



'A LOVING PROVISION' ?

HOW FORMER JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES EXPERIENCE SHUNNING PRACTICES.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
fMRI	Functional magnetic resonance imaging
IBM PC	International Business Machines Corporation personal computers
IPA	Interpretative phenomenological analysis
JW	Jehovah's Witnesses
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
MDMA	Methylenedioxymethamphetamine
NHS	National Health Service
NRM	New religious movement
RI	Re-inventive institutions
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

GLOSSARY

Castout	Term used to describe individuals who have been excommunicated by a high-controlgroup
Congregation	A group of people assembled for religious celebrations
Disfellowshipped	A Jehovah's Witness term to describe an individual who is excommunicated
Disassociated	A Jehovah's Witness term to describe an individual who has left the Jehovah's Witnesses voluntarily
Elders	Clergy
Governing Body	Group of men that lead the Jehovah's Witnesses Congregations worldwide
Judicial Committee	Jehovah's Witnesses internal disciplinary board
Judicial Reproof	A type of sanction in the Jehovah's Witnesses. An individual rebuke for members who have transgressed doctrinal rules, but are found to be genuinely repentant. All cases of judicial reproof lead to the withdrawal of special privileges. Judicial reproof can be made in private or publicly in front of the congregation.
Kingdom Hall	Jehovah's Witnesses meeting place for religious assemblies
Meeting	Religious assembly
Reinstatement	The approved return of a disfellowshipped or disassociated individual to the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation.
Walkaway	Term to describe individual who has left a high-controlgroup voluntarily

Watchtower Bible and Tract
Society

Legal entity name of Jehovah's Witnesses

Worldling

Term to refer to people who are not
members of the Jehovah's Witnesses

Abstract

The impact of ostracism (being excluded or ignored) on its targets has been extensively explored in the last decades. Ostracism has been found to have adverse effects on targeted individuals physical and mental health. Most research in this field, however, has focused on the immediate and short-term impact on ostracised individuals and has been conducted under laboratory conditions. Utilising a qualitative approach, the current study explored the long-term impact of chronic ostracism in former members of the Jehovah's Witnesses who were excommunicated from their community following a variety of doctrinal transgressions. Moreover, the study explored how ostracised individuals make sense and explain ostracism to themselves. The study comprised twelve qualitative interviews with six participants. The results of this study support findings from previous studies, in regards to the short-term effects of ostracism. Ostracism affects four fundamental human needs; the need for belonging, self-esteem, control and meaningful existence. The study offers preliminary evidence that these basic human needs are not only thwarted as a short-term consequence but continue to affect its targets beyond the immediate ostracism episode. Long-term effects of chronic ostracism, as experienced and described by participants in this study, include adverse effects on the perception of participants identity, the development of destructive and harmful coping mechanisms, feelings of disconnection from others, fears regarding ones' personal integrity, as well as anxiety and uncertainty about the future. Further research in this area is needed to provide conclusive evidence for these long-term effects. Based on the findings of this study, a number of recommendations have been identified: The need for raising awareness of ostracism as a controlling and coercive behavioural tool amongst professionals who come in contact with children raised in environments that promote the use of this unethical behaviour, the provision of specialist support services for people who experience ostracism, plans and actions from policy makers and legislators to prevent and prosecute the unethical use of ostracism as a control tool.

