

Candice Schutter: [00:00:00] Welcome back to The Deeper Pulse and the 'cult'ure series. Today, we're diving into part three of my ongoing conversation with Tracy Stamper.

Candice Schutter: The footage you hear is from this afternoon's rainstorm which is currently happening just outside my door.

In fact, full disclosure. I am curled up inside of my bedroom [00:01:00] closet recording this intro for you. It's monsoon season in the high desert and nearly every day, afternoon rains seem to come out of nowhere.

I'm telling you this because it is possible that the sound will break through and you'll hear nature doing its thing just outside my door.

A few days ago, life got hard and I was having all the feels. Which is really just a fancy way of saying that I was a white hot mess of emotion. And so I decided to opt out of my afternoon to-do list and I climbed in my car and drove to the community pool to take a swim.

As soon as my body hit the water, my face started to melt. I floated on my back for a while as tears spilled down my cheeks and into the still waters.

A few minutes later, while lying in the sun, I peeked out at the world from underneath my visor. A lizard scrambled across a rock nearby. A man sat under an umbrella reading [00:02:00] a book. A woman in a sun hat paddled along the surface of the water, back and forth back and forth.

As I watched her, I felt another wave of emotion surfacing. So I flipped onto my stomach and released a bit more, occasionally dabbing my face with the corner of my beach towel.

Eventually the sun dried my face and body and clouds began to gather above. I felt a deep sense of relief. The shade a welcome break from all that blinding light.

The rains arrived in their typical way sudden-like and without warning, and as I flipped back onto my back, I watched as everyone scrambled toward the pool gates and back to their vehicles.

I didn't budge an inch. I felt right at home among the dark clouds. I just sat and watched as tiny droplets of rain pelted the surface of the water. Each one haloing itself [00:03:00] outward.

Soon, the rain was cold against my warm skin and I celebrated the comfort I felt resting there in the muted light.

I'm not really entirely sure why I'm sharing that story with you. Possibly because of the rains outside and also to give you a sense of what it was like to navigate the past week, which I found incredibly humbling.

Now I won't pretend to be surprised by this. I am continually working on uncovering my blind spots, and creating a series like this one is itself the perfect storm. As I talk and presume to understand things I'm still learning.

So smack dab in the middle of a well researched rollout on the intricacies of interpersonal social dynamics, this week, I found myself struggling in some very familiar ways. Grappling with the same well worn questions.

Where am I out of sync with the cultures that I currently occupy? And [00:04:00] is it really okay for me to speak my mind openly? Do I have the courage to no longer enter or to step away from groupthink ideologies that I no longer resonate with?

In this well edited series of podcasts, it's possible that you might develop the preconception that I no longer fall into the same traps of self abandonment. But you would be mistaken. Speaking hard truths and disappointing others, for me, this is the hardest thing.

Now how this usually shows up is I keep my divergent opinions to myself, going along in order to get along... until the discomfort grows and I feel as though I might soon explode. And then comes the disclosure, which is unfortunately often laced with a compulsive need to overexplain myself. Now this is not really a good look on anyone, but particularly on me, because most of the time 'explaining myself' usually just [00:05:00] means too many words and me making more of a mess of things.

And I just recently realized that part of the problem is that when I know in my bones the next hard thing I must do, oftentimes I don't yet have a clear understanding as to why I need to do it.

Why is it that this feels good and that doesn't? What makes one group identity feel comfortable in another one ill fitting?

Oftentimes when I have a decision to make about my relationships or the communities that I reside in, I don't really know why one thing is working and another isn't.

So I guess I'm saying this because when my guests and I share our stories on the podcast, remember that we have the benefit of hindsight. Tortured ambivalence and hurt feelings have since morphed into wisdom and insight.

And it feels important to highlight this because this week I was reminded just how painful it can be when you're in it. What it feels like to grow in a new [00:06:00] direction, to reorient and recalibrate my choices.

Healthy or not, leaving any culture behind can feel like a death of. Sort, As we surrender an identity in favor of something new, something more authentic, that we've more recently unearthed.

So I'm doing my best to move forward despite my chronic desire to please others. Maybe being misunderstood isn't necessarily a sign of failure. Maybe it's a bittersweet signal that we're actually moving in the right direction.

I mean let us not forget that culture is the norm. And unsettling the norm is, well, it's unsettling. Defying a cultural narrative often means walking through blinding confusion, hurt feelings, and the occasional side eye.

But remember this. The number one thing that makes a [00:07:00] culture ' is the idea that our group is higher up or better than. This ideology is dangerous and it is the clever lair of the wounded ego. When we imagine our group's way of life to be superior. When we think our way of doing things is better than another. This is a red flag indicator that other cult dynamics might be present. Not to mention the internal pressures within the group to meet a uniform standard. It undermines connection.

Which circles me back to my conversation with Tracy Stamper. Today, we're back with part three. The session you're about to hear was also recorded back in March of this year. Tracy's gonna share a little bit more of her story, and then we're gonna dive into how culty language develops, the costumes we wear, and just how far back our interest in all things culty really goes.

If you missed parts one and two of my conversation with [00:08:00] Tracy, I highly recommend you circle back as they provide context for today's discussion.

Once again, the stories that Tracy and I share in this episode are true to the best of our recollection. Please note that our memories might be different from how others recall those very same events. Our opinions and perceptions are not meant to be generalized, nor are they intended to malign any individual, group, or organization.

So let's get to it. Here's part three of my conversation with Tracy.

Tracy Stamper: Hi. I am so sorry that I just couldn't get my shit together this morning.

Candice Schutter: Oh God, it's fine. I was able to crank out a, a little bit of something I needed to do anyway. So it worked perfect, as these things do.

I'm so glad we're back doing this.

Tracy Stamper: I am too.

Candice Schutter: It's so wild that [00:09:00] we spent so much time together that first time. And I felt like, wow we. I won't say hardly scratched the surface, but we just got to the surface.

Tracy Stamper: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: And there's just so much to share. And so, I can't thank you enough for being willing to dive down this rabbit hole with me.

Like genuinely. It is like that, isn't it?

Tracy Stamper: It really is like the layers and the dead ends and spirals. It's fascinating.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Yeah. It it's, it's sort of trippy, like Alice's rabbit hole. Like it's a bit of a head trip and I've spent the last week, just really, I just felt like there was so much, like I'd come so far and there was just things that I just still didn't have a language around. And I feel like the more I hear stories about people who have been in similar types of situations and the more I study the language that's developed around a lot of [00:10:00] these dynamics.

It's so profoundly settling to not just be validated in terms of, oh, you're not alone in that experience. But to say there's a word for that, that thing that felt strange to you, that you've been talking to your people about and attempting to explain and all these different ways, there's like a two word phrase for that thing that you've been feeling.

And so, I've been listening to a lot of podcast episodes and reading Amanda Montel's book "Cultish" is brilliant. It's such a great book too, because she's got this like really, sort of irreverent, punchy sense of humor.

And what I love about the book specifically is that it's not just about extreme religious cults. It's about everyday cults. There's chapters on MLM, and just business workings and there's a section on the cult fitness industry, which is fascinating.

