

Undue Influence 101: A Framework for Understanding Thought Control

**Panelists: Bill Goldberg, Steve Hassan,
Dana Wehle, Paul Grosswald**

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Welcome

New Jersey Safe & Sound
www.njsafeandsound.org

Overview

1. Recognizing Undue Influence
2. Understanding the Mechanisms of Undue Influence
3. Mental Health Considerations for Families Confronted With the Cultic Alienation of a Loved One
4. Question and Answer Session

Panelists

- Bill Goldberg, PsA, LCSW
- Steve Hassan, M.Ed., LMHC, NCC
- Dana Wehle, LCSW, PsA, MFA
- Paul Grosswald, Esq.

Part One

The Multiple Faces of Undue Influence

Bill Goldberg, PsA, LCSW
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Recognizing Undue Influence

- The elements of influence in everyday life
- Definitions of undue influence
- Categories of individuals who use undue influence
- Who can employ undue influence?
- Margaret Singer's model of thought reform
- Possible signs and symptoms of undue influence
- Can undue influence be undone?

Elements of Influence In Everyday Life

Robert Cialdini

Elements of Influence in Everyday Life

Cialdini

- Reciprocation
- Commitment and consistency
- Social proof
- Liking
- Authority
- Scarcity

Definitions of Undue Influence

- Gaining unfair influence by taking advantage of a position of power over another
- Inappropriate or excessive manipulation that is exerted against a vulnerable person
- Mental, moral or physical domination that deprives one person of independent judgment and substitutes another person's objectives

Categories of Individuals Who Use Undue Influence

- Con artists
- People who desire to gain power over others
- Those who may not have set out to exploit vulnerable people, but who find the temptation too great
- Those who rationalize that their self-serving actions are really in the service of helping their victims

Who Can Employ Undue Influence?

- Anyone in a position of power
- Adult to child
- Aide/caregiver to disabled or elderly person
- Abusive spouse/partner to battered spouse/partner
- Therapist to patient
- Religious leader to member of congregation
- Cult leader to follower
- Gang leader to initiate
- Sexual predator/human trafficker to victim
- Attorney to client
- Doctor to patient
- Professor to student
- Employer to employee

Margaret Singer's Model of Elements of Thought Reform

- Isolation
- Creation of a siege mentality
- Dependency
- Induced powerlessness
- Fear of vulnerability
- Victim is unaware

Possible Signs and Symptoms of Undue Influence

- Drastic change in autonomy
- Secretive relationships
- Use of clichés and simplistic thinking
- Cutting off of historic relationships
- Delusional quality of accusations, beyond misinterpretations
- History of abuse for alleged influencer

Can Undue Influence Be Undone?

- If what is operating is induced dependency, victims will have moments of recognition and unconscious doubts
- Rebuild trust so that ambivalence can be acknowledged
- Use of third parties to build trust

Part Two

Understanding Undue Influence: Manipulation and Coercive Persuasion

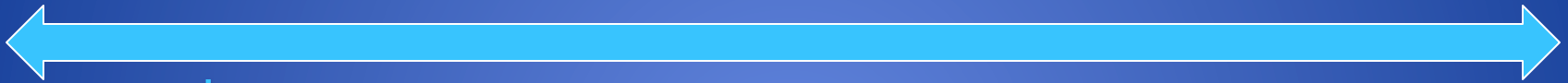
Steve Hassan, M.Ed., LMHC, NCC
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Influence Continuum

Constructive

Destructive

Extreme



Leadership

- Honest
 - Respects Uniqueness of Person
 - Individuality
- Trustworthy
 - Choice
 - Freewill
- Accountable
 - Free Access to Information
- Transparent
 - Sincerely Loving

Influence Continuum

Constructive

Destructive

Extreme



↓

Organizations

- Informed Consent
- Checks and Balances
- Transparent
- Encourages Growth

Influence Continuum

Constructive

Destructive

Extreme



Leadership

- Censorship
- Doctrine Over Personal Experience
- Pressure to Think Right Way
- Pressure to Feel Right Way
- Pressure to Behave Right Way

- Clones People
- Obedience
- Dependency
- Fear/Phobia

Influence Continuum

Constructive

Destructive

Extreme



Organizations

- Pyramid
- Authoritarian
- Ends Justify Means
- Closed – Preserves Power

Influence Continuum

Constructive

Destructive

Extreme



↓ Need to be cautious of
Influence ↓

Apply **BITE** Model Questions

- Behavior
- Information
- Thought
- Emotion

The BITE Model as a Guide to Evaluating Groups and Situations

Steven Hassan M.Ed. LMHC, NCC
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Control of:

