

San Francisco Book Review

Issue:
April 2016

When Nobody's Home

By Michael S. Oden

AuthorHouse, \$16.95, 164 pages, Format: Trade

★★★★★ /5

When Nobody's Home is both book title and metaphor on the underlying contributing factors leading to addiction. As a title, this book presents information based on the author's thousands of interviews and statistics on the increasing incidence of single parent families and families in which the parents are absent, either due to the requirements of working to support the family or neglect in the role and responsibilities as caregiver in the home. As a metaphor, *When Nobody's Home* speaks to the unmet needs addicts experience during childhood that creates emotional suffering. Often, this underlying root cause is unrealized by the individual, and in an attempt to gain relief from this emotional suffering, individuals frequently find solace in drug or alcohol addiction.

Michael Oden's book is clearly written and an easy read in plain language without psychological jargon. The author's compassion for those suffering from addiction and his desire to help them understand their addiction, and how they can turn their lives around, is evident in his effort to strive to understand them, not just their problems, but as feeling human beings. Spread throughout the book are client stories that reveal the family experiences of his clients, explaining how Oden helped them identify the unsatisfied needs of their childhood, and sharing the impact this had on their self-image and prospective outlook on life changes they needed to make. I especially appreciated the various diagrams and charts in the book that defined and demonstrated the concepts, methodology, development, and thinking processes relevant to helping addicts make a lasting change.

In today's society, addiction can be seen everywhere: a family member, friend's family member, in certain neighborhoods, and even on television in the news or in fictional shows. While this book focuses on the author's experience in assisting those with drug and alcohol addictions, I think the process applicable to the broader population. I feel we are all affected, to some degree, in our life stories by unmet needs at some point in our lives, and, as a result, we experience some emotional discomfort or trauma. Like drug and alcohol addicts, we seek solace in other things to lesser degrees that are likely more acceptable in society and not illegal. We have sought solace in shopping, eating comfort foods, sweets, or risky behaviors that are unhealthy for us. We even make light of these other pursuits by calling ourselves shopaholics and even chocaholics! How many other behaviors might we gain more control of and perspective on if we used the tools offered in this book to better understand ourselves and the drivers for our own behavior?

Parents can also gain lessons from this book on how their children might be impacted by unmet needs. Parents should not feel judged by this or complacently feel this book is not applicable to them. Today's youth are also highly influenced by their peers and can be traumatized by these peers through school or cyber bullying, very pertinent issues in our present day lives. Nothing is as indelible as a child, and children often adopt misconceptions that we as adults don't even realize they harbor. How can we make children less vulnerable if we don't know how the potential seeds of these issues are first sown?

Some readers might argue the statistics in this book or the suppositions made as to the origins of addiction, but I urge those readers to approach this not as a scientific treatise or journal article, but as the insightful offering of a compassionate professional with years of experience in helping those most in need. For those who are open with a desire to learn more about the human condition and underlying psychological factors that can impact us all, I highly recommend this book.

Reviewed by Valerie Freitas