And now it's like, oh, there's just this really clear, distinct language. As [00:11:00] we're having these conversations, we can actually say, oh wait, there's a word for that. We're actually sharing something that is a real thing that, because we've been conditioned to think that we're inventing based on our experience and that our inventions aren't useful or real, to be able to look at the work that's been done over decades of research and say, this is very real.

This is a phenomenon that happens a lot. And it's called such-and-such.

Tracy Stamper: Wow. I just exhaled. And I just felt like woosh. The validation, the de-gaslighting.

Candice Schutter: Hmm, right. Whatever the opposite of gaslighting is deep programming, I guess.

Tracy Stamper: Deprogramming that's it?

Candice Schutter: I would imagine, I don't know what to call it. Sanity. The restoration of sanity.

Tracy Stamper: Ding ding ding ding.

Candice Schutter: Let's call it that.

Tracy Stamper: The restoration of sanity. Yeah.

Candice Schutter: You're like, oh, I know what that is. And I know what that is. And I know what that is. That lines up with what I'm feeling inside. This is a very real [00:12:00] thing that happens in the psyche and in the body. And when it's acknowledged that validation is freedom to take that, power back and to reframe the trauma in a different way.

So suddenly you were on the other side of the narrative, whatever the narrative is about those individuals and the betrayal of their leaving and that there must be something that they weren't getting, something that they... work they weren't willing to do, or some critical piece of the teaching that they just hadn't been able to incorporate and embody, because of why would they leave this perfection.

Tracy Stamper: Right?

Candice Schutter: Why would they leave this garden of Eden that we're all living in? And was there like a specific story you would tell yourself about people who left? Or was it a story that you heard or what stories had you internalized about those who leave [00:13:00] and how did it feel to be the one who had done the leaving?

Tracy Stamper: The words that come to me are sour grapes. That's a term that I personally used. I don't know if it was used by anyone else or if it was just my impression of those who had left before me. I figured that they had done something wrong. They hadn't gone along with the program. They had been a squeaky wheel when a squeaky wheel wasn't necessary.

There was always some shortcoming in them. Sour grapes. It was just so easy for me to chalk it up under those two words. And when I did that, I didn't need to know the story. I didn't need to know specifics. And honestly, I was a little bit happier if I didn't even get into that. It was easier for me to not know the stories.

Candice Schutter: [00:14:00] Yeah. When people turn a blind eye and we see this right now in our culture, like mad, like, what is that? Why is it that we aren't willing to look at what's right in front of us and say, yeah, racism is real. Yeah. We live in an oligarchy. Like these things that we are afraid to admit out loud. Yeah. The planet is becoming uninhabitable.

A big part of it is similar to the reasons why you didn't want to know the details. It's because the cognitive dissonance that results when you learn the details is excruciating and it demands, it demands via the body, as you know, which led you to this point where you put out this public statement, the dissonance demands that you make a choice.

Will you incorporate this new understanding through your behavior and your beliefs, or will you suffer?

And so it's better to just be ignorant in a way. To say, well, if I don't educate myself [00:15:00] about climate change and if I don't educate myself about anti-racism and if I don't educate myself about all these things that I could do something about. Albeit it would be painful if I did, because I would have to change my behavior.

So we, we look away. And when I say all those things, I've been guilty of all of those things myself. And so I get it. I get why it was easier to ignore the narrative and to back away from hearing the whole story. Because it's so uncomfortable to be in that space.

It's almost like we have this ability to sense what's going to grow us to our next edge. And we reach for these sugarcoated options instead of turning toward the thing that is the difficult thing, that is the fire we have to walk through, that forces us to look at ourselves and burn down to the bone sometimes who we think we are. And be humbled and fall to our knees and say shit like I was missing a lot of pieces of the puzzle.

We [00:16:00] avoid it. And then we reached for the easy button.

Tracy Stamper: Yes. And the easy button is doled out through who we give the benefit of the doubt to. I'm so glad that you verbalized that. That is something that had showed up in my own journal. And to hear you using those exact same words and to hear you echo that back to me, it was like, whoa, that's something there.

Candice Schutter: I've seen it in so many places, too. Like, outside of there. Like, at work. Who gets the benefit of the doubt. The boss?

Tracy Stamper: The boss.

Candice Schutter: Right? At home. Who gets benefit of the doubt? Whoever parent happens to be the top of the hierarchy at home. The kid who's the favorite. This happens everywhere. So I'm really glad that you highlighted it and named it again, because I think it's really important.

Tracy Stamper: If I didn't do that, that opens up a whole can of worms that's going to get really uncomfortable for me and my loyalty.

Candice Schutter: Absolutely. So well said.

Fb post - Chicago

Tracy Stamper: [00:17:00] So I wrote that Facebook post the morning that my family was getting ready to leave for a long weekend in Chicago. Just for fun, just the three of us spending time together.

And that was the morning when I woke up and I was in so much pain, I knew without question that I had to get the words and actions of someone else out of my own body to recover my health.

And the moment I left the organization, I felt a heightened attention, both internally from me and externally towards me about anything that I would say or do to explain why I left.

Candice Schutter: Where was this attention coming from on the outside that you felt? Was it coming from the organization, the epicenter? Was it coming from your community around you? Was it on social media?

Tracy Stamper: Everywhere.

Candice Schutter: All of the above.[00:18:00]

Tracy Stamper: Which, which honestly means it was all coming from within me.

Because I had been in the organization and I had watched other people leave, I already had a sense that those people were watched. Those people were explained a way or judged or shamed in some way, or basically made to be the bad guy. Or as you put it so brilliantly, they weren't given the benefit of the doubt.

So from the other side, I had seen that happen to so many people and I had taken part in that. I want to be really clear that I, I told myself stories about folks who had left before.

Candice Schutter: In order to stay you, it's sort of what you have to do to justify staying.

Tracy Stamper: Absolutely.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Tracy Stamper: So I just, I knew that leaving was charged. So it, it was less about any actual pressure from anyone [00:19:00] than it was about what I had seen play out before and how just, I felt so raw and vulnerable and cracked, open and tender and wounded.

I felt like anything I said, or didn't say, would be read into, would be talked about.

So the weekend in Chicago did not really turn out to be just a fun weekend, the three of us, because Facebook was exploding with really charged comments and accusations, like not always of me, but other people.

And I remember a couple of days into the trip, we went out to a really well-known deep dish, yummy pizza restaurant. And, it was super crowded. It was rush hour, Friday. And I remember walking out [00:20:00] to go to the restaurant in a very crowded area and just the bustle and the commotion. And I took a moment and I looked around me and I thought, wow, not one person that I can see right now knows what I did.

Not one person knows that I did this horrible thing and wrote a Facebook post that was causing all of this commotion and ickiness and ouchiness. And it was a really fascinating moment for me to remember that the organization was just one little part of the world. And it

had been my world for so long that I had forgotten that I could be in the space and not be judged for what I had done.

Candice Schutter: You were feeling like you did something wrong.

Tracy Stamper: I did.

Candice Schutter: Just even the words you chose in terms of explaining how you felt in [00:21:00] that moment. I heard you holding yourself accountable for the fallout. That clearly you had done something quote, unquote wrong because it had turned into a shit show. Right? Again, that internalizing of the community. That if I express myself openly and people have feelings, then I'm responsible for those feelings. And if those feelings are no bueno. If those feelings are in any way critical, then I'm critical of myself. That I'm somehow the reason.

