

**Candice Schutter:** [00:00:00] Hey friends, welcome back to the Deeper Pulse. I'm here with you this week with another Patreon sampler. But before we dive in, just a quick update.

If you're a regular listener, you may have noticed that I've been on break from the main feed for quite a while now. I've been doing some behind the scenes work and taking some space to regroup in light of some recent pushback to this here pod. I'll share more toward the end of this episode.

But for now, I want to thank patrons of The Deeper Pulse. Not only do Patreon contributions help me to keep this space editorially-independent and ad-free.

But more than that, I want you to know that listeners who take the time to share, [00:01:00] support and comment on this work. You keep me vertical. You are the thing that keeps me upright when the gale force winds begin to blow, when I feel the too muchness of cult politics or when I feel tempted to cut and run. It's really you, the listeners out there that keep me going.

And folks like those you'll be hearing from today.

Now, please keep in mind as you listen in that there have been, quite literally, over a dozen additional bonus episodes that have dropped over on Patreon since the last sampler appeared here on the main feed. So what you're about to hear is just a taste, just a few pages cut from a vast library of 60 plus bonus conversations. There's a lot there and new episodes are added weekly.

Keep in mind you can't explore all the bonus content that's available on a 7 day free trial. Learn more at [patreon.com/thedeeperpulse](https://patreon.com/thedeeperpulse).

Now on to today's Patreon sampler.

The stories and opinions shared here are based [00:02:00] on personal experience and are not intended to malign any individual, group, or organization.

We're going to start today's sampler with our most recent bonus drop over on Patreon. Deconstructing Dogma episode number 57 is entitled, *Leaving Loudly: Bullies, Paper Tigers, and a Size-Stigma Reality Check*. It dropped this past Friday, and it's part one in a two-part conversation with Aimee Van Ausdall, former Org teacher, data analyst, and human hardwired for justice.

Aimee speaks a little bit about her background and how she was raised to, in some ways, defy conventional good-girl conditioning in favor of honest expression and greater understanding.

In October of last year, she chose to not only exit the Org, but to do so loudly, through a very public Facebook post. And Aimee's here to share with us why [00:03:00] leaving loudly felt so important to her.

Let's listen in.

## AIMEE

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** And what I learned very young was that people are not their positions, right? I don't think I told you this, but I also majored in, as an undergrad in public policy. So you're debating ideas. What's the best way to? We all want, you know, these things. What's the best way to get there, right? So you had to get really good at explaining your ideas, and, um, really good at not taking offense when someone doesn't agree with you. Right? So I had that experience and, you know, like, as a debater in high school and in college, I really learned that, that we should be able to all bring our opinions to the table and not get reactive and talk to each other. And, you know, maybe just go, oh, look, I don't agree with that. And that's, that can be all right.

And so, that's my default, right? So find myself in spaces where that's not the case, I just surprise everyone. And then I'm surprised by the fact that the world isn't operating the way that I think it should.

So my good girl conditioning is really that when [00:04:00] you see an injustice or a problem, you ask about it. And that also, if I have something that I'm curious about, my guru relationship is really about, wow, this person is here to help me. So I must get this information, right. Or like, ask the things that I'm concerned about. Or yeah.

And so it didn't feel, um, as big, I guess, as it does for people who've had different experiences. I'm not saying it didn't take any courage, for example, to exit, um, and to exit the way I did. But it was, it was definitely more in my personality. Like, what I would have suffered had I chosen to leave quietly was bigger than the risk for me. Because I have this very strong internal sense of justice that makes it very difficult for me to not say things. You know.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

## aimee - post catalyst

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** So I saw this post by this woman who said, hey, can we talk about this podcast?

And here's [00:05:00] another truth, Candice. I'm not that into podcasts. So I probably would have ignored that too, right? Like I would have been, oh, look, a podcast and they're talking about it. Wow.

But then the reaction to her post was what really set me off. The shaming, the controlling; like, because remember, background. Hey, let's unpack all this. Let's talk about it. What's true, not true? How can we improve, right? That's my, that's my go-to attitude.

And then they eventually just deleted the post. That day, I started researching, how can I continue to teach? Because I work at a rec center, so I really have some kind of credentials, right? I mean, I have 15 years of teaching. Maybe I don't need that, but there I do. And I decided to start my certification that day.

And so there was a period of time, for about 2 months, where I was really thinking about my experiences. I knew that I was going to exit loud, because I was so angry at the way that that had shut down. And I have literally hundreds of friends who are teachers. Because you know how you meet people at belts and [00:06:00] then you become friends with them. And you become friends with people you don't even know who have this in common. So I knew that the reach would be pretty wide.

And, um, so I'm studying for the ACE exam. And I'm writing, about my experiences. And the original thing was much longer. And it was, like I'm working through my feelings, right? So I'm angry. And I'm naming names. And I'm, my tone is a problem, right? But I just let myself do that. And then I let myself distill and distill and distill down to say, what do I want to say to people who have this little sense inside themselves that things are not okay that things are not right, to give them courage? Right? To give them clarity?

And also just, you know, like when you're in isolation, I think one of the reasons that people were exiting so quietly before is like, before social media, you were yelling into an abyss, right? You might write a letter and send it to all the other trainers and that's where it lands. But there was really no way to connect in this way [00:07:00] before. So that's another thing I will, I will say. I think there are a lot of people who probably made courageous exits that you and I never heard about.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right. Sure.

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** So, um. But I was like, I want people to see that you can do this and not be squashed like a bug.

**aimee - business or movement?**

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** And the other thing that I think is really important is that the conversation on that page was very much, um, well, you know, the Org is a business. And so they are allowed to conduct themselves as a business, right?

And I'm like, okay, if you want me to judge you as a business and not as a movement, I can do that. But you don't get to, you don't get to play both ends. You can't invoke the business when someone criticizes you and then ask for all this free labor, because you're movement that is going to change the world. That also, that hypocrisy really bothered me.

