

"*Escaping Utopia* is a must read book for everyone concerned about the real nature of human nature. Authors Lalich and McLaren do a brilliant job in revealing the various psycho-social mechanisms by which cults attract, deceive and bind recruits into their 'families,' at great personal costs—and how to help them exit."

Philip Zimbardo, Professor Emeritus, Stanford University

"This is a unique and valuable book. The authors have taken a much-neglected subject: the fate of children growing up in cults who leave knowing little or nothing of the world outside their cult's boundaries. The book is largely based on interviews with 65 of these former cult members from a wide variety of different types of cults. But the material is thematically unified by the authors' profound theoretical understanding of cult dynamics gained through many decades of studying cults from both inside and out. This accessible and nuanced account of a controversial subject will be the standard reference on its subject for many years to come."

Benjamin Zablocki, Professor Emeritus, Department of Sociology, Rutgers University

Actor Glenn Close. Humorist Garrison Keillor. Musician Lisa Marie Presley. Actor Leah Remini. Singer Toni Braxton. The late actor River Phoenix. Each of these well-known people has more than fame in common; each was born or raised in a cult.

Many of us think of cults as bizarre groups that only strange people inhabit, but in truth, cults are not unusual at all—and the social pressures and controlling structures that create cults exist (to some degree) in every human relationship and every human group. Cult behavior is human behavior—and by studying cults, we can learn remarkably useful things about the world and our place in it.

In *Escaping Utopia*, Janja Lalich and Karla McLaren (both cult survivors) explore the life stories of sixty-five people who were born in or grew up in thirty-nine different cults spanning more than a dozen countries. This original research explores fundamental questions about human nature, human development, group dynamics, abuse and control, and triumphs of the human spirit in the face of extended suffering.

The lessons we can learn from these cult survivors can inform and protect each of us—so that cultic groups cannot gain influence over us or our loved ones.

Janja Lalich is a researcher, author, and educator specializing in self-sealing systems (cults, terrorist groups, extremist groups), with a focus on indoctrination and methods of influence and control. She is Professor Emerita of Sociology at California State University, Chico, and has studied the social psychology of exploitative groups and relationships for over thirty years.

Karla McLaren is an award-winning author and social science researcher who grew up in a New Age healing cult. Her research focuses on emotions, empathy, autism and neurodiversity, social-emotional learning, within-group and inter-group dynamics, agnotology, and influence techniques.

SOCIOLOGY / SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Cover image: © Natureworks

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Taylor & Francis Group
www.routledge.com

Routledge titles are available as eBook editions in a range of digital formats

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ISBN 978-1-138-23974-6



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ESCAPING UTOPIA

Janja Lalich and Karla McLaren

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ESCAPING UTOPIA

Growing Up in a Cult, Getting Out,
and Starting Over

Janja Lalich and Karla McLaren

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