

## ★ **Don't Call It a Cult: The Shocking Story of Keith Raniere and the Women of NXIVM**

**Sarah Berman**

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Journalist Sarah Berman brings her signature gimlet eye and impeccable reporting to the story of the NXIVM women in *Don't Call It a Cult*, a chilling true crime account.

Convicted in 2019 of federal crimes including sex trafficking, sexual exploitation of a child, and conspiracy to commit forced labor, Keith Raniere's shocking abuses of the women who devoted themselves to him made headlines. Sensational stories exposed the links between the Seagrams heirs, a *Smallville* actress, and a toxic "life coaching" program that drained millions of dollars from its victims.

Tabloids emphasized Raniere's manipulation of the women in his thrall, and the degree to which they served him—including consenting to being branded with his signature by a doctor using a cauterizing iron. Berman's account centers the voices of the women who Raniere enslaved, allowing them to explain for themselves why they adored him.

The book is a nuanced story that strays into big questions. Berman interprets Raniere's downfall as "a Rorschach test for what we see wrong with the world: the right of the political spectrum sees liberalism run amok, the worst example of moral breakdown among the monied elite; the left sees textbook toxic masculinity blown up to epic criminal proportions." His power was built over time, by exploiting cultural norms and desires and preying on wealthy white or white-passing women who were accustomed to private schools and country clubs, where subjugation was an abstraction more than a lived reality. Unprepared and vulnerable, these women recruited one another into Raniere's inner circle. The book explores the subtle power exchanges and struggles within the group; it uses victims' stories to explain how each person became enmeshed in NXIVM.

*Don't Call It a Cult* is the nightmarish, unflinching true story of the women who survived NXIVM—and the women who didn't.

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