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A Phenomenological Analysis of Changing Prejudice Among Defectors of Closed Faith

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Abstract

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MA, Bar Ilan, 2000

BS, SUNY, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Prejudice research shows that most psychologists focus on moderate prejudice in superficial settings, rather than extreme prejudice in real-life situations. The present study used an interpretive phenomenological analysis guided by social constructivism on 21 biographies to investigate how the authors voluntarily disaffiliated from their groups and altered their prejudice. The narratives were retrieved from popular and academic book and journal memoirs, digital and print interviews and articles, podcasts and video clips of members of closed faith societies who were socialized to resent outsiders, with their resentments turning into violence. The analysis used Willig's 4 stages: immersion in material, identifying core themes, summary of themes, and the amalgamation of the summary into themes. Results of this study indicate that there seems to be a turning point in which participants perceive the outside world in a different way. This change in perception may occur in members of closed groups through conducting critical analyses, reading source texts, and experiencing altruism from a member of the resented outside groups. Recommendations include that communication between outsiders and group members should reflect subtle, fact-based reasoning and manifest a customized approach to reducing prejudice. The study offers an original approach for understanding socialized violence. Governments and relevant entities could use this research to train invited outsiders of a cult or closed faith society regarding how to decrease the prejudice of closed group members.

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"I can no other answer make, but, thanks, and thanks." -

William Shakespeare

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The study of prejudice is one of the most voluminous fields in social science, but as Paluck (2012) and Paluck and Green (2009) said, research should focus on deeply-held prejudice, rather than on the weak or moderate prejudice that psychologists tend to observe. Prejudice is instigated by an individual's society or culture (Paluck 2012, 2016; Sherif & Sherif, 1953), where prejudice towards different others is inculcated in its members. This may explain why the prejudice-reducing interventions that are mostly developed in liberal colleges on insulated college students do little to reverse prejudicial attitudes (Giner-Sorolla, 2001). In fact, Paluck and Green (2009) recommended that researchers evaluate real life situations for more accurate results and more effective prejudice-reducing interventions.

Multidisciplinary studies, such as identity economics, sociology, ethnopsychology, anthropology, and social psychology, show that individuals have an innate need to belong to a group (Leary & Baumeister, 1995), to the point that people who live in highly conformist settings are more likely to identify with their group norms, even when these practices contradict normative standards that are endorsed by the broader society (Paluck, 2012), harm one's health and safety (Akerlof & Kranton, 2013; Goldman, Giles, & Hogg, 2014; Hogg, Siegel, & Hohman, 2011), or contradict one's private beliefs (Prentice & Miller, 1996). One example of such groups is strongly cohesive religious societies, also called closed faith societies that insulate themselves from outsiders. In such groups, members are more vulnerable to indoctrination, since the group imposes strict rules, has strong leaders, and sets clear boundaries (Weinstein,

2006). Consequences for defiance are also punitive and severe. Subsequently, I found it all the more incredible that certain individuals raised in these settings seemed to be able to objectively detach themselves from the toxicity of their environments, assess their socializations, and voluntarily reverse their enculturated hostilities to outsiders.

This study has been a product of more than 30 years of reading, reflection, personal experience and interviews with former members of obedience-demanding, or closed faith enclaves, prompted by my own experiences of leaving an isolated faith community that applauded and practiced violence. I have also conducted wide and intensive reading on multidisciplinary and related topics, more specifically on epistemology, ethno psychology, religion, history, anthropology, sociology, and advanced mathematics, along with my Master's in philosophy and advanced logics. I interviewed and worked with cults (e.g., Hari Krishna, the Moonies); interviewed, taught, counseled, and worked with aspiring and actual terrorists (e.g., Zionist and Palestinian) in the Middle East; interviewed, counseled, and taught Neo-Nazis as well as former-communists (Hungary, Moldavia, Ukraine); and regularly experience Trumpism, white supremacism and confederate loyalty in parts of North Virginia and environs. As an aside, I studied with Yigal Amir, the man who assassinated Israel's PM Yitzchak Rabin. My experiences gave me a unique insider perspective to this study but also made me a subjective researcher, which is why I labored all the harder to become aware of and hedge my bias.

This is the first study in this genre that uses a qualitative approach based on an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate deeply-held prejudice in a

real-life setting and to examine whether and how some individuals who grow up in indoctrinated closed faith societies independently reverse their taught attitudes. Although this study will be limited in its transferability for reasons that include its qualitative methodology and its extremely small sample, I dare to hope that this dissertation may contribute to the research literature on extreme prejudice. The rest of this chapter discusses the research problem and the conceptual framework for the study before defining certain terms, detailing limitations of this study, and suggesting implications for positive social change.

Background

In 2009, Paluck and Green (2009) conducted the most extensive literature research to date on prejudice-reducing interventions, to find which prejudice interventions worked and to assess the internal and external reliability of the different prejudice studies and their methods. Paluck and Green (2009) defined prejudice as negative bias, racism, homophobia, ageism, antipathy toward ethnic, religious, national, or other groups, prejudice toward persons who are overweight, poor, or disabled, and attitudes toward diversity, reconciliation, and multiculturalism. At the same time, Paluck and Green (2009) excluded gender-based prejudice (i.e., beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors toward gender), although they focused on gender-identity prejudices such as homophobia. In total, the researchers accumulated 985 reports, which they divided into three categories: nonexperimental field studies (66%), laboratory-based experimental studies (29%), and triangulated methods/field experimental studies (11%).

The nonexperimental prejudice intervention studies consisted of noncontrol groups and evaluation studies that mostly investigated sensitivity and cultural-competence programming, mass media campaigns, and diversity training. Out of 207 of these studies, Paluck and Green (2009) challenged the internal reliability of 195. When it came to laboratory or purely experimental studies, Paluck and Green (2009) found these studies creative and precise but faulted them for studying prejudice that is a real-life attitude in a superficial environment. Examples of such studies included intergroup approaches, social identity and categorization theories, as well as psychological affect and cognitions. Their methods ranged from instruction, expert opinion and norm information, manipulating accountability, consciousness-raising, and targeting personal identity, self-worth, or emotion. On mixed methods prejudice reduction studies, Paluck and Green (2009) concluded that most of these studies lacked rigorous evaluation and needed more intensive and extensive research. The focus of these studies included cooperative learning, social media-based technology, discussions, peer influence, cognitive training, self-worth interventions, and social categorization.

Additionally, Paluck and Green (2009) recommended research on the psychological implications of obedience and conformity. The researchers (2009) noted that:

> Psychologists are a long way from demonstrating the most effective ways to reduce prejudice. Due to weaknesses in the internal and external validity of existing research, the literature does not reveal whether, when, and why interventions reduce prejudice in the world. (p. 360)

Paluck and Green (2009) advised researchers to include identity-focused perspectives like social identity and categorization, identity and value-motivated techniques, and social cognitive (stereotype and implicit prejudice) interventions, as well as to focus on areas like multiculturalism and moral education. The reviewers added that although laboratory experiments test certain theses with precision, all prejudice-oriented experiments should be replicated outside the laboratory on "the many millions of ordinary citizens living in conflict or postconflict settings" (p. 359) and that scientists should focus on "obedience and conformity, the very forces that have been implicated in some of the most notorious expressions of prejudice in world history" (p. 360). Paluck and Green (2009) concluded that "researchers should strive to reduce deeply held prejudices rather than the more transitory prejudices associated with 'minimal' groups" (p. 361).

In her 2012 review, Paluck (2012) observed that too many prejudice-reducing interventions failed to show statistical effect, because they investigated attitude in the classroom instead of in a real life setting. Paluck (2012) suggested that social scientists use Lewin's interactionist perspective, where attitude is studied as the integration of person and situation and where situation represents the social, cultural, and political forces in the person's immediate environment. In the same way, Murrar, Gavac, and Brauer (2016) called for more real-world investigations on a diversified and more representative population outside the university walls.

The following study followed Paluck and Green's (2009) suggestions and investigated real life prejudice in the context of an obedience and conflict setting. It also focused on prejudice in its most extreme form, as indoctrinated attitude, and considered

sociological constructs like contact, social identity and categorization, social cognition and moral education. The forms of prejudice investigated in this study were racism, homophobia, antipathy toward ethnic, religious, national, and other groups, and distrust regarding diversity, reconciliation, and multiculturalism in general.

Problem Statement

Most prejudice-reducing interventions are conducted on American, largely liberal, college students who are sheltered from the types of environments that produce extreme prejudice (Pollack & Green, 2009). Meanwhile, extreme prejudice from tribalism, populism, and nativism expanded over the last two years (Slate, 2018). Examples include white supremacism, racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and homophobia. Of the complete range of prejudice-reducing interventions that Paluck and Green (2009) investigated, all of their studies dealt with weak to moderate prejudice and all were tested in sheltered conflict-free environments.

As Paluck (2016) reflected:

> What do social scientists know about reducing prejudice in the world? In short, very little. Of the hundreds of studies on prejudice reduction conducted in recent decades, only 11% test the causal effect of interventions conducted in the real world. (p. 147)

Paluck (2009) called for more rigorous studies that integrate theory and methodology and insisted that researchers investigate subjects in conflict-filled environments. Both researchers urged psychologists to probe deeply-held prejudice rather

than the more transitory prejudices associated with peripheral situations and conflict-free groups. This is what this study sets out to do.

Purpose of the Study

The study analyzed autobiographical data from defectors of closed faith societies to identify core themes associated with the retraction of their socialized prejudices. The narratives were retrieved from popular and academic book and journal memoirs, digital and print interviews and articles, podcasts, and video clips. Themes were analyzed to understand the lived experiences of each participant and their motivations for renouncing their bias. This study's goal is to help peace activists and state-sponsored programs generate and test appropriate interventions to prevent and defuse bigotry in insulated societies.

Research Questions

I used autobiographical material to qualitatively examine the lived experiences of 21 defectors from closed faith groups. This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of defectors of closed faith groups as they disengage and deradicalize?

RQ2: What are the pathways for changing prejudice among defectors of closed faith groups?

Conceptual Approach

I used the theory of social constructivism. Social constructivism says knowledge is constructed through one's particular environment and that one's perceptions derive

from the culture or environment one inhabited (Young & Colin, 2004). It repudiates the idea that observations accurately reflect the observed world (Murphy et al., 1998). The phrase was coined by Berger and Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1961), which maintained that people's knowledge and conceptions of reality come from their societies, making one's experience of reality socially constructed. I approached my research with the admission that my judgments were shaped by my history, identity, culture, and experiences, and that my textual interpretations were, subsequently, subjective.

Nature of the Study

This study used the interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA), where autobiographical texts in the form of books, print and digital articles, video clips, and podcasts were analyzed to search for common patterns and themes (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). I chose IPA, since this approach seeks to discover how individuals construct meaning of their experiences (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004); I sought to discover how certain individuals reversed their indoctrinated prejudices. My methodology choice was supported by studies (e.g., Todorova and Kotzeva (2006) on religious deconversion and Smith and Osborn (2007) on identity conflict) showing that IPA is widely used in mental health and therapy research on toxic attitudes. The interpretive phenomenological stance helped me navigate themes that emerged through analysis of the data. I used IPA to make sense of the contextual and evaluative experiences of the subjects. At the same time, I tried to maintain a social constructivist stance through all stages of the subject's journey, from when the subject delegitimized

the outsider to when the subjects exited their groups and no longer saw the outsider as "other".

My subjects came from a range of closed faith societies that included Jehovah Witness, Old World Amish (Old Order), extreme Muslim groups (like Wahhabi or Salafi ideology), Haredi or Hassidic Ultra-Orthodox Jews, Mormon fundamentalism (FLDS Church), Christian fundamentalism (like Kingdom Identity Ministries, Pentecostalism, or some Baptist and Evangelical fundamentalist groups), and the Official Church of Scientology. A common denominator in their education was their ties to their communities and the spectrum of methods used to raise strong barriers against the outside world. According to Hammersborg (2005), insular faith communities establish an understanding of "they" and "we", where not even close relatives are part of the "we" if they exist outside the community. Such communities generate fear of everything outside. Children know that breaking out will result in severance from family and friends. Defectors run the risk of being despised, excommunicated, and losing their footholds in their communities (Hammersborg, 2005).

Some of these communities restrict contact with the outside, to the extent that they ban outlets that include TV, radio, libraries, secular reading material, movies, and internet. Former participants described it as "You are even not allowed to have free thoughts" (Hammersborg, 2005, p.5). The result is a climate of growing up without exposure to the "outside" world or the possibility for normal opinion forming, which makes it all the more striking that exceptional individuals break out to challenge their

indoctrinations. These are the subjects whose narratives I investigated in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Operational Definitions

Amazing Apostates: Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) gave this term to individuals who come from highly religious backgrounds with intense pressure to conform but disengaged from or exited their group. The researchers considered them amazing because these individuals seem to contradict socialization predictions.

Closed faith society: A group or cult that insulates itself from other societies and cultures to protect its faith and opinions (Hammersborg, 2005).

Deeply-held, or extreme prejudice: Extreme feelings of hostility manifested as one or more of the following: Homophobia, racism, antipathy toward ethnic, religious, national, and other groups, distrust to diversity, reconciliation, and multiculturalism, and may veer to violence or aggression against outsiders (Paluck & Green, 2009).

Deradicalization: The process of changing an individual's belief system, rejecting the group's intolerant ideology, and embracing mainstream values (Rabasa et al., 2010).

Prejudicial Cognition: The social scientific perspective that proposes that evolutionarily and culturally derived mental abstractions subconsciously cause humans to categorize or stereotype. Many contemporary social scientists tend to equate prejudice with stereotyping and subsequently develop prejudice-reducing interventions using cognitive-based strategies (Forscher & Devine, 2015).

Socialization: Socialization refers to a continuing process where an individual integrates the norms, values, behavior, and social skills from his or her culture as part of their identity (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986).

Assumptions

My study's faulty assumptions include the following. First, I assumed that I can extract certain insights from my limited population, although it is highly likely that a larger autobiographical pool may produce different or contradictory indicators. Second, autobiography lacks truth status (Trochim, 2006), which makes my study questionable from the start. Third, I focused on socialized prejudice ignoring the type of prejudice that comes from traumatized experiences, such as terrorism (Bar-Tal & Labin, 2001). This limits research implications to the typified context of my subjects.

Scope and Delimitations

I used a purposive sample of texts collected from academic institutions, universities and colleges, and libraries from six countries and four US states. I also consulted blog posts, audio and visual material from print and digital sources. These included YouTube, forums, chats, and Reddit posts from people who dropped out of Judaism, Catholicism, Christianity, Islam, Mormonism, and sectarian groups like Jehovah's Witnesses, Hinduism, and Protestantism. Search terms included *dropout*, *extreme religion*, *apostasy*, *extremism*, *fundamentalism*, *deradicalization*, and *radicalization*.

I chose to focus on faith-filled insular societies because I reasoned that the indoctrinations and experiences of members of such groups make their prejudice reversal

even more unnatural, and that their reversal comes from their own choice. I limited my research to authors who received minimal or no contact with the outside world, who were incessantly taught hostility to outsiders, and who independently reversed their attitudes. I also focused on psychological "push" features rather than "pull" features. "Pull" features refer to qualities outside the group that the individual finds attractive, while "push" features refer to adverse characteristics associated with the group that force people to reconsider their involvement with the group (McAdam, 1986). Even though both features are integrated, I focused on push aspects to see which elements of the experiences may have caused the subjects to disengage themselves from their group's bigotry teachings, despite lacking contact with an outside world.

Limitations

The interpretative phenomenological approach comes with limitations which include researcher bias. In my case, additional limitations included that my interpretations could not be corroborated by my subjects, and that further research would likely find accounts that may provide different, or contradictory, perspectives. Yin (1994) pointed out that researchers who analyze documents or content tend to possess a biased selectivity, where the researcher may consciously or otherwise only select documents that support their views. This may have been the case with me. I acknowledged the risk of my experiences effecting my interpretations and chose the social constructivist stance to hedge my bias. I also engaged the services of an objective individual (a qualified student with no prior knowledge of my research or reading) to replicate the IPA reading and coding process.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in three ways. First, it used a qualitative approach, in line with Paluck and Green's (2009) recommendation, to investigate prejudice in its real-life setting. Second, it investigated real-life prejudice from the standpoint of authentic experience, deviating from the typical prejudice-based studies that are conducted on largely liberal university students from privileged or upper middle-class backgrounds (e.g., Paluck & Green, 2009; Stangor, 2009). Third, this study examined a deep prejudice that causes violence and terrorism on a micro to macro scale. Significant segments of the world are indoctrinated in deep prejudice. I used IPA for insights on how to prevent and inhibit extreme prejudice in multicultural and cross-generational contexts.

