

Candice Schutter: Welcome back to another episode of The Deeper Pulse and the 'cult'ure series.

Today, Tracy Stamper will once again be joining me for part two of our conversation with Yamuna Benedict. If you missed last week's episode, I highly recommend that you start there, because it lays the foundation for the stories you'll hear today.

But before we dive back into Yamuna's story, there's a little something that I'd like to share

In today's episode, Yamuna is gonna share more about the five years she spent working at the mind-body fitness company we refer to as the Org. And how she turned herself sideways and upside down to shield a global community of teachers and trainers from seeing the full extent of dysfunction that was operating at the company's core.

Now, I've spoken with Yamuna a few times now, both on and off the record. And let me just say that she was very generous when deciding what and what not to share on this podcast. She shares openly and just enough, the right amount to get the point across.

I think I can speak for both of us, all of us really, Tracy included when I say that it is incredibly difficult to speak unfavorably about people who've caused us harm, especially when said harm was done under the guise of a greater good. It's a really complex cocktail of emotions internally, which is why I wanna take just a few minutes to speak about something that has really helped me to understand it all a bit better.

So I hope you'll hang with me while I take a quick detour.

Attachment theory was developed by British psychologist, John Bowlby. Now, I'm not gonna go into the ins and outs of it because: one, I'm no expert. Two, it's super complex. And three, there's loads of resources out there if you wanna learn more. For now, I'm just gonna offer my layperson's version of the gist.

Attachment theory suggests that the bonds that we create, or fail to create, in early childhood often result in relational patterns that stay with us well into adulthood.

Now it's super easy to assume that somebody who's confident would automatically experience a secure form of attachment, but it's a bit more complicated than that. Our attachment style is really based on whether or not we've experienced a consistent, loving and secure touchstone of connection.

Let me illustrate through a personal example.

I met my partner Chris in 2012, and despite our immediate and undeniable connection, I found it nearly impossible to relax in our relationship. He made it clear from the get-go that he was committed, but of course, the relationship was far from perfect and every time we'd face a challenge, my anxiety and feelings of insecurity, were off the charts, out of proportion to whatever the situation warranted. And I found it hard to concentrate on anything else that was going on in my life.

For years prior, I'd assumed that the all-consuming restlessness that had so often accompanied my intimate relationships in the past was really just due to my choice in partners. And this was true in part. But now I was in a safe and secure relationship. Why was I still so hypervigilant and anxious so much of the time?

I'd read about attachment theory here and there, and of course I had already assumed that I had an anxious, aka insecure, attachment style. The writing was on the wall. I didn't need my psych degree to sniff that one out. Anxious and insecure had kind of sorta always described me. In fact, so much so that I had often wondered if I'd ever really be able to relax in partnership with another human.

Eventually, thanks to an interpersonal drama that led us into deep dive trauma informed Hakomi therapy, I was able to do some constructive work around it all. Chris and I worked with a therapist on and off for a little over a year, and since then, and might I add after 10 years of healthy partnership, my attachment style has decidedly shifted toward a secure and more relaxed style of relating.

I share this with you, not to congratulate myself. Although I must admit I'm a bit proud that I no longer feel the need to be inextricably connected to my partner. This is a very good thing.

But mostly I share this to personally attest to the fact that attachment style can shift and change based on our environment, for better or for worse.

In the seventies, psychologist Mary Ainsworth identified three major styles of attachment. They're called by many names, the least academic of which are secure, anxious, and avoidant. And in 1986, researchers Main and Solomon added a fourth attachment style to the mix. One that they called disorganized attachment.

Disorganized attachment is what I wanna talk about today because it's super relevant to today's discussion and to the 'cult'ure series in general. It explains with remarkable clarity, how and why we get so stuck in dysfunctional groups and abusive intimate partnerships.

Very much in the same way that understanding how the experience of early childhood abandonment had shaped my anxious feelings around intimacy with Chris, learning about disorganized detachment has helped me to understand other more bizarre, confusing, and disorienting bonds that I've had in the past, including the bond I had with my stepfather who was emotionally abusive, with the many bullies who often befriended me in my youth, and with more than one culty leader.

In childhood, disorganized detachment develops when a caregiver is a source of comfort and a source of fear. When love, nourishment, and support is highly inconsistent. Or when the attention we are given is both hot and cold, largely unpredictable.

But this same type of attachment bond can show up in adult relationships, too. And it's especially common in abusive closed system environments, environments that in this series we refer to as culty.

Alexandra Stein, a specialist in ideological extremism, has quite literally written the book on the relationship between cultic indoctrination and attachment style. In her book, *Terror, Love, and Brainwashing: Attachment in Cults and Totalitarian Systems*, she explains that cult leadership often follows a predictable and disorienting formula.

Isolate the follower. Immerse them in a system of belief. And then establish the group and its leader as the primary safe haven. Now when abuse is experienced in conjunction with this bond, it creates an environment that is inherently disorienting. One where the leader is continually sending mixed message, alternating terror with love.

She explains disorganized detachment this way:

"When we are frightened, we don't simply run away from the fear, we run to a safe haven to someone, and that someone is usually a person to whom we feel attached. But when the supposed safe haven is also the source of the fear, then running to that person is a failing strategy. This causes the frightened person to freeze, trapped between approach and avoidance."

Even as I read those words, I can feel validation in my body. It sounds so familiar to me.

Disorganized attachment offers one explanation of why a victim of domestic violence or a devoted cult follower is seemingly unable to walk away from the dysfunction. In addition to circumstantial limitations, it explains why we work overtime to make it work. And why we seem to continually contradict ourselves.

Dissociation is of course, a natural byproduct of the chaos that so often leads to disorganized attachment. I mean, it's more than a little difficult to make healthy choices when you never know what to expect, when you're being gaslit and your nervous system is going gangbusters so much of the time.

I vividly remember this disorienting sensation as a child and during my many years working at the Org. This chronic feeling of tension, of being suspended between two conflicting desires. The desire to run far, far away, and in equal measure, a deep longing to experience more of the love that was so sparingly being offered.

Last week, we heard Yamuna speak about something similar. How familiar it was to her, the sensation she had while working at the Org. She called it the "stress fist" feeling in her gut. And she shared how the further she dove into her somatic awareness practices, the more she came to see and understand how much this sensation resembled the anxiety she'd so often felt around her father growing up.

You couldn't see us, but both Tracy and I were nodding along in unison as she spoke.

But not everyone grew up the way we did. There are many others who enter culty culture, and or an abusive relationship, and they develop a disorganized detachment bond for the first time as adults.

An extreme case? You've heard of Stockholm Syndrome, right? If not, Google it. It's not yet made it into the DSM V, but many who've experienced it consider it a very real thing.

Having said that, disorganized detachment isn't always about extreme forms of abuse. Sometimes it develops more subtly.

And of course I wanna be clear that one or two instances of less than favorable treatment, does not necessarily constitute abuse. We're all humans, after all. And we hurt each other from time to time. I'm talking about patterns of relating that show up consistently over time.

