



# The Incredible Ease With Which Hollywood Democrats Were Convinced To Join A Psychotic Women-Branding Sex Cult

Its founder, Keith Raniere, was just arrested in Mexico. But the controversial cult Nxivm has also attracted many rich and famous followers over the years.

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY THE DAILY BEAST

From a *Smallville* actress turned alleged top recruiter to heiresses and billionaires, the cult Nxivm has cycled through a host of famous and influential followers.



Formerly known as Executive Success Programs, Nxivm is the brainchild of Keith Raniere, who was just arrested in Mexico on sex trafficking charges. As The Daily Beast previously reported, Raniere has been accused of creating DOS, a “sorority” in which female “masters” recruited “slaves” who were reportedly branded with Raniere’s initials and, according to FBI official William Sweeney, “considered [Raniere’s] sex slaves.”

Sweeney continued, “He allegedly participated in horrifying acts of branding and burning them, with the cooperation of other women operating within this unorthodox pyramid scheme.”

According to the AP, “Investigators said Raniere preferred exceptionally thin women, so ‘slaves’ had to stick to very low-calorie diets and document every food they ate. As punishment for not following orders, women were forced to attend classes where they were ‘forced to wear fake cow udders over their breasts while people called them derogatory names,’ or threatened with being put in cages.”

But long before Raniere was arrested—before ex-followers alleged branding rituals in *The New York Times*, leading him to flee upstate New York for Mexico—Keith Raniere was just a sketchy “executive coach” hawking his courses to an impressive list of acolytes.

A 2003 Forbes profile of Raniere reported that “some 3,700 people have flocked” to Executive Success Programs. “Prompted by a potent word-of-mouth network, they include Sheila Johnson, cofounder of Black Entertainment Television; Antonia C. Novello, a former U.S. surgeon general; Stephen Cooper, acting chief executive of Enron; the Seagram fortune’s Edgar Bronfman Sr. and two of his daughters; and Ana Cristina Fox, daughter of the Mexican president.” Emiliano Salinas, the son of the former President of Mexico, likened Raniere’s courses to “a practical M.B.A.”

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**“Why should we pay attention to this psycho factory? Because it has**

# well-placed, well-heeled members and appears to be actively pursuing an entrée into political fund- raising...”

Salinas is listed as “VP Ethics” on Executive Success Programs’ [website](#); his [bio notes](#), “A member of ESP’s Executive Board since 2009, he is involved in helping to maintain the company’s standards and responsible for leading its sales force.”

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While Raniere appears to have long courted wealthy and high-profile followers, there’s a wide range of involvement, from those who took Executive Success Programs to long-term believers who are alleged to have been involved in Raniere’s more nefarious machinations. A 2010 [Observer article](#) called out a few high-profile dabblers, including billionaire businessman Richard Branson. Branson reportedly “has hosted an intensive NXIVM course on the Caribbean island he owns” and was “listed along with Sara Bronfman as one of the two ‘benefactors’ of the 2008 Albany A Cappella Innovations conference, the culmination of Mr. Raniere’s brief obsession with a cappella singing.”

[Forbes](#) was cited in 2003 court filings, in which Raniere said “we have been called by MSNBC and *Forbes* who are contemplating running stories based on the false information.” Later on in the filing, Raniere complained that, “Goldie Hawn cancelled her engagement with us next week because of the false press.”

This cancellation was cited in a 2009 op-ed in the *Daily Gazette*, which argued that the Dalai Lama ought to cancel an upcoming trip to Albany in light of the fact that it was sponsored by a Ranieri-founded group, the World Ethical Foundations Consortium. The writer argued, “In 2003, Keith Ranieri roped actress Goldie Hawn into speaking at Vanguard Week, an annual NXIVM event. When Hawn learned about the controversies surrounding Ranieri, NXIVM and ESP, she canceled her appearance. If Goldie Hawn has the sense not to appear at an event sponsored by Keith Ranieri, then cancellation by the Dalai Lama, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, should be a no-brainer.”



While the Dalai Lama did initially cancel his visit, according to a 2010 *Vanity Fair* expose, “What happened next is something of a mystery.” The article continued, “People believe that Sara and Clare [Bronfman] flew to Dharamsala, India, to plead with him. And, if so, it’s possible they were just extremely persuasive—because His Holiness changed his mind. But the Dalai Lama Trust, registered in New York State just two days before the Dalai Lama’s appearance in Albany, raised eyebrows. Calls to the trust were not returned. The Bronfman money, it was said, might still be able to buy a lot of things, but not respect.”

