

San Francisco Sex Cult Sold Female Clitoris Rubbing To Old Men

She Made Orgasmic Meditation Her Life. Not Even Prison Will Stop Her. Nicole Daedone's supporters call her a 'visionary.' Now facing a trial for allegedly exploiting employees, she is out to preserve her legacy. Will orgasmic meditation have a future?

Nicole Daedone, the founder of the orgasmic-meditation company OneTaste, in her New York home.

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| Photography by Brandon Sheer for WSJ. Magazine

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h For over a decade, Nicole Daedone presided over an unusual wellness empire that transformed sexual stimulation into a meditation practice meant to empower women. Through the 2010s, as the founder of the company OneTaste, she spread her philosophy on stage at TEDx and as a guest on the Goop podcast. "What the internet did for computers, female orgasm can do for human connection," she promised in 2013 at South by Southwest.

The practice, in which a partner strokes a woman's private parts, is supposed to free women from trauma and spark creativity. The company says at its height 35,000 people had attended events, 1,500 had become trained teachers and annual revenue topped \$11 million.

Now federal prosecutors say Daedone and other OneTaste officials conspired for more than a decade to coerce people who worked for the company into punishing hours to help expand the business. They controlled these staffers, prosecutors say, by threatening psychological and financial harm if they didn't

do the assigned work. Daedone's last year has been a roller coaster of court hearings, and recently her January trial was unexpectedly delayed until May.

"My biggest mistake was I did not read the room well, in terms of understanding what we were triggering," Daedone says about her company's downfall. "Not just the suggestion that women had power or women had desire, but that we had the right to pursue it."

Even as she faces trial, Daedone has doubled down on her crusade. "My practice has increased to twice a day," Daedone says of her orgasmic meditation sessions, which she does with a male nonromantic partner. She is sitting cross-legged on a secondhand, forest-green couch, which, like nearly every piece of furniture in her home, is available for purchase through a OneTaste outgrowth called Organic Erotic that sells home goods.



Through the 2010s, Daedone spread her philosophy on podcasts and event stages. Photo: John Salangsang/BFA/Shutterstock

Daedone faces a single count of conspiracy to commit forced labor, an offense rarely charged alone and more commonly used alongside sex-trafficking offenses or against defendants accused of exploiting illegal immigrants. While prosecutors haven't called OneTaste a cult, they have asked the judge to allow witnesses to do so and highlighted the group's communal residences and shared beds. OneTaste practitioners were adults who chose to walk in the company's door and were free to leave, her lawyers say. Jurors, some of whom may find the company's teachings distasteful, will grapple with whether Daedone and her co-conspirators' alleged psychological coercion overrode that consent and amounts to a crime.

Daedone is a tall, magnetic 57-year-old who intersperses her deeper thoughts ("You get out of your own suffering") with corny jokes ("I would go remote," she says, of the possibility of working from a prison cell). She no longer runs the company, but as its founder she is working with OneTaste's current leadership to make the practice mainstream. She also remains active in spreading its philosophy in unexpected ways.

At a female networking dinner at OneTaste's newly opened New York center, an expansive three-story space that includes a meditation room and a podcast studio, Daedone was introduced to 100 women as "our visionary." At a different event, this one at a Harlem church outfitted with Gucci-upholstered chairs, she juggled plates while waitressing alongside OneTaste practitioners, who volunteer at a nonprofit Daedone founded to feed homeless people three-course meals designed by a prestigious chef. Inside a women's prison in upstate New York, she dined with dozens of inmates who answered specific questions she had designed to foster connection. "All of those are the application of the practice," she says.

Even with all the trouble that's emerged over the past several years, Daedone still has big ambitions for orgasmic meditation: "OM will be the premier protocol for trauma," Daedone says.



‘What the internet did for computers,

Orgasmic Meditation: In Principle

To Daedone and her followers, orgasmic meditation is a consciousness-raising practice, a connection builder and a way to channel a woman’s sexual energy into creativity.

It proceeds like this: A woman, naked from the waist down, lies on carefully arranged pillows with her legs in a butterfly position. A fully clothed person—often a man—sets a timer for 15 minutes. Using the lubricated and gloved index finger of his left hand, he strokes the upper left quadrant of a woman’s clitoris with the amount of pressure one would use to touch an eyelid.

“Climax is not synonymous with orgasm,” Daedone writes in her 2011 book “Slow Sex: The Art and Craft of the Female Orgasm.” “Orgasm is the body’s ability to receive and respond to pleasure.” The idea is that orgasmic meditation uses arousal to access latent creativity and a mystical state; she believes practitioners can use this “erotic force” to connect with others and decrease suffering.

Daedone grew up the child of a single mother in Los Gatos, Calif. She studied gender and semantics at San Francisco State University. Upon graduation, she founded an art gallery, waitressed at a pizzeria and dabbled in work as a stripper. Several years later, she began searching for meaning in life.

She was planning to become a Buddhist nun when she met a man at a party. “There is a practice you might want to try,” Daedone recalls him telling her before they headed to his place, a yoga ashram.

“Take off your pants, and lie down,” he told her. “I’m going to take my clothes off. I’m going to stroke you for 15 minutes.” It seemed insane at first, she says, but she did as she was told. The experience was eye-opening, she says. “I was walking home at night and just felt so clear.”