We know it when we experience it. That seesaw ride when verbal abuse consistently alternates with positive attention and praise. When someone in our midst is continually making amends for their poor behavior, behavior that repeats again and again and again. When apologies, gifts, and reassurances are plentiful and they start to feel empty and vacant. Or when, worst of all, we're continually gaslit and taught to believe that the pain that we're regularly experiencing and feeling so acutely, that it's all in our head. Just to say, all of these are examples of patterns that can lead to disorganized attachment.

So when you look at why so many people have been, and are still willing to work in service to the Org, despite the fact that people are being exploited and abused on the regular, it really helps to understand the lair of disorganized attachment.

For example, in the Org, the atmosphere may have been abusive in executive team meetings, but the practice itself was also our safe haven. It enabled us to meet incredible people who were committed to doing great work. It's where we experienced body bliss highs and community connection. It provided us a sense of purpose and a social identity, and it was promised path of psychospiritual salvation and financial security.

It's not really all that hard to see why so many people stick around.

All of that to say, this shit is complicated. And choice isn't as simple as it appears. Especially when, such as in Yamuna's case, you're convinced that your personal sacrifices are in service to a greater good, protecting others from seeing what lies behind the curtain.

It's heartbreaking to admit to ourselves, let alone let the rest of the world see, that the yellow brick road does not, in fact lead to an embodiment of lofty principles, but is instead a shiny bright distraction from an epicenter of chaos.

Grief is a huge part of the process of letting go. And to all of you who are still in some ways committed to the Org, my apologies, I know this is sobering stuff. But that's really the point. Sobriety is the only way forward.

Our conversation with Yamuna picks up today with one of my favorite moments, when Tracy offers an important observation about how and why Yamuna's Krishna cult upbringing may have influenced her choices as she fell deeper and deeper into the gravitational pull at the inner circle of the Org.

So let's get back to it.

Candice Schutter : This episode may be triggering to current or former Org members, or anyone who has experienced high demand groups or emotionally-coercive relationships. Please listen with care.

The stories and opinions shared in this episode are based on personal experience and are not intended to malign any group, individual, or organization.

Tracy Stamper: I am really struck by noticing, Yamuna, that you have talked about your job being 24 hours a day, which I know it was. I know it was. Because I probably emailed you at some random hour and heard right back from you.

And what really struck me was hearing you talk about being young in the temple and your mom doing something with the altars at two in the morning. Did I hear that correctly?

Yamuna Benedict: Yeah. She would get up at two to start dressing the, It's called Mangal Artik. It's at dawn. It's like 4:30, 5 the morning. And so she would get up to do all the arrangements, dress the deities, yeah.

Tracy Stamper: So this was, you were following exactly right down to the schedule what you had learned.

Yamuna Benedict: Be of service. How can I be of service?

Tracy Stamper: I found that fascinating.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Yamuna Benedict: I hadn't even made that connection. I love it.

And it's what I'm like, what is the thing my programming that I'm attracted to do this? This is what's fascinating me. So I love that catch. That was good.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

So let's talk about, for the sake of contextualizing the level of sacrifice that you were making and the level, quite frankly, of dysfunction that you were operating in and enabling, for lack of a better word. And I say that as somebody who was also an enabler, . So hopefully that doesn't, you don't take offense to that. Right?

So tell us a little bit about, you're scrambling around doing all the things, and also it sounds like you were maybe cleaning up some messes at the same time. Do you wanna speak that at all?

Yamuna Benedict: All the time. Don't look at the man behind the curtain. That's what I always felt like I was trying to keep the curtain closed.

Don't

Tracy Stamper: Whew

Yamuna Benedict: Don't look back here. Clean it all up. Everything's perfect. It was a show all the time.

I clearly remember always feeling like a ping pong ball between Marissa and Seth. So now we have the two of them running the organization. Seth's the CEO. Very quickly, Marissa started becoming the creator. That was a big topic in 2011. How do we make her the creator and basically erase Raul?

Um, and I just remember anything Seth would have me do, I'd be working on it. Marissa would come over and start slashing it. What are you doing? Why are you doing it? Like, whatever it was. And she wanted me to do it like this. So I'd start doing it like that, and then Seth would come back over and be like, that isn't what I told you to do. And so no matter what I was doing, I felt like I was in trouble with one of them.

I remember feeling like their child, kind of like they were the parents. It was a very like abusive parents. And I was the ping pong ball. And they would also, you know, go tell him this or go tell her that. And that kind of energy and dynamics going on. I see it as two narcissists running the company with a very intense power struggle of who's actually going to be the boss.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: Seth, when he would fire somebody, he'd be cussy and mad and stompy and then drag me out of the office, and we would have to go have Bloody Mary lunches at a restaurant so he could vent and process. Um,

Candice Schutter: So you were his emotional surrogate wife too?

Yamuna Benedict: Yes.

Tracy Stamper: Wow.

Candice Schutter: I mean, I'm using that language from like family systems.

Yamuna Benedict: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Yamuna Benedict: So yeah, then we'd usually end up shopping and presents. You know, and so here you're getting this crappy salary, but all of a sudden here, I wanna go buy you this or buy you that or take you out to a fancy dinner. And that was supposed to compensate for not getting paid overtime or not going on vacation or whatever it was.

Um, there was lots of surprise calls from Seth of trouble he'd got himself into, and he needed help cleaning up. So as I'm, you know, doing studio things and record label things and trainer things and this thing, I would have to go clean a whole mess up that he had made and keep it a secret. When you started talking about the family secrets, I'm like, oh, I have so many of those.

Tracy Stamper: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: Um, there came a time where Seth got very focused on another passion in his life, and I witnessed a lot of, uh, money from the Org going to support his new hobby. And it didn't feel right. The company was definitely struggling for money. So then they would do these fire sales of the clothing line or the DVDs or trainings.

When they started putting the trainings on sale after they had launched the NGT trainers, they needed an infusion of money and they put the trainings on sale, which was in conflict to the agreement with the trainers. They didn't talk to them about it. Um, and then who, who's taking the loss on the money? And it's like, oh yeah, that comes outta your side. We still get our side.

And so it was always, I always felt like everything a day late, a dollar short, fly by the seat of the pants decisions. Very reactionary. No forethought, planning, or how is this gonna affect in the long run.

The revolving door of people, working with incompetent coworkers?

Candice Schutter: Yeah. There was a lot of, just to clarify that, there was a lot of hiring when I was there, and I'm assuming it didn't change based on relationships and not job qualifications. So if like, so I remember when I was there, one of their dear friends who was also part of the community, her friend needed a job. And he was the first music licensing coordinator person. And he had no qualifications to do that whatsoever. And he was flying by the seat of his pants? So it was really common. Right? Was that still a thing when, when you were there? Like people being hired based on the relationship. Somebody knows somebody.

Yamuna Benedict: Lots of friends.

Candice Schutter: Seth likes somebody. Apparently likes somebody's looks, was a part of it.

