



# The benefits of understanding cult behaviour

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# Programm

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# Programm

1. High Demand Groups, focus on behavior
2. What cults and extremist groups have in common
3. Cult or culture
4. Tools to support: Personal experiences & insight
5. The next step. Where do we start? Sharing ideas.....

# High Demand Groups



# Group Dynamic definition



Closed groups with an exclusive ideology and a totalitarian power structure.

- Religious (old and new)
- Also non-religious
- All High Demand Groups

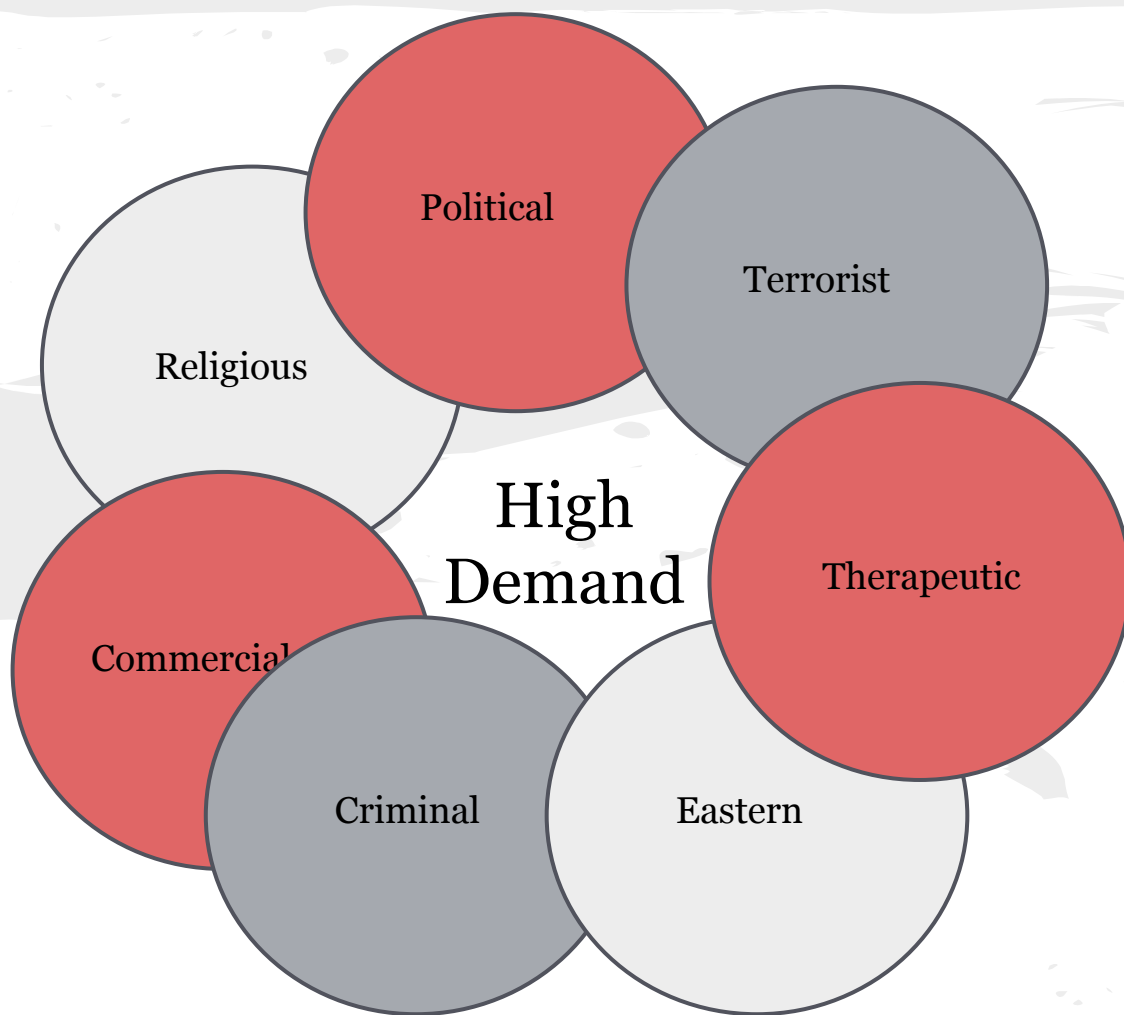
# High Demand Groups

- 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.'

# \*Coercive techniques

- Isolate from former friends and family
- Weaken the person
- Use special methods to enforce one's sensitivity for impressions and submission
- Group Pressure
- Control information
- Erase individuality or ability to critical thinking
- Promote total dependency to the group (and install the fear to leave).