That's that codependency that's just sort of woven into the fabric of how you were taught to relate to your community. All the shame you're feeling is a miscalculation based on how you were taught to respond.

In some ways, it's a light bulb moment. When you look around at the pizza place and you realize, oh wait, this thing that I made the center of my universe for so long, isn't actually the center of the universe.

And this might sound a little absurd to people [00:22:00] out there who've never been in this experience, but when you become so steeped in something, and it's your, it's your spiritual oasis. It's your source of livelihood. It's how you make your money. And it's also the community that holds you.

And so when you step outside of it, there's this huge, massive void and all these different arenas simultaneously. And I'm curious to know when you had that experience in Chicago and then you came back home and you realized the universe was much bigger than you remembered it. And also, I'm assuming you felt that vast echo of empty, all these spaces that were filled by this connection you had to this work suddenly were open.

I'm curious about the relationships that you had with your colleagues, for example, how did it go down once you separated yourself and made it publicly known so bravely that you separated yourself [00:23:00] what happened in terms of your community and your connection?

Tracy Stamper: Whew. Wow. A lot of, um, internal activation even going there. And sweaty palms again. Um, that is very, very present for me to this day. There is a deep sense of loss, of sadness, of loneliness.

Every single one of my relationships shifted.

Candice Schutter: Every single one?

Tracy Stamper: Every single one of them.

With folks that I worked closely with. And, relationships changed. So it was so fascinating to me after I wrote a very honest email to my colleagues, right after [00:24:00] everything that went down. I felt so supported and understood and just loved on by folks who called me or sent me emails and said, wow, I'm really sorry for what you're going through. I felt seen and valued and understood by my peers, which was hugely helpful at this very tender time.

That shifted when I came out publicly and said that I was no longer with the organization.

I just, I felt like I was in a void, in a vacuum. There were very few people there for me at that time. Now I do want to say it had been eight or nine months since I had been let go. So maybe that was just a function of it no longer being news or something that just [00:25:00] happened.

But I didn't, I didn't really feel like I could touch base with folks who had made the decision to stay. That's a very confusing, rocky terrain to walk. And especially when you love these people.

Candice Schutter: Yeah, for sure.

Tracy Stamper: And that piece with a few of my closest loved ones who were colleagues. That piece is the one that remains the most painful to me.

Candice Schutter: Hmm. Yeah.

Understandably.

We talked about the experience that we have in the trainings where there's a very specifically designed intensity to the experience and the bonding of results from that. So having those experiences over many years with people and [00:26:00] then climbing the hierarchy, getting to the, what amounts to the top, whatever the top is for now and creating a bond around that and this sort of shared mission, and really what unites people in a shared mission is a shared vision.

And while you no longer feel that that particular organization is the means to that vision. The vision is something you still share, and those heartstrings are still connected. And perhaps what is most tragic, and one of the ways we know that the community that we're exiting is leaning in the direction of these indoctrinating and isolating frameworks is that somehow the separation is just something that intuitively both parties know it's just part of the deal.

So imagine working for a company and you leave, mainstream thinking would be, so what? You stay friends with that person. No big deal.

[00:27:00] But in these situations, you're no longer speaking the same language. And so there's just this sort of discomfort that emerges.

And then on top of that, which I'm not going to speak for everyone and say that everyone has this feeling who's there, but I know that some people have the feeling of loyalty to those whom you have separated from. And there's the sense of needing to choose sides, which in and of itself is an indicator that something's off because we're grownups. And grownups shouldn't have to choose sides. That's the familial dynamic at work. That's a codependent dysfunction.

And so the fact that it's somehow taboo to have a relationship with you is a red flag in and of itself. Why should that be the case? And I'm not saying that anyone overtly proclaims this to be the case, not at all. It's just sort of like when you were [00:28:00] talking about when I started teaching Zumba and it felt like I had somehow betrayed the organization and you, by proxy. It's a similar thing, right? It's like, well, how do you, how do you buddy up with somebody who's betraying what? I don't even know what. The mission? I don't know exactly what I was betraying or what you were betraying when you left, but there's this sense of that penetrates and it gets in the way of relationships.

And it's so tragic because there are so many aspects of those relationships that were very much real and deep and authentic and could be lasting lifetime relationships if it weren't for this fucked-upedness.

Yeah. So I can see and it just acknowledge that you're still sloughing off and just still feeling the grief and the pain around having those relationships go. And let's not forget that these relationship disappeared during a really hard time in your life when you had just lost your father.

Tracy Stamper: Right. Right.

And [00:29:00] it was interesting to watch, you know, with a whole range of diverse relationships within that group, there've been very different outcomes. And the ones that make me the saddest are the ones where we both tried.

Candice Schutter: Yeah, sure.

Tracy Stamper: We both tried. We knew that there was this thing in between us now that I couldn't be okay anymore being in the same environment I used to be in. And the other was continuing to do their work through the organization that I had just left. And it just became this elephant in the room that, do do we talk and not mention it? That seems really weird, especially when.

Candice Schutter: It was all you used to talk about.

Tracy Stamper: Exactly. It was all that we used to talk about because a lot of [00:30:00] organizations like this, personal development organizations like this become so all encompassing in one's life it becomes a practice that I'm not just doing when I'm at the office or in trainings or teaching classes, but it's the framework through which every word comes out of my mouth.

So it no longer is just one of many topics that we avoid. It's how do you connect in a small room around this massive elephant, right? While pretending it's not there.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Tracy Stamper: And that is the most lingering sadness for me. I worked with amazing, awesome, brilliant, compassionate powerhouse, hilarious, loving people.

And whew, that's a void.

Candice Schutter: Yeah, definitely.

[00:31:00]

CONTINUED - FB post

Tracy Stamper: So it did get to the point with my Facebook post and the completely overwhelming response, it was important to me at a certain point to acknowledge, wow, this is really spun out of control, which in and of itself is very interesting to me.

Candice Schutter: Definitely.

So does that post still live?

Tracy Stamper: It does. Once a year on your birthday, it pops up.

Candice Schutter: What a gift.

Tracy Stamper: Your response truly was a gift. It pops up and every year I reread it and every year, interestingly, I hadn't realized this until this moment, but every year I feel a little bit farther away from it.[00:32:00]

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Yeah. That's how it works.

It's like a slow fade.

Tracy Stamper: Ooh.

Candice Schutter: It's like a slow emotional fade.

Yeah. That's part of how we know something happened to us. I think that's important to just underscore it in general when it comes to, like the word trauma gets thrown around a lot, these days it's used rather loosely. And in some ways I think it's a welcome overcorrection because it wasn't used enough for so long.

Tracy Stamper: Right.

Candice Schutter: And yet at the same time, because it's used casually very much like the word cult is used casually. I mean, the word cult is used in advertising all the time. And so, in some ways it's good when we take the power from them by using them loosely.

But it's also important to circle back and say, this word actually has a really significant and specific meaning. And one of the ways we know [00:33:00] we've suffered trauma is the impact that it has had on our body and our nervous system. And that slow fade that, that activation and the way that it takes, even when we're in like intense therapeutic settings, the way that it takes time, there's no getting around the fact that time is really the thing that as they say, time heals all wounds. It's the only factor that for sure is going to lead to that slow fade and the more help we get, perhaps that slow fade is a little easier. I don't know that it moves quicker or not. I can't speak to that.