Yamuna Benedict: Yes, yes. it became, you know, so going back to teaching and filling these classes, when Raul left, who's gonna teach? It became very focused on what does the teacher look like? And there was one particular teacher who taught a great class, who he told

me he did not wanna see teaching in there anymore cause she didn't have the look that we were looking for.

And I had to argue with Seth about this cuz it was my favorite class when this person taught. So I'm like, it, I thought, we love our bodies here. We love our body, we love our life.

And I mean, really right away in my first few months, Marissa had a whole facelift surgery that had complications. And I was shocked that she was doing that. When we're in this holistic practice of if you have a body, you can come and move it and we are gonna help you feel better in your body and then you're gonna feel good in your life. But here we're doing all these superficial plastic surgeries and suction and things. And so right away my head like, oh, what we're portraying isn't actually what's going on in the core. And I started feeling a little confused and, Hmm. Okay.

Candice Schutter: Didn't you share with us, if you're comfortable sharing, that you were body shamed yourself?

Yamuna Benedict: Yes, I was, um, I have twin boys. I had them when I was 23.

The years I worked at the Org, when I see these pictures of myself from those years, I don't like how I look. I am very, very skinny. I look about 10 years older than I do now.

And I was wearing small dance wear that would hang on my hips. I'm really curvy. I have boobs a butt. That's where I gain weight. When I see these pictures. I am like flat chested. I have bony arms, but yet Seth regularly from the first month I worked there would be telling me I need to do sit-ups and squats to flatten my stomach. And that I could do little reps throughout the day. Could just do like 10 and just squeeze them in. And this went on the entire time. And that I needed to get rid of this little pooch, which is never going to go away because I weighed 254 pounds when I gave birth to my twin boys.

Once you give birth, your body changes. It's not going away. But I still was not skinny enough for his liking.

Candice Schutter: That is so disturbing.

Yamuna Benedict: I ha, another memory came up when I was listening to the podcast, uh, I'm working, I finally meet Marissa. I don't remember, it was just a class or a workshop. But she called me out and she said, just, just walk.

And so, oh, yay, I'm getting picked. You feel special. Like this is, this is cool. And then as I started walking, she started shredding how I walked. And you have lazy ankles. I'll never, ever forget. I had forgotten. But now the memory's come back about my lazy ankles and that I didn't walk right? Cause my ankles were lazy. And then I remember, I, I went from being like, oh, excited, I got picked. To feeling very embarrassed and like, I don't even know how to walk right. And then I remember becoming obsessed with my ankles and like how do they work and are they lazy? Are they working right? And like.

Candice Schutter: What even is that?

And this was, this was done in front of a group of trainees, correct? This was, I just wanna be clear to the listeners. This was a public shaming.

Yamuna Benedict: Yes. That was done in, in a class or workshop. Mm-hmm.

Tracy Stamper: And also just so wild, given you're multitasking, given you're working days a week, around the clock. There is nothing lazy about you. There's nothing lazy about you.

Yamuna Benedict: And on that front, when I went and would ask for a time off, or that I'm here all the time, I would get completely dismissed. Marissa would literally be like, you work Monday through Friday, I don't know what you're talking about.

Candice Schutter: Good imitation of the voice, by the way. Like my blood started to run a little bit cold. You nailed it. Yeah. With the, with the lips too. If y'all could see the lips.

Yamuna Benedict: the lips.

Yeah. Um, and whenever I would go to Seth. I time off. He needed me. I need you here. That was his answer. He needed me here. I couldn't go anywhere. He needed me here.

Also something else that was going on so, you know, we had the, we did a lot of photos. Seth was the main photographer. He would always have a favorite in a training that he would really wanna do a dancewear photo shoot with. Some of the trainees, they were not comfortable when he'd come in the room with the camera. They felt an invasion of privacy.

I also had employees come to me with discomfort around Seth and the clothing line and photo shoots and words and touching. And at one point there was an employee that wanted to bring a lawsuit against him while I was working there. This was pretty early in the career, in my years there.

And I couldn't. She, she really needed my participation to have any weight and I couldn't, I couldn't do it. I had little, I had 11 year olds. I was new. I didn't really know what was going on at that point.

I knew I had this stress fist in my gut and nothing quite made sense. It wasn't really what I had thought it was gonna be, you know? Cause you're under the illusion before you go inside.

And, uh, I just, I couldn't do that. But there is definitely, in the years I was there from students and employees, a mass discomfort with his energy towards women.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Wow. Thank you for sharing that.

Yamuna Benedict: And then, you know, I got asked so many times, like, how could I be his assistant? And I go back to it as the feeling I had around my dad. I was, I've always felt

uncomfortable around my father, but it was just normal and it's, it felt normal and familiar, his behavior.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Yamuna Benedict: And so, I really thought this is like, this is what men are. Men, all men are like this. My dad was like this. So it was okay.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm. I love what you said earlier about, just because it's normal doesn't mean it's healthy.

Yamuna Benedict: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: I feel like that's just another example.

Tracy Stamper: And to have that dynamic, to have that personality, to have that energy in a somatic practice, which many folks who have traumatic histories in need of healing are drawn to somatic practices as a way to work through that, as a way to process, as a way to learn and grow and rediscover what it feels like to be in the body again and to feel safe.

And to have that energy. No, no.

Yamuna Benedict: Mm-hmm.

Tracy Stamper: I had an experience myself within that dynamic where I felt unbelievably just icky. And I didn't know what to do with it. Because when you're in a situation like that and the individual has his own relationship with the person who is your mentor, it can be very, very, very confusing.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Tracy Stamper: I, I know this sounds very vague and weird, and that's because I'm just not ready to share that piece yet.

Yamuna Benedict: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

And as you say, when there's nowhere to go with the information, you know, a lot of folks are like, why don't people speak up? And it's, I mean, it's what the Me Too movement revealed, right? It's like the power structure is such that there is nowhere to go and the cost of speaking up is also another thing to consider.

Like, am I willing to pull at this? You know, I heard an analogy just recently of like pulling at the Jenga piece that's gonna knock the whole tower down. Like, am I willing to pull at that? And most folks aren't for good reason until they get to a point where they feel like they have no choice.

And I love though that you really presence that, the significance of people who've experienced trauma and how they are sort of magnets and can be groomed to keep the silence, to hold the secrets. They already, they already know how to do that. They've been doing it their whole lives, right? That, that was certainly me.

So, um, I love that you underscored that and I think, which leads me to question for you, Yamuna, which I already know the answer to cuz we've spoken, but to share with the listeners.

What would happen if Marissa was clued into some of this? Like how did that go down?

Yamuna Benedict: A lot of the things I kept secret from her cleaning up messes from Seth. She never knew she'd

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: be off at a training some other state somewhere and he'd be playing around.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. And then if he was called out in some manner for

Yamuna Benedict: So she would defend him.

Candice Schutter: Right?

Yamuna Benedict: She would completely defend his innocence, defend his behavior. It was something that was always very perplexing to me that she's presenting I'm a powerful independent woman. This mass codependent, dysfunctional relationship with Seth and the dynamics and then the defending.

