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Cult Recovery: A Clinician's Guide to Working With Former Members and Family

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Cult Recovery: A Clinician's Guide to Working With Former Members and Family

Edited by Lorna Goldberg, William Goldberg, Rosanne Henry, and Michael Langone

Bonita Springs, FL: International Cultic Studies Association. 2017. ISBN-10: 0931337097; ISBN-13: 978-0931337093 (paperback). 500 pages. 79.00 (Amazon.com).

Reviewed by Robin Boyle

This timely collection of essays provides an overview of current approaches to understanding and treating cultic trauma. It is a clinical book, yet eminently readable and definitely appropriate for people who have experienced cultic abuse, their families and friends, researchers, scholars, and the public in general. This book is a remarkable compilation of models and therapy strategies. Drawing upon the contributors' years of experience in working directly with those who were harmed by cults, this resource provides new developments in the counseling and research field.

When the topic of cults comes up in conversation among those outside of a group, a question often asked is whether cults still exist. Michael Langone's 2005 survey explains that not only are cults still in existence, but the average length of one's stay in a cult has more than doubled: In the 1970s, the average term was 2.7 years, in contrast with the more recent statistic of 6.7 years. Moreover, the average age of the cult member went from 21 years (college age) to older—24.8 years. And more so than when they were younger, these older former members tend to seek help independently of their families doing so. That's not to say that family members don't seek help, as well.

The advent of children being born to cult members necessitated new discoveries about different counseling strategies. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s mostly young adults were recruited, fast forward to the year 2000, when those born into the cults now began seeking treatment themselves. This group is sometimes referred to as *second-generation adults (SGAs)*, although it has become apparent that even this term is not fully representative because today there are people whose cultic background extends for multiple generations. People born or raised in cults have personalities shaped within a controlled and often destructive environment. They differ from those recruited as young adults who had a former identity, personality, and sense of family/friends outside of the group. As those who sought treatment have changed, so has the therapy.

The chapters in *Cult Recovery: A Clinician's Guide...* are divided into five sections, beginning with Helping Families Cope with Loved Ones' Cult Membership. Authors introduce useful structures, such as Lorna and William Goldberg's phases of familial reactions: ignorance or denial, recognition, exploration, and action. William Goldberg discusses helping family members

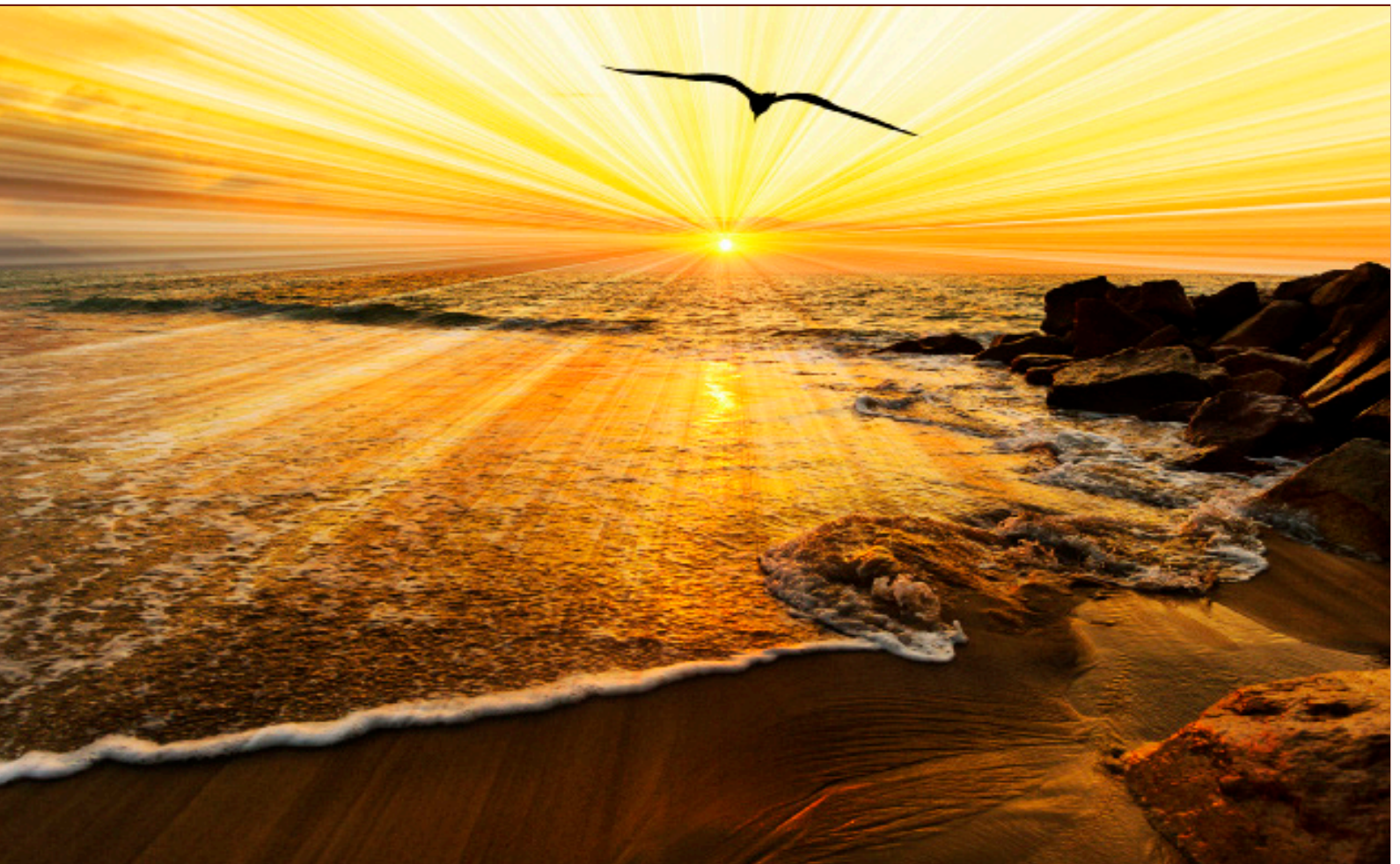
understand and cope with a loved one's involvement in what appears to be a problematic group (Chapter 1). He provides a helpful explanation of what exit counseling and intervention mean today: "...a successful intervention with a cult counselor will only give the cult member the opportunity to make an informed choice of whether to stay in the cult or leave" (p. 14). Another approach is appropriate when loved ones' exiting a group seems unlikely. Then, as Patricia Millar and Cristina Caparesi explain, mediating disputes among family members within and outside the group using a relational conflict-resolution model may be an option (Chapter 2). Finally, Carol

