

## Characteristics of High Control Groups

**Authoritarian:** Central, authoritarian leadership in one person or small group of individuals.

**Oppositional:** Values, beliefs or practices at variance with the dominant groups or tradition.

**Exclusivistic:** Only the group has "the truth," usually based on new insights or revelation.

**Legalistic:** A tightly structured framework which governs spirituality and the smallest details of daily life.

**Subjective:** Undue emphasis on experience and emotions often resulting in anti-intellectualism.

**Persecution-Conscious:** The belief that their group is singled out for persecution.

**Sanction-Oriented:** Stern sanctions issued for anything less than total obedience.

**Esoteric:** An emphasis on secret, hidden or inner truth.

**Anti-Sacerdotal:** Lack of paid clergy and an emphasis on laity in leadership.

## Differences in groups:

**Eastern Mystical:** Groups related to Hinduism, Buddhism and other pantheistic Eastern religions.

**Aberrant Christian:** Groups that claim to be Bible-based but which deviate in practice or belief.  
**Psychospiritual or Self-Improvement:** Groups offering seminars or workshops providing self-improvement or personal transformation.

**Eclectic/Syncretistic:** A combination of several religious traditions.

**Psychic/Occult/Astral:** These groups offer "secret wisdom" and "lost truths."

**Established Groups:** Bible-based, cultic religious movements which have achieved mainstream status.

**Extremist/Political/Social Movements:** High control groups in the psychological or social sense.

- 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 polarised 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 it 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 socialise only with other group members.