Keywords: ostracism, Jehovah's Witnesses, shunning

1 INTRODUCTION

Ostracism (being excluded or ignored), a social control mechanism used to enforce conformity (Wesselmann, Nairne, & Williams, 2012, p. 312), has attracted much attention from researchers during the last decades, due to its profound negative impact upon targets. Social exclusion is ubiquitous (Williams, 2007, p. 428), it can be found in interpersonal relationships, where it is often colloquially referred to as 'silent treatment' or 'the cold shoulder', institutions such as schools ('time-out'), solitary confinement in prison, 'silencing' in the military field, governmental 'banishment' and in religious communities ('excommunication'). Ostracism is also found in the animal kingdom, where weak members are forced to leave the group to increase the others' survival chances against predators. Experimental studies have shown that humans are so attuned to social cues of exclusion that even subtle signs, such as a lack of eye-contact from a passerby on the street, can lead to negative short-term effects (Williams, Bernieri, Faulkner, Gada-Jain, & Grahe, 2000, p. 23). These short-term effects include worsened mood and poses a threat to four fundamental human needs: belonging, self-esteem, control and meaningful existence (Carter-Sowell, Chen, & Williams, 2008, p.143). Chronic or acute ostracism is linked to physical health problems, depression, aggression, learned helplessness and increased mortality (Wesselmann, Nairne, & Williams, 2012, p. 314). Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies have shown that the pain targets experience under ostracism, referred to as social pain, activates the same brain region as physical pain. Researchers explain this finding in terms of risk to survival. Ostracism constitutes such a danger to our survival, that our brain has developed an overlapping alarm system, which allows us to detect even the smallest signs of ostracism so we can respond to it instantly. Humans' need for inclusion and belonging is so strong, that adverse experiences of ostracism are even present when the source of ostracism is a despised out-group (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007). The same team found that even when participants were offered money for being ostracised, they still experienced negative feelings from being excluded.

Smart Richman & Leary (2009, p. 365) have found that people's responses to ostracism can vary between prosocial behaviour, antisocial behaviour and social withdrawal. Antisocial behaviour has received much attention, especially as antisocial behaviour seems counter-intuitive to re-inclusion, and thus threatens an individual's need for belonging, and in extreme cases chances of survival (Williams, 2007, p. 425). Warburton et al. (2006) study on antisocial responses to ostracism shows that antisocial behaviour is linked to thwarted needs of control and the target's likelihood to respond in an antisocial manner increases when targets perceive re-inclusion in the group as improbable. Another fact that

may lead to an increase of antisocial behaviour is when exclusion is viewed as unfair or unjust (Smart Richman & Leary, 2009). Several studies have found links between ostracism and violent crimes, such as men murdering estranged ex-partners, school shootings, men raping women who reject their advances (Barnard, Vera, Vera & Newman, 1982; Crawford & Gartner, 1992; Leary, Kowalski, Smith & Phillips, 2003). It should be noted, however, that it is unclear whether antisocial behaviour leads to rejection in the first place, or if ostracism leads to aggression and antisocial behaviour, as studies have found evidence for both directions (Smart Richman & Leary, 2009, 368).

Although ostracism has received much attention over the past decades, most studies have exclusively focused on short-term effects of exposure to ostracism, predominantly under experimental conditions (Williams, 2007, 429). Studies investigating individual's long-term real-life experiences of ostracism have been relatively few. Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine how people who have been ostracised for an extended period, experience ostracism and how they make sense of being excluded or ignored by others.

The current study explores individuals' experiences of religious ostracism in the form of case studies. Participants in this study are former members of a religious community that practices disfellowshipping and social exclusion- the Jehovah's Witnesses. Active members of the Jehovah's Witnesses are discouraged by their community from having 'unnecessary contact' (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, p.37) with members who have left the movement of either free will ('disassociation') or have been disfellowshipped (disciplinary sanction for unrepentant sinners). 'Having unnecessary contact', including acts as little as greetings, may lead to disciplinary actions taken against members who willfully engage with former members (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2015, p.37). The Jehovah's Witnesses are a world-opposing religious movement (Wallis, 2003), also known by its legal entity 'The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society', who regard people living outside of their community as 'wicked' and governed by Satan (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, p. 186). Therefore, members are encouraged to form friendships only with other Jehovah's Witnesses (Watchtower, 2015, p. 24). Being shunned by their religious community, therefore, severs their existing social ties and leaves them socially isolated in a world that they perceive as evil and dangerous. Current Watchtower Bible and Tract Society's rules dictate that only baptised members can be disfellowshipped or formally disassociate themselves. To be 'eligible' for baptism, the interested party must be a disciple of Christ. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society further specifies the meaning of 'disciple of Christ':

'The principal application of the term is to all those who not only believe Christ's teachings but also follow them closely.' (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2015, p.3)

Thus, while the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society does not specify an age of baptism, interested parties are ought to understand the group's teachings and behave according to them.

