

## Assessing Fundamentalist Islam Using the BITE Model

Below is a list of the main points included in the BITE model. Yasmine Mohammed colored the bullet points in the following ways

- **Green** means does not apply to anyone in the group
- **Orange** means it partially applies
- **Red** means it absolutely applies to all members

**Note from Yasmine Mohammed:** Because this is specifically Fundamentalist/Extremist Islam, I will be responding to the prompts as a person who was raised as an extremist. Muslims who are not fundamentalists did not grow up in extremist families/ communities, will have different experiences and responses.

### Behavior Control

- Regulate an individual's physical reality
- Dictate where, how, and with whom the member lives and associates or isolates
- Dictate when, how, and with whom the member has sex
- Control types of clothing and hairstyles
- Regulate diet -food and drink, hunger and/or fasting
- Manipulation and deprivation of sleep
- Financial exploitation, manipulation, or dependence (for women only)
- Restrict leisure, entertainment, and vacation time
- Major time spent with group indoctrination and rituals and/or self-indoctrination, including the Internet
- Permission required for major decisions
- Thoughts, feelings, and activities (of self and others) reported to superiors
- Rewards and punishments used to modify behaviors, both positive and negative
- Discourage individualism, encourage groupthink
- Impose rigid rules and regulations
- Encourage and engage in corporal punishment
- Punish disobedience by beating, torture, burning, cutting, rape, or tattooing/branding
- Threaten harm to family or friends (by cutting off family/friends)
- Force individual to rape or be raped
- Instill dependency and obedience

## Information Control

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

## Thought Control

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

## Emotional Control

- Manipulate and narrow the range of feelings – some emotions and/or needs are deemed as evil, wrong, or selfish
- Teach emotion-stopping techniques to block feelings of hopelessness, anger, or doubt
- Make the person feel that problems are always their own fault, never the leader's or the group's fault
- Promote feelings of guilt or unworthiness, such as:
  - Identity guilt
  - You are not living up to your potential
  - Your family is deficient
  - Your past is suspect
  - Your affiliations are unwise
  - Your thoughts, feelings, and actions are irrelevant or selfish
  - Social guilt
  - Historical guilt (converts only)
- Instill fear, such as fear of:
  - Thinking independently
  - The outside world
  - Enemies
  - Losing one's salvation
  - Leaving or being
- Extremes of emotional highs and lows – love bombing and praise one moment, and then declaring you are a horrible sinner
- Ritualistic confession of sins (auditing, rundown, and reports)
  - sometimes public confession of sins
- Phobia indoctrination: inculcating irrational fears about leaving the group or questioning the leader's authority
  - No happiness or fulfillment possible outside the group
  - Terrible consequences if you leave: hell, demon possession, incurable diseases, accidents, suicide, insanity, 10,000 reincarnations, etc
  - Shunning of those who leave; fear of being rejected by friends and family
  - 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
- Threats of harm to ex-member and family (threats of cutting off friends/family)