And then he did it to her also. They, I especially remember these outpouring shows at the after the training parties that we would host. And sometimes it would just be so over the top, their love for each other and the gr, I'm sure Tracy can remember some of these scenes.

But they had been fighting all week and they're ready to behead each other and then they get in front of the trainees and it's just this elaborate show of love and gratitude and like it was just, I would wanna vomit. I'm like, what? This is not what's going on. And we are all the side effects of your guys' dysfunction. Were all the casualties That's what I always felt like.

Candice Schutter: And keeping up those appearances is essential to the brand though. So it's like the show must go on.

Yamuna Benedict: And me keeping up the appearance as well. I felt this pressure to keep up the appearance and the optimist, bright, charismatic. And you cannot let anyone know what's actually going on. This is what, when I talked about keep it all behind the curtain.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Yamuna Benedict: I had a costume on as well.

Candice Schutter: Ah-huh.

Tracy Stamper: We all did.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Well said. Yeah. And I think also what's interesting, looking back, is you speak to Marissa's sort of persona as this fem powered person. And this, and, and I do remember as much as I was super entranced by all the things, I do remember when she started participating in this, another organization that I would say is also very much culty that she was a big part of, and it was all about female empowerment. And it was like all about female empowerment with like stiletos and pushup bras.

Yamuna Benedict: I know who you're talking

Candice Schutter: It was, it was the weirdest thing to me. I was like, how is this?

Yamuna Benedict: I know who you're talking about. We had a big event at the studio while I worked there with her. And um, I just couldn't buy into it. I was like, I was not into this program at all and I didn't like having it in the studio. I was just like, this is like too much for me. You've gone overboard. That's what I remember feeling like. I cannot get into this.

Candice Schutter: I mean, it was so patriarchal, right? Tracy, do you remember it?

Tracy Stamper: Oh yeah, I remember it. I remember doing my damndest to deal with complaints about it from students and other teachers as, I don't remember if I was a trainer at the time yet, but I'd been teaching for a long time at that point. And this overtly sexualized program all of a sudden appeared on the scene, and there were a whole bunch of folks who were a whole bunch of uncomfortable with it, myself included.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Well, I think this connects perfectly to, since there's a story that you told Tracy in an earlier podcast that actually we've had since some folks who have left, who've spoken up and said, oh my God, what's been interesting about it? And it's the bathing suit story. For those of you who listened to the earlier podcast, the Bathing Suit story at one of the trainer trainings, and we'll fill it in a second if you didn't hear it.

Since we aired that story, we've heard from folks who remember that. And we've heard from a lot of folks who were there who don't even remember it. They were so dissociated when it happened that they don't even have recollection. So the event was during a trainer training, just to summarize it real quick, where you were all asked to show up one particular morning

for a session in your bathing suits. Nothing else. Just your bathing suits in the middle of January, in the Pacific Northwest with no clue as to why you're wearing bathing suits in this massive, what was it, 2200 square foot studio, this big open space with high ceilings in your bathing suit.

And then there was an exercise, I'm putting that in air quotes, for sure, where you're basically parading across the floor, like catwalking in front of one another.

And I'm dropping this in here because it feels like contextually, it sort of fits with the vibe of this other sort of training that was kind of infusing itself into the Org. This like show pony in your bathing suit energy and calling that feminine empowerment. So then we talked with Yamuna afterwards, and Yamuna share with us because you were there.

Yamuna Benedict: I remember I had also just kind of forgotten the bathing suit event. But I was there and I'm actually, uh, 99% certain I am the one that sent the email out to everyone saying, you need to show up in your bathing suit at 6:00 AM or whatever it was. And it was the first day of the training.

Candice Schutter: Oh, it was the first day?

Yamuna Benedict: This is your welcome. This is how you're arriving. But the day before the training, Marissa came up to me and said, you have to show up here in your bathing suit too. And I said.

Tracy Stamper: The day before?

Yamuna Benedict: I just I'm gonna do what I normally do. No, I have to be in my bathing suit too.

Tracy Stamper: Oh.

Yamuna Benedict: I was like, what? And I felt totally uncomfortable, but Okay.

And so I send this email out, and I instantly start getting what are we doing that?

Candice Schutter: I bet.

Yamuna Benedict: Like I didn't know either what was going on. Everything was about the river of the unknown and keeping people in the fog, and it's a surprise and getting outta your comfort zone and all these things.

But I wasn't participating in the training. I just had to stand in the hallway in my bathing suit and check everyone in. And so I never got the catwalk and the love bombing praise that everybody else got in their bathing suit. I just went back to work and was probably told I didn't do a good enough job, and I needed to do more stuff.

Candice Schutter: Right. You shared with us that there was a conversation behind the scenes that potentially led to this whole bathing suit thing.

Yamuna Benedict: I was in the office during the whole development of the NGT program, and Marissa had a cohort or a muse I would say, that developed the program together. And, you know, I would be working and have work to do, or I, and I'd be on the phone talking to a trainer or ordering fabric or whatever.

And then I always felt like they sound like cackling witches. Like they, how can they come up with these convoluted, crazy ideas? What, how can they make people uncomfortable? How can they, it it, I don't know. It was really interesting watching the two of them create all of this out of the ethers.

I remember you asking Tracy on the podcast like, what was the purpose of it? And I remember thinking there was no purpose.

It's just made up bullshit.

Tracy Stamper: And I would like to say that they were very successful. If their goal was to bring us to a place outside of our comfort zone. They nailed it.

Yamuna Benedict: Mm-hmm.

Tracy Stamper: Nailed it.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Which we were taught is a signal of growth. And this is one thing that, you know, when I watched The Vow and saw sort of the inner workings of NXIVM that really, there's a lot of overlap there. And one of the things that was so poignant in terms of the overlap for me was how we were trained to think about discomfort, and that it is a signal for growth.

And in a way it's like lean in. Lean into that discomfort, because it's building a sense of personal power where our, our language.

Yamuna Benedict: a breakthrough.

Candice Schutter: All about personal power. It's a breakthrough, right? It's a breakdown to breakthrough kind of thing.

Yamuna Benedict: Well, I remember, too, that I used to call Wednesday 'CryDay' during the training weeks. Because I would go up to the studios on Wednesday. So this, the trainings would start on Saturday. They've been here Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday is literally like seven to seven. They're at the studio, the trainees.

And by Wednesday, everyone was having breakdowns. I would go upstairs to the fourth floor and there would be trainees crying in the bathroom and studio B, in the hallway and the dressing room. Having these breakdowns of getting just pushed. They're exhausted and pushed and being body shamed or whatever's going on in the training.

And so I used to brace myself because it just became like, Wednesday was CryDay. It was everyone was crying and having the breakdowns. And then Thursday there would be the breakthroughs. And graduate and have a party and everybody was all high again.

But I just so remember by that Wednesday, everyone was broke down. No energy. They couldn't deal with anything. They all needed something, you know, just.

