, W., price 4/- per Single Bottle, 22 6 half-
dozen, 45/- dozen, and is sold by Chemists and Stores.

By the mid-twentieth century, advertising had come to include a plethora of new techniques. Corporations would now 'sell the sizzle, not the steak.' The housewife would be subjected to 'two tarts in the kitchen' advertisements. TV medical doctor Marcus Welby, MD (actor Robert Young) sold coffee, dressed up in a white coat.



The appeal of authority gave way to the use of celebrities, so Ronald Reagan advocated not only for the Voice of America – the US anti-Communist radio station – but also Chesterfield cigarettes, in the years before his presidency.

Positioning theory showed that it was best to ‘position’ your product against a market leader. Avis car rentals ran against Hertz with their ‘we try harder’ campaign, which successfully increased their market share. In the UK, a very popular series of ads showed Leonard Rossiter spilling Cinzano on Joan Collins. Unfortunately for Cinzano, this led to a surge in market leader Martini’s sales. The outcome of covert influence is not always predictable.

Next came aspirational ‘lifestyle’ marketing, where the product was seen as part of an envied lifestyle. Focus groups were employed throughout the public relations trade, to pinpoint the public’s wants and vulnerabilities. For instance, after their slump in popularity after entering the second Iraq war, the UK Labour party quizzed their ‘floating voter’ focus groups to see what measure might win them the next election. These floating voters were mainly housewives in their thirties. It transpired that they were most

annoyed about neighbours who left their garbage bins on the pavement or sidewalk, so a law was quickly enacted to restrict the time of day that bins were permitted on the pavement. No UK council has ever enforced this law, but Labour won a new term, perhaps in part because of pandering to the taste of those who were politically undecided.

By the 1990s, CT scanners were being used for ‘neuromarketing’ surveys. Instead of relying on verbal answers to questions – which might be influenced by the desire to please the questioner – volunteers were brain-scanned to see what their real uncensored responses were.

Coca-Cola was among the first corporations to use this new technique. This led to ‘emotional’ marketing, which tries to tap straight into the emotional centres of the brain. The most profound allegiances are rerouted, so, for instance, one fan of Pepsi talked about the patriotic rush he felt when looking at the red, white and blue logo on the can. Manufacturers contribute to the funding for movies, with the guarantee that their products will feature prominently in the resulting film. This ‘product placement’ may very well work at a hypnotic level.

The whole drift of advertising is to induce an experience, to create an emotional demand for a product or service. And advertising is a mainstay of modern life. We watch films and go to concerts, because we want to be *given* an experience. Sitting at home and watching a film on the TV, or listening to music on a sound system, is quite different from participating in a group. This receptivity to group experience makes us more susceptible to the contrived tricks of exploiters. We experience a natural high when in company, whether it is a rock concert or a political rally. That innocent high is easily manipulated.

public relations and propaganda

The grip of the Catholic Church was significantly weakened when the Bible was translated into everyday language, and the public discovered there were no priests, no monks, and no mention of buying a stairway to heaven through ‘indulgences’ in the Good Book. In England, before his conversion to the Protestant cause, Henry VIII was so determined to keep the Bible from commoners that he ordered the execution of William Tyndale, whose translation formed the basis of perhaps the greatest literary work in English, the King James Bible.

Protestant propagandists soon created lurid tales of the Catholic Inquisition, although more innocents actually died at the hands of their own witch hunters. These fanciful tales are believed to this day along with many other propaganda myths. The fervour with which such dogma was believed during the wars of the Reformation and the witch hunts fits the same template as the fanaticism of contemporary totalist cults.

1879 was a turning point in human history: the new photogravure process allowed photographs to be printed on ordinary paper, allowing progressive journalists to show the world at large the horrors of poverty and child labour. Called ‘muck-rakers’ by President Teddy Roosevelt, the Progressives refined techniques that would soon be adopted by less ethical persuaders.

At the opening of the twentieth century, public relations became big business, after Edward Bernays asked his uncle, Sigmund Freud, how to influence people by appealing directly to their sexual urge. Freud was happy to oblige. There is certainly evidence to support our attraction to sexually stimulating images and sounds (and should human pheromones eventually be tracked down, probably to scents). Bernays believed that success in advertising derived from subliminal persuasion, and he applied that information from the birth of modern PR – or *propaganda* – through the many decades of his unusually long life.



20,679* Physicians
say **LUCKIES**
are less irritating

"It's toasted"
Your Throat Protection against irritation against cough

*an example of 'placement' to
make cigarettes appear 'healthy'*

Bernays represented Lucky Strike cigarettes for many years. The original cigarette pack was drab green with a red circle. Bernays decided to make a connection between the brand and the proto-feminist movement of the 1930s. He had women dressed in Lucky Strike colours, parading around while proudly smoking the brand –which Bernays called ‘torches of freedom’. All this in a time when it was considered *vulgar* for a woman to smoke in public. It was a statement of defiance, a great propaganda stunt and stealth influence rolled into one. As both the tobacco company and the women’s rights group were clients, the shrewd Bernays was paid twice. His many successful campaigns led to ever more influence: it was Bernays who handled the PR end of the overthrow of the democratic Guatemalan government for United Fruit (and the Eisenhower administration). He was party to Vice-President Richard Nixon’s much-

publicized visit to congratulate the newly appointed puppet dictator, in 1954.

Bernays agreed with fellow propagandist Walter Lippman, that it was necessary for the elite to control the masses through public relations, until such time as the masses were educated enough to create a real democracy. This insidious perspective, which continues to this day among patrician capitalists, is identical with the elitist views of totalist cults. We tend to see *public relations* as relatively positive and *propaganda* as absolutely negative. And yet, until his death at the age of 103, Bernays insisted that *propaganda* and *public relations* are one and the same.

Also starting at the beginning of the twentieth century, Ivy Lee made his name as one of the first modern propagandists, using techniques focusing on emotional manipulation, rather than reasoning, which is the core of manipulation. He is famous for his part in protecting Exxon – as it is more recently known – from the bad public relations resulting from the murder of trade unionists. For instance, Lee characterized activist Mother Jones as a ‘bawdy prostitute.’ She was, in fact, almost 80 years old by this time and had lived an exemplary life fighting for the rights of the under-privileged.

World War One saw the amalgamation of public relations and progressive journalism in the US Committee on Public Information. The Bureau of Cartoons (!) sent out the *Weekly Bulletin for Cartoonists* to 750 cartoonists, with ideas and captions for the coming week’s fare. The Division of Films courted Hollywood. Film is the perfect medium for propaganda and has tremendous potential to manipulate an audience’s beliefs. Foreign film distributors were forced to show Allied war pictures alongside their features, and cinemas that showed German films were simply denied any new Hollywood material.

In American cities, 75,000 Four-Minute Men, pillars of their communities, stood up twice a week and burst into apparently spontaneous speeches at cinemas or other public places. Their impassioned ‘impromptu’ talks were based on bulletins dispatched by the Committee on Public Information (CPI). They defended capitalism, attacked ‘Prussianism’ and introduced the tag line, oft heard since, ‘Make the world safe for democracy!’

The CPI wanted to provide both the material and the sentiment for everyday conversation. Dissent would be quelled and the proper patriotic attitude maintained. The Four-Minute Men also sold war bonds. One CPI bulletin advised ‘One idea – simple language – talk in pictures, not in statistics – touch their minds, hearts, spirits – make them want to win with every fibre of their beings – translate that desire into terms of bonds – and they will buy.’

Within a short period of time, the Committee on Public Information had outposts in 30 countries, which daily poured forth pro-Allied and anti-Axis sentiments. The CPI picked up techniques that had earlier been used to neutralize antagonism between labour and management. It was also economical with the truth, suppressing unfavourable information and censoring dangerous ideas.

Congress passed the Espionage Act, upholding censorship, and later the Sedition Act, which made it illegal to criticise the government. Many American citizens were arrested without charge and imprisoned without bail, losing any access to the outside world. One adolescent girl was sentenced to 20 years for her protest.¹³¹

With the end of the First World War, the Committee on Public Information disbanded, but its journalists, advertising agents and propagandists stayed in touch. With the Second War, the same cast of characters assembled, and, beyond that war, created a network that ran media outlets, advertising and PR agencies as well as the government intelligence agencies. It was deemed necessary by those in power in the West to utilise war-time methods to prevent communism from taking over the world. Similar justifications are now used to support ever more vigorous control of communication by government agencies.

mind control

After the Second World War, Western governments poured funds into covert programmes to determine the laws of behaviour and so control people without their knowledge or consent. Allied governments wanted to know how to incapacitate enemy soldiers, so they introduced LSD to students, accidentally kick-starting the hippie movement. They used the far more savage drug, BZ, on hundreds of unwitting subjects. BZ gives flashbacks lasting for days, which can recur for life. It is now restricted under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The president of the World Federation of Mental Health used his Canadian hospital to experiment on unwitting patients who were given to believe that they were receiving treatment for illness. Sensory deprivation and electric shocks were used to completely erase the memories of patients suffering from depression. The attempt to create a programmable zombie – a Manchurian candidate – failed, because whilst it proved relatively easy to destroy memory, rebuilding it proved to be impossible.

The Unification Church – the Moonies – came into being after its creator, Sun Myung Moon, had used ‘brainwashing’ techniques in the Victory Over Communism programme, in South Korea. The rapid growth of Daesh or the Islamic State has been driven by the determined use of undue influence in propaganda across social media. As we have seen, the techniques they are using were developed by western propagandists.

