

Undoing Undue Influence and the BITE Model of Authoritarian Control

Undue influence is any act of persuasion that overcomes the free will and judgment of another person. People can be unduly influenced by deception, flattery, trickery, coercion, and other techniques including hypnosis. In a court of law, undue influence is a legal term, which involves a person or group taking advantage of their position of power over another person or persons.

Unfortunately, undue influence rates are low for most people as an imminent threat to a free society and happy families. But such oversight is very costly. In the manipulative hands of human traffickers, terrorist and violent extremist groups, charismatic cult leaders, highly controlling bible-based groups masquerading as benevolent religions, multi-level marketers, political action cults, human potential hucksters, and even abusive spouses and parents, undue influence is a major problem in today's world—and it is getting worse.

When undue influence is used to cheat people out of their inheritance or property, break up families, deceive members into thinking that extreme shunning of close family members and friends is a loving act, demand that parents beat their children under the assumption that the bible commands such harsh discipline, encourage people to break the law, turn adolescent girls and boys into slaves and prostitutes, kill innocent people, threaten parishioners with shunning if they report child molestation or domestic violence to the police or tell anyone about it, fly passenger planes into buildings, become involved in shady deals or coerce parents into letting their children die because “it’s God’s will,” these kinds of influence are a significant threat to basic human rights and a free society. Undue influence seeks nothing less than to disrupt an individual’s authentic identity and reconstruct it in the image of the cult leader.

To compound the problem, society loses in the following three ways:

- 1) Groups that practice undue influence as a means of controlling people often have tax-exempt or even charitable status, which means citizens pay the taxes for any properties they own, and the services required to maintain those properties.
- 2) While a group may receive billions of dollars from its members, they often do not put that money back into society to help people other than the cult leadership.
- 3) To meet the demands placed upon them by a high-control group, many members are subsidized by the social welfare system, including the medical system, costing society even more money.

When undue influence is initially imposed on the minds of unsuspecting recruits by extremist cults or pseudo-religious groups, it often starts with “love bombing” and a promise of life in an idealistic fantasy world where they might “never have to die” and could “live forever,” achieve some elite status in a better society to come, etc.

Once recruits have bought into all the initial promises and hype, they are incrementally introduced into a systematic method of control, one small step at a time.

This methodical system of control—undue influence—disrupts the person’s authentic identity and reconstructs a new identity in the image of the group or leader. In the process, an individual’s ability to think rationally and act independently is undermined, enslaving even the brightest, most educated, and most functional people. But exactly how does it work?

Steven Hassan’s BITE Model of Authoritarian Control is an acronym for control of a person’s Behavior, Information, Thoughts, and Emotions. This model can be found in his books—*Combating Cult Mind Control*, *Releasing the Bonds*, *Freedom of Mind*, *The Cult of Trump*—and explains the four overlapping components of control necessary to define undue influence. It clearly spells out the criteria used by cults, manipulative bible-based religious groups, and oppressive individuals to suppress the uniqueness and creativity of their followers. BITE is an acronym for the control of a person’s Behavior, Information, Thoughts, and Emotions.

Undue influence occurs when the overall effect of the methods to control behavior, information, thoughts, and emotions promotes dependency and obedience to some cause, leader, or group. Members of pseudo-religious groups and cults subjected to undue influence can live in their own homes, have 9-to-5 jobs, be married with children, and still be unable to think for themselves and act independently.

BITE Model

I. Behavior Control

1. Regulate individual's physical reality
2. Dictate where, how, and with whom the member lives and associates or isolates
3. When, how and with whom the member has sex
4. Control types of clothing and hairstyles
5. Regulate diet - food and drink, hunger and/or fasting
6. Manipulation and deprivation of sleep
7. Financial exploitation, manipulation or dependence
8. Restrict leisure, entertainment, vacation time
9. Major time spent with group indoctrination and rituals and/or self indoctrination including the Internet
10. Permission required for major decisions
11. Rewards and punishments used to modify behaviors, both positive and negative
12. Discourage individualism, encourage group-think
13. Impose rigid rules and regulations
14. Punish disobedience by beating, torture, burning, cutting, rape, or tattooing/branding
15. Threaten harm to family and friends
16. Force individual to rape or be raped
17. Encourage and engage in corporal punishment
18. Instill dependency and obedience
19. Kidnapping
20. Beating
21. Torture
22. Rape
23. Separation of Families
24. Imprisonment
25. Murder