Candice Schutter: Ah-huh.

Yamuna Benedict: And serving. How can I help these people feel better? What do they need?

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Well that's one of the hallmarks of a cult, right? Is like, find a pain point, activate the pain point, and then deliver a solution. And it's like, I'm tapping my arm here. It's like, gimme more, gimme more, gimme more, gimme more. It's, it's so addictive. So that cycle playing itself out week after week with training after trainee.

And then the next breakthrough is promised, if you go to the next level. If you take the next belt level, then you'll have even more breakthroughs. And on and on it goes as they continue to add belts.

Yamuna Benedict: Like your breakdown is a good thing. You getting over the edge is a good thing.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. It, it means it's working.

Yamuna Benedict: Yeah, it's working.

Tracy Stamper: And it's always followed, like you were saying, Yamuna, with the breakdown comes on Wednesday. Thursday is the breakthrough. Friday's the party.

And you use the term we're all high at that point, cuz we've been through like this shared trauma.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: And I mean these bonds that you make, I mean, I bonded so deeply with several different women when you're in a training. And you'll find someone that like has a very similar experience as you do in life, and then you're feeling the same things and you just like, grasp onto each other for survival through the week. It's intense. They call it an intensive for a reason.

Candice Schutter: And yet you're not speaking to the actual discomfort at all in that sisterhood. So the sisterhood is real and it's deep and it's powerful. And it's also that, you know, they say there's sort of the cult persona and then there's the actual persona. That cult persona takes over to such a degree that you're bonded on these deeper levels, cuz you have things in common. And in terms of the engagement though, and the communication and what you're allowed to talk about and say to each other, it's very much within the realm of the cult persona. At least that was my experience. Did you all have that experience too?

Yamuna Benedict: Mm-hmm.

Tracy Stamper: Absolutely.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. So it's like, we may have shared this discomfoting moment, but we both see it through the lens of this cult persona. And we're gonna talk about it through the lens of this cult persona as a breakdown that's leading to breakthrough, and is evidence of our progression. And look at us go and, yeah, it's whew. Yeah.

Yamuna Benedict: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: Whew, indeed.

Okay, so let's talk about the blindsiding moment of you leaving the Org. Tell us how that all went down. There's a lot of people who are gonna be leaning in right now, who were a part of the Org at time.

Yamuna Benedict: It is a mystery. It's part wanted to come on and share my story is, I just got erased is how I feel. I got a erase from the community.

I'm gonna tell the whole story of me leaving.

So I'd been there four and a half years. I was in a long distance relationship for the last year and a half of me working there. And I was miserable actually at the job at this point, completely fried, overworked, abused, all the things. And I left on my own accord for a relationship and moved to California. It was very traumatic for my, my boys were then 15. They were gonna start their sophomore year. Of course, they didn't wanna move. I thought this was gonna be good for all of us, and I'm gonna change my life and get out of this toxic job that I can't seem to leave. That all blew up in my face within nine weeks. And I ended right back in Portland.

And the second Seth heard I was in Portland, he drove right over to my house And cried on my porch, how much he loves and misses me. And please, please come back cuz we need you

so bad, the routine shoots and the music and this and this and this. Can you please come back?

And I went right back cause I wanted to bury the heartbreak, the embarrassment. I just, I was gonna have the fairytale love story, and it was the nightmare. And go back to what I knew how to do.

I left in July and I was back to work in September. And so I call it my vacation I never got in the four and a half years I was there. It was like exactly two weeks for every year.

And so I went back to work for 31 days in a row, filmed four routines, licensed all the music, got all the outfits together, doing everything.

And um, I know the day this happened, Marissa and Seth were having a power fight at their home. I know this from a mutual friend and colleague that did a lot behind the scenes maintenance and things at the studio, Um, told me that they were having a massive power fight and Marissa was yelling at Seth, I am going to fire your assistant.

And where I'm sitting now, this home that I'm sitting in, I had just rented a new house cuz when I moved to California, I got rid of my house, most of my belongings, everything. So I rent this house with a \$1,900 a month lease as a single mom with two kids with the guarantee of my job.

And literally the day I'm moving into the house, I get a text from Marissa. I demand you to come down to the office today. And I was like, I haven't showered, I'm not moved in, I'm moving.

None of that matters. I need to talk to you. It's an emergency. Be here by four.

I very stupidly got in my car, drove over the bridge, paid to park downtown. I walk into the office, and as I'm stepping into the office, I can see my desk is completely cleared off. There isn't a computer. There isn't a piece of paper. It is an empty desk. And I was like, What's going on?

And as soon as Marissa sees me, she stands up, tells the accountant to come with her. We're going upstairs. And she doesn't really let me enter into the office space, but I got in far enough that I could see my cleared off desk.

We go upstairs to this closet room on the fourth floor, which we held inventory, clothes, chairs, the whiteboard was in there. And she has three chairs all positioned. She'd been planning this, obviously, for the whole day or however long. And she brings me in the closet. She closes the door. Her legs are crossed with her stilettos and her all black outfit.

The accountant is holding an envelope on her lap. And Marissa, I will never forget the words as long as I live. She proceeds to tell me, "You have no skills, no talents. You are not wanted or needed here, and you are fired."

And I couldn't believe the words that came out of her mouth, cuz first of all. I knew that was not true. I knew that is not true, that I do not have skills or talents. I had just been running and growing sales in every department of their company. And doing everything.

But I watched them hire and fire people for five years. I knew one day it was going to be me, and that was the realization I had sitting in there. Today's the day I get fired.

She asked me, "do you have anything to say?" And I said, "can I leave?"

And I picked my and I walked out the door. One of the video photographer guys Seth had brought on was in Studio B or the lounge, and I'm walking out and he came out, he said, "what's going on?"

And I said, "well, I just got fucking fired."

And his mouth dropped. And he goes, "are you joking?" And I said, "I'm not joking. And then I screamed at the top of my I said, make sure you're a real lazy ass and don't actually work. It's the only way you keep your job around here." And I walked out of the building.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: I felt like the queen of hearts beheaded me. Off with her head. And that I got exiled out of the community. I was erased and disappeared. So I went from being the 'it' girl to the tainted black sheep. And not that I didn't hear from anyone. I have a couple close girlfriends that I met through there that reached out to me.

But overwhelmingly, I was shocked at how few people even asked what happened? Where are you? Are you okay? Because they knew I got blackballed. They still wanna be in, so don't touch the tainted fruit.

When I picked myself up and went back to pitching, which is what I had done for many years working booths at home shows. Cuz I needed money. I had rented this house. I'm completely overwhelmed because now I have lost my job, my fitness practice, my spiritual practice, my friends, my community. I had never felt so alone, isolated, afraid, ever in my life.

Yamuna Benedict: About six weeks after I got fired, I got in a car accident. So I had this massive heartbreak breakup. I got fired. And then I was t-boned in an intersection and did 360 and I got a concussion and hurt my arm. And, and I remember when that happened that I was just like, universe, mercy, mercy. What? Stop. Like I can't take anymore.