- Behavior
- Information
- Thought
- Emotion

“BITE” - Behavior Control

1. Regulate individual's physical reality
2. Dictate where, how and with whom the members 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. Thoughts, feelings, and activities (of self and others) reported to superiors
12. Rewards and punishments used to modify behaviors, both positive and negative
13. Discourage individualism, encourage group-think
14. Impose rigid rules and regulations
15. Instill dependency and obedience

“BITE” - Information Control

1. Deception:

- » Deliberately withhold information
- » Distort information to make it more acceptable
- » Systematically lie to the cult member

2. 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 cell phone with texting, calls, Internet tracking

3. Compartmentalize information into Outsider vs. Insider doctrines:

- » Insure that information is not freely accessible
- » Control information at different levels and missions within group
- » Allow only leadership to decide who needs to know what and when

4. Encourage spying on other members

- » Impose a buddy system to monitor and control member
- » Report deviant thoughts, feelings, and actions to leadership
- » Insure that individual behavior is monitored by group

5. Extensive use of cult-generated information and propaganda, including:

- » Newsletters, magazines, journals, audio tapes, videotapes, YouTube, movies, and other media
- » Misquoting statements or using them out of context from non-cult sources

6. Unethical use of confession

- » Information about “sins” used to disrupt and/or dissolve identity boundaries
- » Withholding forgiveness or absolution
- » Manipulation of memory, possible false memories

“BITE” - Thought Control

1. 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)*
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:
 - Denial, rationalization, justification, wishful thinking
 - Chanting
 - Meditating
 - Praying
 - Speaking in tongues
 - Singing or humming
8. Rejection of rational analysis, critical thinking, constructive criticism
9. Forbid critical questions about leader, doctrine, or policy
10. Labeling alternative belief systems as illegitimate, evil, or not useful

“BITE” - 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:
 - 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, actions are irrelevant or selfish
 - Social guilt
 - Historical guilt
5. Instill fear, such as fear of:
 - Thinking independently
 - The outside world
 - Enemies
 - Losing one’s salvation
 - Leaving or being shunned by the group
 - 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:
 - 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, peers, 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

Strategic Interactive Approach (SIA)

A Complex System Approach to creating a network of trained individuals (family, friends, ex-members, media, clergy, therapists) to orchestrate a step by step ethical, influence program to empower an individual or set of individuals to think for themselves.

Strategic Interactive Approach (cont.)

- The SIA is a long term recovery process for both the cult member and members of the family
- The goal is to help the loved one recover their full faculties; to restore the creative, flexible, independent adult who fully understands what has happened to them
- In the SIA, each person has issues that should be addressed
- A customized approach that encourages everyone to develop positive, constructive patterns of communication
- One focus is on the growth and development of healthy relationships within the family
- Everyone is traumatized by the cult involvement, even those who are not directly involved
- Each case is different and presents new challenges; every set of family resources is unique

Part Three

Mental Health Considerations for Families Confronted With the Cultic Alienation of a Loved One

