



*The Awareness Center, Inc.*

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## Characteristics of a Destructive Cult:

1. **Authoritarian** pyramid structure with authority at the top
2. Charismatic or messianic leader(s) (**Messianic** meaning they either say they are God OR that they alone can interpret the scriptures the way God intended.....the leaders are self-appointed.)
3. **Deception** in recruitment and/or fund raising
4. **Isolation** from society -- not necessarily physical isolation like on some compound in Waco, but this can be psychological isolation -- the rest of the world is not saved, not Christian, not transformed (whatever) -- the only valid source of feedback and information is the group
5. Use of **mind control** techniques (we use Dr. Robert Jay Lifton's criteria from chapter 22 of his book *"Thought Reform & the Psychology of Totalism"* to compare whether the eight psychological and social methods he lists are present in the group at question)

1. **Milieu Control:** Control of the environment and communication within the environment  
**Mystical Manipulation:** Seeks to promote specific patterns of behavior and emotion in such a way that it appears to have arisen spontaneously from within the environment, while it actually has been orchestrated totalist leaders claim to be agents chosen by God, history, or some supernatural force, to carry out the mystical imperative the "principles" (God-centered or otherwise) can be put forcibly and claimed exclusively, so that the cult and its beliefs become the only true path to salvation (or enlightenment)  
**Demand for Purity:** The world becomes sharply divided into the pure and the impure, the absolutely good (the group/ideology) and the absolutely evil (everything outside the group) one must continually change or conform to the group "norm"; tendencies towards guilt and shame are used as emotional levers for the group's controlling and manipulative influences  
**Confession:** Cultic confession is carried beyond its ordinary religious, legal and therapeutic expressions to the point of becoming a cult in itself sessions in which one confesses to one's sin are accompanied by patterns of criticism and self-criticism, generally transpiring within small groups with an active and dynamic thrust toward personal change  
**Sacred Science:** The totalist milieu maintains an aura of sacredness around its basic doctrine or ideology, holding it as an ultimate moral vision for the ordering of human existence questioning or criticizing those basic assumptions is prohibited a reverence is demanded for the ideology/doctrine, the originators of the ideology/doctrine, the present bearers of the ideology/doctrine offers considerable security to young people because it greatly simplifies the world and answers a contemporary need to combine a sacred set of dogmatic principles with a claim to a science embodying the truth about human behavior and human psychology  
**Loading the Language:** Words are given new meanings -- the outside world does not use the words or phrases in the same way -- it becomes a "group" word or phrase  
**Doctrine Over Person:** If one questions the beliefs of the group or the leaders of the group, one is made to

feel that there is something inherently wrong with them to even question -- it is always "turned around" on them and the questioner/criticizer is questioned rather than the questions answered directly the underlying assumption is that doctrine/ideology is ultimately more valid, true and real than any aspect of actual human character or human experience and one must subject one's experience to that "truth" the experience of contradiction can be immediately associated with guilt one is made to feel that doubts are reflections of one's own evil when doubt arises, conflicts become intense

**Dispensing of Existence:** Since the group has an absolute or totalist vision of truth, those who are not in the group are bound up in evil, are not enlightened, are not saved, and do not have the right to exist; impediments to legitimate being must be pushed away or destroyed one outside the group may always receive their right of existence by joining the group; fear manipulation -- if one leaves this group, one leaves God or loses their salvation/transformation, or something bad will happen to them; the group is the "elite", outsiders are "of the world", "evil", "unenlightened", etc.