It should be noted that the Jehovah's Witnesses are not the only religious organisation that practices shunning. In fact, most faith communities practice some form of excommunication and shunning. The current study focuses on Jehovah's Witnesses for three reasons; the first reason concerns the researcher's personal experience of being visited by proselytising Jehovah's Witnesses in her childhood home. The second reason concerns access to the group. Due to the high local presence (Edinburgh, Scotland) of this particular religious community and recent international media coverage of the group the researcher postulated that access to former members would be possible. The third reason is regarding the safety of the researcher. It became apparent that some groups could potentially pose a risk to the researcher, as they were opposed to research being conducted within their community.

1.1 AIMS OF STUDY AND RATIONALE

The current study was originally designed to answer the following question:

- 1) How do former Jehovah's Witnesses experience and make sense of being ostracised?

During the process of interviewing participants and analysing the research material, a series of sub-questions emerged:

- 2) How did former Jehovah's Witnesses cope with the adverse effects of being shunned by their former community?
- 3) What challenges did former Jehovah's Witnesses face in their recovery of emotional well-being, intellectual freedom and ability to function outside of this group?
- 4) How did the experience of being ostracised impact affected individuals in the long-term regarding their relationships with themselves, others and religion?

It should be noted that this study focused exclusively on second and subsequent generations (born and/or raised) of Jehovah's Witnesses who have been disfellowshipped. This criterion has been used for homogeneity reasons. Including first generation members would lead to an increase in heterogeneity, as factors such as the age of joining the movement, life before joining, social ties available outside the movement before joining, etc. would have to be taken into consideration. Moreover, members who were born or raised as Jehovah's Witnesses may be at additional disadvantages when leaving the

community, as they have been brought up with the group's beliefs and may thus not have the same understanding of mainstream society, as members who have previously lived as part of mainstream society. Additionally, the decision for studying disfellowshipping, as opposed to disassociation, is based on the fact, as discussed earlier, that disfellowshipping is a punitive action imposed by the organisation on an individual, whereas disassociation is seen as an action taken by a person that no longer desires to be part of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Therefore, even though disassociated members, also referred to as 'walkaways', experience similar treatment in terms of ostracism, their decision generally involves planning and preparation. Disfellowshipped members, on the other hand, may not have the desire to leave the group and may furthermore be surprised by this disciplinary action, thus rendering any preparation and planning impossible. Therefore, the mechanisms and effects involved in disassociation may be different from disfellowshipping, and for the sake of homogeneity, individuals who disassociated have been excluded from the study.

As described, the main aim of this study is to explore people's personal experiences of ostracism in the context of a religious community. However, the social phenomena and social inquiry relating to the present study is much broader. While the present research does not allow for a full exploration of these key issues, it raises concerns and questions on an individual and organisational level. What is ethical conduct in organisations, where is the line between ethical and unethical recruiting, organisational exploitation of members, covering up and/or encouraging illegal activities as part of and/or in the name of organisations?

Questions on an individual level include, but are not limited to the parental right to subject children to a particular lifestyle, religion or community, statutory interventions in cases where children are subjected to dangerous or even deadly practices by parents, such as refusal of blood donations. These are all issues that touch upon key interests of criminological inquiry.

Moreover, these questions present challenges for policy makers and legislators on how those issues are best addressed, in the interest of safety and protection of vulnerable people and the general public. How can legislators and policy makers protect people from becoming susceptible to these group influences? Moreover, if people become victims, how do we support them? Should we, or can we even, rescue victims or do we need to wait until victims want to leave themselves? How do we support them, once they have left? What are the victim's needs immediately after leaving and what are their long-term needs, in terms of physical and psychological recovery? Moreover, on an organisational level: How can we deal with these organisations? Should they be criminalised, and if yes, based on what criteria? As discussed further below, these organisations are not only religious in

nature, but include a much broader set of organisations such as psychological high-control groups, commercial high-control groups, self-improvement high-control groups, human trafficking high-control groups, political high-control groups and even one-to-one high-control relationships (Hassan, 2013, 3). Given the broad range of these organisations, how can we encompass all these diverse backgrounds in one single definition or criteria? Furthermore, there are questions regarding the detection and investigation of illegal or harmful group practices. These groups most often operate secretive, with active members being highly devoted to the group. Members are often actively turned against mainstream society and thus will be suspicious of anyone investigating their group. This means that group members will not voluntarily cooperate with law enforcement or other statutory services. It may be possible to gain information via former members of these groups; however, their testimonies are influenced by their personal experience. Also, not all groups are publicly known. Some groups only have a handful of members, or even just two members, as in the case of high-control one-to-one relationships.