And I see it even on, you know, among those of us who've left, people who are still working through the conditioning and they're talking about. I just feel really guilty, [00:08:00] because these people are still here.

And I don't know if you remember this, but I put an analogy very early on, um, on one of the comments. Where I'm like, you know, if you went to a restaurant, and let's say the food was great, but the service was terrible, right? And maybe the food was so great, you go back a couple more times. And then, like, I don't know, the fourth time, the waiter actually is criticizing the way you're holding your spoon. And he says, I saw you at this other restaurant.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** I saw you at this other restaurant. You're eating other places. Right?

At what point do you go, I'm just not going to go to this restaurant anymore. And then you hear people in the elevator talking about going to the restaurant. Would you warn them? And the answer for me is absolutely, yes. All the time. For days. I will warn them.

I was talking about this example with friends and this may also be my conditioning, because there are a whole bunch of people who go, that's none of my business. I don't want to hurt their experience. Like that would not even occur to me. My thought is, you need to be aware [00:09:00] that this is going on, right. So you can make a choice. I'm not saying don't go. I'm saying, know that this is true. So you'll recognize it sooner. Be aware. Be wary.

And so it really never occurred to me to leave any other way. And so I really crafted that message. I spent a lot of time on it. Trying to stick to the facts. Trying not to throw anybody, trying not to be too harsh. And, really to press, especially the people who are still in.

It is not, and it has never been disloyal to question things. It has never been.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right.

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** And if you are in an environment that is telling you that, you have a problem.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** Right?

**aimee - hold door open**

**Candice Schutter:** But that is the thing that opens that doorway for so many of, that is the thing I was talking about in the Flying Monkey episode. Like when you exit loudly, but then you hold the door open [00:10:00] for the next person. That's you setting it to public, right?

But when we do that, then the bullies lose, they lose the power that they have. Because their power is in our silence.

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** Yes. Their power is reshaping the narrative. And when you were talking about. This goes directly back, in terms of social justice, to this idea that we cannot agree upon facts, right? Alternative facts.

For me, yes, people have their own experiences. And objectively, this happened, and many people witnessed this. Now, we may all have a different experience of what that meant, but we need to be able to agree upon facts.

### **aimee - if you listen to the podcast**

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** If you listen to the podcast, you have a choice to believe or not believe the people who are speaking, right? And if you don't believe them, or you think that they're exaggerating, then that's one thing. But I believed the people that I listened to, right? They were compelling and credible to me. And if I believe that, [00:11:00] how do I stay?

I mean, what I'm basically saying is, yes, I recognize that all these abuses have happened. And furthermore, that it doesn't appear like anything's going to happen. That history would tend to tell us that nothing is going to improve, right. Cause I was very clear about that after talking to my data points, right?

Oh yeah, no, this has been tried many times before.

**Candice Schutter:** Many, many, many times.

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** If I believe them, what I'm saying if I stay, is that whatever I'm getting is more important than their ability to be treated like human beings. And I'm really, I'm really afraid for you to put this on there. Because I know that there's a lot of people who have one foot in one foot out, and that's to make them feel really bad. Um, but it's really honestly what I believe. And I have a lot of compassion for those folks. Um, But I, I don't see a way for me personally to stay in integrity. And I [00:12:00] don't know what --

Now with that said, I will also say something else. I work for a very large corporation, which probably does evil things. Which I'm sure it does. I'm it certain it does do evil things. That we are... like, this scarf, my friend who's an artist made this. And I paid a reasonable price for it, so she's getting compensated. But I don't know where the fabric came from, right? We are constantly, in our society, I am not vetting every single business that I go to. I get that. So, first of all, there is some hypocrisy in what I'm saying. Right?

**Candice Schutter:** Sure.

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** It has to do with how in my face it is, right?

And so I, for me personally, that was enough in my face. Tender hearted, beautiful Tracy, right? Like, I just can't.

It does seem like I was so brave to write that. But it was just because I was the first one who did it quite like that, right? Um, and now, it's a paper tiger. It just falls over, just falls over.

**Candice Schutter:** And it's a [00:13:00] cumulative thing. Like when you posted that, because of the community that we've built, I wasn't afraid for you.

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** Right.

**Candice Schutter:** Because I was like, there's a whole community behind her. There's enough of us, that I knew would step forward if, you know, the flying monkeys came swinging through the branches. We, we're no longer in these silos in the same way. Mmhmm.

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** And that is really, really powerful. Yes, having, definitely having people who I could talk to. Even sending you, like, one of the earlier drafts. I mostly did that for you, because I didn't want to say anything that would put you, you know, at odds. But, that is a big, a big help.

**aimee - leaving has been**

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** Leaving has been nothing but a positive experience for me. It is amazing how much more freedom and excitement and joy, I get out of my classes now. Even though I was doing my own work, now that I'm completely out [00:14:00] of the Org. And I'm like, all the bumpers are gone. Literally all the bumpers. bumper I could like, lift weights or I could.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** Do whatever. Like, the freedom that comes with that. And especially with the freedom combined with the knowledge. Both what I learned in the Org, but also what I learned. Because there's also this tendency to completely dismiss this other kind of traditional fitness knowledge, right? Which is really important. It's one of the ways that I was able to go, oh, some of the things that we're doing here in the Org classes are problematic for some people, and I need to think about that.

And so there's a level of training that happens that's made me better. And better able to respond to students where they are. That's just beyond, you know, move your body in your body's way, and then you're going to be fine. No, people are going to drop their knees in ways that really hurt their knees in certain positions and you got to be ready for that.

And the other thing that I will say, is that landing in ATO and having the kinds of conversations that we had around the dinner table with my dad, [00:15:00] right? There are people that I don't agree with in ATO, that have a different perception about the way things are. And I'm completely fine with that. Like, we can just talk about it. And like, and maybe they move me a couple inches this way, and maybe I move them a couple inches. Maybe neither one of us move. But we can have those opinions. And we can still connect and like each other, and there's no sort of social order. And I love that you created that messy place.