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Giambalvo traces the history and discusses different types of exit counseling and those who have provided it, explaining that the goal is for members to examine their commitment to the group (Chapter 3).

The second set of chapters pertains to Helping Former Members—Individual Psychotherapy. Experienced therapists bring to light their successful, yet continually evolving, theories of treating those who have suffered from trauma and cult experiences. Explored are treatment for trauma victims (Shelly Rosen, Chapter 4); executive-functioning enhancement techniques (Steve K. D. Eichel, Chapter 5); attachment theory (Rosanne Henry, Chapter 6); therapeutic approaches (Leona Furnari, Chapter 7, and Madeleine L. Tobias, Chapter 8); therapy for first-generation former members (Doni Whitsett, Chapter 9); the role of self-care (Linda Dubrow-Marshall and Rod Dubrow-Marshall, Chapter 10); and techniques for helping first-generation parents and second-generation children (Lorna Goldberg, Chapter 11). These chapters include case examples, which are very useful, particularly for a reader who might not be familiar with the theories presented.

The third section covers Support Groups. Here, the Goldbergs explain that support groups are valuable for helping former members deal with harms they may have experienced within their cultic groups, unresolved feelings and symptoms, and the many challenges they encounter in their postcult lives (Chapter 12). Patrick J. Knapp details a model of the faith-based approach to support groups (Chapter 13).



Recovery Workshops, Intensive Programs, and Residential Treatment are the topics of section 4. These options are “more time limited, focused, and didactic” than the support groups described earlier in the book (p. 299). Models for these programs are described, such as the Colorado Model Recovery Workshop (Carol Giambalvo and Nancy Miquelon, Chapter 14) and the Wellspring program (Donna Adams-Weiss, Ron Burks, Greg Sammons, and Lois Svoboda, Chapter 15). “...Time Away for Postcult Counseling” (Gillie Jenkinson, Chapter 16) and “Residential Treatment Modality for Survivors” (Robert Pardon and Judy Pardon, Chapter 17) are additional topics of chapters in this section.

The final section of this collection pertains to Special Issues and Research. Daniel Shaw focuses on the personality of the narcissist (Chapter 18). Lois Kendall contributes two chapters—one on “How to Approach Cultic Studies Research” (Chapter 19) and the other on “What the Research Tells Clinicians...” (Chapter 20). At the end of the book, Kristine Langone provides a comprehensive and useful bibliography of related papers and books.

In summary, *Cult Recovery: A Clinician's Guide...* is a significant contribution to our collective understanding of counseling cult members, former cult members, and their families. It is understandable to lay persons and offers a variety of insights and models. Most cult members eventually leave their groups, and this book summarizes what experts have learned about treating these former members and their families. This book should serve as useful resource for years to come. ■

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About the Author

Robin Boyle, JD, Professor of Legal Writing at St. John's University School of Law, lectures on topics concerning cults and the law. Her articles include “Staying Safe: Observing Warning Signs of a Dangerous Liaison,” coauthored with Andrea Laisure (*ICSA Today*, volume 8, no. 3, 2017); “Employing Trafficking Laws to Capture Elusive Leaders of Destructive Cults” (*Oregon Review of International Law*, 2016); “Current Status of Federal Law Concerning Violent Crimes Against Women and Children: Implications for Cult Victims” (*Cultic Studies Review*, 2002); “How Children in Cults May Use Emancipation Laws to Free Themselves” (*Cultic Studies Journal*, 1999); and “Women, the Law, and Cults: Three Avenues of Legal Recourse—New Rape Laws, Violence Against Women Act, and Antistalking Laws” (*Cultic Studies Journal*, 1998). In 2005, she received the Faculty Outstanding Achievement award from the President of St. John's University, and she is on the Editorial Board of *ICSA's International Journal of Cultic Studies*. ■