The current study is an exploration of personal experiences, and thus, it cannot provide answers to these broader questions. However, this study is an attempt in uncovering some of the issues, that researchers, policy makers, legislators and other statutory services including mental health professionals will need to answer in order to provide support and assistance to this unique group of individuals.

1.2 DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

This dissertation is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 2: Background information on ostracism and the use of ostracism in the context of religious groups.

Chapter 3: Literature review on Jehovah's Witnesses and the groups shunning policy. Exploration of which group norm violations may lead to disfellowshipping and how disfellowshipped members are to be treated according to doctrinal rules.

Chapter 4: Discussion of the methodology and methods used to investigate the above topics and find answers to the research questions.

Chapter 5: Presentation of findings from this study

Chapter 6: Discussion of research findings, similarities and differences between respondents.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations based on the research results

2 OSTRACISM

The need to belong and to have intense and meaningful relationships with others is an innate quality of human beings. Without having positive and interpersonal relationships, the survival of both human and animal species would not have been possible. Therefore, it is not surprising that a lack of these important relationships has adverse effects on our physical and mental health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Smith et al., 1999). The American psychologist-philosopher William James noted that:

'No more fiendish punishment could be devised were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof.'
(James, 1890, p. 294).

In the last two decades, researchers have shown an ever-increasing interest in uncovering and understanding what happens to individuals when they are ostracised (ignored or excluded) by other individuals or groups. Studies have shown that ostracism is part of our day-to-day lives. Ostracism is not limited to adult relationships but is also present in relationships and interactions between children. Barner-Barry (1986, p. 28) found that pre-school children engage in ostracism as a way of controlling other children's behaviour. With ostracism being such a pervasive social behaviour, or more strictly speaking a non-behavior (Williams, Bernieri, Faulkner, Gada-Jain, Grahe, 2000, 25), it begs the question of how frequently it occurs. An Australian study that asked participants to record ostracism episodes in diaries revealed that individuals experience, on average, one ostracism episode a day (Williams, Wheeler, & Harvey, 2001). However, people are both sources and targets of ostracism. In an American study, 67% of participants indicated that they deliberately ignored a partner or friend in their presence (silent-treatment), and 75% of participants stated that a loved one had ostracized them (Faulkner, Williams, Sherman & Williams, 1997).

The observation of ostracism among humans as well as animals and across time and cultures suggests that it is an innate behaviour used by its sources as a way of adapting to situational factors and circumstances (Williams, 2007, p. 429). In the animal kingdom, ostracism is used to protect and strengthen the group, by removing members who present a threat, reducing inbreeding and regulating scarcity of resources. Similarly, in human relationships, ostracism is used to remove members from a group that do not adhere to social rules. Thereby, adherence to group norms increases and group cohesiveness is strengthened. In summary, from an evolutionary perspective, ostracism is a functional and adaptive behaviour that ensures the survival of a group and its in-members, by removing burdensome members. For excluded members, on the other hand, ostracism can lead to

the death of the ostracized individual in extreme cases (Kerr & Levine, 2008, p. 39; Williams, 2009, p. 283).

2.1 A MODEL OF OSTRACISM

As mentioned previously, researchers' interest in this field has increased exponentially over the last two decades. The vast majority of research efforts have focused on the effects of ostracism on the targeted individual or group. Williams & Zardo (2005) revised Williams (1997) originally proposed model of ostracism, according to which ostracised individuals process the ostracism episode through three stages. This ostracism model focuses on the target's experience of ostracism, which complements the perspective of the present study.