Summary

Prejudice studies is one of the most voluminous fields in social science, but more research should focus on extreme prejudice and investigate prejudice reduction in a real-life setting. This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach based on autobiographical texts of individuals who grew up in settings that inculcated extreme hostility to outsiders. The study probed for themes that may have caused these subjects to voluntarily retract their attitudes. Results of this study may help scientists and activists improve their understanding of the psychology of prejudice reversal. Chapter Two summarizes and discusses limitations and gaps in the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This study analyzed autobiographical reports, memoirs, and interviews from multiple individuals who were raised in prejudice-indoctrinating closed faith societies, and who voluntarily reversed their prejudices. The study aimed to understand the lived experiences of these individuals as they reversed their attitudes to outsiders. In this way, this study sought to fill gaps in prejudice-literature, by focusing on prejudice in in its real-life context and in its most extreme form (e.g., Paluck & Green, 2009; Paluck, 2012; Murrar, Gavac, and Brauer, 2016).

Paluck and Green (2009) and Paluck (2012) noted that social scientists tend to neglect prejudice drivers like conflict, obedience, and conformity and that most prejudice studies separate attitude from environment (i.e., they study bias in a superficial insulated setting). This study attempted to correct for these gaps by noting that since individuals are inseparable from their environments, their attitudes need to be studied in their environmental contexts (e.g., Paluck, 2012). My study, therefore, used an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to uncover emergent themes from the lived experience of defectors from closed faith societies who were socialized to demonize and harm outsiders.

Literature Search Strategy

Sources used for my literature research came from peer-reviewed content on prejudice as well as from multi-disciplinary texts and were retrieved from libraries, colleges and universities in Israel, United States, Britain, Switzerland, Prague, Moldova,

and Hungary. Peer-reviewed journal sources came from Walden University's EBSCOHost system, ScienceDirect, SAGE Journals Online, PubMed and PubMedCentral, Academic OneFile (Galegroup), and Omnifile full-text. Key search words used for the literature review included the following: *Loss of faith*, *prejudice*, and *extreme prejudice*, *review of prejudice*, *intolerance*, *conflict*, *bias*, *homophobia*, *inter-group conflict*, and *stereotype.*

Conceptual Framework

I used the theory of social constructivism to guide me. The theory acknowledges that human perceptions emerge from environmental influences (Young & Colin, 2004) and reinforces Bacon's (1897) thesis that one's observations inaccurately reflect the observed world (Murphy et al., 1998).

Social constructionism is related to the postmodernist interpretivist approach on how cognitive meanings are created, developed and sustained, and, like interpretivism, tries to generate an objective science to investigate subjective experience (Schwandt, 2003). In their social construction of knowledge, Berger and Luckmann (1961) proposed that knowledge is societally derived by each society deciding what it wishes to focus on and by each society inheriting and developing its own terminology to discuss fields of knowledge. This affects one's epistemological perceptions on all elements of the world and human conduct. The main problem with social constructionism is that it challenges even seemingly self-evident and stable realities (e.g., Schwandt, 2003) and, consequently, opens the way to subjective and, often contradictory, multiple realities, making it

impossible to formulate any serious conclusions. I, therefore, only used social constructivism as a tool to make me aware of and monitor my bias.

Literature Review Related to Key Theories and Concepts

Duckitt (1992) divided prejudice-based research into seven distinct periods and showed how each era influenced prejudice research through its particular social-political construction. Prejudice research began in the 19th century with its race and class theory, where scientists suggested that certain nationalities and ethnicities dominated others. Historian John S. Haller (as cited in Sarich & Miele, 2005) wrote “almost the whole of scientific thought in America and Europe… accepted race inferiority” (cited by Sarich & Miele, 2005, (p. 78). Race theories encouraged Whites to subjugate Blacks under the understanding that Blacks were intellectually backwards, over-sexed, and primitive. Psychologists developed tests that seemed to confirm this thesis.

In the 1930s to the 1940s, scientists turned their attention to the mechanisms of intra-group bias. That paradigm shift emerged from socio-political upheavals that included race and gender protest movements in Europe and the United States and the cumulative effect of two World Wars. The last War, in particular, stirred discussion on the irrationality of ethnic stereotyping and prejudice. Several of the commentators, including Asch, Milgram, and Festinger, were victims of German discrimination. Winer, one of Milgram's obedience study subjects, noted that "Milgram was very Jewish. I was Jewish. We talked about this. There was obviously a motive behind neutral research" (Alchetron, online). The post-War era was one where scientists redefined prejudice as a faulty and irrational attitude and sought to understand its causes.

In the 1950s, psychologists used psychoanalysis as an explanatory tool for prejudice (Duckitt, 1992) and suggested that bias came from repression and served to relieve inner conflicts and frustrations. Nazis, for instance, allegedly vented their political humiliation on weaker people like Jews, gypsies, or homosexuals. American scientists used methodologies like case studies and longitudinal or correlational research to trace inter-race relations to their Freudian core. Although psychodynamics is rarely used to explain prejudice today, some studies (e.g., Jackson, 2011) still use this model to understand stereotype and conflict.

The fifth paradigm of prejudice emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s, when research transitioned from individual-level psychological factors to cultural and social influences (Duckitt, 1992). The context was race riots in South Africa with government-backed racism and segregation in America's South (Blackwell, 1982). Whole legions of seemingly good and genteel people discriminated against humans of different colors and race. Psychologists proposed two psychological mechanisms, socialization (Lewin, 1952; Pettigrew & Back, 1967; Rokeach, 1960) and conformity (Adorno et al., 1950; Lewin, 1952; Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew & Back, 1967) and promised that harmony would be achieved when Whites accepted Blacks in all areas of their lives. The urban revolts of the late 1960s and the hardening of resistance demolished such optimism and showed that prejudice extended throughout the United States not just in the South. Sociologists turned to historical and sociological factors for drivers that included colonialism (Blauner, 1972), a split labor market (Bonacich, 1972), institutionalized racism (Carmichael &

Hamilton, 1967), and the socioeconomic advantages for Whites in maintaining a stable Black underclass (e.g., Crandall & Schaller, 2004).

Social scientists of the 1970s termed prejudice a more subtle, complex, and insidious type of racial bigotry (Frey & Gaertner, 1986), where antipathy appealed to convention for approval (Brewer et al., 2003; Fiske 2002). (Whites, for instance, would accuse minority groups of exploiting racial preferences (Schneider, 2005)). The 1970s also saw the minimal intergroup paradigm, which stated that people subconsciously categorized individuals into an "us" versus "them" schematology. As the 1970s drew into the Computer Age, social scientists discussed cognitive processes (e.g., Bar Tal et al, 1989) and equivocated stereotype with prejudice. Prejudice was reduced to automatic cognitive elements. Hamilton (1981), for instance, reduced prejudice to stereotypes and called the attitude implicit and subconscious (see Dovidio et al., 2010; Fiske, 1998; Stangor, 2000; Whitley, Kite, & Adams, 2012 for further discussion, history, and literature review). Scientists developed priming procedures to elicit non-conscious processing, with Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz's (1998) Implicit Association Test (IAT) becoming one of the most popular of such instruments. Famous contributors to this "unconscious bias approach" included Kahneman and Tversky (2000) and Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky (1982), who demonstrated that rationality was reducible to mental heuristics. This cognitive approach is the theoretical basis that underlies most contemporary prejudice-associated interventions (e.g., Brown, 2010; Duckitt, 2002; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hamilton, 1981; Taylor & Crocker, 1981). Some social scientists lamented that the "psychological approaches to intergroup relations [have] become more

and more focused upon the cognitive underpinnings of intergroup attitudes and less and less focused upon the affective determinants of prejudice" (Stangor, Sullivan, & Ford, 1991, p. 360), or of sociological determinants, for that matter. As of 2018, the dominant approach to prejudice-reduction remains the cognitive model.

The Role of Cognition in Intra-Group Conflict, Bias, and Prejudice

Most researchers use the cognitive approach for prejudice, equivocating prejudice with stereotype formation, activation and function (e.g., Brewer et al., 2003; Duckitt, 1992; Stangor, 2009). Their works tend to follow Kahneman and Tversky's (2000) pioneering research, where the authors showed that people tend to perceive and judge others automatically. Kahneman and Tversky called these cognitive biases "judgment" or "evaluation" heuristics. Other researchers labeled these heuristics "social categorization" (e.g., Turner & Oakes, 1986), where perceivers automatically classify individuals on appearance, mannerisms, or other types of categories (Brewer et al., 2003; Fiske, 2002).

Historians tend to trace this idea of social categorization to Allport, with twentieth-century and contemporary researchers (e.g., Brown, 1995) tracing these heuristics to early socialization from parents, teachers, or the person's formative environment. Some researchers (e.g., Bar-Tal & Labin, 2001) suggest that these heuristics may be reversed through personal experience and social conditions. Scientists, such as Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz (1998), Nosek and Banaji (2001), and Steinman and Karpinski (2009) developed a wide range of measurement techniques and research paradigms to uncover allegedly implicit bias. These tests work by a process called "priming" that exposes participants to a word or image supposed to trigger hidden

stereotypes (e.g., Ask, Granhag, Juhlin, & Vrij, 2012; Nosek & Banaji, 2001; Steinman & Karpinski, 2009). The IAT (Greenwald et al., 2002), for instance, measures how rapidly people categorize certain words and images. Faster mental responses to "whites or intelligence" and "blacks or violence" could indicate subversive bias.

One of the most potent criticisms of this approach came from Dixon and colleagues (2014) who pointed out that while researchers banter over the relative inconsequentialities of implicit prejudice, they ignore the very real prejudice that harms. It is this type of prejudice, they say, that needs to be researched and treated.

The Role of Affect in Intra-Group Conflict

Critics of the cognitive-based framework (e.g., Dijker, 1987; Edwards & von Hippel, 1995; Esses, Haddock & Zanna, 1993; Pettigrew, 1997; Stangor, Sullivan & Ford, 1991; Zanna, Haddock & Esses, 1990) insist that since prejudice is an attitude, it is affect-based rather than cognitive in origin. To quote Hamilton (1981):

> If there is any domain of human interaction that history tells us it is laden with strong, even passionate, feelings, it is in the area of intergroup relations. And this point makes clear the fact that the cognitive approach, despite the rich and varied approaches it has made in recent years, is by itself incomplete. (p. 347)

If prejudice is affect, this may explain why prejudice-reducing programs that are formulated on cognitive assumptions tend to demonstrate mixed results. When such programs are tested on stereotype cognitions, the program seems to succeed, but when analyzing emotions, those same interventions fail or show insignificant results.

Neuroscience supports the idea that affect drives prejudice, with some fMRI studies (e.g., Amodio et al., 2003; Phelps et al., 2005) linking prejudice with heightened amygdala activity that is the neural region associated with emotion. Schwartz and Clore (1994) showed that people evaluate in terms of an "I feel" rather than an "I think" perspective, while Pettigrew and Tropp (2000) reported that feelings rather than perceptions prime social judgment. Forgas (1995) demonstrated that various conditions of affect, including valence, arousal properties, and motivation, conspire to influence social judgments and behaviors. Fein and Spencer (1997) stated that poor confidence - an emotion - triggers prejudice, while Smith (in Mackie & Hamilton, 1993) defined prejudice as "a social emotion experienced with respect to one's social identity as a group member, with an outgroup as a target" (p. 304). Taylor (2007) conducted a textual analysis which showed that it is only the lowest levels of stereotype that exclude emotion. Prejudice, she said, ranges from highly emotive to muted, and less prejudiced individuals tend to use more cognitive descriptors than individuals on higher ends of the spectrum. High-level racist texts, like Hitler's *Mein Kampf,* employed emotional terms more intensely and more frequently than less dispassionate, academic texts (Taylor, 2007).

How is prejudice produced, or what are its underlying mechanisms? Certain scientists (e.g., Amodio & Devine, 2006; Lazarus, 1984; Mackie & Hamilton, 1993; Smith & DeCoster, 2000) suggested that affect and cognition combine to generate attitudes that include prejudice, while other scientists (e.g., Devine, 1989; Fazio, 1990; Pryor, Reeder, & Landau, 1999; Weiner, 1986; Zajonc, 1980, 2001) claimed that cognition and emotion inhabit separate interacting channels. Pryor and colleagues (1999)

distinguished between the attitude of prejudice that is affect-based and the perception of stereotype that originates from a rule-based, more rational cognitive process, slower to develop and easier to control. Similarly, Bodenhausen and Moreno (2001) affirmed that although stereotypes may shape intergroup perception and behavior, it is the feeling states that arises in the presence of members of stereotyped groups that shadows intergroup interactions. This may explain why the more passionate type of prejudice that comes from conflict-ridden situations typically resists remediation (Bar-Tal & Labin, 2001).

Social Psychology and Prejudice

The social psychology perspective of prejudice suggests that people are acculturated by their groups and that they transmit their group's norms, opinions and beliefs. The social identity model, for instance, emphasizes that individuals divide themselves into in-group/outgroup categories and that group membership determines partisanship to individuals (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). Both Allport (1954; 1979) and Tajfel (1981) noted that people are acculturated to categorize individuals into groups, with Tajfel adding that people categorize to win their group's approval. Wetherell's (1987) self-categorization theory (SCT) posited that a person shifts between personal identity and social identity, depending on which aspect is most salient at the time. A person's level of social identity exists on a continuum, with most people showing an average desire to belong to their groups, while some individuals manifest extreme group identity (Dovidio et al, 2003). It is these individuals who are more likely to demonstrate hostility to outsiders (Guimond, 2000).

Social identity theory reminds me of identity economics which states that people integrate social norms to gain pleasure from group-acceptance and to avoid the penalties and pain of rejection (e.g., Akerlof & Kranton, 2013). Individuals not only develop collective or group selves (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994), but some theorists say that individuals become, or are, groups, namely that they acquire an identity that is inseparable from their groups (Ellemers, 2012; Swann, 2009). This is particularly so with individuals who are socialized in a society of conformism, where indoctrination and societal intimidation emphasize group norms. Paluck (2012) pointed out that people in highly conformist settings are more likely to identify with group norms, even when these norms contradict normative standards that are endorsed by the broader society, harm one's health and safety (Akerlof & Kranton, 2013; Goldman, Giles, & Hogg, 2014, Hogg, Siegel, & Hohman, 2011), or contradict one's private beliefs (Prentice & Miller, 1996). This is particularly so when the group imposes strict rules, has strong leaders, and sets clear boundaries (e.g., Weinstein, 2007). In short, social psychology suggests that prejudice follows a social trajectory as much as it may a cognitive or evaluative one. Whitehead and Stokoe (2015) argued that since people cannot be separated from groups, prejudice should be studied in a real-life setting and evaluated as the social condition that it is.

Studies on Extreme Prejudice

I found few studies that discussed extreme and explicit prejudice, although there were two interesting literature reviews (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013; Berger, 2016) that reviewed deradicalization and disengagement from violent extremism. These reviews

suggested that extremism cannot be remedied with popular interventions like interfaith groups, exercises in logic, or debate, but that members could be influenced to question their options by being exposed to contradictory and questionable elements of their cultures.

Littman and Paluck (2014) suggested that extreme prejudice and hostility originate from violence-prone groups, by these groups desensitizing their citizens and normalizing bigotry and extremism. This explains why even ethically-minded individuals who grow up in such environments tend to exhibit intolerance. Dixon and colleagues (2014), also, negated the effect of prejudice research done by social scientists, claiming that these studies tended to be formulated on "lovey-dovey" ideas of peace and understanding and that they were mostly executed on college campuses, in regions with minimal conflict. Stephan (1986) reported that the prejudice intervention method of encounter groups not only achieved insignificant results but also harmed under certain conditions. Only 17% of studies of encounter groups in conflict-driven environments indicated a decline in prejudice, while 46% of these studies reported an increase (Stephan, 1986). Dixon and colleagues (2014) proposed that prejudice reduction in conflict regions starts with stabilizing the afflicted nation or region. Dalgaard-Nielsen (2013) and Berger (2016) also concluded that interventions like contact-groups or debates fail to reverse extremist attitudes. In short, research indicated that most prejudice-intervention methods are questionable, with certain methods succeeding in certain situations but failing in others. The interventions that succeeded seemed to do so mostly in the "lovey dovey" context, but were defeated in conflict settings, like North Africa, the

Middle East or inner-city ghettos. Dixon and colleagues (2014) concluded, "We hold that the entire 'problematic' of prejudice and prejudice reduction is ripe for a careful reappraisal in our discipline" (p.22).