We need to be aware of the whole array of methods available to manipulators, whether they are leaders of totalist groups, corporate advertisers or governments eager to manipulate the beliefs of the electorate.

Naomi Klein has offered a cogent argument that such techniques – and the inhumane attitudes behind them – are now employed as significant elements in the War on Terror.¹³² At Guantanamo Bay, and in ‘extraordinary rendition’ torture sites around the world, the US military put into practice the methods used in the post-Second War mind control projects. This secret manipulation is our inheritance.

recommended reading:

Pratkanis and Aranson, *Age of Propaganda: the Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*
Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin.*

8 undue influence: the science and the law

‘A substantial proportion of people do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act, and without pangs of conscience, so long as they perceive that the command comes from a legitimate authority.’ Stanley Milgram

Louise Ogborn was an 18-year-old high school graduate when she took a job at McDonald’s in Mount Washington, Kentucky, to help her mother, who had lost her job. Louise wanted to study pre-med at college, but the trauma of events at the restaurant ruined her plans. Ogborn was a church-going former Girl Scout and had not received a single admonition in the four months that she had worked at the restaurant.

It was just after 5 pm when assistant manager Donna Jean Summers took a call from ‘Officer Scott’, who said he was with the local police. ‘Scott’ told her that an employee had been accused of stealing a purse. From his broad description, Summers identified Ogborn as the culprit. Scott asked Summers to search Ogborn, otherwise, she would be arrested and searched by police in jail.

Ogborn was ushered into a back room and ordered to remove her clothes, while Scott stayed on the phone. Summers then followed his directions to put the clothes in her own car, leaving Ogborn with only an apron to cover herself. By this time, Officer Scott had told Summers that Ogborn’s house was being searched for drugs.

Officer Scott next persuaded the assistant manager to summon her fiancé and to leave the young woman in his charge. The fiancé, Walter Wes Nix Jr, followed Officer Scott’s instructions, and ordered Louise Ogborn to perform jumping jacks and stand naked on a chair, while he inspected her, to ensure that she had not secreted anything inside her body.

If Ogborn refused to follow an order, at Officer Scott’s direction, Nix slapped her naked buttocks until she complied. She was left prey to Scott’s orders for two hours. During this time, she was ordered to sit on Nix’s lap and kiss him. Then she was ordered to unzip Nix’s trousers, despite all of her pleas. Nix was later sentenced to five years imprisonment for his actions.

Police estimate that ‘Officer Scott’ was successful in manipulating staff in at least 74 workplaces, over a period of almost ten years. While staff at several of those restaurants have been convicted of offences, the man identified as ‘Officer Scott’ by police was eventually acquitted. Louise Ogborn was paid \$1.1 million in settlement by McDonald’s.

Louise Ogborn explained ‘My parents taught me when an adult tells you to do something, you don’t argue. If someone swipes you on the hand, you listen.’¹³³

Police investigations showed that ‘Officer Scott’ had tried ten other restaurants that day, but even this one in eleven success rate is startling.

Louise Ogborn’s ordeal lasted for two and a half hours. When Nix left the restaurant, Summers called in maintenance man, Thomas Simms, and asked him to take over. Simms, a ninth-grade drop-out, point blank refused. Summers finally called her manager and stopped the assault. She was later convicted of unlawful imprisonment and sentenced to a year’s probation. Summers was paid \$400,000 in settlement by McDonald’s.

It is horrifying to note that the man identified by police as ‘Officer Scott’ was acquitted for lack of evidence, and because it is so hard to define his actual crime. It is interesting that the first person to stand up to Officer Scott’s orders was the least educated in academic terms. The upshot is that we teach our children to be cautious of strangers, but not simply of *strangeness*. We should withdraw and seek better information before complying with any request that seems in the least bizarre.

When an unusual demand is made, it should prompt questioning and resistance rather than compliance. As Chaleff shows in his fine book, *Intelligent Disobedience*, such training is lacking in our educational system or even as a principle instilled by parents. Chaleff also exposes the training given to school teachers that imposes obedience on students using highly questionable techniques.

Louise Ogborn put up some resistance, but, in the end, and out of fear, she capitulated to the terrible demands of Officer Scott. Her compliance is comprehensible; it is far harder to comprehend the behaviour of any of the other participants and spectators, who did nothing to stop these events.

The story seems far-fetched, but is based on over 70 actual cases where a caller successfully targeted restaurants or grocery stores in the US and convinced managers to strip search and, at times, participate in the sexual abuse of store workers. The movie *Compliance* and the short film *Plainview* are both based upon 'Officer Scott's' despicable hoax calls. They illustrate the need to transform our relationship to authority.



Those of us who have counselled former cult members find it hard to understand the reluctance of some social scientists to accept the reality of manipulation, exploitative persuasion, thought reform or undue influence. The point is regularly made that members join of their own free will and that nothing compels them to remain within the confines of a cult. But the point is made as if such a belief is factual and natural and beyond any slightest shadow of doubt. Science always allows room for doubt just as cultic beliefs never can.

In truth, undue influence was recognised in law centuries before the term 'social science' was first heard. For more than 500 years, undue influence has been a legitimate legal concept to provide remedy for the victims of swindlers. The law of undue influence was framed because of concerns that exploitative churchmen were taking advantage of the deathbed fears of the faithful.¹³⁴

In 1617, a woman who rejoiced in the name of Mrs Death made something of a media splash, when the eminent jurist, philosopher and all round genius Lord Francis Bacon tried her case. The following comes from Lord Bacon's ruling, and speaks of Mrs Death's hapless victim, Mr Lydiatt:

'An old man about the age of eighty years and being weak of body and understanding and having a great estate of goods and lands ... was drawn by the practices and indirect means ... to give his house here in London and to come to sojourn with her at her house in the country ... [along with her existing husband, Mr. Death], and that she having him there did so work upon his simplicity and weakness and by her dalliance and pretence of love unto him and of intention after the death of her then husband to marry him, and by sundry adulterous courses with him and by sorcery and by drawing of his affections from ... his kindred, telling him sometimes that they would poison him and sometimes that they would rob him.'

Sorcery, indeed. A later commentator takes up the tale:

'After she had obtained control of his estate and property, Mrs. Death neglected such attendance of him as she had used before and used him in a most cruel manner reviling him and causing him to be whipped and suffered him to lie loathsomely and uncleanly in bed until three o'clock in the afternoon without anybody to help him so as all the skin of his loins went off, he being not able to help himself by reason he was troubled with a dead palsy and other diseases, and when at any time she did come to help him up she would pinch him and revile him and by such cruel and terrible courses kept him so in awe as that he durst not revoke what before he had done, neither would she suffer his nieces to come unto him lest he should make his moan unto them, for she said if they came there she would scald them out of her house.'¹³⁵

Lord Bacon determined that Mrs Death had no right to the property of poor Mr Lydiatt. He had left his property to her when subjected to 'undue influence.' Since that time, hundreds of cases of undue influence have been heard around the world, yet some social scientists believe that undue influence is a new and unwelcome concept that can be dismissed with a shrug as 'brainwashing': They are wrong.

It has been accepted for centuries that anyone in authority has a special position. There is a *presumption* of undue influence. So, if you give a car, a house or even a box of chocolates to your lawyer, to your priest or to your counsellor, you can claim it back. You don't have to prove anything, and this law puts aside any need for guilt to be demonstrated. If you gave it away, you can claim it back, because of *presumed undue influence*.

In Mrs Death's case, the influence went beyond *presumption*. She was charged with 'express' undue influence, for her use of the lock and the rod, and for the dismal conditions that Mr Lydiatt had suffered at her hands. She did not inherit a single penny.

The nature of manipulation was also recognised by the Nuremburg War Crimes Tribunal. Nazis born after 1919, save for those who had committed the most serious crimes, were exempted from prosecution, because they had been indoctrinated throughout childhood into the aberrant and abhorrent beliefs of National Socialism.¹³⁶

In his excellent article on undue influence, Abraham Nieven, PhD, cites the California Civil Code Section 1575:

1. In the use, by one in whom a confidence is reposed by another, or who holds a real or apparent authority over him, of such confidence or authority for the purpose of obtaining an unfair advantage over him;
2. In taking an unfair advantage of another's weakness of mind; or
3. In taking a grossly oppressive and unfair advantage of another's necessities or distress.¹³⁷

Cult members often work a ninety-hour week for only a few dollars in pay. I have interviewed literally hundreds who at one time or another were reduced to a diet of rice and beans, often for months at a time,

while their boss chowed down on *pâté de foie gras* and quenched his thirst with blue mountain coffee made with purified water.

Yet, there is no protection for cult members, unless they realize that they have been subjected to undue influence. By the time they do, they will have left the cult and be too taken up with recovery to even consider bringing undue influence charges for the return of monies squeezed out of them, or fair recompense for their labour. They will also tend to be terrified of the cult, and by the time they recover the statutory time allowed for litigation may well have passed.

In England, we have a legal ‘cooling off’ period of seven days after signing a contract. It has long been recognised that selling techniques can break down resistance, and that even rational, intelligent people can succumb to the hard sell.

The social scientist who rejects the idea of undue influence is the newcomer in this time-honoured field. Most of us recognise that we have at times been gulled into buying some useless artefact, because of a sales pitch. The ego is unwilling to accept this, because the illusion of free will is so complete.¹³⁸ There is no protection whatsoever for those who have given their all to an abusive cult group.