2.1.1 FIRST STAGE – REFLEXIVE RESPONSIVE STAGE

In the first stage, the reflexive response stage, targets of ostracism experienced distress, social pain, and a threat to four fundamental needs: the need to belong, control, self-esteem and meaningful existence. The experience of this distress, social pain and need threat has been found to be a universal response to ostracism and appears to occur independently of personality and the social context. Williams & Beest (2006), conducted an experiment via a virtual ball-toss game - 'cyberball' (developed by Williams et al., 2000) - in which participants would receive money for being excluded from the ball-toss game and would lose money if they were included in the ball-toss game. They found, that even in situations where ostracism led to financial gain, participants still reported that being excluded was hurtful. In another experiment, Gonsalkorale & Williams (2007) found that even when the source of ostracism is a despised out-group (the researchers chose the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) as a reference) the adverse effects participants experienced from the exclusion by a despised group were no less than if they were excluded from a group that they sympathized with. Studies also reported that the immediate pain felt after rejection, is not dependent on the psychological closeness of the source; ostracism is just as painful when the source is a stranger (Williams, 2007, p. 473).

Furthermore, ostracism is not only painful in face-to-face interaction, but also in removed and virtual environments, such as texting, chat rooms and virtual ball-toss games (Smith & Williams, 2004, p. 292). Furthermore, Coyne, Gundersen, Nelson & Robinson (2011, p. 21) found that people who were observing ostracism on a video clip, self-reported feelings of distress that could even be physiologically measured. These research findings suggest that the intense, immediate social pain felt from ostracism acts as a pre-cognitive alarm system to alert individuals of a potential threat. Some researchers even argue that the threat of survival, inherent in extreme cases of ostracism, has led to an evolutionary

overlap of neurological and physiological alarm systems, to ensure that targets were able to adjust behavior, repair the relationship, and ultimately secure survival (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2005, p. 110; MacDonald & Leary, 2005, p. 20). This argument has been corroborated by fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) studies that show that ostracism episodes activate parts of the brain that are associated with processing physical pain. De Wall and colleagues (2010, p. 931) also found evidence in support of an overlap between neurological and physiological pathways. In their experimental study, ostracised participants who were given pain relief medication showed less distress when compared to placebo treatment. This suggests that numbing physical pain may simultaneously numb social pain. Wesselmann, Nairne & Williams (2012, p. 312) had found evidence to suggest that social pain, in opposition to physical pain, can be re-experienced by individuals as if it were happening 'right now' when they were reflecting on an ostracism episode in their past.

2.1.2 SECOND STAGE – REFLECTIVE RESPONSIVE STAGE

The second stage, according to Williams & Zardo's (2005) ostracism model is marked by reflective efforts. The ostracised individual is reflecting on the ostracism episode, its source and reasons, and appraises its significance. This stage also involves coping with the exclusion and fortifying the needs that have been thwarted. Coping responses are moderated depending on which of the four fundamental needs (belonging, self-esteem, control or meaningful existence) are threatened, situational factors and individual differences. The two most important coping responses researchers have focused on are prosocial behaviour and antisocial behaviour. Particularly antisocial behaviour has stirred researchers interest, as it is counter-productive to the need for inclusion. A third coping response, social avoidant or withdrawn behaviour has received less attention (Smart Richman & Leary, 2009, p. 377).

Researchers focusing on prosocial behaviour versus antisocial behaviour regarding ostracism, suggest that individuals whose need for belonging and self-esteem are thwarted, are more likely to respond in a prosocial manner, attempting to repair the relationship and be reaccepted by the individual or group who is the source of the ostracism. Gomez, Morales, Hart, Vazquez & Swann (2011, p. 1574) argue that individuals whose identity has fused with the group are more likely to display prosocial behaviours than those whose identity has not fused with the group. Also, the degree to which the individual believed the group would re-accept him/her at a later stage, appeared to influence a targets' resort to antisocial behaviour. Prosocial behaviour may also be moderated by a cost-benefit analysis (Van Beest & Williams, 2006, p. 919). Individuals who feel that the costs of losing a relationship outweigh its' benefits may be more inclined