High  
Demand

Political

Terrorist

Therapeutic

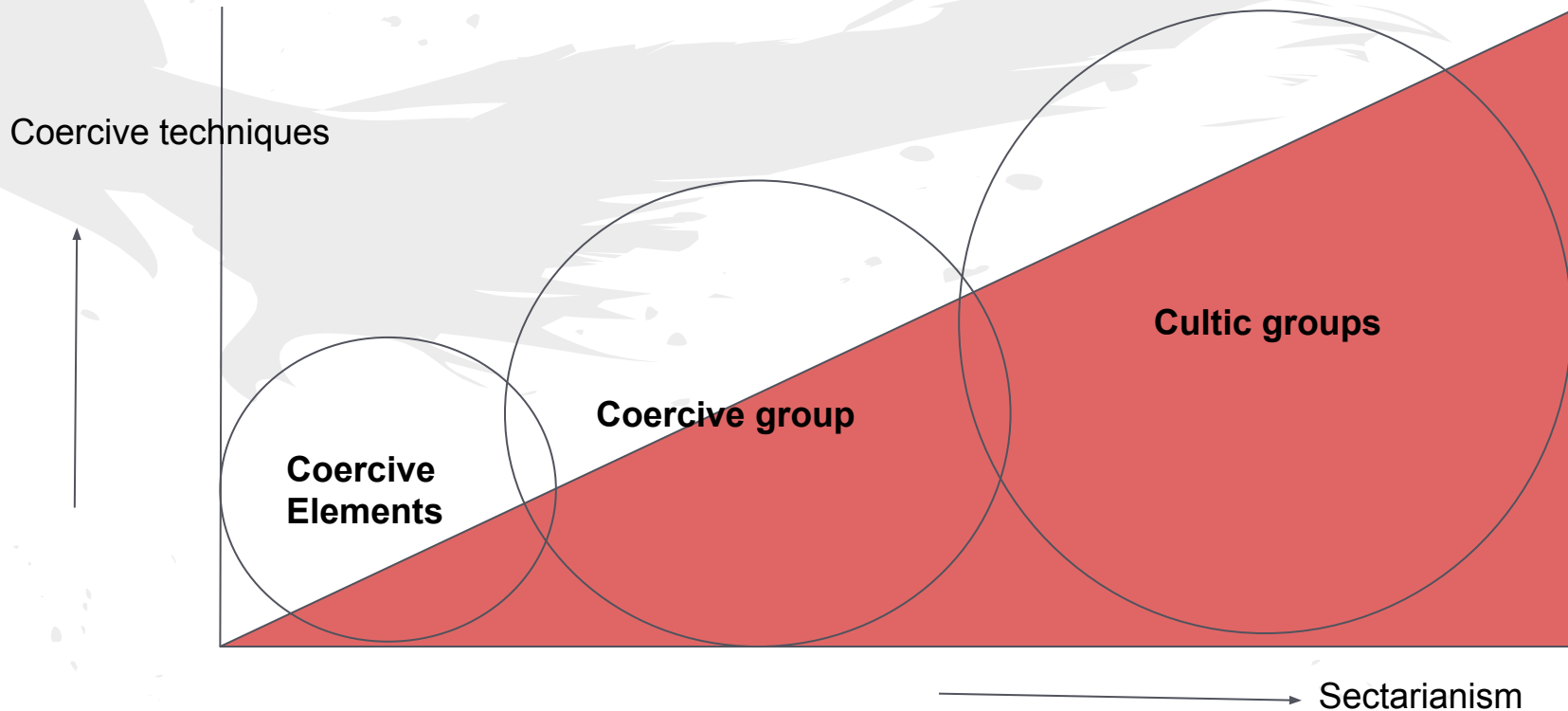
Eastern

Criminal

Commercial

Religious

# From group to cult

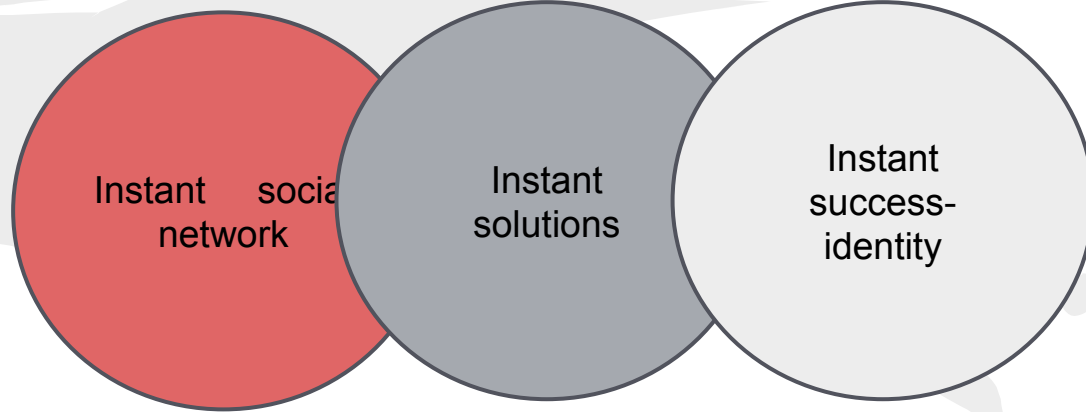


# Injustices

1. Withholding rights:
  - a. Self-determination (physically, mentally)
  - b. Freedom of speech
  - c. Freedom of religion
  - d. Medical care
  - e. Seeing own children/next of kin/family
2. Exploitation (sexual, labor, money)
3. Criminal activities/terrorism/militant activism



# The attraction



# Risk factors for recruitment

- Vulnerable stages
  - transition stages, break-ups, re-housing, illness/handicap, (becoming) unemployed, guilt, loneliness, integration problems
- Adolescence-perils
  - need for adventure, accident-prone, seeking danger
  - foreclosed identity
  - unfinished identity development, critical thinking ability
  - not feeling safe in mainstream society
- Need for recognition
  - instant heroism as an escape route

**BEING VULNERABLE IS NOT THE PROBLEM, ABUSING VULNERABILITY IS !**

# Grooming: Unduly influencing the will

- A hidden agenda
- Taking time to mislead, suggest, blackmail (emotional)