But the fact that you even feel a charge about it, what this will be four years in August. And when you see that post, how you feel will probably not yet be totally indifferent.

Tracy Stamper: Right, right. I'm sure it won't be.

Candice Schutter: And yet, compared to last [00:34:00] year, you're going to feel that difference. And in a way, what a great marker that you get to see that, to just measure that gap and as long as it might take, it's getting bigger and bigger. That sense of spaciousness between that moment of trauma and where you are now.

Tracy Stamper: Right. And something that, that brought up for me was how you were able to speak to how you recognized some behaviors in me that indicated that you knew that I was still more in than you were.

Like, you're seeing where I am in that slow fade, which is fascinating to me because it tells me I've still got some fading to do.

Candice Schutter: And I'll say, I still listen to myself on the podcast or myself talking to a client or myself, engaging with particular people that I'm close to, who [00:35:00] were likewise influenced by this organization and the people in it.

And I have these moments where I'm hearing myself speak and I'm cringing on the inside because I can hear, I can hear it still alive in me. I don't know any other way to explain it.

I don't believe in possession or anything like that, but I do believe that neurological frameworks can get built and then we have to rewire and repattern, and I feel like this entity, this framework lives in me.

And I hear myself speaking in a certain way or censoring myself in a certain way. And I'm like, I still feel like I'm still breaking down the walls or I still feel like I'm still coming out of the cage and I can feel the bars around me. And I'm like, there's a lot more space between them now and I slip in and out, but I'm still in there.

So, yeah, I still notice the way that and something I definitely want us to talk about today, which we'll get into later is language and just the power that language has and the ways that it liberates us and the [00:36:00] ways that it holds us hostage. And I feel both of those really viscerally in the way that I express myself and I'm still trying to break free.

Like, I get way less fucks than I used to, as they say. And yet when it comes to communicating, I still feel myself a little bit behind bars.

Tracy Stamper: Wow. And so it has been, to date now it's been 16 years.

Candice Schutter: And I still, it doesn't land in my brain right. Like even then, like, I can't do the math. It's almost like my body says, no, it hasn't been 16 years because you know what? It hasn't been because of that physically out, but not mentally out.

Maybe I keep thinking it's 12 years because it took me four years to get to the point where I felt like I was really out.

That may be why I struggle with that so much. Simple math. 16 [00:37:00] years.

Tracy Stamper: Which by the way is the number of years that I taught. 16 years.

Candice Schutter: Interesting.

Tracy Stamper: It's a long time.

Candice Schutter: It is a long time. And so well, yeah, we're speaking specifically about one shared experience we had in a specific organization, but the frameworks exist all over culturally.

So it's not a matter of, this particular space that we entered into had a monopoly on these things and invented them like hardly. They're everywhere. I mean, these dynamics happen in families. They happen in workplaces. They happen in churches. They happen in friendship circles. They happen in all these different arenas. And so we're not just unraveling what happened to us there. It's just what happens to us collectively when we inadvertently succumb to these intra-psychic forces and give away our power.

Fringe & Language (closed loop, thought terminating)

Candice Schutter: So I think this is a good moment to highlight, let's remember, you've got people [00:38:00] on the fringe of these organizations who are just sticking their toe in the water.

They're taking a class three times a week. They spend an hour in this maybe transcendental space that helps them become more body aware and delivers all these glorious benefits. And they're hearing the language 60 minutes, three times a week.

Then you've got people who. Are more involved. And you've got people who teach the language. Then you've got people who learn every nuance of the language. You've got people who live, eat and breathe the language. This language becomes an atmosphere and a climate that you operate in and everything's explained through the language and the teachings. And so the thing that develops is called a closed loop system of logic, which basically keeps people within this loop of logic that is created by the system itself.

So everything that happens is passed through these frameworks. There's nowhere else for them to go because it's sort of the guiding philosophy at the center of your life.

[00:39:00] It's called a closed loop system because it often involves things like thought terminating cliches, little catchphrases that everyone's absorbed that diminish critical thinking, citing of a particular teaching or principle, or, uh, the cult researcher, Amanda Montel calls them psychological sedatives.

Tracy Stamper: Wow. Wow. Wow. Wow.

Candice Schutter: And they very much work that way. And, and if you think like, oh, this is some like woo culty thing. It's not. Thought terminating cliches are everywhere.

Like, it's all good. Everything happens for a reason. It is what it is.

At times we need a psychological sedative.

Tracy Stamper: Right.

Candice Schutter: Right? None of these things, nothing that we talk about is by nature, wrong. Like all of these psychological mechanisms are useful to us until they begin to rule us. When they're no longer tools, they become pathological.

So a thought terminating cliché is fine and dandy. We need them. It's a [00:40:00] way that we settle ourselves and there's nothing wrong with that. We need to be able to settle ourselves.

Yet when they exist within this closed system of logic. And there's no, there's no detours anymore. Everything circles back to the teachings are right, because they must be right. Because our very identity, our very livelihood, everything depends on us proving this to be the case to ourselves and one another.

And so we just get stuck there. We just get stuck there.

Tracy Stamper: Oh, that sounds exhausting. And I happen to know that it is because I did it. It's exhausting.

Candice Schutter: Yeah, it is. It is because some part of our being knows that something's off.

It was roughly a year, almost to the day, after I [00:41:00] started working at the epicenter that I did the third level of training and I met you. I flew to Chicago to do that training. And then it was just a few weeks after that there was another training which is like a all levels training where everybody who had done any belt level to that point could come to this training.

And from a business standpoint, this was a way to make money. The numbers were going down in terms of new recruits. And so they decided to create this event where all the people who were die-hards would come together and it worked like a charm. There were a lot of people at this training where all the different levels were invited to come.

And one of the teachers who was of the highest level that you could be at in terms of training with the organization had been involved with the organization for many years. She had the idea that during the training, we should do a dance performance. She wanted to choreographed a tribute performance for the founders as a [00:42:00] gift. Although the training started out as this is an opportunity for all the belts to come together and learn these new skills, it sort of turned into this tribute event for the founders. Like we're all coming together to celebrate these two people who have given us so much.

So she asked many of us who worked at the organization who were teachers and stuff to be a part of this dance piece. And I was chosen to be one of the leads. I was playing the Eagle. And then there was another lead who was a male character and he was playing the flame. He was essentially representing the male founder and I was representing the female founder through this dance.

I hadn't really considered myself quote unquote a dancer until I started doing this practice. So the fact that I was performing as a dancer was just a really great edge for me to explore. It was fun and I felt really honored to have been chosen.

And so we prepared for many moons and we, at the end of this training, did this [00:43:00] performance. The Eagle and the flame.

And at the end of it, it's one of my sort of key memories. And I think it's because it was a big red flag moment for me. And I didn't fully track it at the time. Like I knew it was a little bit strange that way that we were holding this performance and like the roles that we were playing. It felt a little loaded, but sweet.

And at the end, I just remember the founders coming forward. They were seated in the front, of course, coming forward in front of everyone and applause breaking out, everyone standing up and giving them a standing ovation of gratitude for this practice.

And I remember the quality of the energy in the room. And I have this vivid memory of staring at the founders while the applause was happening and something about it creeped me the fuck out.