**Candice Schutter:** Aimee also had a few things to add as a follow up to our recent diet culture conversations.

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** One idea that I really wanted to press against is this idea that some of the pressure for thinness is based on this understanding that people want to see that at the front of a classroom. And that certainly people who are fat, who lead fitness classes, first of all may not be as successful. But then also leave themselves open to all kinds of, um, feedback. All right. We'll call [00:16:00] it feedback.

**Candice Schutter:** In quotes.

**Aimee Van Ausdall:** Abuse.

And as a person who has taught as a thin person and now as a fat person, what I will tell you is that has not been my experience. That my classes have actually grown as I have grown. And that, truly learning how to accept myself where I am with my limitations and my, the things that, my skills, right? That I give everybody else that permission. Really, truly give that permission. Right?

And, um, I have worked over the last 10 years, partly for my own self protection and survival, to really deconstruct diet culture and obsession with thinness. And in doing that, I've really, really gotten to the place where I see beauty in everybody.

There was a period of time where I really didn't want to identify as fat. Just because I didn't want it to be in the conversation, right? I thought that the biggest benefit that I could be, is showing up and being that and just not talking about it all the time, right? Like, just being an [00:17:00] example in the world.

But I went to a day long yoga thing with two people who have some notoriety. Your, your listeners may have heard of them. One of them is Jessamyn Stanley who is, she's been on the cover of shape. She's a Black, queer, fat, amazing yogi. And another woman, Dana Falsetti. And it was specifically for larger body people. Now, there were people of all different sizes there, but it was, it was specifically dedicated to fat yogis.

And, they were talking about doing headstands. And there were, many people in that class had never successfully done a headstand. Right? And so they said, okay, so this is the way they teach headstands in traditional yoga. And if you're bigger, these are the things you need to think about. And this is how you change what you're doing to get into a headstand.

And there were six people who had never done a headstand in their lives who were able to do a headstand that day. It wasn't about strength. It wasn't about, you know, how much fat they had on their body. It was literally about the fact that when you [00:18:00] only have these narrow, acceptable bodies, then you don't know how to evaluate and help them, right.

And, and it isn't like only fat teachers can teach that. But fat teachers have to exist in enough numbers.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right.



**Aimee Van Ausdall:** Right? For thin people to be able to then be able to do that, too. And I don't view that as co-optation. I view that, you know, that's fine. I want every instructor to be able to do that.

And that was one of the beautiful things about my first teacher, my first Org teacher, was that she really embodied that, to the point that it was a while before I realized that that wasn't something that percolated up in a real way through the Organization. So I believed, I believed what I was being told. And then it was being reflected to me. And it took me a while to not recognize it.

There was also when I first started a fair amount, like I had a lot of body shame and a lot of things that made it easier for me ignore those little bits that were around the edges.

So, and it's the same thing. Like, when the Org first started talking about Diversity, Equity, & [00:19:00] Inclusion. It isn't just because it's the morally right thing to do, because it's the kind thing to do. It's because it actually makes us better. And you have to really believe and understand that.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Part 2 with Aimee Van Ausdall drops later this week.

**MELISSA**

**Candice Schutter:** Speaking of diet culture, As you just heard, we've been taking our main feed conversation much further over on Patreon.

Next I'm going to play excerpts from two different conversations with guests who reached out to share what it's really like growing up in a large body, while navigating the impossible expectations of fat-phobic culture norms.

First up, Dr. Melissa Durfey, a longtime friend and supporter of the pod. In *Deconstructing Dogma #53*, Melissa joined me for an episode called *Surviving Anti-Fat Bias & Discovering Intuitive Wellness*. [00:20:00]

In this episode, Melissa shares about her experiences as a survivor of atypical anorexia and how she's been able to reauthor her relationship to food, wellness, and self care.

Here's a quick preview.

**MELISSA**

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** So, I was a sophomore in college. And I was down to the lowest weight that I had ever been in my woman body, if you will. I was very sick. My hair was falling out. Like my skin had no sheen to it at all. My nail beds were crap.



And I went to the doctor to ask for help. Do you wanna know what they told me? That I was doing great and I should keep up the good work, and I only had about 30 pounds to go before I would be deemed normal weight.

**Candice Schutter:** Wow. [00:21:00] God, Melissa.

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** Yeah. And so something broke into me at that point.

And that was really, really painful. That was the beginning of my really seeing medical fat phobia for the first time as an adult.

**Candice Schutter:** Uhhuh.

**melissa - really sick**

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** I ended up getting really, really sick. And when I got really, really sick, I was able to see a nutritionist who went, oh, this is very wrong. This is very wrong.

And from there, uh, I started rebuilding my relationship with food.

**Candice Schutter:** And when? When was this?

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** I was in undergraduate. But I was still on the diet culture train. Then I got into, well, if I'm never gonna be small, I'm gonna be [00:22:00] buff. So that was when started really getting into like the lean protein and the lifting and, you know, all of that. And that was all seen as totally okay in our western medical paradigm of, oh yeah, of course. Right.

Uh, and then I started having some really weird symptoms. And I can't tell you to this day whether or not it was the weird nutrition I was doing that set this off, or this was just the time that it got set off. And I ended up testing for some autoimmune challenges.

And that was really when I decided I needed to have more grace for my body and let my body be. Because I had a illness. And it finally got through to me that I cannot control my body size. That [00:23:00] because of this genetic disposition that this is just me.

**melissa - doctorate**

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** My doctorate is in acupuncture and Chinese medicine; however, my specialization is in integrated health. And I did a lot of my work in the realm of medical fat phobia. I learned so much about what I thought was only a me problem. Finding out that it's much, much more systemic than I even thought. Yeah, of course there's books and there's blogs and there's podcasts. But this is actual like scientific evidence that folks in larger bodies get treated differently in medical situations.