- Coercion: Abuse of (spiritual) prevalence/advantage
- Abusing vulnerability for own interests
- Gradual taking control over the will: the 'game'
- Moment to surrender: 'Where must I sign?'

# BITE analyse (Steven Hassan)

## Behaviour

- Full behavioral program
- Reward and punish system

## Information

- Withholding/controlling info, framing, spying

## Thoughts

- Exclusive loaded language, redefining/\*framing, thought-stoppers for self-censorship

## Emotions

- Stimulating guilt, obligation, fear. Rituals, demanding ‘confessions’



# Framing

A compelling explanation framework:

- Us - Them
- Past - Present
- Black - White
- Good - Bad

For instance words such as 'healthy, natural, free, beautiful, necessary' and harmless images (frames) connecting to a harmful product. Or framing rejection or punishment as 'loving, god's will'. In the extreme case: framing the act of suicide bombing as 'an ultimate act of love', 'something to be proud of'.





What we have in common

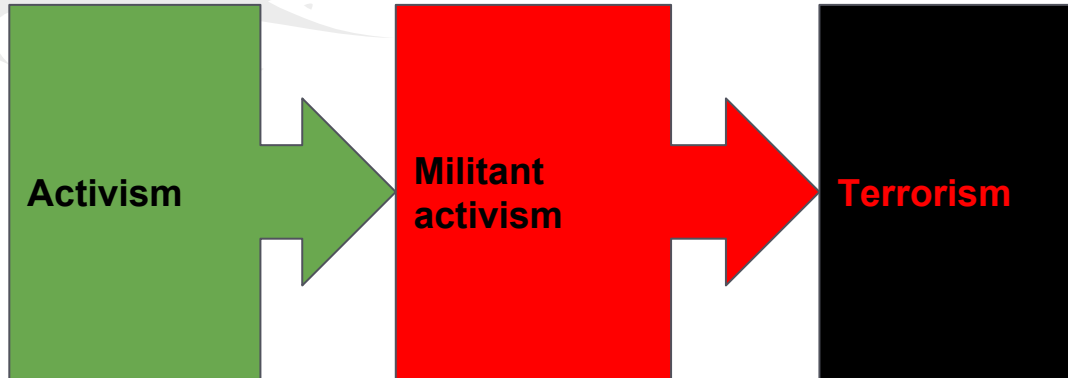
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# Identical processes High Demand Groups and Radical extremism

