# *Undoing* Undue Influence, and the BITE Model
By Richard E. Kelly as of August 15, 2014

*Undue influence* is any act of persuasion that overcomes the free will and judgment of another person. People are unduly influenced by urgent warnings, flattery, trickery, coercion and deception. 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.

On a continuum or scale from high to low of imminent threats to a free society and happy families, *undue influence* rates low for most people. But such an oversight can be very costly! In the manipulative hands of charismatic cult leaders, highly-controlling bible-based groups masquerading as benevolent religions, human traffickers, multi-level marketers, terrorist and violent extremist groups, 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 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.

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 recycle that money back into the local and or even the global community in order to improve society. 3) To meet the demands placed upon them by a high-control group, many members are subsidized by the social welfare system, costing society even more money.

When *undue influence* is initially imposed on the minds of unsuspecting recruits by cults or pseudo-religious groups, it usually 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 élite status in a better society to come, etc.

Once recruits have bought into all the initial promises and hype, they are introduced to 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, the ability to think rationally and act independently is compromised, even for people considered "rational" prior to their coming under undue influence. But does this process work?

The BITE Model* explains the mechanism behind undue influence by clearly spelling out the methods 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 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.

## The BITE Model

### Behavior Control
1. The group, leader or person imposes rigid rules and regulations on members, determining how they should spend their time
2. It dictates where, how, and with whom the member lives and associates with and/or it isolates family and friends by dictating who should be shunned
3. It dictates when, how and with whom the members have sex
4. It decides the dress code and hairstyles that are appropriate for members
5. It regulates diet, including food and drink, hunger and/or fasting for members
6. It imposes sleep deprivation
7. It exploits, manipulates and manages the finances of members
8. It creates restrictions on leisure, entertainment and vacation time.
9. It requires significant time be spent in group indoctrination meetings and rituals
10. It requires permission before members can make major decisions

11. It mandates that thoughts, feelings and activities of self and others deemed sinful and deviant be reported to the group's leaders/elders

12. It uses rewards and punishments to modify behaviors—positive and negative

13. It discourages individuality and independence, and encourages group-think

14. It requires members to proselytize and canvas for new believers

15. It requires members to attend special hearings, convened by the group's local leaders, where they are required to confess sins, answer any and all questions and receive judgment or punishment

16. It instills dependency and obedience from members

## Information Control

1. The group, leader or person uses deception (lack of informed consent):
   a. Deliberately withholding information from members
   b. Distorting information to make the movement more acceptable to members
   c. Systematically telling lies to members
   d. Making promises it cannot possibly deliver on in exchange for loyalty, i.e. "you will see your dead loved one again if you stay faithful"

2. It minimizes/discourages access to non-cult sources of information, including:
   a. Internet, TV, radio, books, articles, newspapers, magazines and other media
   b. Critical information
   c. Former members
   d. Members are kept busy so they don't have time to think and investigate
   e. Control through cell phone with texting, calls and internet tracking

3. It compartmentalizes information into Outsider vs. Insider doctrines
   a. To ensure that information is not freely accessible
   b. To control information at different levels and missions within the group
   c. So only the group's leaders can decide who needs to know what and when

4. It encourages spying on other members to find incriminating information:
   a. To use a buddy system to monitor and control members
   b. To report deviant thoughts, feelings and actions to the leaders/elders
   c. To ensure that individual behavior is monitored by the group

5. It encourages extensive use of propaganda to promote the movement, including:
   a. Newsletters, magazines, books, journals, websites, audiotapes, videotapes, YouTube, movies, attending regular group meetings and other media
   b. Misquoting statements from non-cult sources or using them out of context

6. It promotes the unethical use of confession related to:
   a. Information about sins to disrupt and/or dissolve identity boundaries
   b. Withholding forgiveness or absolution