What Is Unknown about These Issues

The cognitive approach remains the dominant psychological approach to understanding and explaining discrimination, prejudice, discrimination, stereotypes, and conflict (e.g., Duckitt, 1992), but critics point to serious flaws. Two largely overlooked limitations are that the cognitive approach fails to explain individual differences in intergroup attitude and behavior (Condor & Brown, 1988) and that it fails to explain how individuals are socialized into the norms and attitudes of their group. As discussed earlier, the cognitive approach also focuses on a weak sort of bias, while it ignores the very real problems of everyday violence and hatred (e.g., Dixon et al, 2014). Third, prejudice is an affect-based attitude derived from real-life conditions, but the cognitive approach tests its assumptions under laboratory conditions (e.g., Paluck & Green, 2009).

In their comprehensive review, Paluck and Green (2009) and Paluck (2012) rated most prejudice-reducing methods (these included diversity training, multicultural, anti-bias and moral education, sensitivity training, and certain types of conflict resolution strategies) inconclusive. Prejudice-reducing methods somewhat more reliable were cooperative learning and social interdependence theory (e.g., Roseth, Johnson & Johnson, 2008), media and entertainment interventions (built on social norms and social cognitive theories; e.g., Cameron et al., 2005), peer influence and discussion or dialogue programs based on social impact theory (Paluck, 2010), intergroup contact (e.g., Green & Wong,

2009), self-worth interventions connected to cognitive-dissonance and self-perception theory (e.g., Rokeach, 1971), and cross-cultural and intercultural training (Bhawak & Brislin, 2000). Paluck, (2012) and Paluck & Green (2009) reported these programs, too, showed contradictory results and needed to be supported with behavioral and longitudinal observations.

The encounter method of diversity training, for instance, has long been promoted for reducing prejudice despite its propensity for attracting polemical attacks and lawsuits (Feder, 1994). Feder (1994) insisted that many encounter groups use methods that no reliable psychologist would recommend. Allport (1954) was one of many scientists who noted that diversity training works best under conditions where "contact is sanctioned by institutional supports (i.e., by law, custom or local atmosphere)" (p. 202) which makes it impotent for socialization of closed societies like cults. The encounter group can also fail to positively affect individuals traumatized by the stigmatized group (Bodenhausen, 2009; Zarate, Sanders, & Garza, 2000). Successful group dynamics require that individuals of both sides be open to modifying their preconceptions. If this does not occur, participants may refrain from stereotyping atypical exemplars (Fiske, 2002), but persist in stereotyping the group. In short, the encounter group works best on challenging superficial impressions in conflict-free regions but fails to reverse experience or group-derived prejudice, since affect is stronger than cognition and far more resilient to control (LeDoux, 1996).

Research on other prejudice interventions, such as stereotype-suppression and promotion of counter-stereotypes, shows that stereotype-suppression not only fails to

suppress prejudice but has a reverse effect (Galinsky & Moscowitz, 2000; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). When researchers attempted to change actual belief (as, for instance, in Wegner and Petty's [1997] Flexible Correction Model) participants tended to either ignore (Trope & Thompson, 1997), distort (Darley & Gross, 1983), forget (Stangor, 2009), or rationalize (Swim & Sanna, 1996) contradictory information. Some untested studies suggested that individuals may question their prejudice when faced with inconsistencies in their values, attitudes, and behaviors. Hing, Li and Zanna (2002), for instance, used dissonance-related techniques to reduce anti-gay, anti-Asian, and anti-Black prejudice. But their studies were one of many that lacked conclusive evidence (Paluck & Green, 2009).

Finally, I found few studies that focused on extreme prejudice. Messick and Mackie (1989) reported that standard prejudice-reducing interventions focus on superficial in-group favoritism rather than on outgroup hostility. Marilyn Brewer (1999) said that prejudice models focus on positive emotions such as admiration, sympathy, and trust that are reserved for the in-group, rather than on negative emotions, like hate and aggression, that exist in radical conditions. As Dutton and colleagues (2005) concluded after searching in vain for some psychological explanation for the unending inter and intra-group conflict in Africa: "The explanation of the specific forms of violence, rape, mutilation, torture, etc., is not forthcoming from current psychological knowledge [...] psychology has not attempted to account for the extremity of massacre" (Dutton, Boyanowsky, & Bond, 2005, p. 470).

To quote Paluck (2016):

> What do social scientists know about reducing prejudice in the world? In short, very little. Of the hundreds of studies on prejudice reduction conducted in recent decades, only 11% test the causal effect of interventions conducted in the real world (p. 147).

I developed my study to address that need.

Summary and Conclusions

The study of prejudice is one of the most voluminous fields in social science, but as Paluck (2012; 2016) and Paluck and Green (2009) concluded in their reviews, prejudice study and its reduction must branch out substantively to include more qualitative real-life research. Research, too, should focus on deeply held prejudice and probe prejudice reduction in the context of real-life conflict. This study examined the experiences and attitudes of people who were raised in a "culture of conformism" and who independently reversed their prejudices in order to gain some insight on how to reduce prejudice in a real-world situation. This study used a social constructivist/ IPA stance, where autobiographical narratives were investigated to uncover the significance of the experience from the narrator's perspective. It is hoped that the findings from this study will help researchers and social-change practitioners treat the deeply-held prejudice that comes from socialization. The following chapter outlines the methodology of the study, reasons for using this method, and certain ethical concerns before it concludes with the study's limitations and implications.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This study analyzed autobiographical data from digital, print, audio, and visual sources from 21 defectors of insular faith societies to identify core themes associated with their prejudice retractions. My research questions were the following:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of defectors of closed faith groups as they disengage and deradicalize?

RQ2: What are the pathways for changing prejudice among defectors of closed faith groups?

Paluck and Green (2009) noted that prejudice literature tends to neglect extreme prejudice and focuses on prejudice in contrived laboratory situations, rather than in real life settings. This study focused on people indoctrinated with extreme prejudice in conflict environments and used a qualitative API method to gather the participants' descriptions of their experiences.

Research Design and Rationale

I attempted to describe the "lived experience" of 21 individuals in violent closed-faith societies who independently reversed their socialized bias to outsiders. Paluck and Green (2009) pointed out that few prejudice methodologies successfully treat prejudice and those that do deal only with the weak to moderate bias of non-conflict regions. Most prejudice-reduction studies study individuals who come from White, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic countries (Murrar, Gavac, and Brauer, 2016), rather than individuals who experience the extreme type of prejudice that researchers need to

study for conflict-resolution and peace. This dissertation used the phenomenological approach to investigate the process of how subjects in this study evolved to question their prejudices. I achieved this by analyzing their narratives to identify core themes of their experiences during their transitions from prejudice to prejudice-renunciation. The study is important because there are plenty of interventions that exist for treating weak to moderate prejudice but none for treating extreme prejudice.

Role of the Researcher

Scott (2006) advised researchers who conduct exploratory studies to master four qualities: Authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. Authenticity refers to the accuracy of the narrative and the extent to which it matches historical reality. As long as the crux of the story is true, it is considered authentic, even if the narrative diverges from historical reality in minute aspects. Credibility refers to the extent to which the biographer has exaggerated, or fabricated, aspects of the account. The documentary researcher probes for motives of the biographer to test whether author bias distorted aspects of the narrative. The researcher also considers whether the material is reliable, as of whether writing and reflections are original or whether one, or both, are plagiarized. According to Scott (2006), researchers can never fully determine whether narratives are completely reliable, authentic, and credible. The best one can do is flip the interrogation and question whether the sources can be considered inauthentic, noncredible, or unrepresentative. The fourth quality, “meaning”, refers to a clear and coherent descriptive authentically aligned to its historical context.

McCullough (2004) described a "theorization" stance, where the researcher uses a theoretical, hermeneutic framework for interpreting the material. Effective researchers realize the way they interpret the material follows their unique experiences and may differ considerably from the author's intent. In other words, the author composed the descriptive from his, or her, unique perspective; the reader, in this case the researcher, interpreted the narrative from the researcher's unique perspective. The two different perspectives may result in utterly different understandings. Scott (2006) described three phases where the meaning of the reading changes as it passes from writer to reader: The transition of the intended content (i.e., the author's intended meaning), the received content (i.e., the meaning as constructed by the reader/perceiver), and the internal meaning (i.e., transactional understandings derived from the intended and received meanings). Recipients align the intended meaning to their own mental constructs.

Methodology

This study used an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) that is a qualitative research method derived from the philosophical model of phenomenology. Phenomenology advises researchers to see experience as-is, namely in its core essence. It is also seen as the philosophical study of being, or existentialism. Researchers use the phenomenological research methodology for descriptive or theoretical purposes. This model is divided into two parts: Transcendental phenomenology that seeks to bracket or suspend one's interpretations, and descriptive phenomenology, influenced by thinkers like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, who alleged that humans are ontologically disabled from bracketing their assumptions. According to descriptive phenomenology, the best

one can do is to acknowledge one's bias, seek to describe the phenomenon in its raw manifestations, and replicate its truth. This position is often called hermeneutic phenomenology, since it aims to interpret rather than to transcend assumptions (Larkin & Thompson, 2011).

I chose IPA because it starts with the essence of the experience rather than with the individual. Larkin and Thompson (2011) said IPA accomplishes "a meaning-making that is conceptualized at the level of the person-in-context where we focus first on the meaning of an experience (e.g., an event, process or relationship) to a given participant, and recognize its significance for that participant" (p. 102). This idiographic approach suited my purpose, since I was interested in the experiences that inspired my particular subjects to retract their prejudice convictions. I also chose IPA, because it is commonly used in mental health and therapy to study toxic attitudes that range from depression to identity confusion (e.g., Smith and Osborn, 2007). Smith (2004) pointed out that IPA studies frequently assess life-altering events, decisions, or conditions around existential themes, which resonates with my dissertation.

Conceptual Framework

I used social constructivism as my theoretical base to bracket my bias. Social constructivism assumes that "there is no objective knowledge independent of thinking" (Grbich, 2007, p. 8) and that reality is socially embedded and exclusively exists in the mind. I tried to hedge my assumptions and to concentrate on the text to retrieve the essence of what it was that made my subjects change their attitudes. Grbich (2007) claimed that the constructivist approach works well with studies that have characteristics

of ethnography in that these studies involve "thick contextualized description and textual perusal using discourse analysis" (p. 8).

Sample and Sources of Data

According to Clarke (2009), IPA studies achieve credibility even with small sample sizes and the number of participants is reached when the analysis becomes saturated. Sometimes, saturation, as in my case, may never be reached, so I relied on Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), who averaged the number of participants needed in IPA models at 15 (although the trend is towards smaller sample sizes, such as eight to ten individuals, with some IPA studies even declining to as few as four participants or even to just one (Smith and Osborn, 2003). I settled for 21 case studies, although I came across many more relevant accounts both before and while doing my research.

I used print and digital reports of writers who come from isolated faith communities, where there was a certain taught intolerance to outsiders. Communities included Jehovah Witness, Old World Amish (Old Order), extreme Muslim groups (like Wahhabi or Salafi ideology), Haredi or Hassidic Ultra-Orthodox Jews, Mormon fundamentalism (FLDS Church), Christian fundamentalism (like Kingdom Identity Ministries, Pentecostalism, or some Baptist and Evangelical fundamentalist groups), and the Official Church of Scientology. Although the content of their education differed between communities, a common denominator in their education was that teaching was tied to the community and a spectrum of methods was used to raise barriers against the outside world. Most of these communities imposed restrictions related to contact with the outside. Censorship included limiting, if not banning, TV, radio, books, magazines,

newspapers, movies and computers. The result inhibited members of such societies from forming their own opinions. These are the subjects whose narratives I investigated.

Instrumentation

In our capacities as researchers, my assistant and I served as the instruments for data collection. The narratives and background context of my subjects helped me formulate questions and generate themes. I used an interpretive paradigm to investigate the lived experiences of the subjects during all stages of their journeys. I also engaged the assistance of an objective individual (a qualified student with no prior knowledge of my research or reading) to replicate my reading and coding process, after which we identified and resolved differences in our results.

I used a purposive sample of autobiographical texts that were compiled from archival resources of print material from libraries, universities and colleges in six countries and four US states. I also used digital audio and visual resources, as well as material from chat groups, forums, and social media platforms (like Facebook). My demographics spanned various extremist closed faith societies that indoctrinate their members with intolerance and hostility to outsiders.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participant and Data Collection

I selected only subjects who were raised from birth in these isolated faith settings, since I sought to discover why and how those individuals who lacked contact with a wider world reversed their indoctrinations. For the same reason, I chose individuals whose societies imposed an extreme form of censorship and who came from radically isolated groups. Because I wanted to investigate extreme prejudice, I also chose closed

societies where this attitude was part of their cultures. I, therefore, used Malise's (2004) definition of extremism to exclude certain isolated, although peaceful, groups, like Hutterites and Mennonites, from my study.

Additionally, I focused on "push" rather than "pull" features. Research suggests that "push" and "pull" features effect disengagement and deradicalization (or exit from groups) (e.g., Reckless, 1961). "Pull" features are qualities outside of the group that attract, while "push" factors are adverse characteristics of the group that repulse (McAdam, 1986). Even though "push" and "pull" factors are integrated (without the "push", the "pull" would not seem so inviting and the reverse (McAdam, 1986)), I focused on the "push" rather than on the "pull" to investigate motives for exit.

Data Analysis Plan

I closely reviewed each narrative, highlighting relevant excerpts and taking notes. I followed each reading with a summary of the account. These I collated and condensed, before I matched this summary against my original readings to verify whether my assumptions correctly captured the intent, or lived experience, of the original texts. This step is said to be the essence of IPA (e.g., Polkinghorne, 1989), where the researcher moves between inductive and deductive positions and places subthemes under superordinate categories. I also reproduced Willig's (2001) four stages of initial encounter with the text, identification of themes, clustering of themes, and final summary of these themes. I verified that my summary accurately reflected experiences that could be applied to the group as a whole.

On top of that, I used social constructivism to bracket my bias and to enter the mindset of the other. This required the approaches of bracketing, analyzing, intuiting, and describing (Giorgi, 1970; Polkinghorne, 1989; Swanson, Kauffman & Schonwald, 1988). Although each of these are separate items of descriptive phenomenology, I consistently used the practice of all four to achieve a true understanding of the phenomenon under study (Swanson-Kauffman & Schonwald, 1988).

Bracketing involved constantly monitoring my perceptions and bias and was accomplished by taking "field notes" on my emotions and thoughts and using an assistant. Analyzing was where I used five items of Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method to guide my phenomenological analysis. More specifically, I reviewed the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon at least twice to understand their accounts and to attempt to "live" their experiences. I extracted core statements from the narratives that seemed to encapsulate the phenomenon. I suggested possible meanings for significant statements. I categorized these meanings into clusters of themes common to each of the narratives, and I summarized these themes into an exhaustive description of the studied phenomenon.

I used the aspect of "intuiting", a form of empathy (Colaizzi, 1978), to bracket my perceptions, identity with the narrator's experiences and feelings, and try to immerse myself in their context for maximum identification. "Describing" was where I sought to present a theoretical model that accurately and precisely summarized the phenomenon under study and present universal implications (Colaizzi, 1978). Finally, I concluded with the "data collection/clustering" stage, where I collated units of meaning from the texts into particular themes (Sadala & Adorno, 2002) to elicit meanings from the studied

phenomenon. Colaizzi (1978) pointed out that this step may be the most creative of all, since it involves a creative leap on the part of the researcher who deduces assumptions from given excerpts.

Issues of Trustworthiness

My study included various questionable assumptions. First, I assumed that I can extract certain insights from my limited population, although it is highly likely that a larger autobiographical pool may produce different or contradictory indicators. Second, autobiography lacks truth status (Trochim, 2006), which makes my study questionable from the start. Third, I focused on socialized prejudice, ignoring the type of prejudice that comes from traumatized experiences, such as terrorism (Bar-Tal & Labin, 2001). This means that my inferences may only relate to indoctrinated prejudice and have little to no effect on the kind of extreme prejudice that originates from other factors.

Although quantitative research is, generally, considered more reliable than qualitative research, scientists recommend qualitative methodology for studying affect and human behavior. As Cameron (1963) stated, “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted” (p. 3). I, therefore, used a qualitative method for my study. Finally, as Yin (1994) noted, document analysis engenders a “biased selectivity”, where the researcher tends to select documents that support his viewpoint and reflect her beliefs. I may have fallen into that trap, too, despite my endeavors to hedge my bias with social constructivism and an assistant.

Ethical Procedures

The IRB identifies exemptions for research that consists of a collection of existing data that is publicly available. Since my research used publicly accessible data and did not involve actual human participants, I violated no issue of confidentiality or privacy.

Summary

This chapter described the research methodology. My study used an IPA approach to probe autobiographical accounts from multiple individuals raised in isolated faith communities who independently reversed their socialized intolerance. The methodology used social constructivism to bracket, analyze, intuit, and highlight key clusters of the phenomenon, while I took field notes and employed an assistant to control bias.