The first experimental proof of an ‘unconscious mind’ came relatively late – in 1977 – but once it became clear that some part of cogitation takes place beneath consciousness, it was also clear that influence – and thusly undue influence – must occur. The reluctance to accept this comes from a desire to protect our liberty, which is a noble desire. It is more comfortable to believe that we are invulnerable, impervious and completely *self-determined* (as the Scientologists say), but the evidence is powerfully otherwise.

Derren Brown

Anyone who doubts the existence of influence is advised to watch a few Derren Brown videos. For the sake of entertainment and illumination, Derren Brown has cast his net wide in search of scams both old and new. He has revisited the tricks of the 19th century Spiritualist, and shown how innocents can be persuaded to turn tables, make bells ring and write on ‘sealed’ tablets, all the while believing these actions were impelled by some outer force.

Brown is an accomplished hypnotist, and in a matter of moments can install a false memory in what appears to be an innocent conversation. In one show, a fifteen-minute exchange was all it took to convince a lifelong atheist of the presence of God – without any theological discussion.¹³⁹ In another, four business executives each individually held up a security van at gunpoint, before being brought out of trance.¹⁴⁰

Brown also took on the famed objective of the US intelligence agencies, the Manchurian Candidate, a programmable assassin. The CIA had pronounced it impossible, but Brown’s subject fired a gun at actor Stephen Fry, without knowing that it contained blanks.¹⁴¹

proof versus conviction

Galileo had trouble with the astronomers who refused to look through his telescope, insisting that he first prove that the Medici stars, the moons orbiting Jupiter, *could* exist, given the accepted presence of the crystal spheres, on which the sun and planets revolve around the earth.¹⁴² This same perplexity faces the counsellor who helps former members gather their wits after departing a cult, when faced with those sociologists who believe that cult membership is perfectly normal and healthy.

The no-manipulation model also stretches the boundaries of credibility when we look at the most deplorable mysteries of human behaviour. How could Stalin, Hitler and Mao run concentration camps where so many millions died? How did Pol Pot manage to destroy a quarter of the Cambodian population

in a few short years, and why did the world stand by, apparently indifferent?

authority and obedience

The dynamics of manipulation or undue influence exist in every human society and, indeed, in every human being. We are all subject to groupthink, to following the herd, to believing ideas without proper consideration, because we all too easily accept the authority of those who spout those ideas. As Scientology's creator, Ron Hubbard said, all authority relationships are hypnotic: 'Any time anybody gets enough altitude he can be called a hypnotic operator, and what he says *will* act as hypnotic suggestion.'¹⁴³

Oscar Wilde expressed the problem differently when he said: '*disobedience is Man's original virtue.*' Our ability to question even the toughest groupthink is vital.



After studying a dozen cults in some detail, and taking a long look at the history of religion, from the *mystes* of Classical Greece up to the present day, I turned my attention to political and social movements, such as the Nazis and the Bolsheviks.

My own departure from Scientology was spurred by historian Norman Cohn's fine *Pursuit of the Millennium*, which I read two years before I resigned from the cult. Cohn was writing about movements between 1000 and 1250 CE that fervently believed in the imminent Second Coming of Jesus, and murdered Jews, Muslims and fellow Christians in their thirst to bring about the End Days.

This remarkable book planted the seeds of doubt in me, because I was witnessing irrational behaviour in my fellow Scientologists which was frighteningly similar to that described by Cohn in the fanatics who destroyed all around them, through their conviction that the end of the world was very nigh indeed. I went

on to Cohn's *Europe's Inner Demons*, about the murderous witch craze, and found it no more reassuring.

I cheerfully read books criticising Scientology, but did not meet a single member who had followed the same course, or was even willing to discuss the points made by their authors. It became irrefutable: I was involved in a fanatical group.



Sixteen years after I left Scientology, with the new millennium just around the corner, I was fascinated by an interview with Cohn, who, aged over 90, had returned to public view to warn of incipient millenarianism. He proved to be right, but thankfully not on the feared scale. In Uganda, for instance, 778 members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God immolated themselves, assured by their leader of the end of the world.¹⁴⁴

In the interview, Cohn explained that, at the end of World War Two, he had worked in the denazification unit, alongside Russian officers. He said that it was apparent to him that the Bolsheviks suffered from the same irrational and driven fanaticism as the Nazis. He readily described them as 'cult members.'

terrorism

When I first read about terrorists and gang members, I recognised the dynamics of fanaticism wherever I looked. I vainly tried to affect policy regarding militant Islam, but cult experts, like me, were not considered relevant by the powers that be. I was surprised that learned authorities scorned what they mistakenly called ‘brainwashing’, even castigating my expert friends by name. They offered up ‘radicalization’ instead, but without giving any explanation of this process, beyond such ideas as the ‘bunch of guys’ hypothesis, which insists that Muslim lads get together to play football for a lark and the next thing you know, after a quick pizza, they are strapping on suicide belts. Who knew that football and pizza could be so dangerous?

While the work of such experts as Mayer, Post and Atran is full of fascinating information, it stops short of any explanation. For all the light they shine on *radicalization*, they might just as well have stuck with the tabloid term ‘brainwashing.’ Could it be that the behaviour recorded by Robert Jay Lifton in interviews with survivors of the Chinese thought-reform camps not only applied to cults, but also to terrorist cells? Were these universal human weaknesses that might be exploited by the vicious and the manipulative?

The essential understanding is that *the dynamics of human behaviour are always and everywhere broadly the same*. Confirmation bias operates in all cultures. We pay more attention to evidence that supports our prejudices than we do to anything disconfirming and therefore discomfiting. This is the nature of the *cognitive dissonance* that any disagreement with our values entails. The Scientologist unwilling to even consider evidence that Hubbard was a trickster, despite the massive contradictions in his own work, is in no way different to the fervent Maoist or the terrorist, because their fervour is an aspect of the human condition. Their powers of reasoning have been overwhelmed by their emotions.

There is a significant literature of undue influence, largely because the US military poured funding into research after World War Two. Professor Christopher Simpson found that over 90% of psychological research in the US in the two decades after the war was sponsored by the military: ‘Military, intelligence, and propaganda agencies such as the Department of Defence and Central Intelligence Agency helped to bankroll substantially all of the post-World War II generation’s research into techniques of persuasion, opinion measurement, interrogation, political and military mobilization, propagation of ideology, and related questions. The persuasion studies, in particular, provided much of the scientific underpinning for modern advertising and motivational techniques. This government-financed communication research went well beyond what would have been possible with private sector money alone and often exploited military recruits, who comprised a unique pool of test subjects.’¹⁴⁵

Alongside the secret and life-destroying MK Ultra, MK Naomi and Operation Blue Bird programmes, we also owe the excellent research conducted by professors Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo to this funding.

One of the most researched and most significant explorations was Leon Festinger’s work on cognitive dissonance. As we have seen, it is 60 years since Festinger first proposed the notion that disconfirming evidence usually hardens belief, contrary to common sense. When he infiltrated graduate students into a Scientology-related flying saucer cult, he accurately predicted that those members who travelled to the pick-up point would leave with an even firmer faith when the mothership failed to show.¹⁴⁶

We face the same difficulty in persuading entrenched social scientists of the abundant evidence that manipulation does take place, and that undue influence is a reality. And beyond the social scientists come unscientifically-minded politicians into whose hands we place the fate of the world. We have to overcome their cognitive dissonance and persuade them to listen to reason.

In a culture that is permeated with spin and artifice, there is great reluctance to accept straightforward

truth. Our political culture is at just as much risk as the cult groups, should the facts about undue influence become commonly known. We have become cynical, already knowing all too well that those in power always keep an eye on their popularity, quite willing to pounce on irrelevant but emotionally upsetting issues to enlist our support.

With massive unemployment, there will always be a loud focus on scroungers, who actually have an insignificant effect on the larger economy, but can be used as a target for ire, to unite the public behind any raging politico. Both Hubbard and Hitler spoke about the need for an enemy to bring about unity among their followers. Politicians rarely demur from exploiting this vulnerability to their own ends.

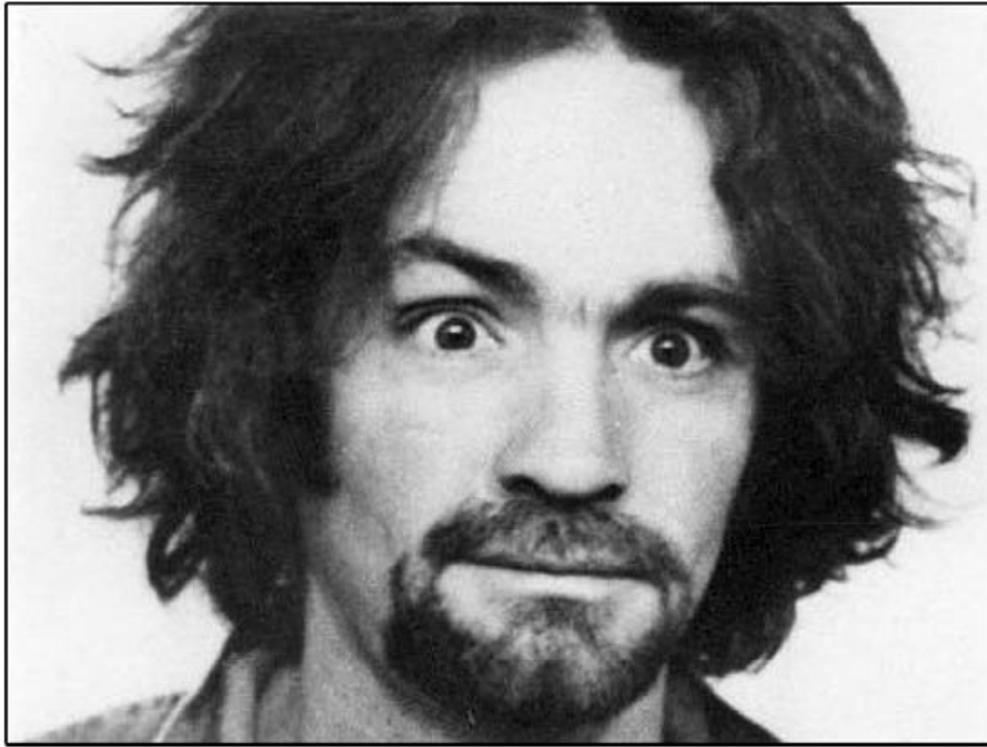
The great problem with undue influence is that it has a *before* and an *after*, but no *during*. While individuals are under the coercive influence, they will swear blind that they are acting out of their own free will. They *choose* to be overworked, undernourished and frantic, to accept the domineering alpha behaviour of their overlords (or, more rarely, overladies). The moment the veil lifts – which can take decades – they are usually without the strength to do anything but crawl away and weep, covered in wounds which need a great deal of licking.