I remember being really conflicted cause there was a part of me that was in awe of them. I was like, [00:44:00] how would it feel to be able to receive this with so much sponginess. It was just this like, yes, of course keep applauding. Applaud as long as you like.

Something about it stayed with me and I never left me because I was both in awe and sort of envious of their self-assuredness.

I was like, wow, that's amazing. And I was also like, huh. The adulation that was coming at them, they didn't flinch. And that troubled me. It troubled me that they were willingly standing on the pedestal without flinching.

Do you remember this at all?

Tracy Stamper: Yes. what I remember most is where in that room I was seated, and I remember being absolutely wowed by what I was [00:45:00] invited to see. I remember just being mesmerized by the actual movement.

Candice Schutter: Well, let me pause you there for a second. That's important. I want people listening to understand that the choreography was purposefully designed to use the movements that we taught in our classes. And these were movements we taught to everyday people of all ages and abilities. So we weren't doing like fancy, modern dance moves. We were representing all these different movement forms that sort of, in theory, came together to create this practice.

So part of when you say that you were moved by what you were seeing, the average Joe who maybe walked in off the street and watch the performance probably would not have been wowed in any way. But the particular audience that we had created it for was very much mesmerized by it because it was like our bodies were speaking a language that they were fluent in and they recognize the language and they were like, oh, and that was what we were going for.

I just want to qualify your [00:46:00] statement to say that my guess is, is that you weren't mesmerized by the movement in any way, because the quality of the movement was over the top. It was more because of what it symbolized.

Tracy Stamper: I was not moved by the choreography per se. I was moved by the movers. I was moved by seeing people who were so immersed in the practice, standing in their power and expressing it. That's what moved me.

I remember something very poignant. Which is so interesting when I have very specific moments that are so poignant, oftentimes they are connected to that hyper arousal and taking in stimuli. And so it's interesting to me that I remember exactly where I was in the room, however many years later.

And I remember something about that evening. By the time I left, I just was both riding a high [00:47:00] from being at this amazing event with amazing people. And I don't remember

specifically the moment that you were talking about where they walked in front. I do remember very, very rowdy raucous applause, and then afterwards feeling a little bit sick.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. It's, it's hard to explain, like how can you sense the quality of applause. There's just something in the air that's different. It's like, if the group is in a trance state, you can feel the spell around you, even if you're in it, you can kind of feel it. And in retrospect, when you come out of it becomes more apparent.

It's almost like there's a part of us that's always awake even when we're in the dream. If we're lucky, I guess I should say.

Tracy Stamper: Wow. I had not thought about that for many, many years.

Journal

Candice Schutter: I find it so fascinating that the only sequential journals that I have from [00:48:00] my whole life, as somebody who journaled my whole life, are those years that I was there. And thank God. Because before we were about to do this, I spent days going through them page by page, literally.

Creating a timeline, capturing the experience, and finding validation in the fact that my body did remember what happened correctly and that the stories that I told myself to justify certain things or to second guess my recollection were just another way that I was responding to the conditioning that no, this really did happen.

So I love that you have the post to go back to and say, no, this is really how it went down and where it went. And yeah, I get that. I get that.

Tracy Stamper: I saved all of the comments for the same reason. I have screenshots of them on my phone so that I can go back. If I ever get into that space of wondering, am I overreacting? Was this, did it really happen that way? Or anytime I [00:49:00] start to doubt what I actually know, I have that. And I can look back and be like, damn. Damn.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Tracy Stamper: That happened.

Candice Schutter: Yeah, exactly.

Meeting

Candice Schutter: Side note, when I first started teaching Zumba and I got involved in it. My dad has a really dear friend, his best friend of many, many years lives in Miami. And that's where Zumba's headquarters are. They're in Miami.

And it was actually shortly after my, my stepbrother passed away tragically. It was the first Christmas after he died. December of 2010. And my step-mom understandably just couldn't

be home for the holiday. And so we planned a trip to Miami to stay with my dad's best friend and just to get away. And [00:50:00] it was just a healing trip. We spent a lot of time by the water and just feeling our feelings and being together.

And as a part of the trip and partially for diversion for me, I said, well, I'm going to be in Miami. I should go take a class with Beto Perez, the founder of Zumba. And so I did, and it wasn't a huge class. It's in this really humble studio. It was a fun class. And at the end of it, I remember so vividly standing at the edge. And there were, as there are, as I know, because I used to manage international headquarters for a fitness powerhouse, there were visitors. There are always people from out of town. And I saw three or four people go up to meet him after class.

And I, reflectively was like, oh, I should go introduce myself. Like I felt that draw. And then I thought, no. No. I mean, part of it was self protection, I think from just having been at the epicenter and feeling a little lingering trauma around it.

[00:51:00] But this was my four year mark. I'm just realizing this was 2010. So it wasn't a huge charge around that, but it was more like, I don't want to be close to the center of this because it's going to ruin it.

That was my attitude was I don't want to ruin this. I enjoy it.

Because I realized in that moment, that being on the fringe was the perfect place to be. I was like, not just a student, I was teaching it and that was enough. I didn't need to go any closer. I didn't need to go any further. And so I just left. And I never met him. And I never went to a convention on purpose.

Because again, you can look at our experience and be like, this is just such an anomaly, this whole culty thing. But if you look at pictures from even a Zumba convention, which is a very, like I said, very different business structure, lots of different people having input. I don't know anything about the inner workings of it. So I'm not going to comment much on it just to say that from the outside, it seems to [00:52:00] functional business.

And I could tell from even just seeing pictures of the convention, that the culture was there. And I should also note that there are Facebook groups, for example, that are dedicated to certain high-level trainers in the organization that are fan pages. And they're people who basically worship these trainers and create groups to hang out and do that together. And they post pictures of the trainer doing this and doing that. And there's a celebrity status that comes with it. And then all of this shit starts to happen.

And I'm not blaming the trainer, whether the trainer wants it to or not.

Now, of course you can play into this shit or you can not. And I do think there's a lot of responsibility that needs to be taken there. And at the same time, this was just what humans do. And I know that, and I was like, I don't want anything to do with any of that. I don't want to meet any of the people I see on the videos.

[00:53:00] None of it. I just want to stay over here and enjoy just teaching my classes to my 50 people. Life is good. And that's what I did. And then eventually I had a normal attrition with the practice. And when I left, nobody gave a shit because I didn't disappoint anybody because I didn't get close enough to anybody that would be disappointed. That's part of it.

But I had to choose to keep that boundary because I didn't quite honestly trust myself.

Tracy Stamper: Right.

Candice Schutter: This isn't about me blaming like, oh, they would've sucked me in. They would have wooed me. No, this is me saying I didn't trust myself to not fall into that trance of groupthink if I went to a convention and start acting like, oh, like, this is the center of my universe, when I knew full well it wasn't.

I mean, I was so on guard after everything that had happened, that I felt uncomfortable wearing the logo.

Like if you look at cult fitness, you'll see this a lot. I mean, you see it even with yoga practitioners, it's like, there's [00:54:00] a, a particular costume. I'm going to call it a costume, because it's attached to an identity. There's a costume we wear. And there was a time when I started teaching the original practice again. And I taught it back to back to a Zumba class at a club that I taught at. And I would change my clothes. I would change my clothes because I was a different persona.