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 4 shows how defectors from closed faith societies chose to retract their indoctrinated prejudicial attitudes, despite being penalized for doing so. Each of the defectors, whose accounts will be analyzed in this chapter, came from strongly cohesive societies, also called "closed faith societies", where pressure to conform was so intense that their cultures formed their identities.

Sociological literature suggests that most participants of extremely controlling religious or political groups have self-annihilating connections to their groups (e.g., Leary & Baumeister, 1995). Isolated and socialized in these groups as they are, I wondered how certain participants recognize the toxicity of their indoctrinations. I also wondered what compelled these individuals to renounce their attitudes, knowing that they would be punished for doing so. This chapter examines 21 such individuals, some of whom were leaders in their groups. Several of these individuals participated in jihad and violence. Many lost their spouses, close family, friends, and even children over their defections. Most were unacquainted with world outside their communities. Some lost their jobs and savings after rejecting their group's bias. I wondered whether I could identify a pattern in these renunciation accounts for understanding and dealing with extreme prejudice in real life settings.

Most prejudice studies are conducted on campus settings in conflict-free environments, making the results irrelevant to real-life situations (e.g., Paluck & Green, 2009). Most methods seem unsuitable for serious prejudice intervention (e.g., Paluck & Green, 2009). Third, prejudice research focuses on weak to moderate bias and neglects

extreme prejudice (e.g., Paluck & Green, 2009). This study sought to investigate extreme prejudice in a conflict-filled real-life context.

Positionality

I chose social constructivism for my theoretical approach to monitor and hedge my bias. According to Grbich (2007), social constructivism assumes that "there is no objective knowledge independent of thinking" (p. 8). This study has been a product of more than 30 years of reading, reflection, personal experience and interviews with former members of obedience-demanding, or closed faith enclaves, prompted by my own experiences of leaving an isolated faith community that applauded and practiced violence. I have also conducted wide and intensive reading on multidisciplinary and related topics, more specifically on epistemology, ethnopsychology, religion, history, anthropology, sociology, and advanced mathematics, along with my Master's in philosophy and advanced logics. I interviewed and worked with cults (e.g., Hari Krishna, the Moonies), interviewed, taught, counseled, and worked with aspiring and actual terrorists (e.g., Zionist and Palestinian) in the Middle East, interviewed, counseled, and taught Neo-Nazis as well as former-communists (Hungary, Moldavia, Ukraine) and regularly experience Trumpism, white supremacism and confederate loyalty in parts of North Virginia and environs. My experiences gave me a unique insider perspective to this study but also made me a subjective researcher, which is why I labored all the harder to become aware of and hedge my bias. That's where I though social constructivism would be useful.

Summary of Participants

I used criterion sampling for my study, choosing only participants who grew up in isolated faith communities. Participants came from backgrounds that included Jehovah Witness, Old World Amish (Old Order), extreme Muslim groups (like Wahhabi or Salafi ideology), Haredi or Hassidic Ultra-Orthodox Jews, Mormon fundamentalism (FLDS Church), Christian fundamentalism (like Kingdom Identity Ministries, Pentecostalism, or some Baptist and Evangelical fundamentalist groups), and the Official Church of Scientology. A common denominator in their education was their ties to their communities and the spectrum of methods used to raise strong barriers against the outside world. According to Hammersborg (2005), insular faith communities establish an understanding of "they" and "we", where not even close relatives are part of the "we" if they exist outside the community. Such communities generate fear of everything outside. Children know that breaking out will result in severance from family and friends. Defectors run the risk of being despised, excommunicated, and losing their footholds in their communities (Hammersborg, 2005).

Some of these communities restrict contact with the outside, to the extent that they ban outlets that include TV, radio, libraries, secular reading material, movies, and internet. Former participants described it as "You are even not allowed to have free thoughts" (Hammersborg, 2005, p.5). The result is a climate of growing up without exposure to the "outside" world or the possibility for normal opinion forming, which makes it all the more striking that exceptional individuals break out to challenge their indoctrinations.

These are their biographies:

- Amir Ahmad Nasr - Nasr's account in *My Isl@m* (2013), describes how the internet transformed Nasr from a religious fundamentalist upbringing to a tech-savvy liberal Muslim.
- Ruth Irene Garrett - *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life* (2003) describes how Garrett grew up in and left her strict Old Order Amish sect.
- Alisa Harris - In *Raised Right: How I Untangled My Faith from Politics* (2011), Harris spent her childhood picketing abortion clinics and was homeschooled in conservative-Republican Christianity but considered other perspectives when she moved into adulthood.
- Ayaan Hirsi - Hirsi, a Somali-born Dutch-American activist, feminist, author, scholar, and former Dutch politician, spent the first 21 years of her life in an extreme Muslim environment. Her writings include *Nomad: From Islam to America: A Personal Journey through the Clash of Civilizations* (2011); *Infidel* (2007); *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now* (2016); *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* (2008).
- Jenna Miscavige Hill - Hill, niece of Church of Scientology leader David Miscavige, left Scientology in 2005. In *Beyond Belief: My Secret Life inside Scientology* (2013), she details her experiences as a member of Sea Org - the church's highest ministry and tells the story of her escape.

- Kyria Abrahams - *I'm Perfect, You're Doomed: Tales from a Jehovah's Witness* (2010) is the story of Abrahams' coming-of-age in, and defection from, Jehovah's Witness.
- *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out* (2003) *is* written and edited by ex-Muslim and secularist Ibn Warraq. The book documents more than 100 cases of apostasy in Islam.
- Sonsyrea Tate - *Little X: Growing Up In The Nation Of Islam* (2005) tells the story of Tate whose growing disillusionment with the Nation of Islam led to her break with the Muslim religion.
- Rachel Held-Evans; *Evolving in Monkey Town: How a Girl Who Knew All the Answers Learned to Ask the Questions* (2010) - Growing up in a Christian fundamentalist culture obsessed with apologetics, Held-Evans asked questions she never thought she would ask.
- Carlene Cross - In *Fleeing Fundamentalism: A Minister's Wife Examines Faith* (2006), Cross, a minister's wife, questions the underpinnings of her fundamentalist faith.
- Yossi Klein-Halevi; *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist: The Story of a Transformation* (2014) - An award-winning Israeli journalist recounts his youth as an activist in the Jewish terrorist Kach movement, and his eventual moderation and advocacy of Jewish-Gentile reconciliation.

- Shulem Deen - In *All Who Go Do Not Return* (2015), Deen recounts how he grew up in an insular Hassidic sect, was raised to know little about the outside world, and soon found his faith unravelling.
- Ed Husain; *The Islamist: Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, What I Saw Inside and Why I Left* (2007) is Husain's account of how he committed his life to Islamic fundamentalism and rejected it five years later to expose its threat.
- Maajid Nawaz - Maajid Nawaz founded Quilliam, a globally active think tank focusing on religious freedom, extremism and integration. *Radical: My Journey out of Islamist Extremism* (2012) describes the journey of Nawaz from top recruiter for Hizb ut-Tahrir to dissident.
- Shoshi - Shoshi grew up in and rebelled against a radically insulated Hasidic community. Her story comes from *OffTheDerech*, a website that interviews ex-Hassids.
- Anonymous - In "A moment that changed me: quitting the Jehovah's Witnesses" (*The Guardian*, 2016), Anonymous describes how she left Jehovah Witness and questioned her ideas and beliefs.
- Vyckie Garrison - Garrison, former leader in the Quiverfull Movement, describes her deconversion in "It happened to me: I escaped the 'Quiverfull' fundamentalist Christian cult" (x*oJane*, 2014).
- Derek Black - A former white nationalist, godson of David Duke. Black is also the son of Don Black, grand-wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, founder of the notorious

white nationalist website, *Stormfront*. Black recounted his deconversion experiences in "The white flight of Derek Black" (*The Washington Post,* 2016).

- Dan Barker - *The Purple Fox* (YouTube, 2010). Barker, popular leader in the Church of Christ, wrestled his faith, before he deconverted to atheism.
- Christian Charette; *From Fundamentalism to Freedom: My Story* (2013). Christian Charette, son of a Christian fundamentalist minister, and leader of various churches, defected to urge tolerance for all faiths.
- Joel Watts, author of the blog *Unsettled Christianity* - Watts grew up in The Church of Jesus Christ. A fire-and-brimstone preacher and self-described Bible-thumper, he left the church after 32 years and speaks out on the dangers of repressive and rigid fundamentalist teachings. His interview appeared in *Innerviews: Spiritual saga traces break from fundamentalist church* (*Charleston Gazette-Mail*, 2014).

Data Coding

Bazeley (2009) warned of the unremitting struggle to achieve objectivity that starts from the data collection stage itself, where I may choose accounts to match my agenda. I followed Bazeley's (2009) recommendations to focus on the context of the text, its layers of description, the substance of the story related to my search, and to monitor my ruminations.

I used Saldana's (2015) four methods for coding, namely, attribute coding, emotion coding, value coding, and narrative coding. Attribute coding identifies essential information on the data and demographic characteristics of the participants. Emotion

coding focuses on the emotions of the participants. Value coding investigates patterns in belief statements or belief occurrences. Narrative coding searches for patterns in individual narratives and in the narratives as a whole. I followed Bazeley's (2009) process of "feedback loops", where I immersed myself in the narrative, and read each account twice, concentrating on the second reading. This was followed by a third reading, where I used Saldana's (2015) second-cycle coding methods, of "pattern coding" and "focused coding", to extract themes. I used "pattern coding" to examine my codes for connections, following which I clustered these connections, or themes, and used "focused coding" to summarize the results.

My associate conducted her own research producing her own conclusions. I merged her themes with mine. The whole took one month of closely focused reading on my part. (I had read most of the material in the past, so I was familiar with the narratives). My associate spent almost three months reading the material and replicating my methods. As each of us separately read the accounts, we looked for themes, highlighted sections, and took notes of our reflections. We summarized our reflections and findings before we proceeded to the next account. At the end, we collated the whole, reviewed it for sense-meaning and contrasted it to the original narratives, before we drafted a rough summary, as described above. Subsequent drafts were composed and edited, until my associate and I agreed that our final production matched the accounts and seemed to satisfy our research questions.

In the course of my study, I identified 291 statements that seemed to be significant. I divided these statements into 15 categories, reduced to four clusters or

themes. My associate thought a motivational category should be added, by which she meant the affective (emotional) domain of psychology, but I rejected that idea, since I considered affect too vague, variant, and unpredictable and sought something specific that people who deal with bigotry could use that transcends cultures and time. Second, participates of cloistered groups may be driven to rebel for natural reasons like love or sex or to escape abuse. I sought Hunsberger and Altemeyer's (1995) "amazing apostates" who defied their groups for cognitive reasons, so that social scientist could replicate my results.

Emerging Themes

My IPA research led to four core themes that seemed to describe the phenomenon under investigation. The first theme I called "As-Is", where the beliefs of my subjects collided with reality, and where "reality" was am incident discordant to their convictions. In all cases, the phenomenon was marked by an abrupt cessation of faith that tended to occur unexpectedly and against their wills. Those who encountered this phenomenon and sought truth, retracted their prejudiced indoctrinations. I called the second theme critical thinking, where subjects conducted analytical reading of their core texts to resolve doubts and/or to proselytize. Jarring encounters with discordant text challenged their beliefs. My third theme was wide reading, where subjects recounted analyzing core multidisciplinary texts from subjects like history, anthropology, sociology or comparative religion and found that facts challenged convictions. Finally, I added a fourth theme of altruism, where an outsider's generosity contradicted stereotypes of demonization held by the

subject's particular group. Although this theme has evaluative shadowing's, I included it because of its cognitive component where the subject ruminated on their experiences.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

According to Yin (2003), researchers who conduct exploratory studies need to master the four qualities of authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. Authenticity refers to reflecting on the truth of the document and on whether it accurately conveys the broader story of the author, even as nuances diverge from reality. I relied on eyewitness testimony, publishing house credibility, and reviews to verify authenticity. The second quality of credibility is whether the author exaggerated or fabricated one or more details. I relied on the sources stated above for narrative credibility, although I allowed for certain points of distortion. Third was whether the material was "reliable", in whether it was plagiarized, or accurately reflected the author's perceived experiences. Since one can never fully determine whether documents are completely reliable, authentic, and credible, I followed Scott (2006) prescription and questioned whether the sources were inauthentic, non-credible, or unrepresentative. I judged them neither of these for the reasons given above.

Finally, the quality of "meaning" rests on whether the evidence is clear and comprehensible, and on the authenticity of its historical and geographical context. Although my experience is limited to only one close faith group, I have spoken to members of others over the years and read enough material to roughly validate the context.

My study is limited in its transferability in that it is based on various questionable assumptions. First, a larger population would likely have produced additional, varying or contradictory results. Second, autobiography lacks truth status (Trochim, 2006), which makes my study questionable from the start. Third, my population reflect extreme prejudice from socialization, while extreme prejudice also derives from trauma (Bar-Tal & Labin, 2001), possibly rendering the implications of my study irrelevant to atypical exemplars.

The Themes

Theme 1: As-Is

I see this "As-Is" theme as the overarching theme, where the subject had his or her belief system shaken in an unexpected encounter with a threat to their convictions. This "As-Is" encounter could also be described as a phenomenological occurrence, where the perceiver came face-to-face with the actual and had his or her "eyes opened." Many of the subjects used expressions that indicated as much. Garett (2003), for instance, said "My mind was a tornado. [After] that moment I felt as though I had been flying blind for years" (p. 20). Cross (2006) described her studies as a light that broke through "the fog" (p. 131). Hirsi (2005) said the religious and cultural contradictions confused her "she couldn't see straight" (p. 32). Later, she said "the "little shutter" in the back of her brain opened and thoughts came tumbling out (p. 104). Held-Evans (2010) only knew that "sometime in my late teens or early twenties, it was as if Jesus packed his bags and moved from my heart into her head" (p. 105).

Held-Evans' faith-infused content of Jesus representing "faith", heart", or "spirit" changed to a Jesus of "atonement", "logos", "the *object* [italics mine] of my faith", and "absolute truth". The first are effective descriptions, the last are cognitive terms. She, also, noted that "[Jesus] was something I agreed to, not someone I followed" (p. 105). I noted the conversion of subject, "someone I followed", into object, "something I agreed to".

Anonymous (2003) described how her faith was impacted by her critical reading of the Quran. Once done, "I found myself standing face-to-face with the truth" (p. 148) - an intimate encounter, not protected from denial. She elaborated: "The denial acts as a shield that covers [believers], that protects them and that saves them from facing the pain of shock and disillusionment. Once that shield is up nothing can break it down." (p. 148). What believers need, Anonymous (2003) insisted "is a good shock." Think of shock in its literal sense as a force that jolts individuals into encounter with the feared unknown. "Shocks are used by doctors to bring back to life clinically dead patients." (p. 148). Further: "The word faith means belief without evidence," You need, she says, "to bombard Muslims with 'facts'" (p. 149). I called this category, the "As-Is".

The triggers were unpredictable, largely unsought for and unavoidable. In *The Purple Fox,* Barker (2010) described an Evangelical woke of all-day singing and Church Prayer Meeting, with thousands of Church youth participating from all over the United States. At some point, he disassociated from himself and saw himself as just someone playing a guitar to entertain the crowd. As he suddenly saw it, it was the instruments, not the Spirit of God, as he had believed, that spurred crowd epiphany.

Deen (2015) recounted his Hasidic experiences and how for the first time he saw God's Ambassador as human. In Deen's (2015) words, each Passover, Hasidim would compare the number of seconds the rabbi wept and analyze the smallest signs of spontaneity: "The rabbi wept this year more than last" (p. 15). They argued over the milliseconds: "this year he wept only once, but for a twenty-three second stretch" (p. 15) - all this to mine for some hidden meaning of mysticism, some tip for self-improvement, some secret message from the Rebbe that was supposed to have infinities of significance.

One Passover, Deen (2015) watched how followers crawled the rafters and pushed to get nearer to the diminutive man sipping his soup at the head of the table. Deen reflected:

> [That] day, I began to wonder. Where exactly was the Rebbe's greatness? Was he a scholar? Was he a saint? Had he ever shown anyone any exceptional kindness? How would one even know it, considering that he was barely accessible to his followers, his acts so meticulously scripted, his public utterances limited to carefully prepared thoughts of little consequence, private audiences always brief and perfunctory, five minute consultation after a five-hour wait. (p. 15)

Deen's (2015) ruminations seemed a perfect example of As-Is, where he reduced myth to empirical occurrence. Deen says:

> I thought about the Rebbes of other sects – so many of them, of late consumed by squabbles. The squabbles were often coated in veneers of piety, but the differences were rarely matters of principle or ideology. They were about power

> and control. And real estate. Millions of dollars in properties and institutions and the great communal wealth amassed by each sect. (pp. 15-16)

The extraordinariness of this reflection is that it was done by someone dedicated to his rabbi with no access to outside material or outside knowledge for contrast. (Deen lacked radio, libraries, the internet, a fundamental education). In contrast, Deen's wife, Gitty, chose faith over fact. "Our Rebbe," she insisted, "was not to be questioned. I was taught to have *faith in the righteous*" (p. 16). Again, Deen used As-Is to challenge his wife's response:

> What did it mean to have faith in the righteous? Was it to have faith in their very righteousness? There was something maddeningly circular about that – how did one know if they were righteous enough to have faith in? By faith? (p. 16).