The vision of the embittered ‘apostate’ currently trumpeted by Scientology mouthpieces is a falsehood; fully 99% of departees are not able to make any protest, because they are terrified of being subjected to the ‘fair game policy’, where they can be sued, harassed, cheated, deceived, and, as Hubbard openly said, ‘destroyed’ or ‘ruined utterly’ without their persecutor being restrained by the cult. They are not embittered so much as terrified.

Cults with religious pretensions, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, will threaten the member’s eternity. Many leave Scientology with the terror of ‘losing their immortality’ – the belief that they will fall into the *abyss* and be lost forever. With this phobia, the member’s fate is sealed.

I once counselled a man who had spent 20 years housebound, because Scientology had convinced him that he was a danger to society. It took only an afternoon to help him back to life, but would that someone had helped him 20 years earlier! To suggest that he ‘chose’ to exclude himself from life is an insult to him and to human nature in general. He was a very personable man, who would not have harmed a fly, so Scientology’s persuasion was entirely misplaced.

Attempts to force intervention on cult members through the law have too often run aground. There is a danger and a difficulty in presuming the individual incapable of decision, especially when we are speaking of undue influence, rather than insanity.



Charles Manson, leader of the infamous 'Family'

The US courts convicted Charles Manson of multiple murders, although he was not present at any of those murders. He was held to have manipulated his followers into committing these horrific crimes, but they too were sentenced, as if his manipulation was *not* the reason for their terrible behaviour. This shows our unwillingness to accept a totality of influence, and, in this circumstance, it was probably the best position to take. Manson's direction mitigated the murderous behaviour he seems to have induced, but it does not excuse it.

But while we should all be held accountable for our behaviour, no matter how drunk, drugged or deluded, those who deliberately manipulate others should also be held to account. If this means that certain practices have to be suspended in the training of monastic novices or rookie marines, then so be it, but the most important aspect of undue influence is probably its esoteric nature; we can do something about that. We can make the tricks public, so that every schoolchild will recognise them, on sight.

education

As long as social scientists disagree with the traditional perspective of undue influence, no progress can be made in teaching schoolchildren how to recognise and overcome such influence. How sensible it would be to teach all children the pitfalls of cognitive dissonance, our susceptibility to Stockholm syndrome and *learned helplessness*. However, the political will is lacking, because our system all too often turns politicians into vote-collecting hucksters, ignorant of science and unwilling to tackle popular taboos, lest they lose their authority and their power.

While one camp of social scientists decries undue influence in the universities, another camp takes its pay from the politicians, to use those same techniques as salaried spin doctors.

The essential aspect of reform is educational. If you want to reduce the number of terrorists, you must not only seek fairness for the populations they believe they represent, but also provide a general education in the techniques common to advertising, marketing, sales and recruitment. Only if people are aware of

these techniques will they lose their potency. What is more, we have the task of spreading that awareness in a world long governed by spin.

recommended reading:

Opton and Schefflin, *The Mind Manipulators*.

9 the way forward

‘When you confer spiritual authority on another person, you must realize that you are allowing them to pick your pocket and sell you your own watch.’ Alan Watts, *Still the Mind*

It is not enough to know that many advertisers, spin doctors, cult groups and terrorist recruiters have hidden agendas, we need to know how those agendas work. There is a developed understanding of these mechanisms in psychology, but it somehow has not entered the public consciousness. Cognitive dissonance, which may well be the best-demonstrated theory in psychology, remains a foreign term to the vast majority of people. Children learn about Queen Victoria or George Washington, but almost nothing about the fundamental principles of their own behaviour.

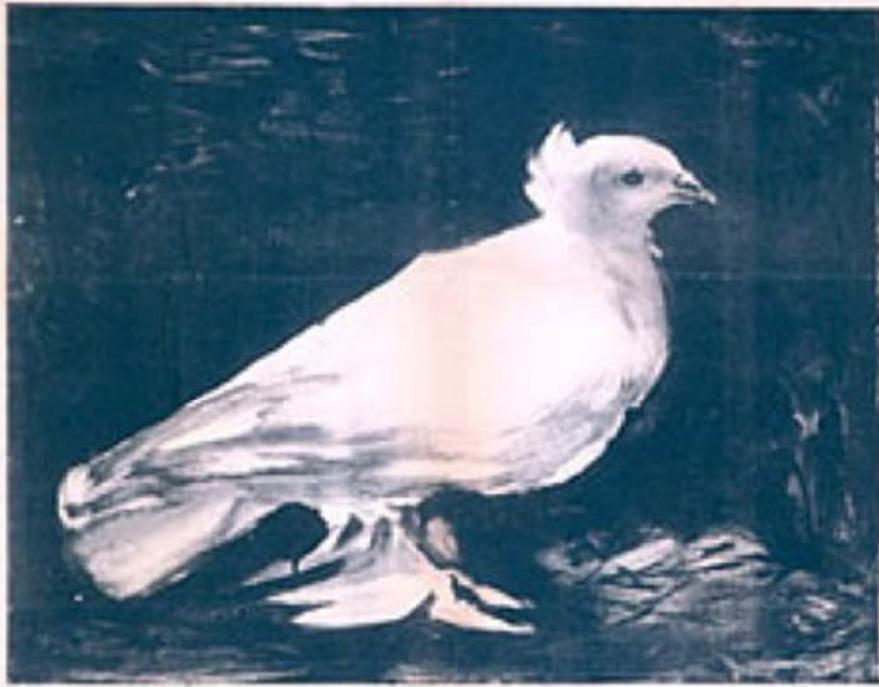
Literacy and numeracy, once considered only the first steps of learning, have assumed a central position. The tradition of rhetoric – where students learn to analyse and evaluate ideas, so that they can be articulated rationally – has long since lapsed. On a positive note, the critical thinking movement has shifted the emphasis of education, encouraging students to participate in the lifelong adventure of learning, rather than instilling a catalogue of facts to be disgorged at examinations; however, movement is slow.

For years, the Programme for International Student Assessment’s surveys have shown that education is best when put in the hands of creative teachers, rather than fixed into a curriculum. The most successful systems in academic terms – in Finland, Shanghai and Korea – have also minimized examination. Declines in educational achievement in the UK and the US have come alongside a significant *increase* in testing. In 2014 in the UK, without consultation, Michael Gove, Minister for Education, shifted the whole system back to examination only, ending years of ‘continuous assessment.’ The opinions of teachers who may well have spent years teaching a child were put aside.

There is a conflict between those who believe that we must be constrained into social conformity and those who believe that education should instil curiosity and creative originality. The paradigm has yet to shift, but we are moving towards a less brutal and more considerate society in the west, and that will certainly allow us to uncover and resist hidden influence.

Each generation develops its own *zeitgeist*. Clear distinctions between art as promotion and ‘art for art’s sake’ were first made in the 20th century. Painting, for instance, evolved during the Renaissance to inspire religious belief. The portrait exalted the patrons of the arts – the rulers of states and religions soon took centre stage. Humanism was born, and promoted through all of the arts.

The Reformation gave birth to a critique of social behaviours, which led to the Enlightenment and a move away from the inherited dictatorships of old Europe. The Romantics created a new identification with the majestic forces of nature. The Expressionist movement took a negative view of humanity, which seemed to be borne out by the horrors of two world wars. WH Auden dubbed the 20th century the ‘age of anxiety’, and *angst* remains the watchword of the arts into this century, where the concept has now displaced the object.



CONGRÈS MONDIAL
DES PARTISANS
DE LA PAIX

SALLE PLEYEL
20·21·22 ET 23 AVRIL 1949
PARIS

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picasso's dove

As the new shoots of 'high' art faltered, popular new forms swept the world – largely originating in the US, which 'coca-colonized' the world with successive waves of jazz, blues, rock and roll, and cinema. Even the most sophisticated artists became agents of propaganda – Picasso's dove design for the Communist International is a direct instance.

The mood of a culture is determined by its artists, and thus, by those who promote their work. The most popular work reflects the cultural mood – so TV soaps have casually taken on the role of informing society. The most skilful writers are employed by Hollywood or HBO. Playwrights like Tom Stoppard or Christopher Hampton turned from intellectual stage plays to Hollywood blockbusters (*Shakespeare in Love* or *Dangerous Liaisons*). Comedy Central and HBO have also become a vital source for political information.