**melissa - self care**

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** And folks who fall into, uh, the overweight or obese category, which I don't like to use that word, [00:24:00] but that's a whole nother conversation. They tend to have a lower rate of self-care in general, which leads to higher rates of anxiety and depression than their, their thinner counterparts. Which is really, really heartbreaking and upsetting. Because, when surveyed these folks felt like they didn't deserve to take care of themselves because they didn't fit into, you know, what, what deemed care.

And that just, that breaks my heart. That's one of the reasons I do what I do. Because I fully believe that everybody deserves to take exquisite amazing care of themselves.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. Well, I think you underscore a really important point around the way that culture shapes our beliefs and our [00:25:00] behaviors. And that, there's a lot of gaslighting that happens around that, of like, why don't you take care of yourself? While I am actually calling you names and making it wrong the way that you exist.

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** Exactly, exactly.

**Candice Schutter:** That's why we really, that's why, you know, I feel like this is such an important conversation in this series, ongoing conversation in this series. Because it's about understanding that we are actually creating an environment where people don't feel like they're worth tending to themselves. Like we're doing that. It's not a fault in them. It's we're creating a culture that demonizes a certain way of being. We create an environment where we demonize people's way of being and then we blame them when they don't align with some ideal.

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** Exactly.

**Candice Schutter:** And it's the insidious cycle where ultimately power always wins. Because unless we name these [00:26:00] things, how would people even know that it's not them.

Like you said, when you said, this was the first time you realized it wasn't just you. Like when you started to do your research on medical fat phobia and you were like, holy crap, what happened to me happens to people all the time. Maybe it's not me.

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** Right.

**Candice Schutter:** So important.

**melissa - love self**

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** It's been completely eye-opening, this journey that I have been on and continue to be on learning about other folks out there who are, just like me, who are trying to make a difference in the world and just help people to love themselves.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-Hmm.

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** And I think, you know, I think that's all that we really want, right. You know, as like, if we really get down to it, is we want to love ourselves.

**Candice Schutter:** As we are.

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** As [00:27:00] we are. Exactly.

And we deserve to love each, each other and ourselves as we are.

**Candice Schutter:** Absolutely.

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** Not saying we don't have work to do always, of course, but.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right. But that, that acceptance, that love and inclusion isn't contingent upon that work. And that work is self-dictated and decided is like, this is what I want and how I wanna grow and change and evolve, but culture's not telling me I need to do this in order to belong.

**Dr. Melissa Durfey:** Right.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

## SARA

**Candice Schutter:** A few weeks later, I sat down with a new friend of the pod, Sara Avery, who shared about her life in a body as well as her activism work, and how and where the two intersect. It's an insightful and empathic conversation, and [00:28:00] Sara really inspired me to ponder the way that meaningful activism is really all about connection.

Here's a sample of Deconstructing Dogma #56 with Sara Avery. *What My Body Is For: Self Acceptance & Embodied Activism.*

A quick heads up, we did have some tech issues. So the audio from our conversation is a bit compromised. Thanks in advance for your understanding.

## sara - allies

**Candice Schutter:** And so what was it like for you to hear some straight size women talking about these things. Was that like a mixed bag experience? I'm really curious from your perspective, I want to know what was of interest and also what are we not talking about? What are we missing? Where did we miss a mark? Anything you want to add in that regard?

**Sara Avery:** Yeah, well, I will say that it was wonderful to hear you talking about it. Because I think this is a thing that, you know, has been very painful for me. And I think probably

everyone who looks like me. And so, I remember [00:29:00] hearing in one of the episodes, you're talking about being allies. And I was like, yeah, I'm an ally. I try hard to be an ally, at least, to lots of communities.

And then I thought, wait a second. They're talking about being an ally to me. Oh, that's weird.

And then I thought, well, you know, what is incredibly helpful to me when I'm trying to be a good ally is listening to people in the communities to which I'm trying to ally. And so I thought, oh, well, maybe I could say something. Maybe I could share my experience and maybe that would be helpful to other people. So, um.

**Candice Schutter:** Absolutely.

**Sara Avery:** Yeah, so I think that's what led me to reach out through our friend.

**sara - in a fat body**

**Sara Avery:** I really lived my whole life in a fat body. And so, you know, I was kind of thinking through this before [00:30:00] we were going to talk and. And I was realizing this is really is my whole life experience.

I think I had a pretty typical experience as a fat kid. I was bullied in school, although they called it teasing back in that day and nobody was making any school policies against it. It was just the way it was. And so there was a kid in my elementary school who, all the way through elementary school, called me the 10,000 pound bowling ball. And in sixth grade, when he was going to sign my autograph book, he sort of sheepishly said, "can I sign this to the 10,000 pound bowling ball?" And I was like, yeah, I guess, you know, okay.

And then, my very first day of junior high, my mom had made this dress that I loved. It was like a sundress with like spaghetti straps. It was pretty. It was blue and white. I had a ruffle. I liked it a lot until that day. Because first day of junior high, I kept getting asked if I was pregnant.

And that's a, [00:31:00] that's a typical thing. And it's kind of odd. I don't think I look pregnant. I carry my weight really low below my waist. So it's, it's just, you know, you look at a fat kid and, and that's what you think if you're another kid and you can have some leverage, right? And so, like many kids, I was sent to the school nurse all the way through elementary school to be weighed. I'm sure there were reports going home about my weight. I don't know what more monitoring was happening that I didn't know.

Um, my grandmother sent me a military calisthenics book when I was like five or six years old. Which just seems so weird to me when I think about it.

Um, and yet the more normal things that I was doing, I was in ballet class when I was really young at the Y. Like, I don't know, four or five years old, I remember. And, and I also was briefly learning how to ride a bike. And unfortunately, both of those things got cut short because my mom, I think, had undiagnosed mental illness. And really both of those

[00:32:00] things were cut short via her own limitations. And so, I never got to do those sort of normal things in terms of just activity as a kid.