Hirsi's (2007) As-Is moment came when she saw Holland for the first time and saw that contrary to what she ha been taught, the Dutch were happier, healthier, and more functional than her own culture in all ways. Says Hirsi (2007):

> The streets were clean, the shopfronts gleamed, no potholes, no lecherous men called me to bed with them. No Brotherhood members threatened women with hellfire. No homeless. No slums, no people who lived on top of one another. No government corruption… I remember thinking 'This is amazing, how can it be so?' I felt I had been thrown into another world. I was Alice in Wonderland. (Infidel, 2007, p. 185)

Hirsi's rebellion shows the As-Is each step of the way. When ten, she wondered why she should convert Christians, if Allah had destined them for hell. By 17, she

wondered why Muslims had to attack non-Muslims for a religious state, if Allah was omnipotent. And if God were all-merciful, why were women victimized?

Hill (2005) described her boyfriend's break with the Church of Scientology, after he was shunned, despite Church teachings that God forgave repentant sinners. "Dallas," she remembered, "was in disbelief. The contradictions of the Church were on full display; perhaps more clearly than ever before he saw how the Church said one thing and meant another" (p. 501). Other As-Is events included how both were startled to discover that few outsiders had heard of Church of Scientology founder, L. Ron Hubbard, contrary to what they had been taught, and that most outsiders were kind and good. When it came to watching TV for the first time:

> I found myself a bit surprised that what I saw didn't match what I'd learned in Scientology. We were taught that homosexuals were perverts and hostile... However, when I watched these guys on television they didn't strike me as any of those things. (p. 517)

Similarly, Held-Evans (2010) described how one Mormon missionary said: "I guess after you spend so much time in another country, you start to realize how similar everyone really is, how there's not that much difference between us" (p. 84). The Muslims they encountered considered themselves God's Elect and tool for spreading the Truth, just as they, the Mormons, did. Said Held-Evans (2010): "The guy who pushed a button somewhere and blew up my vehicle - the guys [who were] brought up in an alien faith and taught to kill themselves or blow himself up at checkpoints" (p. 84). "Most of

them, too," she reflected, "are doing just what they sincerely believe to be God's will. Most are just as passionate and screwed up as the rest of us." (p. 84).

In Held-Evans (2010), a missionary friend reflected:

> I've gotten to know some Muslims pretty well and that's really changed my perspective. They're not all violent fundamentalists. They don't all hate America. In fact, the Muslim guy that helped me learn Arabic is a heck of a lot more devoted to his faith than most Christians I know. … It's hard for me to say 'Hey, you're going to hell because you didn't grow up in a Christian home like me.' (p. 85)

This As-Is incident was compounded by others, where Held-Evans (2010) saw innocent children killed and was tormented that their Jesus-believing killers would enter paradise while their victims were for hell. After reading Anne Frank's diary, she wrote "For weeks, I prayed diligently for Anne's departed soul" (p. 92).

To Yossi Klein-Halevi (2014), it was his non-Jewish girlfriend who perplexed him. If *all* non-Jews hated Jews as his culture said, how come she had never heard of Jews and how was it she liked him despite his Jewishness? "My father had warned me that a gentile woman would betray her Jewish lover in their first fight, calling him 'dirty Jew'. Lyn and I sometimes fought, but my father was wrong" (p. 206). Another time, a homeless person who was Irish, told him he had fought for Israel in 1948. Klein-Halevi was nonplussed: "What was a non-Jew doing fighting for Israel instead of fighting to destroy it" (p. 301). In time, Klein-Halevi (2014) wondered whether the Jews were as friendless as his community had told him, and "whether the 'righteous Gentiles' as we

condescendingly called our allies, were really rare exceptions" (p. 200). Culminated doubts from these As-Is encounters led to his leaving the terrorist Kahane Chai (Kach) group.

Klein-Halevi wasn't the only one disturbed by contradictions between teachings and reality. Husain (2007) pondered why his non-Muslim university teachers showed genuine concern when they discussed Islam. The Hizb had insisted that university professors criticized Islam. Husain (2007) noted, "The exceptionally friendly Professor Judd, [and others] openly discussing the merits of Muslim identity in British India and the exploitation of these sentiments by egotistical politicians… hardly conformed to that stereotype" (p. 158).

Abrahams (2010) was told that gentiles who included people like Mother Theresa, the Dalai Lama, or Elie Wiesel, would go to hell. It confounded her that one of her Gentile friends, who was so ordinary "[she] liked Tears for Fears, button candy and making prank calls" (p. 32) could be a bad influence. As she saw it, there were people in her community who abused their children, beat their wives, connived, and drank. How were these people holy and Mother Theresa evil? Further As-Is questions, like these, corroded her convictions. Tate (2005), too, was oppressed by these same observations, where certain white people seemed better, kindlier, and more honest than some of her Muslim Brotherhood teachers. Her teachers taught her that God wanted her to use all her talents, while at the same time He only wanted her to be an obedient wife and mother. Anomalies like these confused her.

To Shoshi of *OffTheDerech*, it was "Little incidents of non-Jews being kind, something we were told they weren't, or my finger staying intact after accidentally turning the light on Shabbos, not dying after eating candy on Yom Kippur (fast day), etc." (n.d., online). She also mentioned being disturbed by hypocrisy, something that appears in many of my narratives. It seems to me that hypocrisy may be reduced to the same As-Is concept, where the defector notices that parent, teacher, or respected members of the community violate what they preach. There is a misalignment between teaching (where all are said to be holy or to tread a certain path) and fact (where deeds negate doctrine).

I noticed this phenomena with Deen (2015), where Deen was disturbed by incidents where community members, including the Rebbe, perpetrated acts that contradicted their teachings. One time, some followers burned the possessions of a "questionable" student. Another time, they torched the home of someone who chose another rabbi. Some followers stoned lost non-Jewish drivers. As Deen (2015) came into contact with the world, he noticed that both religious and secular Jews outside his group knew more about Judaism than he. The world was more varied, Jews more diverse, practicing Jews were not all Chassidic as his rabbis, or sect, had told him. "I soon discovered a world of people entirely different from anyone I knew" (p. 128). This, among other incidents, "shattered the narrative he had been given" (p. 128).

Later, I came across two other incidents of As-Is that fit the conditions of the research. The first occurred in the 2014 Lifetime movie *Outlaw Prophet: Warren Jeffs.* In the 1970s, Jeffs started his own isolated Mormon polygamous sect of about 50 followers,

where members were taught to distrust outsiders and all followers were ordered to kill those their Prophet instructed them to. One of the group's Apostles reneged when he noticed that events turned out differently from the Prophet's prophecy. He thought: *If the Prophet erred this time, how often had he erred in the past.* The man left to direct cult deprogramming programs.

The second account is from Taylor (2017) who described her defection from her fundamentalist Church on her blog, "*I Dare You*":

> I was sitting in my high school homeroom listening to morning devotions when the name Bill Gothard was introduced and his ten rules for marriage were pronounced "Biblical." I remember my shy, yet outraged hand flying into the air as if propelled by something more than nerves and muscles. "Where are these rules in the Bible? This should not be called a Bible study," I demanded. I went home, disgusted. (para. 5)

Taylor (2017) took "Biblical" literally. As she saw it, the Bible omitted Gothard's rules, therefore they could not be called Biblical. If Gothard was wrong here, his other teachings could be wrong, too. These are examples of the As-Is theme, where the subject encountered hard events or facts that shook their convictions.

Sub-theme One: Critical thinking

Certain subjects seemed to lose their faiths after a concentrated reading of primary sources. Anonymous (2016), for instance, remarked:

> I'm grateful every day for my education and my desire to learn and think independently, a skill that fostered in me those initial doubts about Jehovah's

> Witnesses, and enabled me to have the strength to search for answers elsewhere in unbiased literature. (para. 8)

In other words, her training to analyze texts eventually corroded her bias.

Anonymous (2003) described how he read the Quran in English and was rattled by the results. He was, as he said "the typical religious fundamentalist, trapped in my own world of conspiracies; the Jews are behind everything" (p. 15). A chance encounter with an online group of Muslims caused him to read the Koran in English:

> Prior to joining this organization, I hadn't read the Koran in English, instead reading it in Arabic (believing this would bring me *Swaab* - blessings). When I read it for the first time, I became very worried by the amount of violence in the texts. Subsequent late night sessions with the Koran convinced me that I was reading a text to war. (p. 127)

Nasr (2013) self-imposed project included studying Islamic history and analyzing Koranic and Hadeira verses. He read the religious texts in English instead of in rote Arabic:

> I was dumbstruck. Is this really what Islam says about fellow human beings? Is this truly what my love stands for and advocates? I dug into the Quranic verses that supposedly said Jews were 'turned' into pigs and apes … The interpretation varied (p. 108)

Anonymous (2003) cited an ex-Muslim who said that:

> My apostasy against Islam came about through a sustained critical analysis of the fundamental tenets of all regions, thus opening the way towards self-criticism. …

> It slowly dawned on me that the Koran was not the infallible, immutable word of God, but a fascist slur on humanity, a human document with little relevance to the modern condition as well as the realization of the countless contradictions, historical inconsistencies and errors and some of the most intolerant verses ever written. (p. 209)

Husain (2007) found *his* religious doubts deepened by critical reading of source texts. His teachers, for instance, had told students to disobey parents who discouraged them from martyrdom, but the Koran demanded parental respect:

> How could people in the Hizb reject their parents so easily? Don't they know about the man who wanted to go on a military expedition and the Prophet said that looking after elderly parents was more important than jihad? (p. 155).

Anonymous (2003) said her critical reading of the Koran left her utterly disillusioned. "I had read the whole thing and could no longer fool myself, saying that these inhumane verses were taken out of context" (p. 148). Further:

> The whole Quran is full of verses that teach the killing of the unbelievers and tell how Allah will route them after they die. There are very few lessons on morality, of justice, honesty or on love. The only message the entire book conveys is to believe in Allah and to achieve this, it coaxes people with celestial rewards of unlimited sex with fair *houris* in Paradise and coerces them with the threat of blazing fires of hell. (p. 148)

Anonymous (2003) reflected:

> When the Koran speaks of righteousness, it does not really mean righteousness as we intend it, but it means belief in Allah. Good actions are irrelevant; belief in Allah is the ultimate purpose of a person's life and of the entire creation. (p. 148)

Hirsi (2007) opened the Koran to assuage her doubts:

> If God were merciful, then why did Muslim have to shun non-Muslims - even to attack them, to establish a state based on Allah's laws? If He is just, then why were women so downtrodden? I began collecting together all the verses in the Quran that said God was wise, God was omnipotent, God was just… I pondered them." (Infidel, 2007, p. 33)

One sees the As-Is clearly with Hirsi (2007) when she concluded:

> Clearly in real life, Muslim women were not 'different but equal' as her teacher, Sister Aziza had maintained. The Quran said 'men rule over women'. In the eyes of the law and in every detail of daily life, we were clearly worth less than men. (p. 102)

Hirsi's teachers warned her she was Satan's instrument. So,

> I bought my own English edition of the Quran and read it so I could understand it better. But I found that everything Boqol Sawm [a particularly fanatical preacher] had said was in there. Women should obey their husbands. Women were worth half a man. Infidels should be killed. (2007, p.104)

In other words, the As-Is, or literality, of the Koran, defeated the deep indoctrination of her group.

Held-Evans (2010) desperately wanted to believe, so she collected evidence "for the little trial I was conducting in my head" (p. 97). This included looking into evolution, reading about comparative regions, and confronting an unflattering history of her church. "I studied troubling biblical texts that seemed to support slavery, misogyny, violence and ethnic cleansing" (p. 97). As-Is doubts accumulated: *If God is good and merciful then why did he command Joshua to kill every man, woman and child? That seems to be genocide. How could God be fair and just if most people face eternal damnation?* It seemed a little suspicious that the only true religion was the one she happened to grow up in.

She tried to read the Testament as though she were seeing it for the first time: "If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Do not store up for yourself treasure on earth. Do not judge" (p. 98). She realized these Biblical teachings contradicted Church practices. Her church, for instance, applauded decadent, godless and immoral celebrities, politicians, and billionaires, as well as rationalized behavior that the Bible called "evil". Far from forgiving, the Church was intent on retribution, on setting boundaries and on despising people like the homeless and needy. Held-Evans (2010) concluded, "The teachings of Jesus fly in the face of all we are told by our culture and even by the church" (p. 104). In fact, "as I grew more acquainted with the Gospels [I realized] that Jesus had a very different view of faith than the one to which I was accustomed" (p. 104). Far from being the elect, or the Lamb of Jesus, absorption in the text showed Held-Evans (2010) that

God helped all sorts of people from pagans to despots, regardless of their creed. This As-Is accumulation of contradictions made Held-Evans admit "I was [a] skeptic" (p. 97).

Cross (2006) studied world history to reinforce her faith, and found material that made her question her Christian fundamentalist lifestyle. Intensive historical research showed her there were hundreds of books purporting to be the exclusive testimonies of Jesus and that it was only because of the subjective wrangling of a certain Council of Nicaea that an arbitrary 66 books were chosen for "Holy Scripture". Fundamentalist apologetics rang hollow:

> I remember the day, sitting at the kitchen table while the girls wrote their lessons, when I closed my history book and stared out in the blank openness of the universe. If, instead of God's direct revelation from heaven, the Bible was simply a compilation of religious writings that supported an emerging third-century religious sect, fundamentalist Christianity was a house of cards. Its cornerstone belief that the Bible was without error and thus could be used as a textbook for modern ethics was patently absurd. (p. 133)

This made Cross (2006) investigate the roots of Christianity "letting historical evidence, rather than religious fervor, lead the way" (p. 134). She delved into church history and anthropology, philosophy, comparative religions, and sociology and, gradually, found facts defeating faith. One sees a replication of the same As-Is theme, where focus on the literalness of key texts, or primary sources, results in an immediate encounter (somewhat like the Buberian I-Thou experience) that defeats years of indoctrinated teachings, like hostility to outsiders.

Sub-Theme Two: Clashes of Information

Broad reading, or exposure to other ideas, was another path that seemed to cause subjects to reverse their prejudices. Deen's (2015) rebellion developed with the internet, radio and the local library. Cross' (2006) questions developed with classes that included comparative history, philosophy, and literature. She delved into church history and anthropology, philosophy, comparative religions, and sociology, and was disturbed to discover Church diagrams refuted by the historical record. "History showed that the New Testament was not an errorless document that had been dedicated by God to the apostles shortly after the death of Jesus" (p. 131).

Husain (2007) changed his mind on *kafir* (i.e., infidels) through the following: "I started to read as widely as possible about representative government, freedom and democracy and realize that these were all contested concepts... reflecting different social and political realities in different countries" (p. 159). Islamic radicalism, he noted, was rooted in rejection of the West. Its hatred was a legacy of the group, not of the Koran, and it was the group, not the Koran, that institutionalized intolerance.

One of Husain's professors showed how history and the present was generated by a past open to multiple interpretations. Husain (2007) learned that historical records do not necessarily tell us what happened, but only what their authors wanted us to know about what happened or the author's perceptions on the event. The Hizb prided themselves on "their intellectual purity" as "carriers of deep enlightened thought" (p. 160), but Husain (2007) wondered whether their intentions were really as pure as they claimed, or whether these intentions were constructions of their periods. He had to sever

himself from his faith-infused environment ("Away from the halaqah, in a free intellectual atmosphere" [p. 160]) to conclude that heretics were only called *kafir* because they opposed accepted custom. To be called a heretic, he concluded, was subjective, making hating outsiders irrational.

Hirsi (2007) gained her solace from Western books. "The more I learned about government, about the development of the individual, about systems of thought on social democracy and liberalism ... the more I preferred things this way" (Infidel, 2007, p. 248). When she contrasted the West to her cultural experiences, she concluded that "the concept of individual choice improved people's lives so visibly... I was enamored of the idea that you should think precisely and question everything and build your own theories" (p. 248). Her As-Is experiences and study generated cognitive dissonance.

Held-Evans' (2010) "most liberating moment "came, she writes, when she delved into world religions, history, sociology and anthropology and "discovered, as if for the first time, the diversity of my own religious tradition" (p. 131). Christianity alone had thousands of different creeds. Mormonism, in turn, was split into dozens more. Who was to say her Church owned the Truth.

