

Cult Characteristics

If you groups shows several of these characteristics, it might be a cult . . .

The group is focused on a living leader to whom members seem to display excessively zealous, unquestioning commitment.

The group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.

The group is preoccupied with making money.

Questioning, doubt, and dissent are discouraged or even punished.

Mind-numbing techniques (such as meditation, chanting, speaking in tongues, denunciation sessions, debilitating work routines) are used to suppress doubts about the group and its leader(s).

The leadership dictates sometimes in great detail how members should think, act, and feel (for example: members must get permission from leaders to date, change jobs, get married; leaders may prescribe what types of clothes to wear, where to live, how to discipline children, and so forth).

The group is elitist, claiming a special, exalted status for itself, its leader(s), and members (for example: the leader is considered the Messiah or an avatar; the group and/or the leader has a special mission to save humanity).

The group has a polarized us-versus-them mentality, which causes conflict with the wider society.

The group's leader is not accountable to any authorities (as are, for example, military commanders and ministers, priests, monks, and rabbis of mainstream denominations).

The group teaches or implies that its supposedly exalted ends justify means that members would have considered unethical before joining the group (for example: collecting money for bogus charities).

The leadership induces guilt feelings in members in order to control them.

Members' subservience to the group causes them to cut ties with family and friends, and to give up personal goals and activities that were of interest before joining the group.

Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group.
Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members.