The benefits of understanding cult behaviour

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Programm
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).
From group to cult

- Coercive techniques
- Coercive elements
- Coercive group
- Cultic groups
- Sectarianism
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

- Instant social network
- Instant solutions
- Instant success-identity
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 ÍS!*
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
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

Questions:
Who am I?
Where do I belong to?
What must I do?

Cognitive opening

Identity
Group-identity

Fertile breeding ground
- frustration, discrimination, humiliation, disadvantage or neglect
- own experience or hearsay

Spark
Offer radical ideologies
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
What part do cult-leaders play?

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
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

TED* 
*The Empowerment Dynamic
From victim to survivor

Equal levels
Autonomy
Empowers
Responsibility
“The critical thinking ability works as an antidote 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