

From changingminds.org

Robert Jay Lifton was one of the early psychologists to study brainwashing and mind control. He called the method used thought reform, and offered the following eight methods that are used to change people's minds.

Milieu control

All communication with outside world is limited, either being strictly filtered or completely cut off. Whether it is a monastery or a behind-closed-doors cult, isolation from the ideas, examples and distractions of the outside world turns the individuals attention to the only remaining form of stimulation, which is the ideology that is being inculcated in them.

This even works at the intrapersonal level, and individuals are discouraged from thinking incorrect thoughts, which may be termed evil, selfish, immoral and so on.

Mystical manipulation

A part of the teaching is that the group has a higher purpose than others outside the group. This may be altruistic, such as saving the world or helping people in need. It may also be selfish, for example that group members will be saved when others outside the group will perish.

All things are then attributed and linked to this higher purpose. Coincidences (which actually may be deliberately engineered) are portrayed as symbolic events. Attention is given to the problems of out-group people and attributed to their not being in the group. Revelations are attributed to spiritual causes.

This association of events is used as evidence that the group truly is special and exclusive.

Confession

Individuals are encouraged to confess past 'sins' (as defined by the group). This creates a tension between the person's actions and their stated belief that the action is bad, particularly if the statement is made publicly. The consistency principle thus leads the person to fully adopt the belief that the sin is bad and to distance themselves from repeating it.

Discussion of inner fears and anxieties, as well as confessing sins is exposing vulnerabilities and requires the person to place trust in the group and hence bond with them. When we bond with others, they become our friends, and we will tend to adopt their beliefs more easily.

This effect may be exaggerated with intense sessions where deep thoughts and feelings are regularly surfaced. This also has the effect of exhausting people, making them more open to suggestion.

Self-sanctification through purity

Individuals are encouraged to constantly push towards an ultimate and unattainable perfection. This may be rewarded with promotion within the group to higher levels, for example by giving them a new status name (acolyte, traveller, master, etc.) or by giving them new authority within the group.

The unattainability of the ultimate perfection is used to induce guilt and show the person to be sinful and hence sustain the requirement for confession and obedience to those higher than them in the groups order of perfection.

Not being perfect may be seen as deserving of punishment, which may be meted out by the higher members of the group or even by the person themselves, who are taught that such atonement and self-flagellation is a valuable method of reaching higher levels of perfection.

Aura of sacred science

The beliefs and regulations of the group are framed as perfect, absolute and non-negotiable. The dogma of the group is presented as scientifically correct or otherwise unquestionable.

Rules and processes are therefore to be followed without question, and any transgression is a sin and hence requires atonement or other forms of punishment, as does consideration of any alternative viewpoints.

Loaded language

New words and language are created to explain the new and profound meanings that have been discovered. Existing words are also hijacked and given new and different meaning.

This is particularly effective due to the way we think a lot through language. The consequence of this is that the person who controls the meaning of words also controls how people think. In this way, black-and-white thinking is embedded in the language, such that wrong-doers are framed as terrible and evil, whilst those who do right (as defined by the group) are perfect and marvelous.

The meaning of words are kept hidden both from the outside world, giving a sense of exclusivity. The meaning of special words may also be revealed in careful illuminatory rituals, where people who are being elevated within the order are given the power of understanding this new language.

Doctrine over person

The importance of the group is elevated over the importance of the individual in all ways. Along with this comes the importance of the group's ideas and rules over personal beliefs and values.

Past experiences, beliefs and values can all thus be cast as being invalid if they conflict with group rules. In fact this conflict can be used as a reason for confession of sins. Likewise, the beliefs, values and words of those outside the group are equally invalid.

Dispensed existence

There is a very sharp line between the group and the outside world. Insiders are to be saved and elevated, whilst outsiders are doomed to failure and loss (which may be eternal).

Who is an outsider or insider is chosen by the group. Thus, any person within the group may be damned at any time. There are no rights of membership except, perhaps, for the leader.

People who leave the group are singled out as particularly evil, weak, lost or otherwise to be despised or pitied. Rather than being ignored or hidden, they are used as examples of how anyone who leaves will be looked down upon and publicly denigrated.

People thus have a constant fear of being cast out, and consequently work hard to be accepted and not be ejected from the group. Outsiders who try to persuade the person to leave are doubly feared.

Dispensation also goes into all aspects of living within the group. Any and all aspects of existence within the group is subject to scrutiny and control. There is no privacy and, ultimately, no free will.