In a strange twist of fate, conceptual art has achieved supremacy in the western world, promoted by the

likes of Charles Saatchi, who became a patron by running a group of advertising agencies, which, among other achievements, brought Margaret Thatcher to political power.

The boundaries between high and low culture have eroded, especially with the enthusiastic adoption of marketing strategies in classical music and theatre. The work of psychologist Judith Rich Harris clearly shows that we develop our lifelong tastes and beliefs in early adolescence, influenced neither by parents nor educators, but largely by our peer group.¹⁴⁷

Most people will continue to listen to the music that captivated them in their teens, and follow the values they adopted at that time. Those values come from popular culture. If we are to teach liberty and equality, we must turn education into an interactive, multiplayer game, rather than a fusty, obedience-driven obsession with SAT scores.

honest persuasion versus coercion

When Jemaah Islamiya leader Nasir Abas was arrested in Indonesia, he braced himself for torture. Instead, Abas was persuaded to reveal his own inner turmoil about civilian casualties. The security services effectively *counselled* Abas out of his fanatical affiliation. With his help, they rounded up most of the al-Qaeda related network in South East Asia, the world's most populous Muslim region. The group, responsible for the Bali bombing, has performed no further terrorist attacks in a decade.¹⁴⁸

Despite its dreadful civil rights record, Indonesia's approach has been markedly different to that of the United States and its allies. The US has subjected hundreds of alleged terrorists to brutal and humiliating treatment, which President Obama has admitted amounts to torture and a violation of international law. Though this aggressive policy may have foiled some terrorist plots, it has disseminated terror rather than containing it. There were less than 500 members in the four groups lumped together as Al Qaeda when the awful tragedy of 9/11 shocked the world. Currently, there are hundreds of thousands of Al Qaeda, ISIS (Daesh) and Shia activists, many of whom joined up as a direct consequence of violent military action and reports of torture at 'black sites'.

talking with a fanatic

Shock tactics are counter-productive. However, with patience, most fanatics will reconsider even the most entrenched views, just as alcoholics, gamblers and other addicts can be persuaded to change without aggressive intervention. Long experience with cult members bears this out.

A safe setting without fear of physical or psychological torment allows a fanatic to examine fixed ideas. The counsellor must have empathy for the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of the subject, and a deep knowledge of the realities of the condition or affiliation.

Gradually, the member's own abiding doubts will surface. Then the deception and exploitation of the group can be explored. Such interventions are comparable to the extensive and highly successful denazification process after WWII, and are relevant to anyone who has been subjected to an institutional experience. The template for such an intervention can be transferred to many other situations, including terrorism.

recommended reading:

Lalich and Tobias, *Take Back Your Life*.

10 from groupthink to courageous followership: bringing the living back to life

‘I think the evils of the world are not yet the evils we are pursuing.’ John Le Carre

Ten percent of 12 year-olds in the US have been ‘medicated’ for anxiety, hyperactivity or depression. Emeritus professor of neurology James Austin advocates meditation instead of medication. Improved concentration would undoubtedly benefit our attention-deficient society.

The meditation Professor Austin recommends is not the repetition of mantras, leading to euphoric self-hypnosis, but the Buddhist ‘mindfulness’ meditation, where thoughts are quieted and attention heightened.¹⁴⁹

However, meditation should be approached with care. Many cults call their hypnotic procedures ‘meditation’. A condition called ‘relaxation induced anxiety’ suggests that it is very important to ally meditative passivity with physical exercise.¹⁵⁰

Former cult members will often say that they wished they had listened to their intuition. It is a valid point. In counselling former members, they all offer up red flags that they ignored: the long hours, the lack of external information, the derision towards critics, uniform dress codes, esoteric language, the leadership’s obsession with money. But the desire for enlightenment, heaven, a socialist workers’ paradise, or justice on earth made them ignore that inner voice.

There is a paradox here: I met a vicar once who had an Oxford law degree, and had abandoned doctoral research where he had tried to differentiate whether such ‘intuition’ or inspiration comes from God or the Devil. He could find no rational way of discerning, but rationality is the way. If we pay close heed to our intuition, but test it against evidence, we shall be much safer in our daily life. Intuition itself is too prone to bias to be the sole means of testing anything.

Education needs to encourage disagreement as a foundation for critical thinking, rather than instilling compliance with untested authority. While teaching self-assurance and respectful behaviour, we must constantly monitor the unquestionable assumptions of our cultural truisms, the holy cows of our belief systems.

Resistance to persuasion depends upon developing cool rationality, which necessitates the ability to quiet emotional arousal, without losing a compassionate perspective. In this respect, new studies of secular meditation are very important.

In 2008, a replication of Milgram’s classic compliance experiment showed that the significant difference between those who readily give shocks and those who refuse is a sense of responsibility for their actions. While the only answer to groupthink is individual accountability, western society is actually becoming ever more institutionalised.

The new discipline of *courageous followership* – pioneered in the US – teaches responsible following, showing people how to amend their leader’s behaviour and so overcome our animal inclination to groupthink. Ira Chaleff, an originator of courageous followership, has summed up the philosophy in the title of his book, *Intelligent Disobedience*. He points to the example of guide dogs for the blind, which need to be able to refuse orders that will endanger the person they are helping. *We need better leaders, but that objective can only be achieved if we become responsible followers.*

An evolution in psychotherapy has moved away from endlessly revisiting past trauma – which tends either to reinforce that trauma or create false memories – to therapies which teach careful attention to our own thoughts and responses, so that we can develop new thoughts and better responses.

education

Education is the key to all of our influence problems. It would be relatively easy to add not simply critical thinking but an understanding of the tricks of the mind to the curriculum, however, this demands a fundamental shift in paradigm. We have to create a comfortable learning environment where teachers do not feel compelled to use entrained control techniques.

To do this, we have to raise the status (and pay) of our teachers, at least in many western countries, and either make learning so much fun that children simply revel in it, or find a more effective way of dealing with disruption, or both.

In part, the difficulty is that we do not teach our children the skills of assertiveness. We do not encourage them to say, politely: ‘Hold on a minute. Why are we doing this?’ This is an attitude that we must encourage.

When I was at school, it was still considered quite normal to beat children. By the time my oldest son went to school, this practice had been outlawed, but teachers would still shout to maintain dominance. I’m happy to report a far more considerate attitude from my two youngest boys’ teachers. The culture is changing.

In the traditional view, education is a transmission of knowledge from those who know to those who do not. While the teacher should have far more information about a subject, it is time to accept that we are all – students and teachers – engaged in learning and a school is a community of learning for all concerned.

Children are taught that our knowledge of the world is unambiguous, but the truth is that we do not understand the world fully, and even the most secure ideas may change with further enquiry. Moreover, subjects are divided in school, as if geography, literature and history existed in separate worlds, when in fact they are tightly interrelated disciplines needed to better a student’s understanding of the world. It is important to grasp the overlap between disciplines.

Traditionally, the teacher is seen as infallible, which drowns out dissent and encourages obedience. The purpose of education is seen by some as simply filling the student’s head with facts, many of which will have no relevance in later life. It is much better to teach skills and approaches than streams of facts. There is a significant difference between authority that is earned and authority that is imposed. We all learn more readily in an environment where our teachers show their worth, rather than simply insisting upon it.

Thomas Edison used a 146-question test to determine who he would employ. The test included such questions as ‘Who is called the “father of railroads” in the US?’ and ‘Who wrote the Star Spangled Banner.’ Einstein famously failed the Edison Test. He explained that if he needed to know the speed of light, he could look it up. Bad education enforces unthinking obedience. Good education stimulates curiosity. A good teacher instils confidence, where a bad teacher heightens self-consciousness.¹⁵¹

whistle-blowers and believers: ethical persuasion, pluralism and tolerance

Fundamentalism is in blazing ascent. Claiming God’s inspiration, militant *takfiris* wage *jihad* against *kafirs*. George W. Bush, as the leader of the free world, justified his violent response, claiming to be instructed by the very same God. Even the more secular UK was dragged in Bush’s wake by a closet born-again Prime Minister, who preached the gospel of military intervention, deriding *peacekeeping* long before the conflict began.

Truth and reconciliation can provide closure for our cultural clashes and blood feuds. After any conflict, an independent tribunal should assign responsibility for atrocities. Otherwise, the cycle of

brutality will continue endlessly.

This is not a matter of meting out punishment, but coming to terms with the past, and laying it to rest. Resentment smoulders for generations, where injustice has been glossed over. The conflict in the Middle East is rooted in the policies of the French and British authorities, which took high-handed control after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, at the end of World War One. A significantly unfair and undemocratic society was created. Consider Lebanon, for instance, where the French authorities denied the vote to the non-Christian majority.

We cannot simply draw a line in the sand and move forward. The trauma of the past needs to be expressed, so that it can be left behind. *Muslims will continue to be 'radicalised' as long as their co-religionists are unfairly treated.*

We must also support whistle blowers, rather than ruining their lives. The Russell Crowe movie *The Insider* is based upon real life. Jeffrey Wigand exposed the tobacco industry's experiments to make tobacco more addictive, and paid dearly for his honourable stand. It is possible to overcome the herd instinct to *groupthink* and thereby make a better world.

As individuals, we can learn to quell emotional arousal to find rational solutions. Straightforward tools exist for recognising ideologues and exploiters. Paul Ekman's pioneering methods of behavioural lie detection have long been used by US government agencies (and generated the amusing TV soap, *Lie to Me*). Ekman teaches a clear-minded examination of evidence, which is further enhanced by developing a questioning, devil's advocate position towards enthusiasts of every persuasion from the eco-puritan to the advocate of peace-through-murder.