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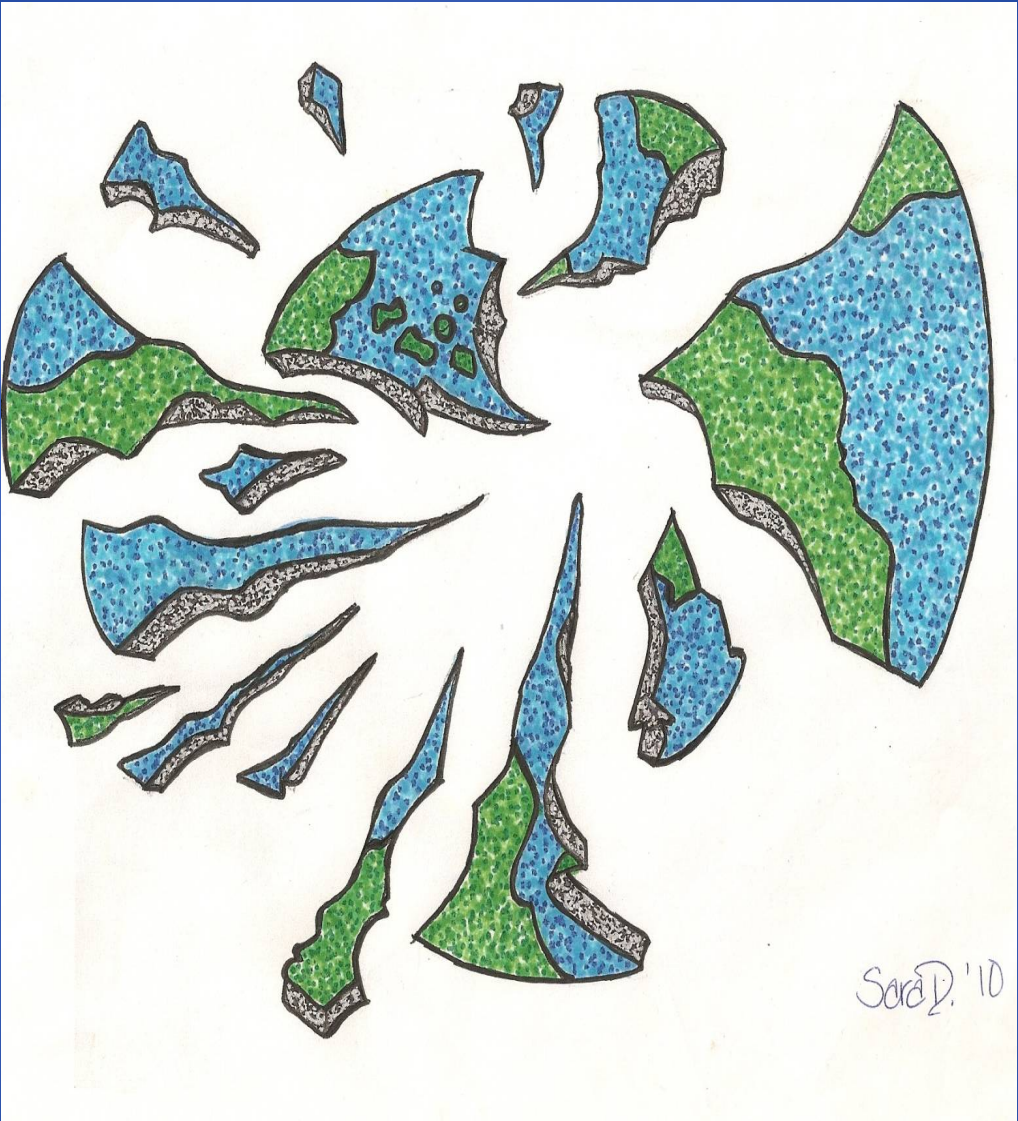


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Sara DeGraff: saras_art@yahoo.com

Shattered World

The family's world is shattered by cultic alienation. Without attending to these feelings, the stress wreaks havoc on the body:

- ❖ Anger
- ❖ Isolation
- ❖ Shame
- ❖ Fear
- ❖ Sadness
- ❖ Guilt
- ❖ Frustration
- ❖ Loss
- ❖ Doubt
- ❖ Anxiety
- ❖ Trust

Individual, Couple, Family, Group Psychotherapy

- ❖ Cult or trauma specialist
- ❖ Psycho-education about the dynamics of a loved one in a cult
- ❖ Processing of thoughts, emotions, and memories

Three Primary Considerations

1. Tracking how stressful emotions are experienced in the body/self-care.
2. Commitment to psychological growth including experiencing/processing avoided emotions within safety of therapy .
3. Commitment to improving intra-family communication

What To Expect From Initial Consultation With Cult Therapist

- ❖ Learn about therapy versus exit counseling
- ❖ Assess immediacy of need for exit counseling
- ❖ Focus on maintaining connection by avoiding criticism
- ❖ Establish collaborative approach with psychotherapist and exit counselor

How Psychotherapy Helps

- ❖ Ongoing support
- ❖ Develop coping methods and a focus on self-care
- ❖ Learn Grounding Techniques to keep mind on the present moment
- ❖ Replace negative thought patterns with positive
- ❖ Link pre-cult and cult history of loss and trauma to contextualize current despair
- ❖ Track effect of stress on health, self-perception, and interpersonal relating

Psychodynamic therapy specifically focuses on patterns that **connect past and present.**

- ❖ It is a creative process that unfolds over time, enabling the individual to develop and speak his/her **subjective voice** from a deep and unguarded place through development of trust and mutuality with therapist.
- ❖ The best-case scenario is for the family to model this stance when the alienated loved one returns.