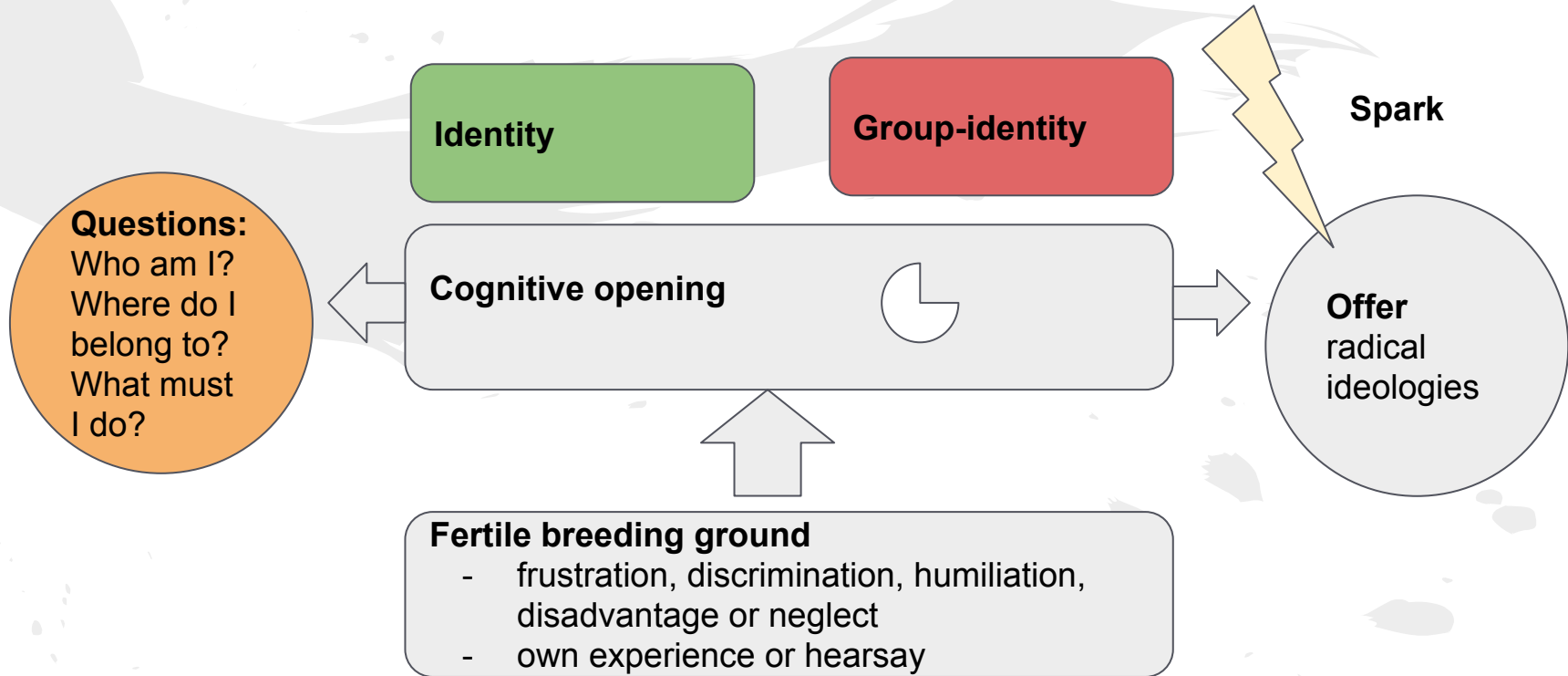
- Recruitment (appeal value)
- 1st and 2nd generation
- Cult-identity (even another name)
- Fanaticism (total commitment) and isolation
- Mainstream Society seen as inferior

# Is being radical always a bad thing?

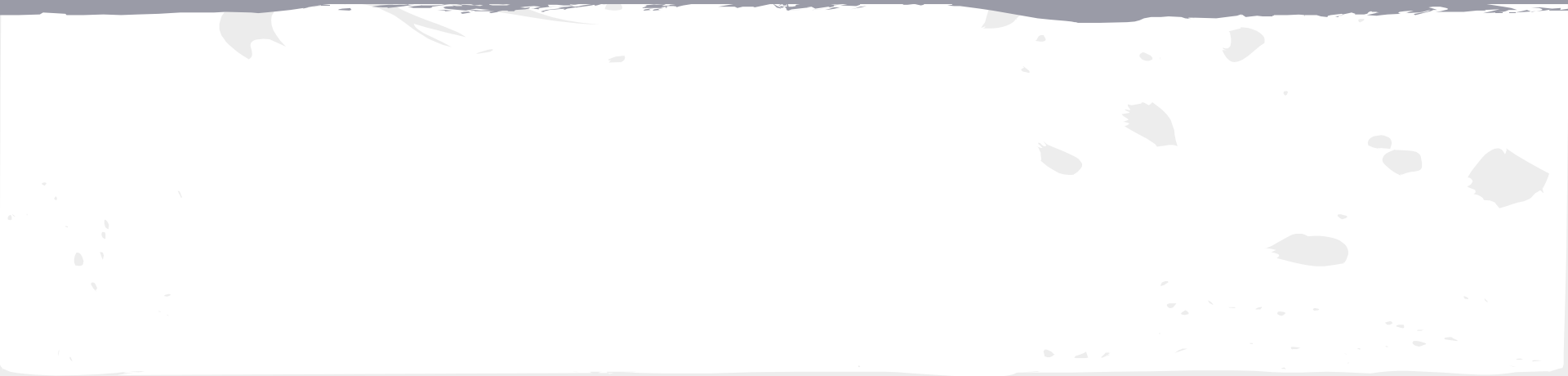
Cause of huge changes in the world  
(f.i. Maarten Luther, Ghandi, Mandela)