Researchers at the University of Cardiff have developed a system to grade the authenticity of evidence. Professor Harry Collins asks us to imagine the discovery of a terrorist gene. Right-wingers would demand birth control. The media would carry scare stories. It is not impossible that a government would initiate a testing programme (the last UK Labour government actually suggested such testing for infant sociopaths, at the beginning of our century).

Collins shows how to determine the authority of an expert and how to better construct evidence. To show how gullible even scientists can be, he even passed himself off as an accomplished physicist at a conference. Not one of the assembled scientists suspected his complete lack of credentials.

We need to take time before committing ourselves. Today's 'buy now' offer will usually continue until the goods are actually sold. We need to be in a calm frame of mind, because both optimism and pessimism are actually irrational. It is hard to reason when we are either too cheerful or too sad.

Sleep deprivation is the 'royal road' to compliance, according to one Guantanamo Bay torturer – victims there were woken every hour, to make sure that they would never be fully awake: it is vitally important to your mental and physical health to make sure that you have enough sleep.

Nutrition is also vital. Extreme fasting endangers reasoning. The occasional day without food actually lengthens life, but too much fasting induces delusion. High-carbohydrate diets do not provide the nutrients necessary for the brain to function at its best.

Drugs and alcohol will distort perception and interpretation. And that includes medical drugs, such as anti-depressants, anti-anxiety pills and painkillers. It is not enough not to operate machinery when under the influence: it is also necessary not to make any life-changing decisions. The same is true for the euphoria generated by the hypnotic techniques of cult groups, and participation in group activities. It is wonderful to feel part of a group, but where a rock concert or an opera is usually beneficial, this natural euphoria can easily be twisted into control by a manipulative group.

We must make clear distinctions between exploitative and ethical persuasion. The former always uses

deception, ethical persuasion is open and honest and reveals all of the known information in a clearly accessible way.

The simple truth is that *we behave as we believe*, so it is vital that we are willing to question our beliefs. By recognizing and overcoming manipulation or undue influence, we can greatly reduce conflict, better conserve our environment and lead more fulfilling lives. We have the tools to make a better world and we have the ability to use those tools.

recommended reading:

Ira Chaleff, *Intelligent Disobedience: Doing Right When What You're Told to Do is Wrong*
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

afterword: the open minds foundation

‘Intelligent disobedience is about finding the healthy balance for living in a system with rules and authorities while maintaining our own responsibility for the actions we take.’ Ira Chaleff, *Intelligent Disobedience*

Thank-you for taking the time to read this book. I hope that you have found the journey worthwhile and feel inspired to join our campaign to expose manipulation and undue influence. I am always eager to hear any comments that might improve my work, so please feel free to write to me at jonatopeningminds@gmail.com

Opening Minds: the secret world of manipulation, undue influence and brainwashing is my first project for the newly-formed Open Minds Foundation. It became apparent to me many years ago that the problems of totalitarianism are not limited to destructive cult groups or extreme political parties. After many discussions with my friends Christian Szurko, Steven Hassan and Dick Kelly, a group of us came together to create a charitable foundation following the pattern of United Way Worldwide, so the new foundation owns nothing but will channel funds to worthwhile projects that have been approved by our expert Review Board.

At the time of writing, the Open Minds Foundation is a community of about 150 academics and experts working to raise awareness of the devastating problems caused by the manipulations of undue influence. We include social scientists and legal experts who are researching and developing better strategies to deal with all forms of totalitarian influence in our world – from cult membership to radicalisation, from gang dynamics to human trafficking and slavery.

All of the topics touched on in this book will be addressed by the Open Minds Foundation, and your contribution would be most welcome.

The Open Minds Foundation is pluralistic: our only agenda is to expose and analyse the dynamics of manipulation. We are a community that welcomes people from all backgrounds and beliefs. We are united only in our opposition to totalitarian beliefs and behaviours. We encourage evidence-based investigation and agreeable disagreement.

Open Minds will provide financial support and expertise for like-minded people to take action against manipulation and undue influence through a broad range of activities. We seek to offer or develop:

1. stronger legal protection against undue influence
2. help to writers, film makers, artists and games makers to spread the word about undue influence
3. an international network to share best practices between therapists, mental health practitioners, medical doctors, law enforcement officials, responsible clergy, lawyers and jurists, activists and concerned citizens
4. support for universities and qualified researchers to investigate the mechanics of undue influence and to detail the cost to society of such influence
5. programmes to educate students and train therapists to better identify and resolve issues of manipulation
6. help for those victimized by manipulation to recover

Our ultimate goal is the global recognition of undue influence and the means to undo it, wherever it exists.

Please join us in the campaign to promote the understanding and recognition of manipulation and undue

influence. To find out more about us and our goals, please visit us at www.openmindsfoundation.org to see how you can contribute to the cause or to find out how we can help you.

jon atack, nottingham, november 2015

acknowledgments

My first thanks are due to my brother Jim and his wife Janet. This book would not have been possible without their unstinting support. Indeed, none of my work these last twenty years would have been possible without their generosity. My brother Andrew has provided help and advice in matters practical these many years.

The book was outlined with the help of my dear friend Christian Szurko, one of the most experienced counsellors in the counter-cult field. Several chapters belong to a more substantial work, written with the encouragement and editorial assistance of Jonny Jacobsen. Professor Khapta Akhmedova kindly reviewed the chapter where her remarkable work is mentioned.

Dick Kelly suggested that I distil my thoughts into a short book, and has been involved at every stage. His help and advice have been invaluable.

A number of friends have provided editorial comment, most significantly Spike Robinson, who has been untiring in her devotion and undone many a grammatical lapse and added several of her own illustrations, created the cover and also provided the glowing 'about the author' section. Thanks to Gary for the author photo from his filming for *Getting Clear*. Thanks to Mike White at Ghost River Images, who prepared the book for Kindle. I would also like to thank Gail Benton, Carmen, Louise, Flunk, Dave, Rex and Betsy for their useful and heartening comments. The author's path is always lonely, and I am grateful to everyone who has offered comfort and encouragement along the way.

My work has long been inspired by my friends Louise Jolyon West, Margaret Singer, Betty Tylden, Steven Hassan and, as ever, Christian Szurko.

My gratitude will always be due to my children Ben, Elisabeth, Sam and Dan, and to my extended family, especially Amelie and Aarti. They are a constant source of inspiration.

about the author



Born in the cathedral city of Litchfield, UK, *jon atack* has always been fascinated with the intricate workings of the human mind. He draws his unique perspective and streetwise, yet compassionate, wisdom from hundreds of interviews with the survivors of undue influence in a career spanning over three decades. Widely acclaimed in academic circles not only for his talents as a historian and researcher, but also his sharp wit and social insight, he honed his skills while deconstructing the labyrinthine net of lies surrounding cult leader Ron Hubbard. Having devoted much of his life to helping former Scientologists recover their mental equilibrium and spiritual independence, he has since turned his attention to the wider problems of unethical persuasion, not only in abusive groups but in our culture at large. To this end, he spearheaded the Open Minds Foundation in 2015, and is working to educate the public on the social manipulation we all face in our daily lives. He lives in a quiet village near Nottingham, England, where, following Voltaire's advice, he cultivates his garden, and also his four children and one grandchild – Spike Robinson

(Endnotes)