II. Information Control

1. Deception:
 - a. Deliberately withhold information
 - b. Distort information to make it more acceptable
 - c. Systematically lie to the cult member
2. Minimize or discourage access to non-cult sources of information, including:
 - a. Internet, TV, radio, books, articles, newspapers, magazines, media
 - b. Critical information
 - c. Former members
 - d. Keep members busy so they don't have time to think and investigate
 - e. Control through cell phone with texting, calls, internet tracking
3. Compartmentalize information into Outsider vs. Insider doctrines
 - a. Ensure that information is not freely accessible
 - b. Control information at different levels and missions within group
 - c. Allow only leadership to decide who needs to know what and when
4. Encourage spying on other members
 - a. Impose a buddy system to monitor and control member
 - b. Report deviant thoughts, feelings and actions to leadership
 - c. Ensure that individual behavior is monitored by group
5. Extensive use of cult-generated information and propaganda, including:
 - a. Newsletters, magazines, journals, audiotapes, videotapes, YouTube, movies and other media
 - b. Misquoting statements or using them out of context from non-cult sources
6. Unethical use of confession
 - a. Information about sins used to disrupt and/or dissolve identity boundaries
 - b. Withholding forgiveness or absolution
 - c. Manipulation of memory, possible false memories

III. Thought Control

1. Require members to internalize the group's doctrine as truth
 - a. Adopting the group's 'map of reality' as reality
 - b. Instill black and white thinking
 - c. Decide between good vs. evil
 - d. Organize people into us vs. them (insiders vs. outsiders)
2. Change person's name and identity
3. Use of loaded language and clichés which constrict knowledge, stop critical thoughts and reduce complexities into platitudinous buzz words
4. Encourage only 'good and proper' thoughts
5. Hypnotic techniques are used to alter mental states, undermine critical thinking and even to age regress the member
6. Memories are manipulated and false memories are created
7. Teaching thought-stopping techniques which shut down reality testing by stopping negative thoughts and allowing only positive thoughts, including:
 - a. Denial, rationalization, justification, wishful thinking
 - b. Chanting
 - c. Meditating
 - d. Praying
 - e. Speaking in tongues
 - f. Singing or humming
8. Rejection of rational analysis, critical thinking, constructive criticism
9. Forbid critical questions about leader, doctrine, or policy allowed
10. Labeling alternative belief systems as illegitimate, evil, or not useful
11. Instill new "map of reality"

IV. Emotional Control

1. Manipulate and narrow the range of feelings – some emotions and/or needs are deemed as evil, wrong or selfish
2. Teach emotion-stopping techniques to block feelings of homesickness, anger, doubt
3. Make the person feel that problems are always their own fault, never the leader's or the group's fault
4. Promote feelings of guilt or unworthiness, such as
 - a. Identity guilt
 - b. You are not living up to your potential
 - c. Your family is deficient
 - d. Your past is suspect
 - e. Your affiliations are unwise
 - f. Your thoughts, feelings, actions are irrelevant or selfish
 - g. Social guilt
 - h. Historical guilt
5. Instill fear, such as fear of:
 - a. Thinking independently
 - b. The outside world
 - c. Enemies
 - d. Losing one's salvation
 - e. Leaving or being shunned by the group
 - f. Other's disapproval
6. Extremes of emotional highs and lows – love bombing and praise one moment and then declaring you are horrible sinner
7. Ritualistic and sometimes public confession of sins
8. Phobia indoctrination: inculcating irrational fears about leaving the group or questioning the leader's authority
 - a. No happiness or fulfillment possible outside of the group
 - b. Terrible consequences if you leave: hell, demon possession, incurable diseases, accidents, suicide, insanity, 10,000 reincarnations, etc.
 - c. Shunning of those who leave; fear of being rejected by friends and family
 - d. Never a legitimate reason to leave; those who leave are weak, undisciplined, unspiritual, worldly, brainwashed by family or counselor, or seduced by money, sex, or rock and roll
 - e. Threats of harm to ex-member and family