

*Anything you are about to read and hear in this series is meant to be only educational material*

## What do you think a cult is?

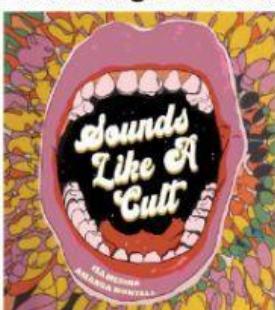
## Have you ever experienced any sort of encounters akin to a cult?

**Read the word-cloud what other words come to your mind by association?**



**Wikipedia:** In modern English, a cult is a social group that is defined by its unusual religious, spiritual, or philosophical beliefs and rituals, or its common interest in a particular personality, object, or goal. This sense of the term is controversial, having divergent definitions both in popular culture and academia, and has also been an ongoing source of contention among scholars across several fields of study. The word "cult" is usually considered a pejorative.

According to this definition, don't you think that any group of interest can be called a cult?



Do you think SoulCycle is a cult?

What about Elon Musk stans? Or the Royal Family? What about spiritual influencers? Is Instagram itself a cult? We're Sounds Like A Cult, a



podcast that analyzes a different zeitgeisty group every week to try and answer the big question:

This group sounds like a cult, but is it really?

The co-hosts of the podcast are Amanda Montell and Isa Medina. To get the first idea of the podcast, listen to the clip:

## Who are the girls talking about?

This LWS is mostly tailored around an episode of Sounds Like a Cult podcast and excerpts from an article from The New Yorker



Zoë Kate Hinde Heller (born 7 July 1965) is an English journalist and novelist long resident in New York City. She has published three novels, *Everything You Know* (1999), *Notes on a Scandal* (2003), and *The Believers* (2008). *Notes on a Scandal* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and was adapted for a feature film in 2006.

## What Makes a Cult a Cult?

*The line between delusion and what the rest of us believe may be blurrier than we think.*

By Zoë Heller

July 5, 2021

*All of us hold some beliefs for which there is no compelling evidence.*

1. **Read the first excerpt. Find among words in bold matching following definitions.**

a plan or scheme, especially one used to \_\_\_\_\_  
outwit an opponent or achieve an end

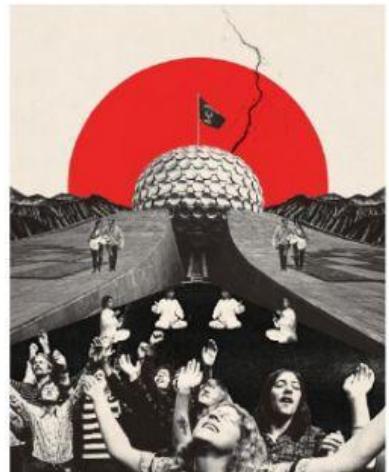
crying, whimpering \_\_\_\_\_

marked to show ownership \_\_\_\_\_

quick to notice any unusual and  
potentially dangerous or difficult circumstances; vigilant \_\_\_\_\_

a speech, especially one that is long and spoken  
quickly and is intended to persuade the person listening about something \_\_\_\_\_

an emotional problem or inhibition \_\_\_\_\_



### 2. Read again and do this T/F activity

1. Male cult leaders hardly ever find any noble or benevolent reason and disguise for their sexually inappropriate behaviour. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Keith Raniere was a follower of self-help cult NXIVM. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Keith Raniere tried to “purify” ( by having sexual intercourse with him) some women in the cult from the sins they supposedly committed in their previous lives. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Another approach to make women hate themselves was to praise their femininity. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Members of the DOS kept compromising facts about Keith Raniere and his nude photos. \_\_\_\_\_

Male cult leaders sometimes claim droit du seigneur over female followers or use physical violence to sexually exploit them. But, on the whole, they find it more efficient to dress up the exploitation as some sort of gift or therapy: an opportunity to serve God, an exorcism of “**hangups**,” a fast track to spiritual enlightenment. One **stratagem** favored by Keith Raniere, the leader of the New York-based self-help cult NXIVM, was to tell the female disciples in his inner circle that they had been high-ranking Nazis in their former lives, and that having yogic sex with him was a way to shift the residual bad energy lurking in their systems.



According to Sarah Berman, whose book “Don’t Call It a Cult” (Steerforth) focusses on the experiences of NXIVM’s women members, Raniere was especially **alert** to the manipulative uses of shame and guilt. When he eventually retired his Nazi story—surmising, perhaps, that there were limits to how many reincarnated S.S. officers one group could plausibly contain—he replaced it with another narrative designed to stimulate self-loathing. He told the women that the privileges of their gender had weakened them, turned them into prideful “princesses,” and that, in order to be freed from the prison of their **mewling** femininity, they needed to submit to a program of discipline and suffering. This became the **sales spiel** for the NXIVM subgroup DOS (Dominus Obsequious Sororium, dog Latin for “Master of the Obedient Sisterhood”), a pyramid scheme of sexual slavery in which members underwrote their vow of obedience to Raniere by having his initials **branded** on their groins and handing over collateral in the form of compromising personal information and nude photos. At the time of Raniere’s arrest, in 2018, on charges of sex trafficking, racketeering, and other crimes, DOS was estimated to have more than a hundred members and it had been acquiring equipment for a B.D.S.M. dungeon. Among the orders: a steel puppy cage, for those members “most committed to growth.”