To summarize, critical exposure to other ideas seems to have been another factor causing subjects to question their socialized prejudices. The same As-Is theme occurs where subjects seemed compelled by their absorption in primary sources to question their convictions.

Sub-Theme Three: A surprise encounter that showed the goodness and altruism of the demonized other.

This theme refers to unexpected encounters with the demonized other, or "outsider", where the other proved kinder, better, and more compassionate than stereotyped by the group. It is another instance of As-Is, since the reality contradicts group teachings.

Harris (2011) described how moved he was seeing an "apostate" minister humbly use his own resources to feed homeless adults who lived under bridges. He concluded that this was real Christian love not the kind practiced by his particular group, who strapped placards to shoulders and blasted homosexuals. This unanticipated face-to-face encounter with pure goodness, shattered indoctrination and shook his fidelity to his Church. Love doesn't happen, he writes, by being isolated from the world and by only donating to one's community. Rather, it happens by interacting with the world and by contributing to the *whole* universe. Real love must be *seen* to be believed. This kindness was a more incarnational love than that practiced by his group. Says he "I knew it when I saw it." (p. 20). Note the emphasis on seeing and realness.

Husain (2007) had been attracted to Jamaat-e-Islami and Hizb ut-Tahrir because they claimed to represent true Islam and to perfect the world, but after one vicious group meeting he wondered. "Where was all the brotherhood we spoke about? On the bus home that day, for the first time in years, I cried" (p. 110). Over time, he wondered whether Islam had anything to offer and soon realized he was confounding Islamism with Islam.

The disillusionment of Nawaz (2013) started in Pakistan, with the As-Is disconnect with leaders' preaches and their brutality. Nawaz (2013), jailed for killing non-Muslims, was confounded when Amnesty International freed him because it was the

"right" thing to do. He remarked, "As I got sucked into the Islamist ideology, I began to dehumanize others [while Amnesty] instead of dehumanizing people, it dehumanized them" (p. 184). This As-Is perspective made him question his willingness to kill infidels: "Instead of being fascinated with the afterlife and death, for the first time in many years I began to reconnect with life itself, and with humanity" (p. 185).

Nawaz (2013), also, scrutinized Islamic history and found a "rather different story" than what the Hizb-a-Tihr (HT) had told him. He noted, for example, that not only had the Caliphate lacked the unitary codified legal system that HT advocated as a "return to the old", but that it was a far more flexible, tolerant, and pluralistic and more compassionate system than his own. When he came into contact with outsiders in jail, he contrasted the violent and farcical behavior of his teachers with the gentle and humane conduct of the demonized other. "I had always been taught - and had passionately believed - that the presence of Islamism meant justice, and the absence of it created injustice. But now I began to see things differently" (p. 92).

To summarize, this "altruism" theme, where kindness done by the demonized other contradicts prejudiced teachings also contains an As-Is theme, where subjects collide with a phenomenological essence that breach their convictions.

Connection to the Research Questions

The sample population. Each of the subjects grew up in closed faith settings, where group leaders emphasized their elites, while derogating outsiders. Members of these groups were taught to fear the unknown and to distrust any system of knowledge that differed from theirs. As Hammersborg (2005) writes, members knew that breaking-

out would mean rejection from family and friends. Shoshi (n.d.), for example, was brought up in a community so small that "once you are OTD you can't really walk around the *frum* [i.e. "pious"] area without meeting people you know, and some people will make your visits uncomfortable by publicly telling you off, screaming at you or at best ignore you" (para.2; online). There were no organizations to help defectors, while members who rebelled were told they had a mental illness. Shoshi grew up with ten siblings. She writes that they:

> Were extremely *frum* [i.e. "pious"]. We spoke only Yiddish, the girls always had to wear tights outside of the bedroom, and always had to dress modestly. Newspapers or fiction books were not allowed to enter the house, even the frum yiddish newspapers were considered *schmutz* [dirty] ... My mother vocally opposed anything secular, and would consistently contact the school and teachers about anything that she considered excessive promotion of English language and ideas such as a sketch based on the book Heidi or a song with English lyrics. (Online; para. 6)

Husain (2007) was taught he was a better, purer, and superior Muslim to others and that others who were *kafir*, namely non-religious or only "partial Muslim", deserved his scorn and hostility.

Hostility could become vicious. Nasr's (2013) teachers, for instance, asked each child what they wanted to be when they grew up, then warned them that Jews would destroy their dreams. The students were trained to stand up and chorus "The Jews are our enemies. They kill innocent people every day… They drink [your] blood" (p.35).

Ruth Garrett (2003) described how:

> As Old Order Amish children, we were taught that we were the privileged ones, chosen by God to do his work and the only ones who stood a chance of being saved. We were also warned that everything outside our world, otherwise known as English, was evil, inhabited by thieves and liars. (p 8)

The Jehovah Witness sect of Abrahams (2010) taught her that "worldly" people corrupted her. She was forbidden to play with "worldly" friends and was taught to pray "go away Satan" to diminish their influence:

> If I had to quote one scripture that was drilled into our brains from children, it would be 1 Corinthians 15.33, which reads 'do not be misled; bad associations spoil useful habits.' It didn't matter what **kind** of person you were. People who were Jehovah Witnesses were considered good associations, and that was where the creditor for fishing ended. Sure, some people might **appear** to be nice on the outside. They may even **claim** to be Christian. But Satan, they were told, used them as opportunity to lead Jehovah Witnesses astray. Sin, they were over and again taught, lurks in their hearts... The point was, if someone wasn't a JW, he was going to die at Armageddon, and there was no point in befriending the condemned. (p. 470)

Anonymous (2016) described how she was taught to distance herself from Gentiles:

> I was warned away from cultivating any close friendships with non-Jehovah's Witnesses". The process of leaving was so intimidating that "most young

> Witnesses grow up sequestered in their homes and their congregations, fearful of anything outside those boundaries. If at any point you do have doubts and want to leave, your forced isolation up to that point makes the decision inevitably intimidating and potentially overwhelming because of the prospect of being alone and without a support network to guide you through the process (online; para. 6).

When she left the faith at age 18, her best friends shunned her and attributed her apostasy to material weakness and greed.

Tate (2005) was taught that America was "the most vile and wicked nation on Earth, one that would be destroyed" (p. 30). Indoctrination started from kindergarten on:

> Every day we were drilled on a few of our twenty-five Actual Facts… we were taught that our God, who came to North America in the form of Master W. Fard Muhammad, measured the Earth, all the other planets and the distance between. This God wanted us to memorize the widths and weights of all the planets, our teachers said, because someday we black people, especially when few of us chosen for the Nation of Islam, would rule the world… By age six I could rattle off facts and figures in cadence. (p. 30)

Each of these authors was taught to condemn outsiders. Many of them were taught to hate. Some were brought up to harm and kill others and were applauded by their communities for doing so.

Hirsi's lecturers indoctrinated their students to hate the West and Jews:

> Sister Aziza told us about the Jews. She described them in such a way that I imagined them as physically monstrous: they had horns on their heads, and noses

> so large they stuck right out of their faces like great beaks. Devils and djinns literally flew out of their heads to mislead Muslims and spread evil. Everything that went wrong was the fault of the Jews... Saddam Hussein was a Jew. The Americans were controlled by Jews. The Jews controlled the world and that was why we had to be pure: to resist this evil influence. (*Infidel*, 2007, p. 85)

Nuqul Sawm, a popular preacher, was one of the many young men belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood, who strode through the streets and screamed "at the top of their lungs" (Hirsi, 2007, p. 85) for citizens to hate infidels. Hirsi (2007) described how such preachers gained thousands of converts as well as donations, with some women donating their dowries. This irrational, extreme hatred penetrated all aspects of life. This is not the type of prejudice studied on liberal American campuses where researchers do IAT tests on black-and-white racism. It is a racism manifested by a conflict-ridden society, socialized by years of indoctrination.

Other subjects like Deen (2015) and Klein-Halevi (2014) may not have joined Jihads, but their environments applauded and sanctified violence to apostates and outsiders. Klein-Halevi (2014) grew up among Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe who passed on their traumas:

> In the yeshiva I attended we got a children's magazine called *Olomeinu*, Our World - an appropriate name, because nothing non-Jewish, extra systemic penetrated its pages… Some Borough Park children said it was a mitzvah, a religious commandment, to spit when you passed a church. An alternative opinion held that it was forbidden to even walk within spitting distance of a church. There

> was a big church… near Eighteenth Avenue, and I'd cross the street rather than pass it. If I got too close, grasping hands might suddenly emerge from its massive doors and drag me into the basement, where priests would imprison me and force me to become a Christian. (p. 15)

In time, Klein-Halevi determined that he "wanted to be a protector and an avenger like Yossi Katz, a "big boy" who single-handedly prevented a pogrom in a Hungarian village. Had Tate (2005), who lived in Brooklyn, too, met Katz, she would have hated him - because he was Jewish and White and she Muslim and Black. Tate's uncles boasted how they attacked Whites for fun. "I guess we was about, eleven or twelve, ok," one uncle tells her, "and we had this little club called the White Hunters Club… what we used to do, okay, was, we would go around," he paused for drama, "and beat up white people" (p. 25). They would hide in bushes near Union Station, "all of us in a group", see a White lady (it usually was the women who were more vulnerable), kick her in the legs, and run. Their uncles were respected in the Temple, where preachers demonized Whites.

The Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of defectors of closed faith groups as they disengage and deradicalize?

Initially, each of the subjects sought to retain their convictions. Their identities were tied up with their groups, and they knew how much they would lose were they to challenge or defy group ideas. All of my subjects lost friends, family members, and their sense of identities, along with their status in their groups as they transitioned. Most had to

deal with a strange world, which was foreign to them and where they knew no one. They had no support, nor the education and know-how to deal with this outside world.

Agonizing religious doubt was another common aspect. Most of my subjects pushed back on their questions and many started their investigations to quell their doubts... For most, their defection was a spotty, circuitous, grueling journey. Tate (2005), for instance, tried to tell herself that Satan was testing her and her religious doubts were for self-improvement. At one point, she became suicidal:

> Some nights I curled up on the window sill and wondered if I jumped where I would die before my body hit the ground below. That way I could die without feeling the pain. I was tired of living, tired of thinking, tired of feeling. Tired of feeling the anger, confusion and depression… I wanted to do the right thing and please Allah, mostly to avoid His wrath. But I wasn't clear about that the right thing was anymore. For the next couple of months I was so depressed I couldn't eat, and my clothes began to sag." (pp. 224-225)

On Ramadan, Tate read each of the 114 chapters of the Quran and prayed over her doubts. Husain (2007) compared his identity to a narrative that was logical and clear one moment and chaotic and confused the next. His narrative consisted of statements such as "Our religious tradition and holy book is the truth. Theirs is rotten and corrupt." (p.110) and "My God is awesome. Theirs isn't." And then came the rupture, where "you discover things you'd rather not deal with… and it can be painful" (p. 111). Nawaz (2013) described his experiences as "uncomfortable" and guilt-ridden. "I shied away from the implications [of my thoughts] for a long time, retreating back into the comfort of

my Islamic beliefs" (p. 192). Like the other biographers, "as hard as I tried to bury [my doubts], I couldn't shift the nagging thoughts I had in my mind" (p. 192). Hs wife divorced him and took the children.

Hirsi's parents refused to speak to her, her husband left her, and her sister, who tried to leave too, killed herself, since the loneliness was too intense. Hirsi has government-paid protection to save her from those who consider her an infidel. Growing up, she was warned her doubts led to hell, "But I found I couldn't ignore them. I had to resolve this" (2005, p. 105). Similarly, Held-Evans (2010) persistently:

> look[ed] for ways to glue the pieces of my faith back together, trying to convince myself and my friends that everything was okay. In my commencement address, I assured the senior class that we were exceptionally prepared to answer life's questions, that our biblical worldview glasses would bring everything into focus, sharpening the contrast between black and white, right and wrong, evil and good. I said it, wanting desperately to believe it was true. I said it, knowing good and well that it wasn't going to be that simple. I said it, knowing that the world just didn't make that kind of sense anymore." (p. 80)

Changing long-held convictions can be frightening. Anonymous (2003) reflected "After reading the Koran, my perspective of reality was jolted. I found myself standing face-to-face with the truth and I was scared to look at it" (p. 148). Here, by the way, is another As-Is term. Anonymous (2003) was jolted from the comfort of faith (that told her she was unique and elite) to incarnational reality: "This wasn't what I was expecting to see. I had no one to blame, to curse and call a liar. I had found all those absurdities of the

Koran and the inhumanities of the author by reading the Koran itself." (p. 148). Nawaz (2013) titled the chapter of his change "where the heart leads, the mind can follow", but he said it took a long time for his mind to change:

> My change of views wasn't an overnight process. Ideological dogma doesn't work like that: It's not like a tap you can just switch off. So ingrained was HT's cause in my very being that it would be a process of years for me to work my way out of it. First emotionally and then intellectually, and politically, and finally socially, until piece by piece I had to reconstruct my personality from the inside out. This is not an easy thing to do" (p. 181).

His exploration took five agonizing years. "This was the prism, the mind-set from within which I had viewed the world: to unpick that, in descending order, until I questioned all my fundamental convictions was nothing less than a paradigm shift" (p. 182).

Once started, the search could not be stopped. This was why Deen (2015) called his book *All Who Go Do Not Return*. According to Nasr (2013):

> "By September 2006, I was beginning to feel scared from all the blog reading and blogging, but I couldn't stop. It was too late. My subversive thoughts and activities had already opened a can of worms that had to be dealt with" (p. 112).

2. What are the pathways for changing prejudice among defectors of closed faith groups?

I extracted one overarching theme of As-Is with three sub-themes of concentrated multidisciplinary readings of primary texts, critical analysis of religious texts, and

unexpected altruism by the demonized person. It seemed to me that each of these themes could be reduced to the As-Is, where face-to-face encounter with an incarnational reality dispelled indoctrinated intolerance to outsiders.

I noticed that many of the subjects used indicative expressions. Garett (2003), for instance, said "My mind was a tornado. [After] that moment I felt as though I had been flying blind for years" (p. 20). Cross (2006) described her studies as a light that broke through "the fog" (p. 131). Hirsi (2005) said the religious and cultural contradictions confused her "she couldn't see straight" (p. 32). Later, she added "the "little shutter" in the back of her brain opened and thoughts came tumbling out (p. 104). Held-Evan (2010) only knew that "sometime in my late teens or early twenties, it was as if Jesus packed his bags and moved from my heart into my head" (p. 105). Note the transition from affect to cognition, where the comfort and emotion of faith gives way to the distance and logic of cognition.

Research Team

I recruited an assistant to duplicate my research methods and to generate her own inferences, some of which differed from mine. For example, my assistant noted that one of the things that made Hill (2013) challenge Scientology was realizing its prescriptions were based on Society rather than on Religion and that Scientology subordinated Religion to its own inclinations. Similarly, my assistant thought that one of the things that made Harris (2011) change was distinguishing between Church and Religion and noticing that his Church was not necessarily religious in that it transgressed Biblical prescriptions. Tate (2005), too, contrasted teachings of self-improvement of the Muslim

Brotherhood with the outside world and concluded her community failed her. When it came to accounts written by ex-Muslims involved in terrorism or attempted terrorism, my assistant wrote that “most of these people saw what their religion was doing to other people and themselves and how what they were taught wasn't true. This made them bitter and go in different ways... and get angry.”

Deen (2015) contrasted the conduct of people in the outside world where his job was with that described by his group. Few of these individuals seemed as lecherous, miserable, and aimless, as his community told him they were. Men and women held hands when walking the streets. They seemed to live happier and more harmonious lives than he had been told. Few hated him, as he had been warned. My colleague pointed out that Watts (2014) also deradicalized himself through repeat encounters with facts. Watts (2014) wrote that he liked facts. His frustrations with the inaccuracies of his Church reinforced by extensive reading and a critical review of Holy Writ led him to question his prejudices.

My assistant came up with five themes: Wide reading, always asking questions, exposure to the goodness of outsiders, encountering incidents that disproved doctrine. Her fifth theme was emotional experiences. As mentioned, I rejected that theme for the reasons described earlier. My assistant pointed to Black (2006) as manifesting each of these four themes. He conducted wide reading of both core and multidisciplinary texts, experienced an encounter with as-Is, and described the unexpected loving-kindness of members of the demonized group. Black (2006), for instance, studied medieval history and noted that far from Whites being as evolutionarily superior and cultured as he had

been taught, they had gone through periods of profound decay during which Muslims and Asians superseded their intellectual and technological contributions. Black's discussions with Jewish hosts on Shabbat made him question his prejudice to the point that he publicly recanted his opinions. They behaved in ways that contradicted his ideas of them. Their kindness also bewildered him.