# Fertile breeding ground and fuel



Cult or culture



# Cult

- Entered a 'new world'
- Became involved as a young adult or adult
- Coerced into the cult by a human predator
- Leaves after a period of time
- Recollecting what happened
- Recovering

# Culture

- A world in itself
- Born into the group or from early childhood onwards
- A high demand group with a hierarchical system, own laws and law enforcers, closed social network
- Foreclosed identity: group identity (24/7) internalized
- After leaving, need for building up own identity

Control (BITE) parent(s)

Leader is Head of the large Household

Group-values/-norms superior

Unity as a coercive measure



Reward & punish system, applies to parents and children

*What part do cult-leaders play?*



# How to spot cult behavior 1

- Strong urge to preach and 'save' others
- Imprisoned in the magical thinking-bubble of the leader
- Secure in cult-mode, insecure on personal level
- Problems with reviewing fallacies
- Little to no close contact with people outside

# How to spot cult behavior 2

- Distrusting, even fearful of the 'outside world'
- Struggling with (personal) boundaries
- Black-white thinking, idealistic, grandiose ideas
- Irrational fears, feelings of guilt and obligation
- Dissociation, 'floating', incongruent

Tools to support

# Drama Triangle

Unequal levels

Dependency

Weakens

No responsibility



# From victim to survivor



Autonomy

Empowers

Responsibility

Boundaries

Mutual respect

# From victim to survivor



Equal levels  
Autonomy  
Empowers  
Responsibility



“The critical thinking ability

against radicalisation”

- Massoud Djabani

(former MEK member)

# Inoculate the young and old

## Knowledge about:

- universal rights
- philosophy
- the faces of manipulation
- coercive groups

## Attitudes:

- self confidence
- feeling free to choose
- coercion-aware

## Skills:

- critical thinking
- intelligent disobedience
- knowing where to find help





# Tips for mental health professionals

- Listen carefully. Take seriously until proven otherwise
- Find an experienced colleague with a similar background
- If not, worthwhile to find more info about the group
- Address cult issues first, family issues later
- Help figure out boundaries own and cult's responsibility
- Refer if necessary to judicial support system and hands on support systems

Where to start?

# Need for social safety

- Recognize wrongs in ideological groups and individuals
- Pluriform society is reality
- All allowed to participate and demonstrate
- Functioning rule of law, for all
- Provide education and knowledge about rights/duties

# Sharing knowledge



Network of world-class experts

Offering free information/advice from experts

Funding research to understand manipulation

Resource to an accessible database and information that keeps on growing

Developing new projects

# Promoting education



To promote education about human predators  
and the techniques they use

To proof people against manipulation in all its many forms

To bring together counselors and scholars



What do you think?

How would you like to use  
your experience to support?

Websites:

[www.openmindsfoundation.org](http://www.openmindsfoundation.org) The OpenMinds Foundation  
[www.free-choice.nl](http://www.free-choice.nl) Coaching/counselling formers and family  
[www.bonniezieman.com](http://www.bonniezieman.com) Psychotherapist/Writer of “Exiting the JW cult”  
[www.iacsso.be](http://www.iacsso.be) Library and documentationcentre Brussels

Books:

Take Back Your Life Madeleine Tobias and Janja Lalich  
Emotional Blackmail Dr. Susan Forward  
Opening Minds Jon Atack

Thank you for listening

# Starting points

- We all share same Human Rights (art. 18 ICCPR)
- Focus on cult mechanism, no “naming and shaming”
- Realize it’s about our human condition, our makeup
- Focus on citizenship and connection
- Personal experience a key to help and support