But blessings come in disguise. That accident landed me in a year of physical care, of acupuncture, chiropractic, and massage all paid for. And it truly helped me heal my mind,

body, soul. And so I was like, oh, that's why I was in this accident. So I got this gift of nurture and care and healing this next year, and I started re-finding myself.

And I wanted to dance. Dance is my medicine. And I felt like Marissa took my dance away from me. And I didn't know where to go. I didn't want to go to one of the Org's classes. I didn't want to be bombarded with the questions. I didn't wanna have to defend myself. I didn't really know what they were saying.

I had a trainer tell me, make sure you take the high road. Basically don't tell the secrets. Don't say what you know. Don't say what happened. Take the high road. Be the, be the bigger person.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: And I finally went to sacred circle ecstatic dance on Sunday morning. I remember going for the first time and moving, and I think I danced with my eyes closed for two hours in my own world. And it was after that day that I remembered, I've always loved to dance.

I found the Org because I am a dancer. The Org didn't make me a dancer. I remembered I'm a dancer. And she can never take that away from me.

And it's something I'm hearing from the second generation trainers in this group that, you know, I embodied this. I did the work. I paid for it.

You know, I didn't financially pay for trainings. I paid for it with my life force energy. Time is how I paid for things, but it's mine. It's in my body. The moves are physical body movements. They're not owned by the Org. The music isn't owned by the Org. And that's what I just, and it was a whole process of realizing all of those things. That's what I felt like I couldn't listen to the music anywhere. I couldn't do the mo, wait a minute, this is my body. This music's available everywhere. What? And so this brainwashing that it is proprietary.

Candice Schutter: Yes.

Yamuna Benedict: And they own it. It's just simply not true. But you definitely feel that way when you leave or get out.

Candice Schutter: A hundred percent. Yeah. And it takes a long time, like you say, to unravel that.

Yamuna Benedict: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: It really does. And that's how we know it was indoctrinating, right? It wasn't just an idea that we accepted. It's like, how we were taught to frame and have relationship to the work. Even the words, the work. There's so many things that are like, they're not triggering to me anymore, but certain language that just takes me back.

And it's like this idea around "the work" and even the moves, there was a specific phrase around that the moves. Those moves themselves don't belong to the Org. They don't. They didn't invent any of them. If you look at every single one of 'em. They're basic or they're appropriated from something else. And they're moves that the body can do and they're not owned by the Org.

So I love that you're speaking to that, Yamuna. Obviously this is something I feel really passionate about. I've shouted about it on the podcast a few times now.

And I, and I get so fired up around it because like you, I felt like I had been robbed something for the longest time and I couldn't, I, like, I couldn't utilize this wisdom that I had embodied. I couldn't utilize it, I couldn't speak about it. I couldn't. That, that there was this idea that I was betraying and stepping outside of my integrity, if I even moved in a certain way.

Like literally when I started teaching Zumba, I remember the first time I was in a Zumba class and an instructor, a Zumba instructor did a cross front cha cha cha. And I immediately, something went off in me like an alarm, like she can't do that.

And that was moment I realized, yeah, that was the moment I realized the absurdity. Now it took me a while to unravel all the other. But in that moment it hit me like a face palm. Holy shit. I gave authority over that really basic movement that bodies have been doing before there was even something called dance, bodies just do that. I gave the movement away to this practice told myself that I couldn't do it.

Now, there was also very real triggers in doing certain movements, so part of why I steered clear was just like it, it brought up too much stuff. And then once I got through that though, it was like, how do I take ownership back over my body and my dance? And love that you found ecstatic dance as a space that you can do that. And I'm just so glad that you restored and reclaimed your right to your own body.

Yamuna Benedict: And to move the way I like to move.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Yamuna Benedict: I was in my first dance class when I was three. I've been dancing my whole life. But it was really, it is interesting how you feel like you're not allowed to do it anymore.

I mean, now when I think back, cuz it was eight years ago, I'm like, how and why could I ever think that? But it is totally how you feel that you got exiled and she took it all back and it is not yours.

Candice Schutter: Well, and that sacred pseudoscience that Robert Jay Lifton speaks to, the sacred pseudoscience being a part of what defines a cult. And that sense that, and I even hear this now as, as we're welcoming people and who are at all different stages of exiting. And I hear people struggling with this idea that, and they're not using this language, but I'm putting it through this frame of sort of cult jargon because this is kind of what's being communicated

is like but the science that I was taught, the science of the movement, like I can't use that. I can't speak about it. I can't go over here and facilitate similar things and call it something else. Because the science.

And it's like, that's part of the indoctrination is that there's something special, and again, like you say, proprietary about the things that we were being taught. Which were just a conglomeration of things that are taught in all different places. And it's hard to see that until you get out and you go to all different places. And I've had 16 years to go to all these places and I'm like, oh my God, like all of this existed already. Like every last bit of it. They just put different words around it.

Yamuna Benedict: Another point on that. You know, the lost so many amazing, gifted, talented people that have gone off and created some other training faculty of somatic movement. And I worked there when several different people left and started their own thing. And then listening to Marissa and Seth foaming at the mouth. They're copying and they're cheating. And I remember thinking, you're the original copycat. There's nothing in this that is actually original, that it's a potpourri of all these things. And you put it together in a book. But there really is not an original concept. So how can you say they're copying? Cause they're just doing the same thing. These people have studied yoga, and this modality, and this. And now the Org's work and they're, it doesn't work to be with the Org, so they're taking what they know. But I just remember they were livid of the copycat, stealing their work.

Candice Schutter: Well, and really what they're foaming about, the underneath the underneath is we're losing money. Like it really comes down to that we're losing power and we're losing money. What is it like sex, power, and money? Like those are the three things that like motivate, sort of cultic power down dynamics.

And so we're losing power and influence, because the brand is being watered down. And we're losing money. We're losing this person who we have taught to buy into this idea for the rest of their life.

And I really want listeners out there who are part of the Org to really just, like, take a minute

Yamuna Benedict: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: and think about this idea. And people say, like, but it's not a cult. You can't really call it, I don't know, cult. Anything that tells you that you need to buy into it for the rest of your life, even if they wrap it in capitalistic language, is culty as fuck. I'm sorry, but that's what it is.

Thoughts?

Tracy Stamper: Hell yeah. Absolutely.

Candice Schutter: And some would argue, someone would say to me, well, Zumba's like that, like if you wanna teach. And, and it's true.

Like I said in an earlier podcast, and like Yamuna has said so beautifully, just because something's normal doesn't mean it's healthy. And when I spoke about the non-disparagement clause that the Org has since added to the teaching contract since, I think since all of us have left, I'm not for sure about that.

It's like, oh, well, non-disparagement clauses which basically is a clause that you add to a contract that says you're not allowed to speak negatively about anybody involved with this or the company. Ever. These clauses are used in Silicon Valley companies. It's like, well, yeah, that's also fucked up. Like, just because it's normal doesn't mean it's a good thing.