to seek relationship repair. Similarly, victims of ostracism may identify with a counter-group and act prosocially towards the counter or out-group to gain membership and security. On the other side, individuals whose need for control and meaning is threatened tend to display antisocial behavior towards the source of the ostracism as a means to restore and fortify their sense of control (Warburton et al., 2006, p. 21; Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000, p. 758). An individual's need may be particularly control threatened when the reasons for ostracism are unknown, and the ostracized individual lacks 'interpretative control' (Rothbaum, Weiz & Snyder, 1982, 5). Antisocial responses towards the source of ostracism, according to Smart Richman & Leary (2009, p. 368), were also more likely to occur if the individual evaluated the behaviour as unjustified or the relationship to the source was not deemed essential. People who believed that the group would not reconsider were more inclined to respond in an antisocial manner than individuals who felt that they could rejoin the group in the future (Twenge, 2005, 1058). Experimental studies (Warburton, Williams and Cairns, 2006, p. 215; Williams, 2007, p. 441) demonstrate that ostracised individuals may turn on the ostracisers and devalue and criticise them. Williams (2007, p. 43) found that a history of rejection may lead to maladaptive responses, such as 'rejection sensitivity' that may, in turn, increase the risk of future rejection. Downey and colleagues (2002, p. 547) demonstrated that men who are rejection sensitive and simultaneously highly value their relationship with a romantic partner are more likely to use violence in that relationship.

It is important to note, however, that most studies investigating the link between ostracism and antisocial behaviour have been correlational. It is therefore unclear, whether rejection leads to aggression and antisocial behaviour in some individuals, or if individuals who behave aggressively are more likely to become targets of ostracism. Evidence for both directions exists (Smart Richman & Leary, 2009, p.374). Ostracism, mainly characterised as a 'non-behaviour', may trigger an aggressive or antisocial response, as the victim might try to gain some form of behavioural reaction, regardless of it being positive or negative. The third response to ostracism is social withdrawal or socially avoidant behaviour. This can involve two types of withdrawal: physical withdrawal, where individuals avoid and no longer engage in physical and social encounters, or psychological withdrawal, where individuals are still physically present but are psychologically distant and avoid entering meaningful relationships with others. It has been hypothesised that individuals who fear the pain of future rejection or feel uncertain about their worth and acceptability by others, resort to this coping mechanism (Vangelisti, 2001 as cited in Smart Richman & Leary, 2009, p. 376). These individuals may have doubts about their relational value and may perceive the rejection as a fault on their part. This is particularly linked to ostracism episodes that individuals perceive as embarrassing or shameful (Ferguson, Stegge & Damhuis, 1991; Tangney, Miller, Flicker & Barlow, 1996, as cited in Smart Richman &

Leary, 2009, p. 377). Additionally, the perception and experience of ostracism appear to be moderated by individual differences such as age, gender, social anxiety, loneliness and self-esteem (Williams, 2007, p. 439). Researchers found that higher age weakened the impact of ostracism. They hypothesised that people might become more habituated to experiencing ostracism over time and as a result of such were less sensitive to it. Gender seemed to have an impact on the degree of compensatory behaviour employed, with females working harder and putting more efforts into collective tasks than males. Williams (2007, p. 439) found that lonely and socially anxious individuals may recover more slowly from ostracism than individuals who showed normal levels of social anxiety and loneliness. Similarly, participants who measured low in self-esteem were more negatively affected by ostracism, relative to participants who were high in self-esteem (Onoda, Okamoto, Nakashima, Nittono, Yoshimura, Yamawaki, Yamaguchi, Ura, 2010, p. 389).