Now, when you’ve read something about a real cult, let’s work on clips from the episode of the podcast where the co-hosts and their guest are trying to decide whether Tony Robbins’ followers are cult or not, but we are going to come back to the article in the course of the lesson.

3. Listen to the snippet. Does the man sound familiar to you? \_\_\_\_\_  
Fill the gaps with prepositions. What do you make of the statement?

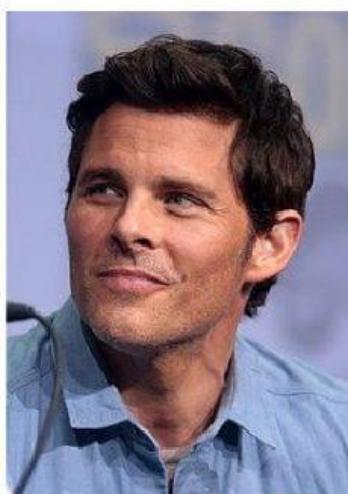
Some people’s expectations, their belief systems are “life should be taking care \_\_\_\_\_ me.” I gotta show people that you need to deliver something \_\_\_\_\_ life cause as long as you’re waiting for somebody take care \_\_\_\_\_ you, then you are always the victim, you’re always waiting. It’s not \_\_\_\_\_ getting the goal. It’s \_\_\_\_\_ who you become \_\_\_\_\_ pursuit of it.

4. Listen and put the lines in order \_\_\_\_\_

- Don't believe, I feel like he's putting on an act. \_\_\_\_\_
- That's his real voice. \_\_\_\_\_
- It does, but he does vocal exercises to maintain that sound. \_\_\_\_\_
- He's a monster. \_\_\_\_\_
- That's like what someone with vocal fry surgery sounds like. \_\_\_\_\_
- I swear, that's like his signature. \_\_\_\_\_
- Wait, that's his voice, it's like so creepy. \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Listen and answer the questions \_\_\_\_\_**

- 1) How much is Tony Robbins worth?
- 2) What shifts Amanda's perspective of Tony Robbins?
- 3) Is Tony Robbins "Latino in any capacity"?
- 4) What do you think "He's definitely sprayed-hand" mean?
- 5) Why are the pictures here?



- 6) What do the hosts say about Tony Robbins' teeth?

- 7) What is "the least of his problem"?

**8) Listen and shadow**

A \_\_\_\_\_ For those of you who doesn't know who Tony Robbins is. He is a motivational speaker and he kind of started his career really early on. I don't think he has actually ever had a real job. He has published two books: *Unlimited Power* and *Awaken the Giant Within*. Ooh! What does that mean?

B \_\_\_\_\_ No doubt ghost-written, sorry, that's me being assaulty of... when people make bajillions of dollars on books they didn't write (that's speculation, but)...

C \_\_\_\_\_ Basically, he is just one of the most famous and successful, richest motivational speakers in the USA of all time.

D \_\_\_\_\_ I think it's a little bit important to know a little bit about his early life, cause it says a lot about him. He is

a motivational speaker to help people get their life on track, but he ran away from home when he was seventeen. And immediately met his mentor who was a motivational speaker/hypnosis guy who kinda took him under his wing when he was seventeen. And I think that's really important to know when you're looking at someone who's built an empire telling people how to live their life.

E \_\_\_\_\_ Mm Ehmm... Yeah, it really is an empire like this guy is known primarily for the conferences that he hosts which are these massive events with thousands upon thousands of attendees. Tickets will run you between a few hundred dollars and a hundred thousand dollars. And throughout the day you will be exposed to meditation, personal development break-out seminars, he'll like pluck people out of the audience and basically do the old-school-healer things what's like "you're blind, I'm gonna help you see!"

F \_\_\_\_\_ Yeah, you've probably heard of the guy who had people walk across hot coals, that was Tony Robbins. That was To-ny Ro-bbi-ns.

G \_\_\_\_\_ So, he for sure has a cult following. But we are here to determine how dangerous of a cult he's really running here.

**Find in the transcript above "run" with the correspondent meanings:**

6. be **in charge of**, **manage**.

"Andrea runs her own catering business"

Синонимы:

be **in charge of**

**manage**

administer

direct

control



- (of a system, organization, or plan) **operate** or **proceed** in a particular way.

"everything's running according to plan"



**organize, implement, or carry out.**

"we decided to run a series of seminars"

Синонимы:

carry out

do

perform

fulfil

execute

- **own, maintain, and use (a vehicle).**

"he could no longer afford to run a car"

Синонимы:

maintain

keep

own

possess

have

drive

## 12. NORTH AMERICAN

cost (someone) (a specified amount).

"a new photocopier will run us about \$1,300"

**9) Report back everything you can remember about Tony Robbins from this lesson**