Creativity entails **internal courage.**

(The Courage To Create, Rollo May, 1994)



Psychological growth and
improving communication skills
require **internal courage**

Identify, Express, and Explore

Painful

❖ Feelings ❖ Thoughts ❖ Memories

Dissociated and known through
gestures and behaviors only

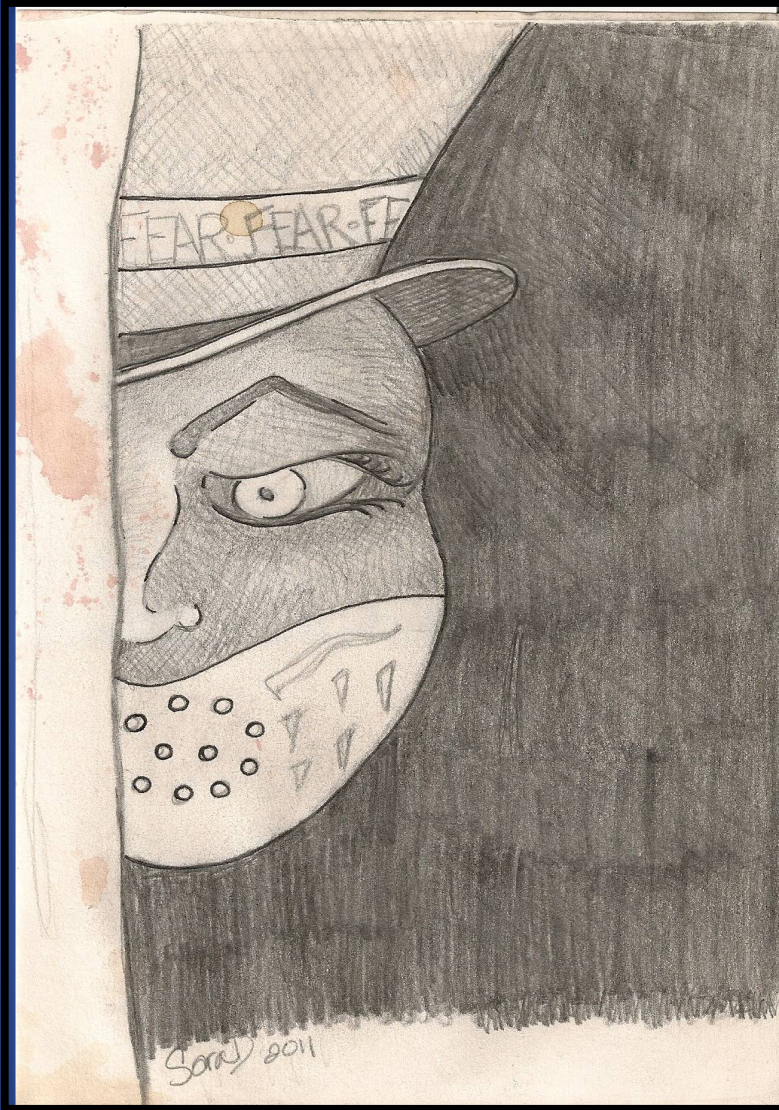


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Fear

Emotions and the Body

Parent Narrative

“They had pushed me to a point where I had a cardiomyopathy and discovered that only half my heart was working. The other name for what I had was Broken Heart Syndrome which was induced from stress. We are all on the road to healing now.”

Emotions and the Body

- ❖ **Emotion is necessary for rational thought/decision making.**
- ❖ **Emotion is induced by neural and chemical routes.**
(*Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, Antonio Damasio, 2005)
- ❖ “[The therapist] help[s] the individual feel and identify **bodily sensations** to then use language to name and understand their meaning in current life.” (*The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment*, Babette Rothschild, 2000)

Emotions and the Body (cont'd)

- ❖ A normal mind splits (dissociates) as a way to cope when overwhelmed by a traumatic event.
- ❖ Dissociation leads to black/white thinking, the traumatic event unlinked with emotions and thought.
- ❖ “The traumatized person's experience of not being able to think is because trauma impairs reflective functioning in the brain.”

Processing Avoided Painful Feelings

- ❖ Lessens defensiveness
- ❖ Lessens reactivity
- ❖ Lessens sense of fragmentation
- ❖ Encourages emotional openness
- ❖ Encourages good communication skills
essential for family member's return

Former Member Narrative

“I think I would not be able to receive some of the recent information I have as deeply. Before beginning this work, I felt cared about, but think it took me much longer to accept those type of connections. The biggest benefit was that before this work I was less in touch with my body and myself ... To feel like I'm living inside my body ... in touch with myself is new. Now I don't ignore when my stomach tightens... I more realize it is a symptom. I noticed the biggest changes in the last 3 to 4 years. I came to the conclusion that it would have taken me a lot longer to identify feelings such as fear and to process them. If I am afraid, it is now more front and center; before it was in the back of my mind... not so conscious. I would have been pushing it back. I recognize mixed emotions more.. less black-and-white thinking... because the hard feelings are more lived now I am more comfortable talking about them.”



Part Four

Question & Answer Session

- **Bill Goldberg, PsA, LCSW**
- **Paul S. Grosswald, Attorney at Law**
- **Steve Hassan, M.Ed., LMHC, NCC**
- **Dana Wehle, LCSW, PsA, MFA**

For More Information

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