Although the aforementioned Bronfman sisters may not be Ranieri’s most A-list associates, various reports have made them out to be an invaluable

resource to Ranieri.

The Bronfmans, heiresses to the Seagram's fortune, made an appearance in the 2003 *Forbes* profile, which featured allegations that Clare Bronfman had "lent" \$2 million to Ranieri's program. Allegations against Executive Success Programs were made by none other than the Bronfman's own father, Edgar Bronfman. While Bronfman once participated in an Executive Success Programs course, *Forbes* reported that, "He hasn't talked to his daughters in months and has grown troubled over the long hours and emotional and financial investment they have been devoting to Ranieri's group." Bronfman even went so far as to call ESP a cult.

The subsequent *Vanity Fair* piece, "The Heiresses and the Cult," delved much deeper into the Bronfman sisters' financial backing of Ranieri's dubious endeavors, alleging that, "According to legal filings and public documents, in the last six years as much as \$150 million was taken out of the Bronfmans' trusts and bank accounts, including \$66 million allegedly used to cover Ranieri's failed bets in the commodities market, \$30 million to buy real estate in Los Angeles and around Albany, \$11 million for a 22-seat, two-engine Canadair CL-600 jet, and millions more to support a barrage of lawsuits across the country against Nxivm's enemies."

In 2012, Albany's *Times Union* published a list of high-profile Nxivm-ites entitled "NXIVM courts rich, powerful and influential." It cited Roger Stone, who was allegedly employed by Nxivm. A 2007 *New York Magazine* article asked, "Why should we pay attention to this psycho factory?" continuing, "Because it has well-placed, well-heeled members and appears to be actively pursuing an entrée into political fund-raising. Stone, paid by NXIVM, had funneled at least \$20,000 to the state GOP; the heirs to Seagram's fortune are devotees; and, per the *Post*, Richard Mays—a Clinton friend and one of Hillary's top fund-raisers—is an 'Espian' as well, having taken so-called intensive classes with Ranieri."

The *Times Union* piece also named a contingent of actresses, including Linda Evans, Nicki Clyne, Allison Mack and Kristin Kreuk. Grace Park, best known for roles on *Hawaii Five-O* and *Battlestar Galactica*, took part in "Keith Ranieri Conversations," a collection of "informal thoughts on civilization,

ethics & humanity.” While the conversations featuring Park appear to have been taken down, remnants of Park’s participation can still be found on the internet.



Raniere fled for Mexico after *The New York Times* published its shocking Nxivm report in October, complete with testimonies from former members. The article featured Dynasty actress Catherine Oxenberg, whose daughter India was initiated into the sorority. In a statement following Raniere’s arrest, Catherine Oxenberg wrote, “For months, I have worked to expose Keith Raniere and NXIVM, and today’s arrest vindicates my efforts. I want my daughter to know I love her and that I want her back in my life.”

As The Daily Beast previously reported, allegations have swirled around Mack, the former *Smallville* actress who is now rumored to be a top Nxivm recruiter. Mack has written openly about her involvement with Nxivm and Jness, a Nxivm women’s group of which Raniere has deemed himself the “conceptual founder,” and can be seen in Jness video testimonials, as well as ones interviewing Raniere himself.

Frank Parlato, a businessman and reported former Nxivm publicist who is involved in an extended legal battle with the Bronfman sisters, has spoken out about Nxivm on his blog, The Frank Report.

In a 2017 [blog post](#), Parlato wrote at length about Mack’s alleged involvement in DOS: “Both women’s groups, Jness and DOS are based on the teachings of Mr. Ranieri. Both require members to keep the teachings secret. Jness is open to females who want to take entry level self-improvement courses on female empowerment. A beginner is not told about the higher level teachings until she proves qualified...Since Miss Mack has assumed control of both organizations, Jness is evolving into a training ground and recruitment camp for women who may qualify for the teachings of DOS. The ‘cream’ of Jness women are invited to join DOS, and the ‘cream’ of DOS women are invited to join Mr. Ranieri’s harem [subject to his approval].”

Mack is [further alleged](#) to be one of the women who was living with Ranieri at the time of his arrest, [who](#) “chased the car in which the defendant was being transported in their own car at high speed.”

On Wednesday, Parlato told the [New York Post](#) that Kristin Kreuk actually introduced her *Smallville*-star Allison Mack to Nxivm. “Kreuk had come first, sometime around late 2005, early 2006,” said Parlato, although she allegedly left the group in 2012. Parlato further claimed that, “Allison was used, as was Kristen, as a lure to bring in other women because of their celebrity status.”

<b>Amy Zimmerman</b>		
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