- 1 Pratkanis & Shadel, *Weapons of Fraud*, AARP, Seattle, 2005.
- 2 Definition formulated, in 1985, at a Conference on Cults and Society arranged by the American Family Foundation, chaired by Professor Louis Jolyon West, M.D., cited by Singer & Addis, *Cults, Coercion, and Contumely*, published in eds. Kales, Pearce & Greenblatt, *The Mosaic of Contemporary Psychiatry in Perspective*, Springer-Verlag, NY, 1992. Also cited in West & Martin. See Singer & Lalich, *Cults in Our Midst*, for a thorough definition of 'cult' attributes.
- 3 Margaret Singer and Janja Lalich, *Cults in Our Midst: the Hidden Menace in Our Everyday Lives*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1995, p.17.
- 4 Hill and Knowlton and Jack Trout were both on the Scientology payroll.
- 5 Margaret Thaler Singer with Janja Lalich, *op. cit.* While 'cult' groups in western society tend to consist of educated seekers, this is not true of popular movements from football hooligans and gangs to the grass roots support for Nazism. In the US, Identity Christians do not fit the profile of other more sophisticated groups, either.
- 6 'the outstanding common characteristic of terrorists is their normality,' Martha Crenshaw (1981 study of the Algerian FLN), 'terrorists do not show any striking psychopathology,' McCauley and Segal (1987) cited by Jerold M. Post, *Leaders and Their Followers in a Dangerous World*, New York, 2004, p.128; see also Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia, 2004; Anne Speckhard & Khapta Ahkmedova, *The Making of a Martyr: Chechen Suicide Terrorism*, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Volume 29, Issue 5, pgs. 1-65. 2006.
- 7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2XkzZvbJCg>
- 8 This chapter is adapted from the author's upcoming book *Waking Reason*.
- 9 Margaret Thaler Singer with Janja Lalich, *op. cit.*, p.xix.
- 10 see Steve Hassan's *Detailed Information on the Moon Organization, History of Organization*. <http://www.freedomofmind.com/resourcecenter/groups/m/moonies/moonhistory.htm>
- 11 *What turned two happy teenagers into hate-driven suicide bombers?*, Nick Britten, Rosie Waterhouse and Sean O'Neill, Daily Telegraph, filed 2 May 2003.
- 12 Zimbardo and Lippé, *The Psychology of Attitude Change and Social Influence*, McGraw Hill, NY, 1991, p.10.
- 13 Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, Penn, University of Philadelphia Press, 2004, p.92.
- 14 Ed Husain, *The Islamist*, Penguin, London, 2007, p.73. I use the term 'Islamist' to mean a Muslim who sees the faith as political.
- 15 Husain, *ibid*, p.3
- 16 Husain, *ibid*, p.70ff.
- 17 Husain, *ibid*, pp.108, 113, 116, 117, 153. When Scientology was banned in three Australian states it simply restyled itself 'The Church of the New Faith' until the ban was lifted.
- 18 BBC Panorama, *Faith, Hate and Charity*, 2006.
- 19 Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'Brainwashing' in China*, Norton Library, NY, 1963, 1969, p.420.
- 20 Steven Hassan, *Releasing the Bonds*, Freedom of Mind Press, Somerville, MA, 2000; also Hassan, *Combating Cult Mind Control*, second revised edition, 2015.
- 21 Husain, *op. cit.*, p.77.
- 22 Husain, *ibid*, p.38.
- 23 L. Ron Hubbard, *Organization Executive Course*, volume 7.
- 24 Husain, *op. cit.*, pp.81-82.
- 25 suras 5:29, 5:32; 18:74; see <http://islamicsupremecouncil.org/understanding-islam/legal-rulings/21-jihad-classical-islamic-perspective.html> and <http://www.meforum.org/5320/islam-suicide-bombings>
- 26 Husain, *op. cit.*, p.52.
- 27 Lifton, *Thought Reform, op. cit.*, p.429.
- 28 a swastika has been discovered that is 12,000 years old, see Joseph Campbell, *The Flight of the Wild Gander*, Viking Press, NY, 1969.
- 29 Husain, *op. cit.*, p.71.
- 30 according to the Hizb, for thirteen centuries, when the last sultan was removed, in 1924, Husain, *ibid*, pp.134-135.
- 31 *There Can Be No End to Jihad*, Christianity Today, 31 January 2005.
- 32 Husain, *op. cit.*, p.145.
- 33 Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.424.
- 34 'mystical manipulation' and 'planned spontaneity' in Lifton's model.
- 35 Robert Jay Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It*, Henry Holt, NY, 1999. The doctrine of *poa* is an ancient Buddhist idea, but separated by Shoko Asahara from the more fundamental doctrine of compassion.

- 36 Husain, *op. cit.*, p.147.
- 37 *Captive Minds: Hypnosis and Beyond*, Pierre Lasry, Canada, 1983.
- 38 Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.432.
- 39 *ibid*, p.431.
- 40 Singer and Lalich, *op. cit.*.
- 41 for a more complete explanation of Occam's razor, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occam's_razor
- 42 Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.428.
- 43 Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It*, p.67.
- 44 Husain, *op. cit.*, pp.151-153.
- 45 *There Can Be No End to Jihad*, *op. cit.*.
- 46 *Attack on London 'inevitable'*, The Age, 19 April 2004.
- 47 Sharif Maher, *Glasgow bombs: the doctor I knew*, New Statesman, 5 July 2007; BBC News channel, *Bomb plot: Arrests and releases*, 5 October 2007.
- 48 this chapter is adapted from the author's *Waking Reason*.
- 49 Khapta Akhmedova, emails to the author, November & December 2008; see also *Mass hysteria: Terror's hidden ally*, New Scientist, 14 October 2006; *Poison in the air*, The Guardian, 1 March 2006; see also *Ethnic strife triggers psychosomatic illness*, New Scientist, 25 January 1997. Two papers are available on this subject, but neither has yet been translated from the Russian: Akhmedova, Khapta (2006), *Factors and Conditions of Mass Sociogenic Illness (the Chechen Case)*. J Social and Clinical Psychiatry, Volume 4, 2006; and Akhmedova, Khapta, *Clinical Description of the Seizures of Patients Involved to Mass Sociogenic Illness*, Materials of Russian Psychiatric Conference on Modern Principles of Therapy and Rehabilitation of Patients with Mental Disorders, 2006. I am deeply indebted to Khapta Akhmedova for her painstaking help with this chapter. Any errors are mine.
- 50 For a detailed account of mass hysteria, see Aldous Huxley, *The Devils of Loudon*, which was the basis for Ken Russell's stylish film, *The Devils*. Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*, deals with the Salem witch trials and is also available in two film versions.
- 51 Bartholomew and Wessely, *Protean nature of mass sociogenic illness: From possessed nuns to chemical and biological terrorism fears*, British Journal of Psychiatry, 2002, 180:300-306. <http://bjp.rcpsych.org/cgi/content/full/180/4/300>
- 52 Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd*, Macmillan, NY, 1896.
- 53 For the satisfaction of fellow pedants, the possessive apostrophe is not used in the place name 'Robbers Cave'.
- 54 Muzafer Sherif, O. J. Harvey, B. Jack White, William R. Hood, Carolyn W. Sherif, *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robbers Cave Experiment*, 1954, study published 1961. <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Sherif/>
- 55 Andrew Davies, *Gangs of Manchester*, Milo Books, London, 2008.
- 56 Aaron Beck, *Prisoners of Hate*, HarperCollins, NY, 1999, p.304f.
- 57 see the Propaganda Model as described by Herman and Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Bodley Head, London, 2008.
- 58 Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: How good people turn evil*, Random House, US, 2007, p.30. This is an essential text.
- 59 *ibid*, pp.32&33.
- 60 *ibid*, p.59.
- 61 *ibid*, p.60.
- 62 In keeping with Christopher Simpson's claims that almost all post-war funding for social science in the US was military (see reference note, chapter 1), the Stanford Prison Experiment was funded by the Office of Naval Research, Zimbardo, *ibid*, p.236.
- 63 *ibid*, p.77.
- 64 *ibid*, p.107.
- 65 Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, NY, Harper & Row, 1974, p.23.
- 66 see <http://www.videosift.com/video/The-Original-Milgram-Experiment-1961>; Some researchers believe the participants in the experiment – and in all the replications of the experiment – knew the 'student' was acting, see K.M. Taylor and J.A. Shepperd, *Probing Suspicion Among Participants in Deception Research*, American Psychologist 51, no.8 (1996), pp.886-887, cited by Aaron Beck, *Prisoners of Hate*, p.309. However, in 1972, Sheridan and King published a study showing that 20 out of 26 participants gave real shocks to a puppy that was 'running, howling and yelping'. Milgram had this to say, 'At many points we attempted to establish a boundary. Cries from the victims were inserted: they were not effective enough. The victim claimed heart trouble; subjects still shocked him on command. The victim pleaded that he be let free and his answers no longer registered on the signal box: subjects continued to shock him.' Milgram, *op. cit.*, p.188. Milgram's remarkable book shows that he checked many permutations of the experiment.
- 67 Milgram, *op. cit.*, p.188.
- 68 Festinger, Riecken, Schacter, *op. cit.*, p.56.
- 69 *ibid*.

70 'changed date: failed predictions', *JWfacts* <http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/1800s.php>

71 for a full discussion of cognitive dissonance, see Harmon-Jones & Mills, eds, *Cognitive dissonance: progress on a pivotal theory in social psychology*, American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, 1999.

72 Harmon-Jones & Mills, *op. cit.*, pp.3-10.

73 see Asch S. E. (1956) *Studies of independence and conformity* at <http://www.gerardkeegan.co.uk/resource/seminalstudies.htm>

74 Replication with different groups has produced varying results. In one experiment, science students showed virtually no compliance, *ibid.* Keegan references Perrin and Spencer, 1980, 1981; Nicholson, N., Cole, S. & Rocklin, T, 1985; Lalancette, M-F & Standing, L.G, 1990; Neto, F. 1995.

75 Gina Kolta, *Study Finds Big Social Factor in Quitting Smoking*, New York Times, 22 May 2008.

76 According to William Safire, *New York Times*, 8 August 2004, William H. Whyte coined the term in *Fortune*, March 1952, defining it thus: 'Groupthink is becoming a national philosophy ... Groupthink being a coinage – and, admittedly, a loaded one – a working definition is in order. We are not talking about mere instinctive conformity – it is, after all, a perennial failing of mankind. What we are talking about is a rationalized conformity – an open, articulate philosophy which holds that group values are not only expedient but right and good as well.'; see also Irving Janis, *Victims of Groupthink*, Boston, 1972, p. 9 and Janis and Mann, *Decision Making: A Psychological Analysis of Conflict, Choice and Commitment*, Free Press, NY, 1977.

77 quoted in Daniel Goleman, *Vital Lies, Simple Truths*, Touchstone, NY, 1986, p.181, see also pp.184-189. '...it is hard to believe in retrospect that the president and his advisers felt the plans for a large-scale, complicated military operation that had been ongoing for more than a year could be reworked in four days and still offer a high likelihood of success. It is equally amazing that we in the agency agreed so readily.' Richard Bissell, CIA Director of Plans, *Memoirs of a Cold Warrior: from Yalta to Bay of Pigs*. Arthur Schlesinger, in the Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *A Thousand Days*: 'Fulbright, speaking in an emphatic and incredulous way, denounced the whole idea. The operation, he said, was wildly out of proportion to the threat. It would compromise our moral position in the world and make it impossible for us to protest treaty violations by the Communists. He gave a brave, old-fashioned American speech, honorable, sensible and strong; and he left everyone in the room, except me and perhaps the President, wholly unmoved.'