And I can remember my mom screaming at my babysitter once for giving me ice cream. Screaming that it was going to kill me like it killed my diabetic father. Uh, my dad died when I was three and a half of kidney failure. And so, you know, I'm this little kid, and my mom's screaming at my babysitter about ice cream.

So the scrutiny and the sense that there was something wrong with food for me was always there. I never really had a day before I remember that kind of thing. Although my first formal diets were probably in high school. None of them ever worked for me. I think I gained weight on Weight Watchers. I was doing it strictly, and I gained weight.

So, um, yeah, I was in school and on these diets and, you [00:33:00] know. And I think that's pretty typical, too.

**break**

**Candice Schutter:** You just mentioned your volunteer work. What are you working on and focusing on in your activism?

**Sara Avery:** So I volunteer with the Friends Committee on National Legislation. FCNL, this Quaker lobby, works broadly on issues of peace, justice, environment, and Native American affairs. But, um, the part of FCNL's grassroots that I'm part of largely works on foreign policy. And so, for the last 11 years or so, I've been working on various, kind of, facets of foreign policy. And, um, the fact that we are by far the world's largest military. And so that I think gives us as American citizens an outsized ability to have influence over what's happening in the world. And so, right now, my main focus is two things. One, our advocacy [00:34:00] teams in FCNL are working on reining in the Pentagon budget this year. And so I'm working on that. And then I'm also working separately on getting a ceasefire in Gaza.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. Yeah. Thank you for that.

**Sara Avery:** Yeah, well, um, it is absolutely my privilege. Because, again, here I am sitting in a nice, comfy home office and, um, there are people who are really, really suffering. And so if I can do anything to stop that, I will. And to, to make sure that, you know, all people in the region get to live in peace. That's the goal, right?

**Candice Schutter:** Absolutely.

**sara - overlap**

**Candice Schutter:** You said that It's important to you to be an ally in the work that you do. How does the journey that you've had in this culture and the challenges that you face. How has it shaped the advocacy and activist work that you do?

**Sara Avery:** Well, you know, I think what having been in [00:35:00] this body and in a marginalized community, although not really realizing that, has done for me is it's given me a little sliver of a window into what other people, Black, Indigenous, other people of color, people in war zones, people in really, truly rough situations have to deal with at a much higher level than I do. And so, I think that I just always have had heart for people who are struggling and people who are suffering.

And, you know, I mean, I think childhood trauma does that, too. You know, I just, um, feel like if there's something I can do for people, I should do it. So I think that's, that's really the connection there for me.

**Candice Schutter:** As somebody who's experienced a marginalization in the culture, what do you need most from allies? This word ally is thrown around a lot and I think a lot of times [00:36:00] it's more of an ideological stance. Like I'm an ally. I'm an ally in the sense that I agree that this shouldn't be happening.

But what is allyship really look like when it comes to supporting folks?

**Sara Avery:** I mean, I know there's some folks who have really specific suggestions that are really granular. Um, so, there's that. But I think the bigger picture thing for me, because I'm interested in the bigger picture is that we just, you know, this, this idea that, I don't know, I'm trying to figure out how to put it. That the only way to have any worth is to look a certain way, is the thing we have to start getting away from. And I, I think that, you know, Sonya Renee Taylor. I know you mentioned her, has a really wonderful framework for that. This idea of this ladder of bodily hierarchy and the white men are on the top and then white thin women are, you know, just [00:37:00] below. And then everybody is just trying to climb that ladder, right?

And I think that the best description, I heard an interview with her, in which she said that the ladder is made of our shame, the ladder is made of.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Sara Avery:** Feeling that we are not good enough, that there's something wrong with us. And that we have to, the only way that we can, you know, in essence, make ourselves matter, which I see as the most fundamental human need we have is to, is to matter. Then the only way to climb the ladder is to make ourselves look better. Is to try and fit as close as we can to the image at the, at the top of the ladder.

And, there's a podcast called I Weigh, W E I G H, with the actress Jameela Jamil. And at the end, at least of some of her episodes, she asks the guest what they [00:38:00] weigh. Meaning, how do you gauge your impact in the world? People answer, like, I weigh myself in kindness or in my advocacy for immigrants, or this is how I weigh myself.

And so, you know, that's, I think, I think we have to all find a way to get to that place for ourselves. And it's easier said than done. So whatever pathway it takes for people to do that, I think that's the thing that will allow the ladder of bodily hierarchy to start to crumble. When

we're not all just obsessed and in a pit of despair or policing someone else, because we feel like if they exist, there's a danger I could look like them.

All of that just, that needs to stop, I think.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Sara Avery:** My [00:39:00] comfort being in this body really coming to a full acceptance. And then really understanding what my body is here for. My body is not here to be seen. It's not here to be a pedestal, on a magazine cover, on anything. My body is here for me to be able to get stuff done, to be able to do my work, to be able to do my advocacy, to be able to go hike on a trail in Colorado, because I'm so privileged to live in Colorado. That is what my body is here for.

And I am truly deeply grateful to my body for everything it does for me. If you told me I would get to that place, I would not have believed you. So, yeah.

I love that.

**NOA**

**Candice Schutter:** Alright, next up, Deconstructing Dogma [00:40:00] #55. This hour and 45 minute deep-dive episode received a lot of engagement and appreciation over on Patreon.

Noa Kadman's story has been described as, *a self-aware and compelling share*. And one listener writes, *This interview from both of you is gold. It's going to stay with me and I intend to listen again*.

It's an episode entitled, *'Spiritual' Self-Sacrifice: A Cautionary Tale & Cult-Hopping Heads Up*.

Before we get into the conversation, I'm going to share a little bit from the intro to this episode, because it's such an important takeaway when it comes to this series.

**noa - my intro**

**Candice Schutter:** So I just want to underscore before I share with you today's bonus conversation, just a reminder that when we walk away from culty wellness spaces, we're often left with a hunger. A hunger that was being filled in said community. And in our desire to fill the [00:41:00] void that is left behind and in a response to our grief, we can reach for something other-than. We can, we can look for a new community and a new practice, a new experience to ground ourselves in. And there's nothing wrong with that, of course.