Summary

This chapter described how 21 subjects who grew up in hate-filled closed faith groups renounced their extreme prejudices, despite being penalized by their groups as a result. I used IPA and social constructivism to explore for themes and to control my bias and recruited an objective student to model my research. My study yielded four themes: As-Is (a phenomenological contact with an unexpected reality that shattered conviction), intensive reading of the subject's own religious texts, focused multidisciplinary reading, and altruistic conduct exhibited by a member of the demonized group. It seemed to me each of these four themes could be reduced to the As-Is element. Finally, I connected these themes to my research questions. The As-Is experience seems to have impelled my subjects to retract their prejudices, while each of my subjects showed common experiences of isolation from an outside society, living in a violence-saturated society, and experiencing a progressive unravelling where subjects labored to suppress their doubts, and were shunned as a result. Chapter Five discusses the limitations and implications of this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This IPA study investigated 21 individuals brought up in closed faith groups who challenged their extreme prejudice. Certain closed faith groups preach extreme prejudice resulting in violence, aggression and, sometimes, terrorism. Deradicalization programs for radicalized individuals exist that employ preventative measures by targeting profiles of people who are deemed most at risk to violent extremism or developing encounter-type groups to encourage tolerance. Some of these programs are effective, but it is difficult to verify the case-by-case impact and to correctly identify individuals most at-risk, partly because people hide their prejudices (OPM, 2008). The main problem with such programs is that they attract only individuals who are already interested in meeting different others, in contrast to members of closed faith groups who fear outsiders would contaminate them and that they would be penalized by their groups for interacting. Those, therefore, who most need such programs absent themselves from them.

I wondered how some individuals who grow up in closed faith settings independently reverse their beliefs and whether there was some insight into their prejudice reversals that entities like social work practitioners and peace activists could use. I found their attitude reversal particular confounding given that such individuals contradict social norms on seeking acceptance and rebel despite being severely penalized as a result. I also wondered how these individuals were able to detach themselves from their indoctrinations and change their prejudice attitudes, despite being closed off from the world.

Social science researchers largely conduct prejudice interventions on campus settings in conflict-free environments, rendering results irrelevant to real-life prejudice (Paluck & Green, 2009). Paluck and Green (2009) also reported that most prejudice intervention methodologies show minimal to no evidence of efficacy. Finally, prejudice research tends to investigate moderate to weak prejudice, altogether abandoning bigotry and extreme intolerance. This study aimed to compensate for those gaps by investigating autobiographical accounts of radical hostility in real-life settings. I used a flexible IPA to investigate the lived experiences of 21 former members of closed societies as they reversed their prejudice attitudes, and to probe for common themes describing the attitude changes of these individuals. To obtain research objectivity, I recruited an assistant who replicated my methodology and produced her own results.

I based my research on the following two questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of defectors of closed faith groups as they disengage and deradicalize?

RQ2: What are the pathways for changing prejudice among defectors of closed faith groups?

This chapter summarizes the study's findings, before discussing its limitations and implications for future research.

Connection to the Literature

Paluck and Green's (200) comprehensive review on prejudice methods concluded with three recommendations. First, researchers should focus on prejudice in real-life settings, rather than in the conflict-free environments of academic institutions. Second,

prejudice studies should integrate qualitative with quantitative research for more reliable results. Third, more prejudice studies should investigate extreme prejudice, particularly with bigotry and terrorism on the rise (Paluck, 2012). My study investigated extreme prejudice in a real-life conflictual setting.

I conducted a flexible IPA to investigate the lived experience of former members of closed societies as they reversed their indoctrinated bias. An assistant replicated my study, and we used social constructivism to bracket our bias. My IPA research led to four themes that seemed to describe the phenomenon under investigation. The first theme I called "As-Is", where subjects seemed to experience an unanticipated collision of beliefs with incarnate reality. The second theme illustrated how subjects reversed their prejudices through critical reading of their source texts. The third theme dwelt on critical analysis of multidisciplinary primary texts, while the fourth and last theme showed how certain subjects renounced their attitudes after receiving, or witnessing, altruism from the demonized other. It seemed to me that each of the four themes could be reduced to one "As-Is" essence, where subjects found their beliefs jolted by an unanticipated phenomenological encounter.

Contrary to more temperate or moderate groups that are less concerned about members leaving (possibly because they feel more confident with themselves (Sacks, 2017)), closed faith groups are more possessive with their members. They intimidate them from leaving with threats and abuse and encourage them to stay with promised rewards (like Paradise) and social incentives like acceptance. Douglas (1966) notes all societies like to impose order, but that some do so more than others. These groups'

empathies rituals as meaning-making for identity and societal values and distinguish between an “us” and a “them” to make its members feel superior (also see Derrida, 1986).

Groups that have more rigid, or doctrinaire, forms of thinking tend to be more concerned about “infections” invading their orderly world and about the ability of their immune system to cope with these infections. They, therefore, feel threatened by both outside *and* inside influences - by outside influences that are contrary to their own ideas and by people or ideas that demand parity and move in their own spaces. The last are ambivalent people within the group, who have been branded as deserters, troublemakers, or detractors of value (Douglas, 1966). Such people arouse anxiety because they ask questions that the group is unable to answer or because they are not “like us” (Bauman & May, 2003).

Most closed groups use a combination of territorial and spiritual separation, such as insulating themselves into ghettos and making the conditions both “inside” and “outside” intolerable for detractors if they leave (Douglas, 1966). The more complete the territorial separation, the more important does the group became because that’s all what members have. Intercourse with strangers is reduced to strictly business exchanges; social contacts are avoided (Bauman & May, 2003). Some of the most effective strategies that the group uses to dissuade intimate connection with these “outsiders” is through overt hostility, resentment, and prejudice. Active avoidance of contact is constantly boosted by the fear of contamination from those who are not like “us”. Resentment is associated with

everything that the stranger represents: their dress, their ways of talking, their rituals, their food, their lifestyle in all its nuances.

Meanwhile, members of such closed faith groups may often be unaware that they are controlled, while others crave the order perspective and meaning that their religious affiliation gives them (Hansberger & Jackson, 2005). People often think they control their destinies, but as Mead (1934) showed, the "self" is acquired over time through factors like environment, group, and social interactions with others, rather than an independent entity. To people who grow up in a closed faith society, their only, or primary, interactions are largely with those in that community. This shapes their identities and shapes how they view others.

Recent neuroscientific studies indicate that individuals may be able to overcome their distorted cognitions when their brains are activated by a logical, analytical perspective. The psychological term "priming" refers to a stimuli or action that triggers a particular representation or cognitive association, such as the word "yellow" of a banana. Chiappe, Smith, and Bessner (1996) found that priming may be inhibited when participants focus on specific non-evaluative lower-level features of the prime. For instance, the researchers found that when they broke down the familiar evaluative word of LOVE into the letter string of L-O-V-E, participants replaced their emotional mindset with a cognitive one by focusing on those letters. Summarily, Spruyt, De Houwer, and Hermans (2009) proposed that priming could be modulated by the stimulus information that it is selectively focused on. Glaser (1992) recommend modulating one's response to affective images by intentionally selecting lower-level non-evaluative features (such as

focusing on the shapes of the images or on individual letters), which would transform the instinctive evaluative reaction into a logical, analytical stance. I noticed instances where the prejudice levels of my subjects seemed inhibited when they focused on lower-level non-evaluative items. Deen (2015), for instance, described how he first began to see his Rebbe as mortal when he fragmented the myth of the Great Man into phenomenological particles:

> I began to wonder. Where exactly was the Rebbe's greatness? Was he a scholar? Was he a saint? Had he ever shown anyone any exceptional kindness? How would one even know it, considering that he was barely accessible to his followers, his acts so meticulously scripted, his public utterances limited to carefully prepared thoughts of little consequence, private audiences always brief and perfunctory, five minute consultation after a five-hour wait. (p. 15)

Ayduk, Mischel, and Downey (2002) observed that emotional sensitivity seems to be reduced when the individual focuses on the psychologically distancing, physiological reactions of the experience, rather than on the emotion itself. People could also distance themselves by analyzing their physiological reactions during the emotional incident. In both cases, the individual shifts stimuli from an affective to a non-affective response by intentionally focusing on lower-level non-evaluative features. In other words, such agents operate from a fact-based/ As-Is mindset.

Hirsi (2005) described how she saw Kenyan woman molested by Muslim males. Others from her culture called the women outcasts. Hirsi reduced the spectacle to lower-level, cognitive features and saw them as thirsty women who needed help. On the

response, she differed between the people and the religion: “Everyone in that camp called themselves Muslims and yet nobody helped these women in the name of Allah. Everyone was praying - but no one showed compassion” (Infidel, 2007, p. 158).

Neurological research shows that when a person fixates on emotional aspects, the cerebral emotionally-involved regions of the amygdala are flooded with cerebral brain fluid (CBF). This CBF *decreases* when the person fixates on attentionally-demanding, cognitive tasks, reducing the viewer’s emotional response (Drevets & Raichle, 1998). The left prefrontal cortex, which is the analytical sector, is now activated with its own fluid (Drevets & Raichle, 1998) and the person can act rationally. Applying Drevets and Raichle (1998) to my study, I noticed the affect-based prejudices of my subjects seemed to vanish when their minds focused on cognitive-based facts, regardless of the context. I called this the As-Is factor. Held-Evans (2010), for instance, quotes one Mormon missionary friend who reflected: “I’ve gotten to know some Muslims pretty well...and that’s really changed my perspective. They're not all violent fundamentalists. They don't all hate America” (p. 85). This was the logical thinking of the left cortex at play rather than the emotion of the amygdala. The missionary particularized Muslims into individuals, no longer as a generic demonized entity.

None of these individuals whom I studied *chose* to challenge their prejudices. None *wanted* to - just as none of these individuals would have chosen to attend an interfaith or deradicalization event. Certain non-evaluative, cognitive-based experiences unexpectedly occurred and all found their convictions altered. Husain (2007) was told all professors hated Islam, but his university professors “hardly conformed to that

stereotype" (p. 158). Anonymous (2003) described himself as "the typical religious fundamentalist, trapped in my own world of conspiracies; the Jews are behind everything" (p. 15). His prejudices changed when he read the Koran in English: "When I read it for the first time, I became very worried by the amount of violence in the texts. Subsequent late night sessions with the Koran convinced me that I was reading a text to war" (p. 127).

Finally, Harris (2011) described his attitude change when he saw a minister of a vilified church feed homeless individuals from his own resources. To Harris, *this* was real Christian love in contrast to the kind practiced by his own group who carried placards and denounced homosexuals. Says he "I knew it [i.e., love] when I saw it." (p. 20). One sees the cognitive component that came with lower-level elements (where the practices of his group were reduced to standing with placards and yelling). This defeated the literal brain-washing (or swamping) of emotional faith.

Anonymous (2003) described how her Quranic analysis (where her mind was absorbed in non-evaluative elements) brought her "face-to-face with the truth" (p. 148). Note that "truth" is a cognitive term. She reflected that "The denial [of faith] acts as a shield that covers [believers], that protects them and that saves them from facing the pain of shock and disillusionment" (p. 148). This is supported by Drevets and Raichle (1998) who note that when a person fixates on emotional aspects, the cerebral emotionally-involved regions are flooded with cerebral brain fluid (CBF), which stops them from thinking rationally and seeing the As-Is in its incarnate form. What believers need, Anonymous (2003) reflected, "is a good shock" to jolt them from their emotional comfort

zone. Muslims, she says, need to be "bombarded with facts" (p. 149). Drevets and Raichle (1998) demonstrate that concentrating on non-evaluative elements reduces the CBF fluid in the emotionally-involved regions. What actually happens is that the mind converts its emotional triggers into cognitive assessments.

Hariri, Bookheimer, and Mazziota (2000) used MRI to show that when participants focused on emotional expressions of facial images, the CBF of these participants increased in the left and right amygdala. On the other hand, when these images were accompanied with linguistic labels (which represents a cognitive task), their CBF decreased in the amygdala region and increased in the right prefrontal cortex, associated with emotion. The researchers concluded that the analytical functions of interpretation and labeling can inhibit emotional responses at the most fundamental levels in the brain. Evans and Treisman (2005) also note that context has a major influence on the responses people make. The more the context emphasizes a cognitive type of perception, the more rational is the response and the more it reduces the emotional percept of the target.

In short, extreme prejudice is tantamount to Simon's (1982) bounded rationality, where emotions hinder their possessors from seeing reality as is. Prejudiced individuals literally "brainwashed" by their emotional faith convictions, have their right prefrontal cortex flooded with cerebral fluid that impedes them from considering anything that contradicts their beliefs. It is only when a jarring encounter causes the mind to shift into a cognitive mode, that CBF decreases in the amygdala-emotion filled region and allows the left region (of logic) to dominate. Indeed, Anonymous (2003) suggested that the one way

to challenge Muslim believers is by *subtly* feeding them data that contradicts their convictions. Nothing else, no encounter groups, deradicalization programs, prejudice intervention strategies, or the like, have the same effect.

While there is some literature on the disaffiliation process from religious groups, I think there is a radical difference between disaffiliation from "simple" religions and disaffiliation from a fundamentalist or extremist religious background with strong pressure to conform and isolation from an outside world. Fisher (2017), for instance, reviews multidisciplinary research on changes related to exiting religion and the process that an individual transitioning toward irreligion may experience. Fisher's (2017) review plots a seven-step process of questioning, doubt, reconfiguration of faith, switching, changes to irreligious identities or "deconversion," disaffiliation, and opposition to previously held religious beliefs. According to Fisher (2017), all individuals set out by experiencing unconscious questioning that sharpens into doubt. Individuals often choose to switch to a different religious group within their wider group or may reconfigure by "flying under the radar" (e.g. Berger, 2015, p.679). All this time, they may reject the proxy but retain the theology. A certain undocumented percentage of Ultra-Orthodox Jews who are too intimidated to outright leave their communities live secret lives as agnostic or atheist individuals while publicly appearing Orthodox (e.g., Berger, 2015). For some, such behavior results in higher levels of psychological distress as well as in more marital tension (Fisher, 2017). Deconversion is the next step, where the member leaves the religious group. This may be followed by disaffiliation which takes two forms, ending one's membership or "dropping out" of activity in the religion (Fisher, 2017) and

misidentification with the group or theology (Fisher, 2017). In a study of conversion narratives of former Muslims, Khalil and Balici (2017) found that most former Muslims became Christian, agnostics and atheists. Apparently, more males than women deconverted, although Khalil and Balici's (2017) study is based only on a limited sample of popular published narratives, popular online testimonials and interviews with former Muslims.

As Fisher (2017) notes, the process and after-effects of deconversion vary from person to person. Some exit the group quickly (sometimes within a few weeks), while others take years of uncertainty and anguish to make the break. Defectors leave for a variety of reasons, ranging from intellectual concerns to psychological motives. Their reason for leaving tend to depend on their own personal experiences and on the practices and aspects of their groups (Fisher, 2016). Shaffir and Rockaway (1987), for instance, found that ultra-orthodox Jews who disaffiliated were motivated by extended periods of doubt, or having questions ignored or poorly dealt with by others. Khalil and Balici (2007) report that former Muslims cite the status of women as a major motivating factor for their exits. Hookway and Habibis (2015) conclude that individuals from Jehovah Witness seem to leave largely because of their dissatisfaction with JW practices together with the allure of freedom and the hedonistic attractions of this-worldly lifestyles. Similarly, the after-effects vary according to the rigidity of their groups. Goren and Plaut (2012) concluded that not only do some deconverts not experience emotional pain as a part of the process, but they also benefit from non-belief in some ways, such us such as higher prosociality toward outgroup members. It seems to me that Goren and Plaut's

(2012) studies come from more moderate religious groups, where leaving is not treated so weightily or harshly as it is in more extremist versions.