Candice Schutter: I taught Zumba for nine years, and then I decided to step away from my life in 2019 in every single way. And so I reached out to them and this was the moment at which I realized my relationship with Zumba was gonna end forever.

Because I reached out, you know, in an automated way. Everything's automated cause it's a huge organization now. But I reached out and said like, I wanna pause my license or whatever. And they said, oh, okay, you can do that. In order to do that because just to be clear to the listeners, the way these things work, you train and certify in the practice, then you license to teach it, you have to pay a monthly fee in order to use the brand name. Which is fine. You know, brand names are brand names.

So I had been paying this monthly fee for nine years, and I said, I wanna take a break. They said, well when are you gonna come back? I don't know. Okay, well in order to put your license on hold, you have to pay \$5 a month. And then when you're ready to reinstate it, we'll reinstate it. But if you don't pay that \$5 a month, then you have to take the training over again if you wanna teach it again.

And that was the end of my relationship.

Yeah, I mean, I still go take classes, but I wasn't gonna give them a dime more of my money. I was like, no, no. Hell no.

And to, to say to somebody, you can't teach a kumbia or a salsa move ever again unless you give us money every month is absurd. And you can probably see it if you look at it from Zumba's, like, but if you're in the Org, you've been indoctrinated you think, but this is different. This is so different because it's like.

And I have so much compassion cuz it's like you wanna really wanna sit down and add up how many thousands of dollars you've spent on those trainings? Of course we have to believe that we were investing in our own like, long-term PhD program in somatic education. But even if that were true, you wouldn't have to pay for your PhD the rest of your goddamn life.

Yamuna Benedict: Right.

At some point you stop paying for the education.

Candice Schutter: Exactly. At some point you stop paying. And I think this is worth just speaking to for a second though, Yamuna. Some people did stop paying. Yeah? Some people didn't pay for trainings.

Yamuna Benedict: Oh, there tons of gifting going on. You know, I could never figure out the rhyme or reason to why and who, but lifetime teaching memberships. And it'd get marked in their account lifetime. They never had to pay the \$520 a year. Gifting trainings all the time, not everyone paid. And why and who gets gifted what they do is just on their whim and their liking and their favoritism and trying to keep people in, bring people back.

I actually got gifted finally, my brown belt in 2015. So a year later, I get an outreach if I'd like to come do the Brown Belt, which, you know. So I worked there five years. I had already done my white belt. I signed up for the green belt at my white belt. So I was committed to doing that.

Seth didn't like it that I was doing that training and then I had to fight with him to do the blue belt. So I thought I'd go through all the trainings while I was there, but it stopped at blue belt. I never was allowed to do anything else.

Candice Schutter: Wow. I didn't know that. So you weren't progressing through the, I progressed through the trainings while I was working there, and I think now it's because of Raul.

Yamuna Benedict: Probably. You know, we started hosting, Sue Hitzmann from Melt, the Melt Method. And the first time she came, she offered to gift me the MELT training, and I was so excited. But Seth told me, no, you cannot do that. I need you.

And so I could have been a MELT certified teacher as a gift. And then by two years in, they had split the training into two. It was one weekend for the certification, but then they split it up into two different trainings, twice as much money, and I would've had to pay. So of course I never did that. But yeah, I also had an opportunity to do the training and I was told I cannot do that.

Candice Schutter: Yamuna, I'm just so sorry that you were treated the way that you were treated. And it's been, I'm really glad that we had a conversation before this, before we pushed record that I heard a lot of this. I dunno about you, Tracy, but, um, so I think first time, I think the first time we heard a lot of this, I mean, you shared a few things we hadn't heard before and a lot you had shared with us already.

And you know, I, Tracy and I were both getting pretty fired up and, and understandably so. And again, something we were taught to not be reactive. You know, this idea of non-reactivity is like taking the high road, all the things, And when our anger and our outrage is actually serving a purpose. It's pointing us toward injustice. And it's saying this isn't right.

And so, um, I wouldn't apologize if we did get really angry during this conversation, and I wanna keep the focus on you and your expression and your healing. So I'm glad we got to spill some of that in the first call.

Tracy Stamper: No kidding. I mean, the number of F bombs that I dropped when the three of us talked off record, there was pure expression going on, let's just say. Very pure fiery

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm, right? Yeah, exactly.

Tracy Stamper: Also, I was really struck by just how much I always loved Yamuna. How much everyone always loved Yamuna.

Yamuna Benedict: Um, thank you.

Tracy Stamper: And you went through hell. I had no idea. I had no idea.

Yamuna Benedict: It was a stressful job. It was exhausting, stressful, abusive, toxic.

Tracy Stamper: Well, the end in particular. I just, what would've been different had I known how you were fired? What would've been different? A lot of things would've been different.

Yamuna Benedict: And I wanted come on. I've held it in secret for eight years, almost to the day. Very few people know the words that were told to me and why I just disappeared off the scene, and I want people to know, and then maybe their minds will change on how they look at things over there.

Tracy Stamper: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: You're such a brave woman.

Yamuna Benedict: Ah, thank you.

So what now, Yamuna? Like what are you doing to recover and heal from this? Aside from being brave as fuck and coming your story with us and the world. Like, how's that process for you of healing? What's that looking like?

Just a lot of self-reflection. You know, I shared in our first conversation, I touched on it. You know, I'm a real estate agent now. I've been doing real estate over five years. I really like it. I'm good at it. I've been successful.

But I spent, uh, four years and 10 months working for a very small boutique company that I'll just call the owner Melissa, cuz Marissa and Melissa were interchangeable. And I mixed their names up the whole time I worked there, and I had the same uncomfortable feeling.

Candice Schutter: Hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: Yet I stayed. And finally in July, I moved companies and I'm working as a solo independent broker now, and I'm much happier. And shortly there, thank you. Yes, myself.

And then the podcast came into my life, the cult in culture, and realizing I just repeated the Org five years with this dynamic. And so I'm processing, why did I stay? I knew in 2020 I should leave. I didn't leave. I tried to leave in 2021, but she renegotiated with me to get me to stay. And it's took me a whole nother year to actually leave.

And so, like we started with full circle, you have to look back to move forward. You need to learn from these experiences. So I'm just reflecting, learning. It feels really good to share these stories and not just hold them in secret and be supported. And so I feel like I've released a lot of the weight.

It's been really joyful connecting with the two of you and the other people that are in the After The Org group and, um, Yeah.

So, yeah, and I'm, you know, after Covid, I, I didn't dance during Covid at all. And I'm back to my Sunday dance, which is, that is how I heal myself and release everything is through movement. So I'm moving again, releasing the weight I've been holding for years and years.

And I'm still a seeker. I'm never done learning. When I tell people like, if I'm done learning, I better be dead, because life's so boring then. I'm always seeking new information, new ways. And so just to keep that, keep my heart and mind open. Which after what happened eight years, I closed up. It doesn't feel good.