But oftentimes when we've had an experience in a high-demand environment, we walk away and we think, well, as long as I steer clear of power-tripping personalities and quote unquote gurus with ulterior motives, then I'm in the clear.

And this is certainly solid advice. But if you've been listening in on the 'cult'ure series you know that the dynamics that create these problematic experiences, they go much, much deeper than that.

And so rather than focusing so much on the individuals at the center of the leadership narratives, I just want to remind us all to just be super conscientious about how easy it is [00:42:00] to, for example, romanticize ancient healing traditions. Especially those that come from cultures other than our own. It's very easy to think of the exotic and to pedestalize it in a way. And just a reminder that, historically, all across the world, shady power structures have been operating for centuries. That no spirituality or religion that has been created by humans has been done so in a vacuum. And that things like thought-terminating cliches and spiritual bypassing and overt coercion, as well as soft power manipulations, the patriarchy and these capital C cult dynamics of supremacy and what have you, they're also baked into the cake of whatever practice we're learning about.

And so despite the best intentions of those leading, it's very possible, and you might even say statistically probable, that groups are going to employ the [00:43:00] same strategies that have been passed down for millennia. It's important to not gloss over and idealize the context in which they were born.

And cult dynamics, in the way that we define them in this series, the more nuanced definitions where we look at the undercurrents that are guiding our interpersonal relationships, these dynamics have been internalized every damn where. And so, the reason I mentioned this is because I really relate to the story that you're about to hear today that reminds us that it's not enough to just walk away from this group or that group. And it's not enough to trust in people's good intentions. Whether we are trusting ourselves as a facilitator in terms of what we're creating next or trusting someone else to lead us.

Because we all must take time to unlearn, and learn how to do different and better, when it comes to this stuff. Because if we don't, we unfortunately and inadvertently end up passing along similar harms that we ourselves [00:44:00] experienced.

Today's episode is really an illustration of what can happen when hyper-spiritual ideals wed us to impossible or unrealistic standards that sideline our individual needs for the sake of quote unquote, the work. And in some cases, ask us to invest our hard-earned money or countless hours of free labor in a utopian vision that, in the end, benefits mostly if not only, those at the top who are calling the shots. Folks who mean well, but are very often so high on their own supply, that they can't even see the harm that results from their good intentions.

**Candice Schutter:** And it is once again with deep compassion, and honesty, that we speak openly about an experience involving former colleagues at the Org. An after the Org story that went awry. May we all learn from these experiences and strive to do better.

Now let's hear from Noa.

[00:45:00]

### noa - cautionary

**Noa Kadman:** What I wanna share is also a cautionary tale. Um because seeing all the patterns that happened and were repeated and how everybody isolated, didn't even know that the same thing was happening. Like it's a, it's an MO, systematic.

So, um, I was like, this is amazing how even if it's a new Org, the behavior is the same slash even worse. Uh, so that's why I really wanted to come on. And, um, it's also like a shout out to those who did step out looking for greener pastures.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Noa Kadman:** That, you know, you still have to have your antennas out. And double check that you're not just, uh, falling into another.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Noa Kadman:** Another culty Org.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah, yeah.

### noa - different & good

**Noa Kadman:** [00:46:00] So that's when I met them for the first time. A charming, charismatic couple. And everything was very, very hyper spiritual. And really enjoyed the retreat. Just could feel that there's something else in their energy and their approach.

And I really had no awareness of the inner works of the Org operations. I think the first time I heard any complaints about that, about how the leaders of the Org operate was actually through them. They were very unhappy about how they were remunerated. And they, they really talked about it a lot. And I was actually surprised. Because I was so naive and starry-eyed. And I only cared about the practice and I, I was surprised that the trainers of the Org would be so, uh, critical of the organization.

**Candice Schutter:** So at this [00:47:00] point though, they were still facilitating Org trainings, right? So they're still involved, but being vocal about the ways it's not working for them.

**Noa Kadman:** Yes.

**Candice Schutter:** So you kind of encountered them just as they were in that cognitive dissonant phase of still doing the work, but also maybe looking for a way out, it sounds like.

**Noa Kadman:** Yeah. So, you know, there were like camps in the Org of some people had affinity to Raul and some had affinity to Marissa. So they were like in the Raul camp. And he had left already, so, uh, I think that was also part of uh, you know, that they were unhappy about that, about changes happening.

But they were still, uh, involved. And people who followed them were very much loyal to their style of teaching. And to the special energy that they brought, which was really the spiritual yogic, non-capitalist [00:48:00] energy.

They really emphasized that they are not taking the things that they viewed as negative from all the practices that they, uh, trained in or taught. And that this is an opportunity to create something from scratch where they only choose the best of all things. And, and it, it seemed very sincere and genuine that it was not about the money.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. Well, it sounds like they were really very deliberately setting out to learn from their prior experiences and to create something different. It seems like that was truly their genuine intention and aim.

**Noa Kadman:** very, It was very authentic and they were really trying to. Uh, I, I mean this was the reason many of us came to them, we were looking for a better community and organization. And this, it seemed like this is it! You know, it was a winner.

#### **break - seva stars**

**Noa Kadman:** So I came back from Bali, and I was like on fire again and motivated. I [00:49:00] taught both practices in my studio. And then I signed up immediately for the next two trainings because I was totally in. And, again, I made a lot of wonderful friends. Most of them former or current Org practitioners.

And at that point, there was already the practice of, uh, SevaStars in the trainings themselves. SevaStars meaning... Seva in Sanskrit relates to being of service. So basically it's like an assistant. But they really emphasize that you're a helper, but the intention has to be very pure of being of service to everybody in the training and to them. And it was discussed a lot.

And, uh, so one of the guys from my first training, he was already like a SevaStar, which was like, above, like a higher level because he already completed the whole thing.