Tracy Stamper: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: A hundred percent. I grew out of it a little bit toward the end of it, and I just sort of let it stand. And I would put on a hat backwards when I taught Zumba or something, just to be sort of spunky. But when I first started, it was almost as though I couldn't step into the energetic of each one. I was still so much a channel for it unconsciously, instead of just doing this thing that I liked to do, that I wore the attire that was appropriate to the given practice.

And so if you look at videos, like I could go online right now and, totally unmarked, look at [00:55:00] images from a Zumba convention, look at images from a training of the organization we speak of, look at images from a yoga retreat, and I could tell you exactly which one was which. I don't have to know anything.

And that's how this stuff happens. And there's, again, there's nothing wrong with the fact that this happens. It's just do we lose ourselves in it to such a degree that we don't know who we are anymore? And we're like, oh, I have to put this outfit on to show up and teach this class, because it's really just a metaphor for this bullshit persona that I'm putting on to show up and do this thing instead of just being myself.

It's crazy.

Tracy Stamper: It's interesting. When you told that story, when you said that you taught those two classes back to back, I felt just a little bit of panic. Like what did you have a wardrobe change? How, how did you go from that's? How do you do that? I felt that panic.

Candice Schutter: I did. I had a wardrobe change.

Part of it, I should say. I mean, just to give [00:56:00] myself a little credit, is I sweat like a banshee when I do anything movement oriented. So I, pretty much at the end of any format and.

Tracy Stamper: You need a wardrobe change.

Candice Schutter: I really do. I mean, it's, it's really a gift to the next class. They're like, what is happening? The sweaty woman is going to tell us to do what?

So, you know, part of it was purely practical, but I didn't just bring, you know, a different yoga top. I brought my uniform. Exactly.

Tracy Stamper: You brought your costume.

Candice Schutter: I brought my costume. Uniform, costume. They both have different connotations, but they both work.

Tracy Stamper: Yeah. Yeah. They do. Weird.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. It is weird.

And it's a slow and steady rousing from a slumber. And for me, that slumber [00:57:00] started when I was a child and the ways that disassociated and checked out and took myself out of the equation when it came to whatever was happening in my family and in the world around me. And as the new girl growing up and going to different schools, it was really always about wearing a uniform and a costume in order to make friends in order to sustain connections in order to lose them and start over again, in order to appease my raging step-father, who was an alcoholic. That it was just such a theme for me that by the time I reached my twenties, I was already indoctrinated to be susceptible.

And yet the research that I've done, what keeps coming up from different sources is that there's a real surge right now in people's interest in all things cultish. People are really fascinated by it.

I think just generally people want to understand, like what leads somebody to go down these rabbit holes and that [00:58:00] interest and that hunger that people have who are not themselves survivors or don't even really know anybody who's been in a situation like that. Why, what's that interest about? What is the draw?

People want to know if they're susceptible, they want to understand, could this happen to me?

And then they watch and they purposefully watch, because it's what's made, because we like to be entertained. They purposefully see things that accelerate to such a point that they can finally exhale and say, no, that would never happen to me. I would never get a brand on my body. I would never drink the Kool-Aid. I would never fill in the blank. And so these sensationalized stories validate people into thinking that they would never get involved in a situation that would in some way compromise their sense of autonomy and their sense of agency.

But we all on some level know that we're susceptible. And that's why we want to watch, [00:59:00] right? And I, again, I can't speak to that specifically because I have been in a situation. And so my curiosity is different. But I know a lot of people who are curious about it and I do think, if we look at Q Anon or something, it's like, people love to freak out about it because it's worth freaking out about. But also because it's like, oh, there's an example. It's so ridiculous. I would never, I would never, I would never, I would never.

People who have been involved in organizations are so judged because people need to judge them in order to justify their sense of safety and their sense of, it would never happen to me.

And I'm here to say bullshit because it happens so incrementally that you don't even realize it's happening. And so I watch a show like The Vow, and I look at Sarah Edmondson, who now has a podcast with her partner, Nippy, and is so bravely talking about all of this.

And I look at her choice. I still get goosebumps all over my body when she was brave enough to expose the abuse and to post a picture of her brand that she got when she was involved in the [01:00:00] innermost circles of NXIUM, and the way that she was judged and criticized and people thought never.

And I saw that and I thought, who knows? Honestly, who knows? It's easy to say I would never, I would never. But you don't know. You don't know unless you're there.

So anything you want to say about that?

How many hours do you have?

Yes, actually so many things. First of all, thank you. I just found myself nodding and giving you the thumbs up.

And, interestingly, right now I am in the midst of watching the series Secrets of Playboy. It is wild. It's not an easy thing to watch. It's a lot of trigger warnings. And I'm watching these individuals talk about what kept them in, why they didn't leave. [01:01:00] And I, several times I think I've watched maybe five episodes. Several times I actually heard myself say, yeah, but you went back to work the next day?

Right.

Tracy Stamper: And then I thought, when have I gone back to work the next day? When my innards been wrestling with each other. When I was doing mental gymnastics to, to triple axle the cognitive dissonance?

Candice Schutter: Where's your gold medal? That's what I want to know.

Tracy Stamper: Exactly.

I probably have earned quite a few at that point. I was good at those gymnastics.

And it was so fascinating to hear myself. It's almost like I was listening to someone else say, wow, do you think that was a red flag? Or how could she not see that? And how humbling that was?

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Tracy Stamper: For me. [01:02:00] There were things that I didn't see or I saw and I tried so hard to shut my eyes and just that, that compassion. So thank you for sharing that, why we watch those things.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. I, I think it's really similar why we watch certain kinds of relational dramas too. It's a really similar thing. And why the sensationalized dramatic, aggressive, violent stories become so titillating. Because, whatever, we're strange carnal creatures and humans have always gotten off on seeing other humans suffer, whatever that is. But also this sense of whatever concessions I'm making in terms of my sovereignty and my relationship, whatever ways I'm turning a blind eye, whatever shit I'm putting up, with pales in comparison to this. So it must be okay. It must not be such a big deal, even though something in me saying this [01:03:00] isn't okay. I need to take a stand around this particular thing or, or whatever. I think part of it is cathartic in a way.

And it's maybe one of our ways of unpacking it and understanding it. I know for me watching these shows, it's like you might, the listener out there might be thinking, well, why would Tracy put herself through watching the show about the Playboy mansion? But watching these things, for me, watching these documentaries just really helps me to understand the mechanisms that work inside of me and how they operate and to develop a sense of empathy. Like, it helps me develop a sense of empathy, even if I might have judgment right out of the gate, when I come down from that activation and I really asked myself what that's about, there's something for me to see within me that I have to reckon with. And that's helpful.

And again, like you say, being deliberate about it, not like bingeing it and going into a dark place, but just really being deliberate about how you [01:04:00] take it in.

Tracy Stamper: Right.

I'm curious. Question for you. Were you, did you find yourself drawn to, or interested in shows or books about high demand groups before you found yourself in one? Because I did. And I'm curious.

Candice Schutter: Yes, actually.

Tracy Stamper: Interesting.

Candice Schutter: Wow. It's so interesting that you say that because I experienced some developmental trauma that made it such that I just don't remember things really well.

I don't remember most of my undergraduate college education. I did it five years cause I did a double major and an honors thesis. And I don't remember most of my classes and things that happened or anything.