Defectors from most extreme groups suffer more intensely and longer than defectors from more moderate groups, where most still keep in touch with their friends, have not experienced the type or intensity of indoctrination that those from extremist groups experience, are better able to transition to an "outside" world and are, generally, not punished for doing so. In most cases, defectors tend to feel guilt, anxiety, the confusion and pain of switching from a life-narrative that made sense and that ordered their identities and gave them a mission to a world that was suddenly purposeless. Hookway and Habibis (2015), for instance, found that individuals who defected from JW experienced high levels of anxiety, guilt, and insecurity. ("The gamble on freedom had immediate rewards but they continued to fear its ultimately catastrophic consequences – 'getting wiped out' at Armageddon" (Hookway & Habibis, 2015, p. 854). This is particularly the case with those individuals across groups who transitioned to agnosticism or atheism. Indeed, Moscati and Mezuk (2014) found that such transition in perceptors tended to demote self-esteem and, occasionally, resulted in substance abuse. Scheitle and Adamczyk (2010) associate defection from "strict" religion with worse health. In Berger's (2015) treatise on former ultra-orthodox Jews, he reports that finding show the same "taxing personal process [of culture shock, loneliness, and financial difficulties" (p. 680) as reported in studies of those defecting from the Mormon Church (Albrecht and Bahr, 1983), cults (Solomon, 1991), the Amish (Garrett and Farrant, 2003) or Islam (Khalil and Bilici, 2007). Berger (2015) describes that:

> Like immigrants thrown into a strange land where they do not know the rules, the language, what is expected and what is prohibited, without a script to guide them or anybody to support them, exiters felt like aliens and tried to grope their way to the best of their ability. These challenges yielded feelings of anxiety, frustration, loneliness, sadness, anger, and distress as manifested in statements such as ‘‘it drove me crazy’’ and ‘‘I was dying inside.’’ (pp. 680-681)

Many individuals feel stuck between two worlds, unable to feel accepted or comfortable in mainstream society (e.g., Fisher, 2017).

Fisher's (2017) final step of the exit process is apostasy where a certain segment of defectors not only disaffiliate but also indicate an oppositional stance where they "engage in a continuous chain of acts of revenge against [her or his] own spiritual past" (Scheler, 1992, p. 131). Fisher (2017) cited Smith (2011) who found that those who came from stricter religious backgrounds tended to more resentment toward religion and were more public about these feelings than others. In a study of former evangelical Christians, Fazzino (2014) noted that publicizing the negative aspects of their religion helped these individuals make more sense of their disaffiliation. Most famous former Muslims in this category include writers and activists like Muslim-turned-Christian Nonie Darwish, Jeffrey Lang (*Losing My Religion: A Call for Help*), and Muslim-turned-agnostic Ibn Warraq (*Why I am not a Muslim* and *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out*). Some of these works were quoted in this essay.

In my brief review on the disaffiliation process from religious groups, I noticed that several authors (e.g., Albrecht and Bahr (1990) on those exiting the Mormon Church

and Greil and Davidman (2007) on the defection of Orthodox Jews) noted that the more religious the upbringing, the less likely was the person to leave. This was not the case with me - I came from an intensely religious background - nor was it the case with my 21 subjects. Some researchers also suggest that disaffiliation from strict groups is prompted by dysfunction in filial attachment and cross-generational religious adherence (e.g., Hookway & Habibis, 2015). Greil and Davidman (2007), for instance, found that movement out of the Haredim was often prompted by the presence of a less committed parent. Again, I found exceptions with my subjects. Most of my case studies (although not myself) had close contact with their parents, if not grandparents. There was no inter-generational break.

In the end, I can only conclude that people leave their religious groups for a variety of reasons that vary according to their particular experiences, characters, and qualities of their groups, strictness of their groups, economic, political, and geo-historical aspects, among other factors. Reasons are so diverse that it may impossible to generalize.

Interpretations of the Findings

I chose to study extreme prejudice because of the lack of research on this important topic (Paluck & Green, 2009). Since Paluck and Green (2009) recommend that prejudice researchers focus on real life situations in conflict-filled settings, I studied individuals who grew up in closed faith societies and who independently retracted their prejudices. I chose this population after realizing that prejudice-reduction programs, like deradicalization programs or programs based on Allport's (1954) 'contact hypothesis' idea, have small to minimal impact on extreme prejudice. (Allport's contact hypothesis

recommends acquaintanceship with members of the stigmatized group and has evolved into egalitarian, interfaith groups, and the like. According to Paluck and Green (2009), the contact hypothesis works best under limited and largely superficial/ laboratory conditions).

On the one hand, governments focus on reactive measures such as deradicalization groups in response to individuals who are already radicalized. On the other hand, social scientists develop preventative measures, seeking to remediate the psychological, emotional and intellectual appeal of social narratives that violence-based groups use to recruit their members. Examples of the latter include programs that teach perspective-taking (Dovidio et al., 2004; Galinsky & Moscowitz, 2000), awareness of moral hypocrisy (Oskamp, 1992; Hing, Li, & Zanna, 2002), and training in complex thinking and in statistical logic (e.g., Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Such programs are usually executed in school or college classrooms and may challenge a group's ideology by pointing out contradictions in its theology (e.g., Christmann, 2012), involving members in positive affiliative-building activities, or giving them responsibilities to provide the feeling of belonging and sense of purpose that people attracted to terrorist groups cherish (Christmann, 2012; Davies, 2016).

The Institute for Homeland Security Solutions (IHSS) (2015) pointed out differences in extreme prejudice across three types of groups - terrorist organizations, gangs, and cults - and recommended that deradicalization programs would improve their efficacy if they focused on the disjuncture between these different groups. Terrorist affiliation is usually produced by a sense of political grievance or individual

victimization, fear of threat, or the member seeking a sense of community or "belonging" (e.g., McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Gang affiliation is usually produced by economics, poor education, dysfunctional family, and a longing for gang, or "brotherhood", participation (e.g., Brotherton & Barrios, 2004; Jones, Roper, Stys, & Wilson, 2004). Religious, utopian, or psychotherapeutic cults (typified by the closed faith societies of my study), present a brotherhood, or affiliative, motivation, too, but members are also motivated by ideological factors, by a sense of eliteness, and by the cognitive dissonance engendered by the abandonment of such beliefs. The evaluative, or psychological, motivators are so intense that the member's identity becomes absorbed into the powerful collective identity of the group (Huddy, 2001), members are unable to think independently of the group, and this identity becomes a core aspect of the indoctrination process (Ferguson et al., 2016). (It's about the group, I once heard someone say, not about God). Years of this type of indoctrination cause psychiatrists like Winell to note that:

> The most difficult thing to overcome, by far, is overcoming the intense indoctrination of early years. As an adult, for example, the fear of hell can pop up and cause panic attacks even if a person rationally rejects the doctrine. ("JourneyFree"; online)

In contrast to the prejudice of terrorist or gang affiliation, when it comes to cult-induced prejudice, none of the standard prejudice-reducing interventions have the slightest impact. Cult members function, as it were, on the lowest levels of Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory, where they know that were they to question their

indoctrination or associate with outsiders, they would suffer great loss, which includes their sense of purpose (Gallant, 2016) and group-sourced identities (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002).

Oskamp (1992) recommends exposure to atypical exemplars to inhibit prejudice. There is also the popular theory of combating prejudice by exposing the prejudiced individual to different cultures and other examples of thought, through channels like the internet, social media, courses on anthropology or comparative religions, travel, or films (e.g., Paluck & Green, 2009). The problem with suggestions such as these is that cult members, that include isolated faith groups, are sequestered from the outside world and indoctrinated to reject these influences. Leaving my-conformism aside (where people naturally tend to gravitate to views that confirm their own), encounter models are irrelevant to cult members, since members of radically insulated groups have little to no contact with the world and are bred to fear them.

In short, it seemed to me that whichever way I turned, I came up against the logical fallacy of *circulus in probando*, or circular reasoning. I wanted to find a solution for extreme prejudice, but a significant population of those who manifest extreme prejudice grow up in environments that are closed to reforming impressions nor are they amenable to reflecting, nor can outsiders approach them. There are plenty of programs that exist for prejudice, but as Paluck and Green (2009) pointed out most of these programs are for weak to moderate prejudice, and the few programs that exist for extreme prejudice attract those who self-select or who are forced to attend.

My own research pointed me to the As-Is theme where individuals growing up in indoctrinated backgrounds seemed to reject their prejudices once they unexpectedly encountered a core left-cortical phenomena that collided with their emotional convictions. The As-Is came either from an encounter with a core text (a primary source as is in its incarnate form), or from seeing events or a situation in its lowest-level form. In all cases, the impetus came from the perceptor, rather than from someone trying to convince the prejudiced individual with a program or with reasoning. It was some cognitive fact from an experience, from something they read, from an act of kindness done to them that caused them to change their minds. For instance, Deen (2015) found that contrary to what he had been taught, Jews, outside his group, knew more about Judaism than he. When he communicated with outsiders, "I soon discovered a world of people entirely different from anyone I knew" (p. 128). Early experiences of this As-Is factor were "infuriating" to him. They "shattered the narrative he had been given" (p. 128).

An As-Is experience from critical reading was descried by one of Ibn Warraq's (2003) subjects, when the person reads the Koran in English for the first time. The author described himself as "the typical religious fundamentalist, trapped in my own world of conspiracies; the Jews are behind everything" (p. 15). Reading the Koran in English (in order to correspond with an online group) was where things changed.

> "Prior to joining this organization, I hadn't read the Koran in English, instead reading it in Arabic (believing this would bring me *Swaab* - blessings). When I read it for the first time, I became very worried by the amount of violence in the

> texts. Subsequent late night sessions with the Koran convinced me that I was reading a text to war." (p. 127).

The person saw the text in its essence, in contrast to the enculturated meaning imposed on it by his society.

Cross (2006) was affected by critical multidisciplinary reading where she concentrated on source texts. Intensive historical research showed her there were hundreds of books purporting to be the exclusive testimonies of Jesus and that it was only because of the subjective section of the Council of Nicaea that 66 books were called Holy Scripture. Cross (2006) writes:

> I closed my history book and stared out in the blank openness of the universe. If, instead of God's direct revelation from heaven, the Bible was simply a compilation of religious writings that supported an emerging third-century religious sect, fundamentalist Christianity was a house of cards. Its cornerstone belief that the Bible was without error and thus could be used as a textbook for modern ethics was patently absurd. (p. 133).

Finally, there is the As-Is altruism of the demonized other, described, for instance, by Harris (2011) with the impression of the minister who quietly fed homeless individuals from his own resources. The unexpected experience, or face-to-face encounter with pure goodness, shook his fidelity to his Church. Love doesn't happen, he wrote, by being isolated from the world, but by interacting with the world and engaging in practical, literal love. Almost all of the subjects described a long, drawn-out and tormented struggle, where it was only the desire to know the truth that pushed them on.

The experience of change must be felt by the subject. When Deen (2015), for instance, tried to share his experiences with his wife, he was unable to reach her. Similarly, Anonymous (2003) insisted it was futile to debate a terrorist's beliefs. Not everyone is willing to change, nor can the impact of this change experience be transmitted to another.

Recommendations

Certain outsiders who penetrate the defenses of isolated close faith societies include doctors, social workers, certain specialized teachers, and other professionals. These practitioners may serve as channel to reduce harmful prejudices through their regular interactions with the group, by subtly exposing group members to ideas and influences that contradict negative perceptions of the other.

As Anonymous (2003) insisted, we have to bombard strong believers with "facts" to overcome "the hurdle of tradition and false values imposed on us by thousands of years of religious upbringing… The word *faith* means belief without evidence" (p. 149). Strong believers need evidence. At these same time, because strong believers are in denial, this evidence needs to be subtle and "bombarded" - directed at them without it appearing manipulated by an agent: "The denial acts as a shield that covers them, that protects them, that saves them from facing the pain of shock and disillusionment. Once that shield is up nothing can bring it down (p. 148)."

Messages also need to be customized:

> Because every person's sensitivity is different, what shocks one person may not shock another? Even as a man, I was shocked when I read that Muhammad instructed his followers to beat their wives. Yet I have come to know many

> Muslim women who have no difficulty accepting these derogatory statements uttered by their prophet [because] they are in denial. (p. 148)

Bertram (2016) noted that "factors that contribute to the radicalization of a terrorist may include religious discourse [and] deceptive teachings" (p. 124) and to counteract these deceptive teachings, workers should provide "counter-narrative[s] that identify the conflict between [the religion] and the distortion of [that religion] that was propagated by the terrorist organization" (p. 124). My study suggested these counter-narratives should be fact-based and introduced as ingenuously as possible as though it were the believer randomly encountering them for himself, rather than an outsider pushing them on him. Invited outsiders should work from the strong believer's perspective. Cult members exist in a paradigm outside of the secular world, therefore common motives like a good job, career, a college education, or money tend to not appeal to them.

Change, too, starts with the influencer modeling qualities that contradicts the way they've been demonized. This means not only acting ethically and professionally, but also demonstrating deep, unconditional care to the other and appearing informed about the other's culture while being broad-minded, well-read and knowledgeable on matters in general. Brown (2016), former KKK leader, was influenced by the Shabbat meal and background discussions of his Jewish college friends that were unexpectedly more logical and open-minded than anticipated.

In short, outsiders who work in faith-based societies that practice extreme prejudice can contribute to preventative deradicalization through their communications

with members of these groups. Practitioners should challenge toxic views with a subtle, purely fact-based reasoning and approach the prejudice teachings from different angles, since people tend to respond differently to different aspects. These agents should be consistent, they should not attack the culture of the targeted member, and their mannerisms and involvement should indicate an outside world where people act and think contrary to stereotypes. Their attitudes, interactions, and conduct should be sympathetic, refined, and exemplary. Such invited outsiders include therapists (occupational, physical and psychological), certain teachers, school secretaries and the like.

Although people are generally reluctant to interfere with another culture on the basis of cultural tolerance popular in the West, invited outsiders can be brought to recognize that their actions may not necessarily violate political correctness. Their motives are to target the harm-inducing prejudice opinions, nothing else, and they do so by appealing to recognizable facts. Unchallenged deceptive teachings could lead to disasters like suicide, homicide, conflict, violence, and terrorism. Invited outsiders could be told they are only professionals with access to such an unreachable group.

Governments, or pace-organizations, can sponsor training programs for such invited outsiders as part of their professional training. So a law informant worker, social worker or therapist, for instance, could receive a course, as part of their training, on how to mitigate prejudice in a cult-like setting. Relevant programs could exist outside specialized training, too, and material (such as books, brochures, lectures) could be produced on the matter.

Limitations of the Study

Yin (1994) points out that researchers who analyze documents or content tend to possess a "biased selectivity," where the researcher may consciously or otherwise select documents that support his viewpoint and reflect her beliefs. Furthermore, a documentary IPA has limitations which include the researcher's bias, that their assumptions cannot be corroborated by subjects and that some of these autobiographical narratives may contradict other autobiographical narratives of the same genre. Additionally, a larger subject sample may have given me different, if not contradictory, results. Autobiography also lacks truth status (Trochim, 2006), which makes my study questionable from the start. Moreover, my study tested a prejudice typology produced by socialization, while extreme prejudice also comes from trauma (Bar-Tal & Labin, 2001), which may render the implications of this study irrelevant to other populations. Finally, some studies (e.g., Farrell et al, 2013) suggest that cognitive-based attitudes are most effectively challenged with logic arguments, while affect-based attitudes need affect-based reasoning. Since prejudice is affect-based, it may be that certain people can only be reached by an affect-based, rather than a fact-based response, and, contrary to my suggestions, would be resilient to fact-based reasoning.

Implications of the Study

If my recommendations succeed, they would likely do so only on a receptive personality. Deen (2015), for instance, was driven by his intellectual need for truth and disaffiliated himself from his group. His wife, Gitty, on the other hand was far more emotionally-driven. She persisted with her emotional retention to faith ("Our Rebbe," she

insisted, “was not to be questioned. I was taught to have *faith in the righteous*.” (Deen, 2015, p. 16). Hirsi (2007), too, noted she seemed to be the only one with doubts. Her friends accepted their social norms and culture. All they wanted to do was get married, settle down, retain their society’s approval, and remain part of their communities. In contrast, Hirsi needed her belief system to be logical and consistent. Some individuals are resilient to logic-based arguments and may only be susceptible, if at all, to affect-based experiences (Farrell et al, 2013). As Gielen (2017) argued: we need to move away from the “what works?” question towards the “what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and how?”

Given these limitations, it seems to me that if my insights impacted even one percent of my targeted population, my study would be valuable in that it would exponentially affect that particular segment, with at least one individual desisting from tram sitting his, or her, legacy of extreme prejudice.

Conclusion

My study used an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) on 21 individuals to investigate how certain individuals who were brought up in closed faith societies voluntarily altered their extreme prejudice to outsiders. The research indicated that prejudice reversal manifested four themes: The overarching As-Is; analytical reading of group texts; critical broad/ multidisciplinary reading; and love or altruism, where an outsider’s goodness or kindness defied stereotype. The study suggested that governments could use this research to sponsor prejudice-reducing programs and material that draw on these themes for invited outsiders who work in a cult or in a closed faith group setting.

The invited outsider's communication style should incorporate a subtle, purely fact-based reasoning and approach deceptive teachings from different angles. These professionals should be consistent, they should not attack the culture of the targeted member, and their conduct and involvement with the member should contradict how the group has stereotyped these outsiders. My study and recommendations have limitations, but it seems to me that if my insights impacted even one percent of my targeted population, the exponential effect may make the world more peaceful.

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Appendix A: Sources Used for Documentary Analysis

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