**Candice Schutter:** So once he completed the process, then he was able to, and I'm just gonna use the word that it is, *volunteer* [00:50:00] to work for them. Not to say that there isn't such a thing as a reason for selfless service. However, how these things get repackaged in these environments when it is part of the dogma that it's like the highest level of dharma to do seva service. And how that can be very easily leveraged.

And, and also like, attaching it to the word star. Like that's just a, sort of a fascination for me in terms of the psychology of what that communicates, 'cause it's like you've been chosen to volunteer. And it's a great honor. And, and as somebody who's studied a lot of cults now, this

is so common. They don't use that language, but it's so, so, so common. It's an honor to serve the leaders.

They didn't invent this idea. It's, it goes very far back. That's what they learned from their teachers. You know what I mean? Like, So it's just something, I just think it's worth highlighting here.

**Noa Kadman:** That's such a good point. And, and also, the SevaStar has a little, um, [00:51:00] pin with the symbol of the practice, which signals to the other people that this is your SevaStar. And they get a special bracelet at the end, to show that they are, you know.

So I decided, okay, this is my path. And I, I said to them while I was in the training, I said, okay, what do I have to do to become a trainer?

**Candice Schutter:** If you listen in you'll hear how Noa devoted many years, thousands of dollars, and countless hours and it landed her in a Zoom call for an example of spiritual gaslighting that truly boggles the mind.

Here's a quick taste.

### **break - gaslighting**

**Noa Kadman:** And that was a moment where my brain short-circuited.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-Hmm.

**Noa Kadman:** I'd never felt anything like it. It was like I lost touch with reality. It was so confusing. And I just went into shock. I couldn't speak.

I never really [00:52:00] understood somatically what gaslighting is, but now I know.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Noa Kadman:** It's a real thing. It was a rupture in reality. And I couldn't make sense of it. And she continued, she continued speaking. I remember I went into this daze.

And then we signed out with another spiritual Om.

And my friend from, uh, Hungary, she starts crying, crying. And she says, I can't believe this happened to me. It's like my relationships with men that they take advantage of me. And I'm so naive, and I put so much energy into this practice.

You know, and I was heartbroken, because she's a single mom. And the fact that she took it upon herself and felt that she was a failure with her relationships with humans. It triggered this reaction. And I was, I, I told her, no, you know what? It's not you. It's not you.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right.

**Noa Kadman:** This is 100% them. [00:53:00] And don't even go there, you know? But it was heartbreaking for me. It was just crushing.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Noa Kadman:** Yeah. Be careful. That's what I'm saying. Be careful.

**Candice Schutter:** Okay, one final preview. This one's from a solo episode that I released on March 14th as part of a new, unscripted Patreon solo series that I call *Subject to Change*.

The episode is entitled: *The Bully Pulpit*. It's a behind the scenes update and an impromptu riff on somewhat painful realizations I've been having around what it really means to blow the whistle, stand up to bullies, and take on psychosocial systems that reward silence and misinformation.

And it's really the perfect way to wrap this sample, because it points directly at where we're going to be heading as the series [00:54:00] continues in the coming weeks and months.

## **BULLIES**

**Candice Schutter:** As promised, today I'm coming to you really, sort of rough around the edges in terms of what I want to say. All that I've been grappling with over the last few weeks. And it's so muchness. There's just so much muchness. That I feel like I just had to sit down and push record today, even though I'm not really sure exactly where this is going to go. And I do have some specific topics I want to touch on to bring you up to speed with what's happening, what's been happening behind the scenes.

You may notice that I haven't been on the main feed for almost five, six weeks now. Part of that is just the natural flow of things. You know I like to take long breaks from time to time.

But another big part of that is because we released an episode on Patreon, which was a two-hour dialogue that Tracy and I had where we really [00:55:00] spoke off the cuff. And, we received some backlash, which I've spoken to already a little bit here in this portal. And I want to speak, I want to give you a little bit more information about that. Not to go into the, the narrative around what went down. But just to say that the backlash that we got is part of what I've been processing. This larger thematic that puts the cult in culture wherein people leverage their influence or their income or their position of power to silence others. This sort of bullying behavior where, *if you don't zip it, then I will crush you*. Essentially.

I grew up in a very unsafe environment. And so, I sought out wellness spaces that offered the [00:56:00] promise and the solace of safety. And then I was re-traumatized in those

environments. And then I'm stepping into the real world, and I'm realizing like, everywhere exists the threat of harm. And that what we're doing here is not trying to create a world where harm is something that never happens. But trying to normalize the fact that we experience it, and that we're not ever going to reach some superhuman capacity where we don't experience it. And so we need to talk about it. And we need to grapple with the feelings that we have around it. And we need to be able to be visible in that.

But that visibility is challenged by structures that reward silence. They reward it in terms of belonging, like, keep it zipped and you can stay in this group. They reward it in terms of, when you become a whistleblower, raising my hand, there are channels through which people with enough privilege, power, and [00:57:00] money can put you through the ringer. And that's just the truth of the matter. And we see this in cult doc after cult doc after cult doc.

When threatened people in positions of influence will sue the people who are speaking out. And they have mechanisms that support this. And this was one of the sort of sobering things, as you do research into this stuff. It's like, NDA agreements that people can be forced to sign or "invited" to sign, coerced into signing. Um, non-disparagement clauses, such as the one that exists in the Org teaching contract. Which as I understand it, once you're no longer a teacher, it doesn't apply. But this idea that you can build in a structure so that people can't actually use their voices.

There are many ways in which the mechanisms of control show up in our culture. And just because something is legal, [00:58:00] that doesn't necessarily mean that it's right. I mean shit, look at colonialism. Look at the civil rights movement and the laws that, that had to be disbanded. Laws are created by humans with power agendas. And right now we see the right-wing movement trying to institute laws that basically reinforce these cultic dynamics and these capital-c cult systems. And influencing the masses in such a way that they're actually advocating for the subjugation of people around them, and in some cases themselves. I mean, it's, it's wild. And we're going to go way into this when Nikki G comes back onto the pod.

