

Yearning to Belong: Discovering a New Religious Movement, by John Paul Healy. Ashgate Publishing, Ashgate New Religions Series, 2010. \$99.95. ISBN 978-1-4094-1941-9 (hardcover).

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Sometimes, though not always, an insider perspective on—and a close familiarity with—a new religious movement can be a boon in an academic context. In his 2010 monograph on the Siddha Yoga movement John Paul Healy succeeds in maintaining a fine balance, since his own previous involvement with the movement, rather than coming across as apologetic, informs and contextualizes his research. Healy's book is divided into twelve chapters and two main parts. The introductory section provides the preface to the study in terms of a brief introduction to Indian-oriented guru movements in the West, some historical contextualization of the Siddha Yoga movement, and some background regarding the author's involvement with the movement.

The first section (Chapters 2-5; *Guru-disciple Yoga Practice, The Study of Religious Activity, Brainwashing and the Helping Profession and The Study*) covers the theoretical and methodical aspects of the research process. Here Healy presents the various themes within his study, which serve the purpose of conceptualization, aspects of what he names guru-disciple yoga practice, schisms within the movement, and the positioning of the study within a broader framework of sociological studies of new religious movements (NRMs). Conversion to NRMs (and to Siddha Yoga in particular) is an overarching theme in this book and is dealt with throughout the monograph, while the first part also covers themes like the brainwashing debate from various perspectives. However, I find the most interesting part of this section to be chapter 5, where the author presents the research process and his own positioning and experiences. Here the author explains the study as a "... qualitative exploration of NRM involvement [...] informed by ethnographic fieldwork, grounded theory and phenomenology" (47), also alluding to the interactionalism of constructivist theory as opposed to a positivist approach. Further, Healy explains his primary and secondary motives for this study, namely informing what he calls the helping professions – offering these a new perspective on 'cult involvement', and also adding to the academic knowledge

of NRMs and Siddha Yoga. In this chapter the author lists the key points and research questions that have guided his research and vividly describes the many aspects of a mixed methods research process. This chapter in particular is one of the reasons I believe this book would be useful in graduate courses, as it can be seen to pedagogically present a form of methodical “blueprint” that is engaging yet understandable, and also replicable for studying many other forms of religious movements.

Healy’s grasp of pedagogy is also evident in the remainder of the monograph. He explains concepts and theories thoroughly, and he is adamant in contextualizing his findings within the larger field of NRM studies. On the downside his meticulousness may cause some, especially experienced readers, to feel that the book may be slow reading at times. However, Healy is doing inexperienced readers a favor.

Chapters 6 to 12 (Discovering a Guru-disciple Yoga Practice, Experiencing Siddha Yoga Life, Spiritual Life: ‘Sadhana’, Movement away from Siddha Yoga, Life After Siddha Yoga, The Varieties of Religious Experience and Conclusion) explore various aspects of life before, during and after involvement with the NRM. Especially notable is how much Healy allows his respondents to speak for themselves in this book; the quotes from the interviews are often extensive, and (probably due to his methodological soundness) always to the point. Regarding for example conversion to the movement the author makes an important distinction between “active” and “accidental” seekers, while noting (as can be found in almost all literature on religious conversion) the importance of a network of family and friends in the process of affiliation to a movement. The interviewees reflect on their life within the movement, either in the early days when some of the respondents were much involved in developing the movement, not unlike what Healy deems any “grassroots” organization. Other respondents became involved after the movement had become organized and popular, and the author highlights the different experiences various forms and degrees of involvement did give Muktananda devotees. Always aware of the complexity and variety of respondents’ religious experiences, Healy presents their views on their guru, his importance and their connection to him. The devotees also speak of their spiritual experiences in the movement, such as receiving Shaktipat (a form of grace), also known as the Kundalini awakening. One of the more interesting findings in this particular discussion is the respondents’ tendency to interpret and speak of their relationship with the guru and their spiritual experiences in Christian language, where for example the “...analogy of the guru to Jesus appears to have assisted the individuals in this study to integrate the new concept by using the old” (118).

In Chapter 9 the author moves on to discuss disaffiliation from Siddha Yoga, where he uncovers a few significant themes common for the respondents. Most devotees chose to move away not for a single reason; rather themes such as a changing organization, noteworthy events or competing interests would have together offered enough momentum to make the devotee leave the organization. Some respondents moved to offshoot organizations such as Shiva Yoga, other affiliated with other non-yogic belief systems, and others who left did not report any contact with any religious or spiritual organizations. Healy also presents and discusses how his respondents coped with life after Siddha Yoga in terms of refocusing their lives – easy for some and harder for others. However, the study shows that the respondents all have something positive to take with them from their time affiliated with the movement, whether it is happy memories from community life or a continuing non-organized practice and devotion to their guru.

Chapter 11 and 12 present the final discussion and conclusion of the monograph, and summarizes the main themes and discussions presented in the book. In the part named ‘Implications of the Study’ Healy returns to his main objective for writing this book, namely that of the helping professionals in the healing professions. Here the author highlights the need to move away from a brainwashing perspective on conversion and affiliation and for helping professionals to realize that the tools already available in counseling and therapy are functional enough to help those adversely affected by NRM involvement. Importantly though, the “...gathering of resources is already an expectation of helping professionals when addressing the various needs of clients. Therefore, informing oneself of an individual’s religious or spiritual perspective could be an important inclusion in this process” (170).

I believe Healy has succeeded in his objective of making aspects of a relatively unknown NRM available to professionals and students alike, in a manner that is both informative and engaging to read. The qualitative, individually oriented method, as well as the style of presentation, lends a depth to his description and analysis. In that sense Healy’s book leaves me with much interesting information and at the same time wanting more, wanting to know even deeper. There are certainly some aspects, for example a gender perspective, I would enjoy to see included in the study, but that does not significantly lower the value and applicability of the study.