## Thought Control

1. The group or leader requires members to internalize its doctrine as "the truth"

    a. Adopting the group's 'map of reality' as reality
    b. Instilling simplistic black and white thinking
    c. Deciding between good versus evil, what is right or wrong in God's eyes
    d. Organizing people into Us versus Them (insiders versus outsiders)
2. It requires that members study literature it produces and publishes, with questions designed to lead the reader to the "right" conclusion
3. It changes a person's authentic identity into the cult's identity
4. It uses loaded language and clichés to constrict knowledge, block critical thinking skills and reduce complexities into platitudinous buzz words
5. It encourages only "good and proper" pure thoughts
6. It uses hypnotic techniques to alter mental states and undermine critical thinking
7. It uses age regression techniques so members act more like children than adults
8. Memories are manipulated and false memories are created
9. It uses thought-stopping techniques which shut down reality testing by stopping negative thoughts about the group, allowing only positive thoughts, including:
    a. Denial, rationalization, justification and wishful thinking
    b. Chanting
    c. Meditating
    d. Praying
    e. Speaking in tongues
    f. Singing or humming
10. It rejects rational analysis, critical thinking and constructive criticism, labeling this type of thinking as tools of the devil
11. It forbids critical questions about the group's leaders, doctrines, or policies. If one persists, they will be told that they do not really love the group's God, or that they are insincere
12. It labels alternative belief systems as illegitimate, evil, or irrelevant
13. It manipulates the memory of members and induces possible false memories

**Emotional Control**
1. The group or leader manipulates and narrows the range of feelings for members; some emotions and/or needs are labeled as evil, wrong or selfish
2. It teaches emotion-stopping techniques to block feelings of homesickness, anger, doubt and the love of family members who must be shunned because they are non-believers or ex-believers of the group's dogma
3. It makes the member feel that problems are always his or her fault, never the leaders or group's fault.
4. It promotes 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

 i. You don't love God if you can't believe all of the group's religious ideology

 j. You would contribute more time or money if you were sincere

5. It instills fear, such as fear of:

a. Thinking independently

b. The outside world

c. Enemies

d. Non-believers and ex-believers who are labeled as evil apostates

e. Losing one's salvation or that they will die at Armageddon

f. Leaving and being shunned by the group

g. Disapproval by the group's leaders

h. Losing one's faith

i. Losing privileges within the group/organization

j. Being publicly humiliated by reporting on one's perceived misdeeds

6. It creates an environment for extreme emotional highs and lows – love bombing and praise one moment and then declaring that the member is a horrible sinner

7. It uses ritualistic and sometimes public confession of sins

8. It imposes Phobia Indoctrination: inculcating irrational fears about leaving the group or questioning the authority of the leader, like:

a. No happiness or fulfillment is possible outside of the group

b. Terrible consequences if a member leaves: hell, demon possession, death at Armageddon, incurable diseases, mental illness, accidents, loss of God's favor, suicide, insanity, and many more

c. Shunning of those who leave; fear of being rejected by friends and family

d. There is never a legitimate reason to leave; members who leave are weak, undisciplined, don't truly love the group's God, unspiritual, worldly, brainwashed by family or counselor, or seduced by money, sex, or a 'worldly' lifestyle

e. Threats of harm to ex-member and family

9. It makes the member feel like they are in an Elite Group

Undoing *undue influence* begins when a person is able to identify the problem. That is, when people become aware that a high incidence of methods of control (noted in the BITE Model) by high-control groups and people are being used to manipulate their mind and the minds of their loved ones. Acknowledging that you may be under undue influence is the first step in *undoing* it.

More information is available to help people rid themselves of undue influence and transform their lives from a cult-like high-control identity to their authentic identity. Two books that I would highly recommended reading are Steven Hassan's *Combatting Cult Mind Control* and Margaret Singer's *Cults In Our Midst.* While these are by no means the only books available, they are a good place to start a person's healing and understanding of how to undo undue influence.

*Steven Hassan published the four components of the **BITE Model** in his first book, *Combatting Cult Mind Control* (1988). Rev. Buddy Martin, a friend and colleague of Hassan, recommended rearranging the order and call it BITE, making it easy to remember. So, in his next two books, *Releasing the Bonds: Empowering People to Think for Themselves* ( 2000) and *Freedom of Mind: Helping Loved Ones Leave Controlling People Cults and Beliefs* (2013) the BITE Model was formally introduced and published.

The model was based on the work of Dr. Robert Jay Lifton's eight criteria of Thought Reform (*Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, 1961), Dr. Margaret Singer, Dr. Edgar Schein, Dr. Louis Jolyon West and other mental health professionals, including Kurt Lewin for his theory on "freezing".

Hassan started with Leon Festinger's "Theory of Cognitive Dissonance" (1962 and 1957) which talks about Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviors being interlaced and effecting each other in terms of beliefs. He added Information as a category and was then able to take all the existing theories and organize them in a simpler way to understand the process of *Undue Influence*. Hassan is director of Freedom of Mind Resource Center, Inc. at freedomofmind.com.

**Undue influence is not the same as brainwashing. The distinction between the two will be thoroughly discussed in a future paper.