2.1.3 THIRD STAGE – LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF OSTRACISM

The third and last stage of Williams & Zardo's (2005) ostracism model is concerned with the long-term effects chronic or acute ostracism has on targets. Even brief episodes of ostracism cause negative emotions, negative self-perception, feelings of loneliness and distance between self and others, lower self-esteem, feelings of incompetence and unworthiness of attention, and the perception of life as less meaningful, with long-term effects including decreased coping responses, feelings of helplessness, alienation, despair, depression and suicide attempts (Williams, 2007). In Baumeister, Ciarocco, Williams, Sommer's (2001, p. 241) study, individuals, who had been asked to write two stories about their experiences of ostracism, one where they had been the source and one in which they were the target, stated that as target they would prefer physical or verbal abuse over ostracism (referred to as 'silent-treatment' in the study). Participants equalled physical or verbal as an acknowledgement of their existence and stated that visible bruises would provide them with evidence of abuse that they could give to authorities, whereas the silent treatment does not leave behind any material evidence. Moreover, as Gomez, Morales, Hart, Vazquez & Swann (2011, p. 1583) suggests, individuals whose identity has merged with that of the group may experience an identity crisis following irrevocable ostracism.

2.2 OSTRACISM IN A RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

This paper focuses on one specific form of ostracism, religious excommunication. Religious excommunication is, in fact, a double-edged sword, as religion serves as a major coping mechanism for ostracized individuals, yet at the same time, most religious communities practice some form of excommunication to punish religious deviance.

The idea of religion as a coping mechanism for social exclusion and rejection goes back to Freud (1927/1964) who believed that religion is comforting for people who feel socially isolated and lonely. Individuals are particularly prone to turning to religion and divine, transcendental beings in times of crisis (Pargament, 1997). The psychological necessity and function of religion for some individuals has already been acknowledged by Voltaire, who once stated that 'Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer' (Translation: 'If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him'). This idea was further developed by psychologists and attachment-theorists, who perceive and study God as a substitute attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 1998, as cited in Granqvist, 2010, p. 7). Religion can satisfy thwarted needs (see ostracism model above) of belonging, control (Ai et al., 2005, p. 785-787) and meaningful existence and self-esteem, as it provides a shared meaning in a group context, comforts peoples' fear of mortality (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991; Jonas & Fischer, 2006), and presents believers with a shared set of norms and clear established rules to guide behavior (Bergin, 1991).

Religiosity also provides believers with internal and external coping mechanisms in the face of adversity (McIntosh et al., 1993, Ai et al., 2005, p. 764). Internal coping mechanisms refer to how individuals cognitively process and understand external stimuli and stressors, whereas external religious coping mechanisms refer to the social support believers receive from the religious community and religious leaders. Aydin, Fischer & Frey (2010, p. 751) demonstrated across five studies involving Christian students that being ostracised led to an increase in their religious affiliation and religious coping resulted in a decrease in stress-response following ostracism. Evidence suggests that religion may serve as a protective factor for aggression, as participants who were shown a prime to remind them of their religious affiliation displayed less aggression relative to the control group, who was shown a neutral prime. Furthermore, religiosity is also associated with lower rates of suicide, anxiety, depression and an overall greater sense of well-being. In contrast to these salutary aspects, there are also a set of pathogenic and pathoplastic aspects present, such as an increased acceptance of certain types of deviant behaviors, for example strict segregation with certain communities and discriminatory actions against specific lifestyles or orientations, as well as intrapersonal pathoplastic aspects, such as stress and anxiety induced by obsessive thoughts about rules and sins (Pietkiewicz, 2014, p. 2). In fact,

Pargament, Zinnbauer, Scott, Zerowin & Stanik (2003, p. 1337 - 1338) describe three coping mechanisms, which may lead individuals to experience intra- or interpersonal conflicts: putting too much emphasis on religion and the religious community and thereby neglecting other basic needs, strict adherence to faulty religious explanations and neglecting other explanations that are more fitting, and experiencing conflict with others (such as family members or friends who are of a different devotion), conflict with God, or with the self (doubts about religion, congregational rules or clergy). Thus, as the above discussion shows, religious involvement can provide benefits and disadvantages for practising members.

The current study is interested in the link between religion and ostracism, similar to studies described above, but from a perspective that differs from those studies. Namely, one in which the religious community is not a substitute for the ostracized group, but in which it is the source of ostracism.

In a religious scenario, ostracism can be used as a means to keep members obedient and devout to the cause, while discouraging them from leaving the community. Any group that exerts a high level of control over its members to keep them obedient and devout, such as by threatening them with social exclusion can be described as a 'high-control group'.