The most vivid memory I have of being in a class was a sociology class. And I tell this story in one of the earlier episodes of this podcast. I was in a sociology class, and they were showing us a documentary on Jonestown. There was a video playing and it was coverage of the [01:05:00] incident. They were showing footage of how Jim Jones had created this whole movement and this community.

And I don't remember anything about the video except this one scene. There's probably a dozen people in a room. And Jim Jones is on a chair at the front of the room and he's delivering some sort of teaching. And all these people are seated on the floor and the camera man is sort of panning the room. And this one woman catches the camera man's eye. She's sort of hard to not notice. And so he zooms in on her face really slow. I remember this so vividly, he's zoomed in, on her face so slowly. And the look in her eyes is something that I will never, ever forget. It was burned into my memory.

She had this sort of doe-eyed vacant expression, and the word enamored doesn't touch it. She was worshiping Jim Jones and the words that were coming out of his mouth and the way that she was holding her body, the shape that her body took, the way she was looking at him.[01:06:00]

And just the feeling that I had, the nausea that I felt in my body, and the terror. And I would think about that memory a lot. I would have an experience of, like, my most serious boyfriend in college, who I dated for three and a half years was involved in a group that there was a leader overseas and he'd started this movement and it was like an energetic healing practice, but also kind of use the word yoga mixed in there.

And my boyfriend was really involved in this practice and there were all these different levels, which is par for the course, like all these different levels of training. And as you progress through the different levels, you could heal people from greater distances. It was sort of like Reiki, but on steroids.

And there were all these trainings and you had to pay thousands of dollars to go to the trainings. And I remember, he went to Geneva to do this training. He sent me postcards and he, he did, he was really involved in this organization.

A few months after we were dating, he sat me down and opened my [01:07:00] chakras and it was just this sort of, sometimes hands-on healing, sometimes distant healing thing. And I

remember being so curious, and also having this like tremor inside of like, I don't know about this. So I never did the trainings, but he would teach me little things.

And anyway, a few years into our relationship, he had done this highest level of training and something that happens as we all know in these organizations, when the leader of a movement begins to lose power in some way, they invent a more alarming narrative. So in this instance, the, he came back from a training and said that the founder had said that there was going to be this apocalyptic event. And he gave the exact date of this apocalyptic event and when it was going to happen.

And I can't remember the details of it, but it was kind of a freaky little prophecy. And I remember going to bed the night before with my partner, and him being in this interesting [01:08:00] state of, I think at that point, he was kind of wavering, which I think is what was happening overall in the organization. People were starting to waiver, which is why he created this, this terrifying prophecy. And so he was really experiencing some major cognitive dissonance at this point, because I think some part of him was already on his way out, but another part of him was afraid that this thing might happen.

We woke up the morning that the cataclysmic event was supposed to happen. And I think there was something related to weather patterns because it actually, coincidentally happened to be a really overcast day. And so we woke up and it was kind of like this eerie, spooky, oh my gosh, like maybe he's right thing. And I just, I guess I'm sharing this story because I feel like for so much of my life, I was sort of riding that edge.

Cause I was sort of nervous too. Like, well, what if this guy's right like I was susceptible enough to be watching the sky all day, that day. Just in case. And then when it didn't happen, I [01:09:00] wasn't surprised.

And then my partner, I remember he went through a period of grief and that was when he inevitably left the organization and extricated himself.

Because of where we were in terms of our emotional maturity, we never really talked about it. And I'm curious to this day, like what that was actually like for him, because he just sort of casually stopped doing it. And I know it wasn't that simple. It couldn't have been.

Tracy Stamper: Right.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. So this is a very long answer to your question, but to say that, yes, I've always been fascinated in somehow on the fringe of these types of experiences.

One answer to your question is I studied psychology for God's sakes. And any time there was talk about trance states or indoctrination or susceptibility to that, it was always so interesting. And I think what's frustrating to me, which I hope is changing now in terms of education in those arenas is that there was always only talk of these extreme groups.

So there wasn't an [01:10:00] education around, even in our psychology classes, we didn't really talk about like, how does this happen exactly, this indoctrination? Like, what is the

process and how do people get in? It was very much we were always looking at the outcome and then trying to explain how do people end up, you know, in a mass suicide? When that's not the real question we need to be asking. Like, we need to go back a few paces and say like, how does somebody slowly, incrementally over time get to the point where they succumb to that kind of influence.

And in graduate level courses there's discussion of that. But I do think it would be behoove us in a Psych 101 program to educate people about some of this stuff. Because I had a degree in psychology, and I got involved with more than one organization that I lost myself in.

So something, something doesn't add up there. Right.

Tracy Stamper: Wow. That is fascinating. And that's something that I've really [01:11:00] paid attention to is when you ask someone what cults they know about, it is always going to be the most extreme.

Candice Schutter: Yep.

Tracy Stamper: It's going to be the branding. It's going to be the sex slaves. It's going to be the martians, the mass suicide it's going to.

Yeah.

And as long as I am looking at those examples, I'm always going to measure up as doing pretty well.

Candice Schutter: Well, relative to that, of course, what I'm in isn't a cult.

Tracy Stamper: Exactly. And that's, I really got tripped up there when it became difficult to acknowledge what I was seeing for what it was, because there were only examples that were extreme.

Candice Schutter: Exactly, which is why we're doing this aside from our own selfish desire to have this process of healing with one another.

Why are we sharing it publicly, [01:12:00] is because we need more people talking about these everyday examples. And there are people, cult educators out there that are talking about these things now. But it's not showing up in the mainstream. It's people who have already survived the situation who goes seeking information, and then you find, oh, this was all here? This was all available all along?

And so how do we bring this to the forefront? And if we can stop getting stuck in this push pull of, the word cult it means so many things, depending on who you ask. And there's this sort of looseness with it in terms of popular vernacular and how it's used, but then there's this extremism it's like, we think of only fundamentalists cults, I guess it's sort of like if the word religion there's word, religion, and then you've got fundamentalism.

Like the word cult sort of gets pushed in this fundamentalism category where these extreme things happen, and we don't have a word there really isn't a word for what we're talking about. You know, [01:13:00] these high demand groups is sometimes thrown around. But I've listened to so many podcasts and read so many books now and I haven't heard one person create a word that really describes this less dramatic experience of indoctrination and how it actually penetrates every aspect of our culture.

And there's even cults of one. If you look at the codependent relationship, that's a cult of one. Like these dynamics... if everyone can just loosen their grip on the word cult and what it means, and just get curious about the dynamics, they're everywhere. This isn't about easily fitting things into categories so you can feel safe. This is not what this is about.

It's about acknowledging how we're all susceptible and we all participate in these psychological mechanisms. They're working all the time.

Yeah. So yes, I was definitely interested in all of [01:14:00] this. We would need a little more expert support for us to really figure out why we would both be interested in this thing and then ended up getting engaged in it and sort of a measurable way. And it makes me wonder if I'm just going to guess, I'm going to say two things.

I'm going to say part of it was because I grew up in a home that was my mother was Protestant. My stepdad was atheist. And there was no spiritual or religious framework. And there was no, um, aside from my stepdad getting drunk and passing out on the couch, there was no altered states going on.

