

GROUPS, SECTS AND CULTS.

Some broad definitions.

Groups. There are many religious groupings for example within Christianity, such as Roman Catholics, Methodists, and Anglicans. All these are seen as legitimate groups, with different emphases, accents and traditions within the broad spectrum of Christianity. They may not always see eye to eye, but generally recognise each other's legitimate existence.

Sects. These are usually short lived, small groups or factions. They may arise as the result of a charismatic leader, or out of disaffection with the status quo. They may be small or large in number and may be quite active and vocal. They may decay on the death of the leader or be re absorbed into a mainstream group. Examples of this include Primitive Methodism or Puritanism. Sometimes they go on to achieve legitimacy, becoming a group in their own right. Christianity was originally a Jewish sect.

Cults. This is a negative term. It generally refers to a group or sect that has sinister aspects to it, such as attempts at coercion. In various ways they are dysfunctional, unhealthy groups.

CULTS

There are four main types: Religious, Political, Therapy/educational, and Commercial.

They do not carry out brainwashing. Brainwashing is overt, coercive and it is plain who the enemy is. Rather they carry out mind control or thought reform. Here, the perpetrators are

- a) regarded as friends or peers making the candidate less defensive.
- b) The candidate participates unwittingly with their controllers, for example by giving private information.
- c) The new belief system is internalised into a new identity structure.
- d) The group may use hypnotic processes and group dynamics.

THE COMPONENTS OF MIND CONTROL

1) BEHAVIOUR CONTROL

By regulating the environment:

- a) Where you live
- b) What clothing you wear
- c) What food you eat
- d) How much sleep you have

- e) What jobs and goals you have.
- f) Rituals and indoctrination
- g) Restriction of free time – sometimes an apocalyptic sense of urgency
- h) Financial dependency
- i) Permission required to do things, i.e. phone relative
- j) Suppression of individuality to group conformity
- k) Pyramidal authoritarian command structure
- l) Use of punishment and reward, often keeping members off balance – praised one day, punished the next.
- m) Use of mannerisms of speech and posture
- n) Regulation of interpersonal relationships – emotional allegiance to leader – no real friends because if the person leaves they may take others with them.
- o) Group activities which creates privacy deprivation and thwarts reflection.

2) **THOUGHT CONTROL**

By indoctrination, such that beliefs are internalised.

- a) Group has the Truth – the only map of reality. This moulds and filters incoming data. The doctrine is reality, the most effective being those which are unverifiable – global yet vague but apparently consistent. Reality is externally referenced via an authority figure and other members who are looked to for direction and meaning.
- b) Black and white thinking – Group is good, outsiders bad. Thus good vs evil, Us vs them, Spiritual vs physical. No pluralism or multi perspective taking.
- c) Group beliefs are scientifically proven and explain everything
- d) Loaded language. E.g. A Cain and Abel problem
- e) Blocking out critical thoughts by:
 - i) Denial: “What you say is not happening at all”
 - ii) Rationalisation: “It is happening for a good reason”
 - iii) Justification: “It is happening because it ought to”
 - iv) Wishful thinking: “I would like it to be true so maybe it is”
 - v) Demonising: “Lies put about by Satan/Persecution that we would expect”.
 - vi) Thought stopping: By chanting/ tongue speaking
 - vii) Punishment: Being given the silent treatment or transfer to another group e.t.c.

3) **EMOTIONAL CONTROL**

Emotions are controlled by the use of:

- a) Guilt: in order to produce conformity and compliance. Guilt takes a number of aspects:
 - i) Historical guilt. – We dropped the bomb on Hiroshima
 - ii) Identity guilt – “I’m not living up to my potential”
 - iii) Past guilt – “I cheated on a test” A persons past is rewritten: everything is dark

- iv) Social guilt – People are dying of starvation
 - v) Quality guilt- not meeting standards
- b) Fear: By creating an outside enemy – unbelievers, Satan, therapists.
Of discovery and punishment by leaders
A major motivator.
 - c) Happiness: As defined by the group. Obtained by good performance and/or confession.
 - d) Loyalty and devotion.
 - e) Confession of past sins – this is often used against the person.
 - f) Phobia indoctrination. Induced panic reaction at the thought of leaving. Dark stories are told of those who have left both in lectures and informal gossip. The idea of the Devil waiting to seduce and tempt, kill or drive insane. The more vivid and tangible, the more intense the cohesiveness it fosters.