But speaking of Nikki G actually, when we had our meeting with the lawyer, it just so happened that I had a planning meeting with Nikki right after the call with the lawyer. And when I got on the call with her, she knew that, that we had been consulting with a lawyer. [00:59:00] And so she was offering her empathy. And I was sharing just how frustrating it is to stand up to bullies and then know that they have these mechanisms that they can use to, to try to silence through legal means and whatnot.

In that moment, she just looked at me through the Zoom screen, locked eyes with me and said: *"You know, Candice, that in and of itself is a form of spiritual abuse."*

And that really landed for me. Yeah. It was like, I knew it. But it just landed on this whole other level. Stripping it down to its bones. It's the same sort of trauma. Power being flexed. But in this case, I'm in a different place because one, I'm no longer in the fold, and so I'm not under the spell of the person flexing the power. But also, I have a [01:00:00] platform. Privilege, for sure. And a small amount of influence that I can leverage to stand tall and pushback.

And that's kind of the place I'm landing in. But it's taken me a few weeks to kind of recover.

The bully pulpit is something we see everywhere right now. The most glaring example being Donald Trump. And the power that he has over the cult of Trump, which is a very real cultic phenomenon. There's no question in my mind about that.

**break**

**Candice Schutter:** I've been really thinking about some topics that I want to touch upon that are *hot* button topics where as soon as the subject is even broached, it's like folks are on guard, myself included. It's like, where are you going to land on this? Like what side are you on? Or how do you see this? And what pile of shit are you going to step in? And what button are you going to push? And how are you going to get [01:01:00] canceled? And by who?

Like, those sorts of topics. We have so many of them. And I might get my feelings hurt. Or things might get difficult for me. There might be a tension that emerges, which again, connects to the flying monkeys episode, our willingness to stand in that positive tension, like MLK talked about, we have to be willing to go there. And at the same time, when we're in a culture that is so quick to demonize and sort us into culture war categories, it's no wonder that we fall silent. Right?

So it's, it's both and.

We have to do the work to be able to stand in that tension. But we also don't need it to be this like vitriol, divided, cultic dynamic where we can't even actually have the conversation because it's already been decided who we are based on one, two, or three comments that we make. Right.

So it's, it's a clusterfuck. It's, it's a real mess [01:02:00] and I want to start picking it apart.

**Candice Schutter:** And this is where I have to reference the work of Naomi Klein. This book, *Doppelganger: A Trip Into The Mirror World*, is fan freaking tastic in terms of describing all of this. Especially if you want to understand the political landscape that we are operating in right now.

I'm going to read this quote from her book. I think it's beautifully said.

She writes:

*"When looking at the mirror world, it can seem obvious that millions of people have given themselves over to fantasy, to make believe, to play acting. The trickier thing, the uncanny thing, really, is that that's what they see when they look at us. The point is, that on either side of the reflective glass, we're not having disagreements about differing interpretations of reality. We're having disagreements about who is in reality [01:03:00] and who is in a simulation."*



So how do you have a healthy debate and disagreement when the default position is 'those people over there, they have reality wrong.' And then the people over there saying, 'well, you people over here, you have reality wrong.'

And we're saying, 'you're functioning in indoctrination in these, you know, old paradigm systems and this fascist protocol.' And then on another side, they're saying 'you're being indoctrinated into the cult of anti-racism and the cult of LGBTQ+.'

Like, they're basically flipping the narrative and taking the very things, the tools of social justice, appropriating them and making themselves the victim. Which episode 59, right, victim shaming. And then this reversing of the narrative of oppression. This sort of social justice cosplay that happens where, as Naomi Klein describes it in her [01:04:00] book, folks are "appropriating the language of the civil rights movement." She writes:

"It is as if by absorbing the language and postures of the oppressed, the diagonalists,"

Which diagonalists, basically, are folks who were seemingly left-leaning, on the surface progressive, but are actually reinforcing far-right and fascist ideas.

Um, yeah, so.

*"It is as if by absorbing the language and postures of the oppressed, the diagonalists are attempting to outrun the long shadow of the past. Including the fact that our young countries are built on top of burned villages and graveyards, whose spirits have never been put to rest."*

She continues.

*"The distraction of casting themselves as cosmic victims of every crime against humanity of the past 500 years combined. This might explain why the conspiratorial claims in the mirror world so often seem to contradict one another. For this new political configuration, [01:05:00] convincing people of their unproven theories was never really the point. It was only ever a tool. The point, consciously or not, is to foster denial and avoidance. The point is not to have to do the hard and uncomfortable things in the face of hard and uncomfortable realities."*

And then finally, she says:

*"Denial needs narratives and cover stories. And that's what conspiracy culture is providing."*

That's where cognitive dissonance goes. It rewrites the narrative. It flips it. Perpetrators become victims, and so on. And so it continues.

And one of the things that I love that Klein really emphasizes is that, when it comes to the way this mirror world functions. She's speaking about conspiracy theorists when she says this, but ultimately it sort of applies to a lot of these situations we find ourselves in where we

feel like, yeah, that's true, but it's not. Is [01:06:00] that she says conspiracists often get the feelings right, but the facts wrong.

**break**

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

And so, we're entering into the messy, messy domain, outside of the black-and-white wellness world that I was brought up in.

It's anxiety inducing. But it's worth it. Because it's nothing compared to the anxiety and terror that so many people feel because we're unwilling to do this, individually and collectively.

So, I'm here for it.

**END**

**Candice Schutter:** Thanks for listening. And remember you can listen to the full-length episodes over at [patreon.com/thedeeperpulse](https://patreon.com/thedeeperpulse).

And if you have thoughts, or even a story you'd like to share with me over on Patreon, you can message me at [thedeeperpulse](https://patreon.com/thedeeperpulse). [01:07:00] Thanks so much for tuning in and I'll see you back here soon. Bye for now.