And just to keep your heart and mind opened and to be clear in your thinking and to really, like, when you're getting into something. I'm definitely like, I go all in. I dive in head first, like I dive in. So maybe, you know, start in the shallow end and test it out a little bit, before I go diving in to the deep end with, you know, a new group or something. So just to be a little more thoughtful and aware of my surroundings.

I mean, one thing I was taught in the Krishna movement, we were taught you are what you're around you. Whoever, you're hanging around druggies, you're gonna be a druggie. You're hanging around, you know thieves, you're gonna become a thief. You're hanging around people that wanna become higher up, you're gonna become higher up. So just being really aware the people around you, and the energies around you and the groups you're getting involved with, and looking at it from all sides.

Don't just drink the Kool-Aid.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Yeah.

Tracy Stamper: Something that I have seen repeatedly since I've been learning about cultic dynamics and reading and articles and books and documentaries is, there's a lot of talk about what makes individuals susceptible, vulnerable to cultic involvement. And one of the things that I've seen several times now pop up that just made me wanna start singing and dancing

was that one of the biggest markers for what makes an individual susceptible or vulnerable is as simple as them not understanding how cultic dynamics work.

Which why I am so cheering Candice on every step of the way as she walks this path. This is so vitally important and I feel, it feels so good to be in this space with two women who I love wholeheartedly knowing what you have both been through, knowing what I have been through. And now knowing that we know.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Tracy Stamper: We know.

Candice Schutter: Beautiful Tracy.

Tracy Stamper: That's huge.

Candice Schutter: It is huge and it's, it's impossible to inform and educate without stories. The dynamics, the jargon, the academia of it, they're just words without stories to illustrate.

And so I cannot stress enough how absolutely critical and essential the willingness that you both have had to step forward and bravely bare the details for folks who are like, Oh, well, why, why rehash the details?

Because the truth is in the details. The dynamics are revealed through the details. And your willingness to be so vulnerable and to share things that you were taught never to speak about ever, ever, ever, from the time you were really little. I happen to know both of your back stories enough to know, to never, ever, ever reveal the family secrets. For you to be brave enough to share them, not just to bare them and free yourself, but to help us understand how this happens.

And what is, what is love bombing, really? What is, you know, sacred pseudoscience? What does it mean when we have that gut feeling and we don't respond to it? What does that look like? Why don't we respond to it? What is cognitive dissonance? Like, all of that. Those are just academic words until you fill it in with your stories, and we continue to share with vulnerability.

So I just thank you, Tracy, for saying that so eloquently and beautifully. And that's the whole purpose of this series is to help us to all wake up from this larger trance that I believe we're all in, where we are blind to the way these dynamics are operating in so many of our relationships and communities.

And when we all wake up to them, we not only save ourselves from the potential of being, um, yeah, I'm gonna say it victimized by them, but also we become a part of the solution. We become less likely to perpetuate the environments that make these things possible and that we ourselves, I'm sure each one of us could share an individual story to illustrate how we exercised these dynamics over people while we were in the Org. I'm sure that we could come up with a few. It could be a whole other podcast.

So waking up to these things isn't just about like, oh, you're such a victim and you think you're such a victim and you have to be able to see and protect yourself. It's like, that's part of it. And secondly, we want to be able to see ourselves clearly and say like, how am I part, very much like anti-racism education? Like how am I perpetuating this shit? Like how am I a part of the problem? And I feel like that's the work that we're doing and we can't do it without your stories.

So I feel so much love for both of you and deep, deep gratitude. And just such appreciation that we have this friendship, all of us and this larger After The Org community that continues to grow. Anyone who wants to join us, we are here for you with open arms of the non culty variety.

I'm not gonna love bomb you to get you to come on over. But I will say that we welcome you. And yeah, this has just become something much larger than I think any of us could have really imagined. And it's nothing without your bravery and your stories.

Yamuna Benedict: Well, thank you for inviting me on. It's been a real pleasure connecting and sharing, and I'm happy I could share my story finally. Thanks for doing this.

Candice Schutter: Thank for doing this.

I love you guys.

Yamuna Benedict: I love you, guys.

Tracy Stamper: I love you, so much.

Candice Schutter: Wow. I can't thank Yamuna enough for showing up here with Tracy and I to share her story publicly for the first time.

While a visibility hangover is to be expected, it is my hope that, like Tracy and I, she feels a sense of freedom from the secrets she's been carrying inside of her.

And it's also my hope that many of you who were moved by Yamuna's share will reach out and let her know that she does not stand in her truth alone. Speaking of, another shout out to Tracy for standing by Yamuna's side, and for joining in on this conversation.

I think I speak for all three of us when I say, thank you for listening and for the kind messages we've been receiving. You should know that both Yamuna and Tracy are active participants in the After The Org Facebook group, as well as the TDP Patreon community. Reach out if you'd like to join us.

Discussions in the Facebook group are private and ongoing. And over on Patreon, Tracy and I are unpacking some of the nitty gritty indoctrination that we experienced at the Org in our

ongoing deconstructing dogma bonus episodes. It's inspiring some authentic discussions and it's doing wonders for many of us, helping us to untangle the best bits of the teachings from the royally effed up parts that were sometimes weaponized.

If you were in, or are on your way out of the Org, feel free to send one of us a message with a request to join the ATO group over on Facebook, or to learn more about the Patreon community.

And keep in mind, the Patreon discussions aren't just for people who are coming out of the Org. It's really a discussion about wellness doctrine in general and it's a place where you can support the podcast. You can learn more at patreon.com/thedeeperpulse.

And as we wrap this heavy duty two-parter up, I just wanna reiterate, humans are messy imperfect creatures. We fuck things up from time to time. These episodes, this series, it's not a call for the perfecting of human connection. It's a cry for accountability, to those who lead poorly and to us who so willingly follow.

When we are bound, ideologically, emotionally, financially, to those who cause us harm, it takes time to break free. This is to be expected.

But we can find alternatives. With time, proper resources, and support systems, we can restore our personal integrity and seek out connections that more accurately reflect our current values.

We spoke a lot about "the work" at the Org, but maybe the real work we must do isn't about championing a particular practice or conforming to a specific belief system. Maybe the real path to so-called enlightenment requires that we reckon with difficult choices, override complacency, and grieve our losses.

Or maybe I am just an idealist and this is as good as it gets. Of course, it's quite possible that I'm wrong about all of this. It might even be true what I was taught to believe, that I'm just an oversensitive, victimy nutcase who thinks way, way too much about things. It's certainly possible.

But one thing that response to this series has taught me is that I'm not alone in so much of this. And that enough is a reason for me to keep going.

So I'll be back next week with another conversation. This time with a brand new friend who is a coach, writer, and advocate, who's been kind enough to sit down with me in shared accountability. We're gonna talk about what puts the cult in coaching industry culture. I've been waiting a really long time to have a conversation like this, so I hope you'll tune in. And in the meantime, thank you for listening and I appreciate you rating, reviewing, and sharing the podcast with your friends.

Until next time.

Caio.