She trained for about seven years, including with California sex guru Ray Vetterlein, known for teaching a method to prolong orgasms. In 2004, she founded OneTaste with a business partner. The name came from a Buddhist quote about freedom, she says: “Just as the great ocean has one taste, the taste of salt, so also this teaching and discipline has one taste, the taste of liberation.”



To Daedone, pictured here in 2007, orgasmic meditation is a consciousness-raising practice, a connection builder and a way to channel a woman's sexual energy into creativity. Photo: Gabriela Hasbun

As the company grew, OneTaste students began living communally in dozens of so-called OM houses, most of which the company said were run by individual practitioners without any formal affiliation. "There were wait lists to get into those houses," says Caryn Roth, a longtime OneTaste participant. "People shared beds because they were working part time and wanted to be able to live in San Francisco."

In 2017, Daedone sold her stake in the company to three OneTaste practitioners for \$12 million in cash. "I was drowning in infrastructure, and wanted to write, do the science, do the lobbying," she says.

Then came what Daedone refers to as her "cancellation." In June of 2018, [Bloomberg Businessweek](#) story about OneTaste accused the group of aggressive

sales tactics, a freewheeling sexual atmosphere and cultlike practices that pushed participants into debt. Soon the new owners were navigating a Federal Bureau of Investigation probe and had closed all OneTaste centers worldwide.

Anjuli Ayer, the current CEO of OneTaste, said that the day the Bloomberg story came out Daedone called her and the two other new owners. "I'm so sorry. I never anticipated anything like this ever happening, if you want your money back," Ayer recalls Daedone saying.

Five years later, Daedone and her head of sales, Rachel Cherwitz, were indicted. Daedone set sales quotas for Cherwitz, who in turn pressured her team, prosecutors said. Staffers sold OM seminars—among them "TurnedON Woman's Summit" and "Nicole Daedone Intensive"—by promising OM could solve their problems, according to prosecutors.

Staffers were encouraged to dress the part and at times to sell with sex, including by staging sexual scenes based on "The Wizard of Oz" for an early investor, according to prosecutors.

Bosses, they said, told some employees they needed to take more classes themselves in order to succeed, driving them into debt.



In 2023, Daedone and her head of sales, Rachel Cherwitz, were indicted. Daedone set sales quotas for Cherwitz, who in turn pressured her team, prosecutors said. Photo: Bloomberg via Getty Images

Complicating matters was a lack of separation between home and work. In OM houses residents were required to participate in morning OM sessions, discouraged from drinking alcohol or watching TV and were told not to report problematic behavior to outsiders, prosecutors said. In an apparent “Harry Potter” reference, prosecutors said, they called these outsiders “muggles.”

Lawyers for Daedone and Cherwitz have said prosecutors crafted their narrative by cherry-picking the accounts of a select few from thousands of OneTaste students. “Countless others said they were enlightened,” Imran Ansari, then a lawyer for Cherwitz, said in court.

OM Goes to Court

In 2023, Daedone went on a pilgrimage to Asia to study Tibetan Buddhism. She was asleep in a yurt in outer Mongolia that June when she was awakened at 2 a.m. by a friend with her OneTaste colleagues on speakerphone. "There's been an indictment," her colleague said. "They arrested Rachel."

Armed federal agents had stormed into OneTaste's rural California retreat center to arrest Cherwitz; the Justice Department said Daedone "remained at large." Daedone began the 36-hour trek back to the States, where she was handcuffed and fingerprinted at a federal courthouse in Brooklyn. Her mother, in court on speakerphone, agreed to cosign her bond.



Despite the trouble that's emerged over the past several years, Daedone still has big ambition

At the Brooklyn federal courthouse in November, Daedone, wearing flowy khaki pants and a loose black cardigan, appeared serene. Behind her, several dozen of her supporters packed the courthouse gallery, professionally dressed women in their 40s and 50s, sporting blazers and heels and freshly done hair. Daedone would later post a video on Instagram of the glowing women strutting past the courthouse, their heads held high, with Erykah Badu's "The Healer" playing in the background.

"It's all these erotic women walking into the heart of a masculine government building," said Maya Gilbert, who has been involved with OneTaste since 2009, and now teaches orgasmic meditation and is the creative director for the company. "It's so potent."

At the hearing, a prosecutor explained why they wanted a clinical psychologist to testify at trial about coercive control, or the idea of manipulation without force.

"Average jurors understand that relationships can be manipulative," said Jennifer Bonjean, who represents Daedone. "The witnesses here were grown individuals who were free to come and go."

Prosecutors also asked that witnesses be allowed to use the terms "cult," "members" and "leaders." The defendants' lawyers had argued such terms were unfair.

The judge denied the use of the expert for now, but didn't ban the term "cult," saying it was "often used colloquially" and did not imply a formal structure.



Even as she faces trial, Daedone has doubled down on her crusade. 'My practice has increased to twice a day,' Daedone says of her OM sessions, Photo: Jeenah Moon/Associated Press

Although Daedone is no longer officially with the company, she remains its inspiration, says Ayer. The business, which currently operates at a loss, is supported financially by its three owners. It recently rolled out an online platform and a free app. It also aims to expand into a franchise model. "My vision is to have this philosophy and this modality reach a billion people," Ayer says.

Back in her apartment, Daedone considers the possibility of spending years in prison. She says her work would continue there, with hundreds of women who have experienced trauma and could be open to practicing orgasmic meditation. "Where better to work with women," Daedone says, "than around women who don't color inside the lines?"

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