Like, um, what am I trying to say? Like there was no magic in the world that I grew up in. There was no magic. And I used the word magic, not in a pejorative way or even a descriptive way, but in the mystical way. Like there was nothing mystical about my life growing up. I would go to church with friends when I would visit on sleepovers.

And I was always spell bound and highly confused by the whole [01:15:00] experience. I found it so fascinating, this trance that everyone in the room would be in that I would be on the margins of, and not have any understanding of and a part of me yearned to feel that. And there was another part of me that, because I didn't believe the story they were telling couldn't.

I was enamored by the way that people would lose themselves to this mystical sort of altered state that I had never really experienced. So I think for me, part of it was that I wanted the mystical in my life. That I wanted to feel that feeling. And in some ways, I guess, unconsciously, I was willing to pay the price for that, because I just wanted to feel what that was like. So I think that was part of it for me.

And then I think the other thing is I wanted also a sense of belonging. I didn't feel like I belonged to my family in some ways. I didn't feel like I belonged when I would go to school. And I just [01:16:00] always felt on the margins everywhere I went. And so I think another appealing part of it was just to feel like I was a part of something and that I mattered and that I belonged.

And then the third thing, which is the thing that again, when I do the research that comes forward over and over again, is that the assumption that a lot of people make is, oh, people who are ignorant and less educated are more susceptible to these influences. They are people who are, are weak-willed or weak minded in some way are susceptible.

In actuality people who are most susceptible they've found are people who are kind of overachievers, people who are really highly educated. But the thing they most have in common is that they are idealists. That they have an optimism and a hopefulness and a belief in the possibility of creating something better to such a degree, that they seek out people who promise we have the [01:17:00] power to do this thing that's going to make things better.

And that optimism is the most predictive factor in terms of who gets ensnared. And part of why this is the case is because the way the optimism functions.

So you get into the organization because of the vision and you start doing the processes, which are very supportive and actually really useful because they're growing you into the person that can support that vision. And you're becoming a more aligned with your values person. And it's so beautiful. And then as things start to go sideways as they do when humans create hierarchies, because the person values that idealistic vision to such a degree, they're willing to overlook the personal challenges. They're willing to say, well, because of this larger vision, my needs can be set aside. Because of this larger vision, the way that the founder just spoke to that person can be overlooked. Because of the larger, the list goes on. That that idealism is what gets people in the door and it's what keeps them [01:18:00] there.

And when I heard that, I was like, ding, ding, fucking ding. That is me. So I think all of those three, I said two initially, but those are the three things that pulled me in the door.

Tracy Stamper: Candice, I have read and watched and listened to so much information about cults. And I have never heard that connection with idealism.

And wow, does that, I feel like you just handed me a piece to a jigsaw puzzle that I couldn't quite put together. That is profound. Thank you.

Candice Schutter: I felt the same way when I read it, and I read it in a week's time in like three different sources. So I feel like it's something that's just now coming sort of to the forefront of understanding as more and more people are having conversations about this and more and more research is being done where there's actual survivors who are being interviewed and they're starting to find these themes.

So I think it's kind of a [01:19:00] new insight. Perhaps not, I don't know that for a fact, but I know it's new to me and it kind of knocked me on my ass, because it's the same thing that got me in trouble when I say got me in trouble, I'm putting that in air quotes. But in terms of my intimate relationships too, like I suffered so many ridiculous dysfunctional dynamics because of that same idealism when it came to romantic love.

So whether it's love of a country, if you look at a Q Anon follower. Or love of a worldview, when you look at people who are in organizations that are going to change the world and

enlightened humanity. Or whether it's, I believe that this relationship that I'm in has the potential to be something that it's not.

You stay. You just stay. If you have that belief, you stay in it, because the belief transcends the limitations that you're experiencing and it transcends your discomfort. Sadly.

It's big.

Tracy Stamper: [01:20:00] Whew.

Candice Schutter: So you said that you were also interested in these types of things before all of this happened.

Tracy Stamper: Absolutely. There was no magic in the way I grew up. And I never fit in. I was, I am highly sensitive, empath, left leaning liberal, and I was in a very, very different environment. And I felt so alone. I didn't realize until I was well into my adulthood, that there's a whole world of people who think like me and feel like me and share the same worldview or similar worldviews as I do.

But that's not the world that I was plunked into as an infant. So I always felt, you know, what is wrong with me? Why can't these things roll off my back like they do everyone else? I was just very different. So that sense of belonging is huge.

Candice Schutter: [01:21:00] Yeah.

Tracy Stamper: Huge. And also, as a child, I lost my mom. She passed when I was five years old.

So even that sense of belonging in the world.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Tracy Stamper: Was something that I struggled with as a child. With a history of childhood trauma, those high-intensity environments may have felt like waters I had been swimming in before. Right?

There may have been a fucked up sense of comfort.

Candice Schutter: Now you're knocking me on my ass. Yeah.

Tracy Stamper: Right?

Candice Schutter: Yeah. So that's what I'm saying. When I'm saying people, I feel like I'm beating everyone out there over the head with it, but it's like these dynamics have nothing to do with cults, really. They have everything to do with how we are wired and how conscious we can become about these patterns of [01:22:00] thinking and the impact they end up having

on our choices and what we are willing to overlook and suffer according to some vision that we, God love us, are just completely willing to sacrifice ourselves to.

And I think that's what's so heartbreaking and beautiful to me, both heartbreaking and beautiful to me, being on the other side of this are still waking up, of course, moving through this is actually, it's not the idealism that sets us free. It's our humanity. And that the belonging that I wanted, isn't about Tracy's ideal self and my ideal self showing up and having a conversation. It's about taking the costumes off and then it's like, oh, oh, this is a totally different sensation of belonging where I can relax. And I don't have to try so hard and I'm just accepted.

It's not about creating [01:23:00] utopia. It's about being able to find peace.

Tracy Stamper: Peace.

Candice Schutter: Where we are.

Tracy Stamper: Peace, yeah.

Candice Schutter: Even as there's a war raging. Even as I feel in my body, close to tears, thinking about what's going on in Ukraine and doing what I can with the little resources I have to assist and understanding that there's a lot that I can't do. In many ways, there's nothing that I can do.

And yet, can I find peace and stay engaged in that. It's a both-and endeavor instead of this, like what will we do to erase and eradicate suffering forever? Like it's not going to fucking happen.

Tracy Stamper: It's not going to fucking happen.

Candice Schutter: And us suffering in order to eradicate suffering that's never going to be eradicated is about the most absurd closed loop system of logic I've ever heard.

Wow. It's a [01:24:00] bit surreal to be on the other side of sharing these past three episodes with you. Tracy and I recorded this content nearly six months ago when we still weren't even sure if we would be sharing these stories with you.

Next week, Tracy and I will be reuniting in real time to discuss what it's been like sharing such personal stories so publicly. We'll speak a bit more about the overarching themes we've uncovered and do our best to answer some of the questions we've received from listeners and former colleagues.

And then we'll talk a bit about where the culture series will be headed next. Especially as I now have plans to carry this series into the fall season.

We have loads more to share with you, and I hope you'll join us next time. Until then please take a minute to rate the podcast and feel free to send either of us at thedeeperpulse.com/share.

Keep on moving toward what moves you and we'll see you next time.

Caio.

[01:25:00]