4) **INFORMATION CONTROL**

The control of destabilising information by:

- a) Denial of information so that sound judgements cannot be made. E.g. minimal access to T.V., non-group magazines, newspapers or radio. Partially achieved through busyness.
- b) Criticism of the leader with peers not allowed
- c) Members report improper activities to leader.
- d) New converts do not talk to one another without a chaperone
- e) Contact with ex members and critics avoided.
- f) Compartmentalisation of information so that members do not know the 'big picture'.
- g) Multi levelled truth- the higher you are, the more is revealed.
 - i) For outsiders
 - ii) For members
 - iii) For leaders
 - iv) For high leaders

THE PROCESSES OF MIND CONTROL

There are three steps:

- 1) Unfreezing
- 2) Changing
- 3) Refreezing

1) **UNFREEZING.**

This is a shaking up and disorientation. A breaking up of the frames of reference used by the person for understanding themselves and their surroundings. This disarms the person's defences against concepts that challenge reality.

Approaches include:

- a) Physiological disorientation via sleep deprivation, new diets and eating schedules. Often best accomplished in a totally controlled environment such as a retreat at a country estate.
- b) Hypnotic processes such as the deliberate use of confusion via contradictory information.
- c) Sensory overload – being bombarded with material faster than it can be digested.
- d) Use of double binds – “I am putting doubts in your mind”.
- e) Group exercises –
 - 1) Guided meditation.
 - 2) Personal confession
 - 3) Prayer sessions
 - 4) Group singing
 - 5) Vigorous callisthenicsGroup activities enforce privacy deprivation and reflection.
- f) As people weaken – A bombardment with the idea that the person is badly flawed, mentally ill, incompetent or spiritually fallen. Any identified problems are blown out of all proportion. There may be humiliation in front of the group.

2) **CHANGING**

The imposition of a new identity, a new set of thoughts, emotions and behaviours to fill the void of unfreezing. This takes place:

- a) Formally – in lectures, seminars and rituals
- b) Informally –in spending time with members, reading, listening to tapes, watching videos.

The approaches to change include:

- a) Repetition, monotony and rhythm – the hypnotic cadences in which formal indoctrination is delivered
- b) A focus on central themes:
 - 1) The world is bad.
 - 2) The unenlightened do not know how to fix it
 - 3) The old self keeps you from experiencing the new truth fully.
 - 4) Old concepts drag you down.
 - 5) The rational mind holds you back – let go.
- c) The material for the new identity is given out gradually – “Tell him only what he can accept.” “Milk for the baby, meat for the adult”

- d) Artificially induced spiritual experience. Private information is secretly passed and revealed at the appropriate time as an 'insight'.
- e) Asking for God's will for them. Via prayer and study. The implication is that joining the group is God's will, leaving is not.
- f) Group processes:
 - 1) Being surrounded by people who are convinced that they know what is best for you.
 - 2) Via cells or small groups- questioners and doubters may be isolated into their own group.
 - 3) Sharing sessions with ordinary members, where past evils are confessed, present successes told and a sense of community fostered.

3) REFREEZING.

This is the building up of the new person, giving them a new purpose and new activities to solidify the new identity. New beliefs are internalised by the person.

Approaches include

- a) Denigration of the old self, maximising sins, failings, hurt and guilt.
- b) Modelling. The new member is paired with an older member whom they should emulate.
- c) The group is the member's new family.
- d) Possible giving of a new name.
- e) Turning over the bank account – subsequently it may be too painful to admit this mistake.
- f) Sleep deprivation, lack of privacy, diet changes continued.
- g) New location – no links with the past – only the new identity here.
- h) Evangelising/prosteletizing – selling one's own beliefs to others to firm up one's own beliefs.
- i) Difficult and humiliating fund raising. Can provoke a sense of glorious martyrdom.

General comments

There is no **legitimate** way to leave a cult.

The result of these processes is a dual identity - the old self does not disappear, but occasionally surfaces in humour, and greater emotional range and spontaneity. But it is clothed in the new cult self such that the person is more robot-like, rigid and cold-eyed. But the real identity holds the key to escape and to the inner desires. These emerge via psychosomatic illness, requiring outside treatment, dreams of being trapped, concentration camps e.t.c. and spiritual experiences, of voices telling them to leave e.t.c..

Problems in the group are always the fault of the member, due to:

- a) His weakness
- b) His lack of understanding
- c) Bad ancestors
- d) Evil spirits
- e) His inadequacies.

ANALYSING AND ASSESSING GROUPS

Look at what the group does, not at what it believes. They have the right to believe what they want, but they do not have an automatic licence to act on those beliefs, else white supremacy groups would kill all blacks for example. Destructive groups undermine individual choice and liberty.