78 Loren Coleman, *The Copycat Effect*, Paraview, NY, 2004. Cho Seung-Hui, who murdered 32 people at Virginia Tech before turning his gun on himself, called the Columbine killers 'martyrs'. See also Michael Bond, *Can media coverage of suicides inspire copycats?*, 9 May 2007, *New Scientist*; Laura Spinney, *Why we do what we do*, 31 July 2004, *New Scientist*; see also Zimbardo and Lieppe, *The Psychology of Attitude Change and Social Influence*, McGraw Hill, NY, 1991, pp.50-51, reporting Albert Bandura's studies of copycat aggression among children.

79 Sageman, *op. cit.*, p.92.

80 Kurt Lewin's model of coercive persuasion consists of unfreezing, changing and refreezing the identity.

81 Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'Brainwashing' in China*, Norton Library, NY, 1963, 1969, p.420.

82 see the Propaganda Model as described by Herman and Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Bodley Head, London, 2008.

83 Darley, J. M., and Batson, C.D., *From Jerusalem to Jericho: A Study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1973, 27, 100-108.

84 Stanley Milgram, *The Perils of Obedience*, Harper's Magazine, 1974, reprinted as *An Experiment in Autonomy in The Moral Life*, ed. Louis J Pojman, OUP, NY & Oxford, 2004.

85 Lifton, *Thought Reform*, p.429.

86 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1949.

87 Lifton, *Thought Reform*, *op. cit.*, pp.429-430.

88 Lifton, *Thought Reform*, *op. cit.*, p.424.

89 H.G.Wells, *In the Country of the Blind*, Complete Short Stories, Benn, London, 1966.

90 Lifton, *Thought Reform*, *op. cit.*, p.423.

91 Zimbardo, *op. cit.*, p.187.

92 Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, Basic Books, US, 1986.

93 Festinger, Riecken, Schacter, *op. cit.*, p.4.

94 This if the profession of Orwell's hero in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Outcasts are dropped down the 'memory hole'.

95 'The ability of good music to enthrall the masses has been sacrificed on the altar of petit-bourgeois formalism,' according to a 1936 article in *Pravda* allegedly written at Stalin's behest.

96 Lifton, *Thought Reform*, *op. cit.*, pp.427-428.

97 'The human understanding, once it has adopted opinions, either because they were already accepted and believed, or because it likes them, draws everything else to support and agree with them. And though it may meet a greater number and weight of contrary instances, it will, with great and harmful prejudice, ignore or condemn or exclude them by introducing some distinction, in order that the authority of those earlier assumptions may remain intact and unharmed ... The same reasoning can be seen in every superstition, whether in astrology, dreams, omens,

metempsychosis and the like, in which men find such vanities pleasing, and take note of events where they are fulfilled, but where they are not (even if this happens much more often), they disregard them and pass them by. But this evil lurks far more insidiously in philosophies and sciences, in which an opinion once adopted infects and brings under control all the rest ... the human understanding still has this peculiar and perpetual fault of being more moved and excited by affirmatives than by negatives, whereas rightly and properly it ought to give equal weight to both; rather, in fact, in every truly constituted axiom, a negative instance has the greater weight.' Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 1620. This is the same Lord Bacon who ruled on Mrs Death's case.

98 Thomas Kuhn's theory of paradigm shift was proposed in the 1960s, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago University Press, 3rd edition, 1996.

99 Hans Franck: TV documentary *War of the World*, part 3; 'Frankly, you and I have diametrically different views of the Chinese. You may be dealing with them as human beings, but I regard them as swine. We can do anything with such creatures.' Lt Col Ryukichi Tenuka, *ibid*; Blamey, *ibid*, part 4. General Sanchez, while Commander-in-Chief in Iraq, said that detainees were 'like dogs', Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, p.337.

100 Konrad Lorenz: '[I]t must be the duty of racial hygiene to be attentive to a more severe elimination of morally inferior human beings than is the case today ... otherwise, humanity will ... be annihilated by the degenerative phenomena that accompany domestication.' 1940, cited by Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, *op. cit.*, p.134.

101 Baumslag and Pellegrino, *Murderous Medicine*, Greenwood, 2005, p.123. Only 20% of teachers joined the Nazi Party, *ibid*.

102 For an exhaustive examination see Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors op. cit.* Hitler had earlier congratulated the US on its enforced sterilization of tens of thousands of mentally ill people. That programme was supported, and even applauded, by leaders of the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish communities in America. See Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics*, Oxford, OUP, 2004. See also Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism and German National Socialism*, Oxford, OUP, 1994: 'The leaders in the German sterilization movement state repeatedly that their legislation was formulated only after careful study of the California experiment ... It would have been impossible, they say, to undertake such a venture involving some 1 million people without drawing heavily upon previous experience elsewhere.' p.42. See also <http://downsyndromeuprising.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/a-brief-history-of-down-syndrome-part-6.html> which outlines 'eugenics' programmes in France, Belgium, Sweden and Great Britain.

103 Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'Brainwashing' in China*, Norton Library, NY, 1963, 1969, p.420.

104 see Robert Jay Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It*, Henry Holt, NY, 1999, p.326ff.

105 Adam Curtis's BBC TV documentary series, *The Power of Nightmares*, explores the origins of Al-Qaeda – and its opposition – in some depth. See also Peter Taylor's BBC TV documentaries, *Age of Terror* and Marc Sageman's *Understanding Terror Networks*, *op. cit.*

106 David Cohen, *All the world's a net*, 13 April 2002, New Scientist.

107 Several groups labelled 'terrorists' have achieved respectability in government. Former members of the IRA now sit in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Irgun settled into the political scene after the declaration of the State of Israel. Fomer Mau Mau established the first independent government of Kenya.

108 This chapter is adapted from the author's upcoming book *Waking Reason*.

109 Jill Bolte Taylor, *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*, 2006, p.19.

110 Jung, *A Review of the Complex Theory: In the Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, 1934, Collected Works, volume 17, p.289.

111 Flavil Yeakley, ed, *The Discipling Dilemma*, 1988: <http://www.somis.org/TDD-01.html> p.27.

112 *ibid*; Yeakley became president of the Association for Psychological Type in 1987.

113 Professor Rod Dubrow-Marshall, *The Influence Continuum – the Good, the Dubious, and the Harmful – Evidence and Implications for Policy and Practice in the 21st Century*, International Journal of Cultic Studies. vol.1, no.1, 2010.

114 *Once Upon a Time*, Laura Spinney, New Scientist, 10 January 2015.

115 Gerald Edelman, *Second Nature: brain science and human knowledge*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2006; Kathleen Taylor, *Brainwashing: The science of thought control*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

116 Gerald Edelman, *op. cit.*

117 The full passage reads, 'Man is not capable of thought in any high degree, and even the most spiritual and cultivated of men habitually sees the world and himself through the lenses of delusive formulas and artless simplifications. For it appears to be an inborn and imperative need of all men to regard the self as a unit. However often and however grievously this illusion is shattered, it always mends again. The judge who sits over the murderer and looks into his face, and at one moment recognizes all the emotions and potentialities of the murderer in his own soul and hears the murderer's voice as his own is at the next moment one and indivisible as the judge, and scuttles back into the shell of his cultivated self and does his duty and condemns the murderer to death. And if ever the suspicion of their manifold being dawns upon men of unusual powers and of unusually delicate perceptions, so that, as all genius must, they break through the illusion of the unity of the personality and perceive that the self is made up of a bundle of selves, they have only to say so and at once the majority puts them under lock and key, calls science to aid, establishes schizophrenia and protects humanity from the necessity of hearing the cry of truth from the lips of these unfortunate persons ... In reality, however, every ego, so far from being a unity is in the highest degree a manifold world, a constellated heaven, a chaos of forms, of states and stages, of inheritances and potentialities. It appears to be a necessity as imperative as eating and breathing for everyone to

- be forced to regard this chaos as a unity and to speak of his ego as though it were one-fold and clearly detached and fixed phenomenon. The delusion rests simply upon a false analogy. As a body everyone is single, as a soul never.' Herman Hesse, trans Creighton, rev. Sorrell, *Steppenwolf*, 1927, 2001, Penguin Classics, pp.70-72.
- 118 Alan Watts, with Al Chung-Liang Huang, *Tao: the Watercourse Way*, Arkana, NY, 1975.
- 119 John Gottman, *The Relationship Cure*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2001.
- 120 The term 'pseudo-identity' was coined by Professor Louise Jolyon West.
- 121 *13 More Things: the Nocebo Effect*, New Scientist, 2 September 2009. It seems important to conclude that if there is evidence for cognition in the brain and evidence that physiology can be influenced by thought, the 'hard problem' of consciousness itself, which bedevils psychology and philosophy is far from being solved.
- 122 John F Kihlstrom in Nash and Barnier, *The Oxford Handbook of Hypnosis: Theory, Research and Practice*, Oxford Library of Psychology, OUP, 2012.
- 123 Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*, Random House, NY, 1996. Peter Huston, *Night Terrors, Sleep Paralysis, and Devil Stricken Telephone Cords from Hell*, Skeptical Inquirer, Fall 1992.
- 124 Brian Inglis, *Trance*, 1989, Grafton Books, London.
- 125 Derren Brown, *The Heist, 2006*; and *The Assassin in The Experiments*, 2011
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