3 HIGH-CONTROL GROUPS

3.1 TERMINOLOGY

Sects, sectarian organisations, cults, New Religious Movements (NRM), destructive and authoritarian groups, high-control groups; these and others are all terms used by researchers to describe groups that exert power and undue influence over its members. In order to facilitate our understanding of the phenomenon investigated in this study, it is crucial to pay attention to the terms used to describe these groups. The terms cults and sects, even though historically a neutral term used by sociologists of religion, have gained a pejorative meaning over time, and additionally lack an agreed upon definition, making them too vague to use in academic research (Richardson, 2013, p. 33). The term New Religious Movements (NRM) has been used by scholars since the 1970s (Barker, 2014), albeit used inconsistently and perhaps too narrow in focus. NRMs, according to Barker (2004 & 2014, p. 238-240) refer to religious groups and communities that developed after the second world war and have predominantly first-generation members. However, the term itself has its problems; firstly there is an inherent difficulty in defining what constitutes as 'religious', furthermore many groups that have been labelled by scholars and non-members as NRM do not like to be associated with the term 'religion', but prefer to be referred to as spiritual community or a similar term. Another difficulty lies in defining the term 'new'. When is something new and when is it old? In fact, many groups that are labelled NRMs have formed as breakaway groups from larger, more mainstream religious groups and had, in fact, existed for centuries. Barker (2014, p. 239) suggests that the term NRM would be most useful if applied to first-generation religions only.

Another term that appears in sociological research and shares similarities with the type of coercive groups investigated in this study is 'total institutions'. The term emerged as part of Goffman's research in asylums (1961a). Goffman's research interests lay in the mechanisms employed by institutions in the reformation and reshaping of individuals' identities. Goffman postulated that the reformation of individual identities was made possible through the existence of coercive practices and power imbalances between 'inmates' and 'staff'. He concluded that the absence of external control and critique enabled staff to erase 'inmates' former selves and replace them with new ones. Goffman's (1961a) total institutions were characterised by individuals whose daily routine unfolded in the same place under the same staff. 'Inmates' were accustomed to rigid timetables and activities were not freely chosen but imposed by officials and employees working in the institution. Barriers between the inside and the outside world were created to establish a world that was completely secluded from outside influences. There was also a clear and uniform plan,

namely the re-socialisation of inmates. Goffman (1961a) argued that an individual's self does not exist independently, but is shaped in social interaction with others:

'The self in this sense is not a property of the person to whom it is attributed, but dwells rather in the pattern of social control that is exerted in connexion with the person by himself and those around him. This special kind of institutional arrangement does not so much support the self as constitute it.' (Goffman 1961a: 154)

Scott (2011) revisited Goffman's concept of total institutions and compared it to newer forms of similar institutions, which she termed 're-inventive institutions'. Even though, as Scott postulates, individuals join these groups voluntarily, as opposed to Goffman's asylum, they nevertheless become exposed to a, yet more subtle, form of power and control. Scott (2011, p. 40-43) describes 're-inventive institutions' as places of 'biographical identity work'. In these new institutions power no longer flows from top-down, but is distributed multi-directional, as members enforce rules via a system of peer-to-peer surveillance. Scott explains the rise in re-inventive institutions (RI) as a result of the self-becoming ever-increasingly fluid and thereby causing ontological insecurity and existential angst. RI offer to 'process, reshape and reform' the self. However, by doing so, individuals whose primary concern is to find their 'true' self and live authentically fail to see that the opposite happens. Rather than being unique and finding one's true self, they are turning into '*gingerbread people*', (Craib, 1994, as cited in Scott, 2011, p. 40) 'all fitting the same cookie-cutter model and chanting the same views'. Scott (2011) explains the shift from total to re-inventive institutions as a change in power dynamics. Accordingly, RIs have moved away from explicit and direct coercion and employ disciplinary power (Foucault, 1975). Foucault (1975) positioned that the use of force and violence by authority figures has become obsolete as it has been replaced with a disciplinary power that individuals have learnt to conform to and discipline themselves. Such disciplinary power is present in various administrative and disciplinary institutions, such as schools, prisons and mental hospitals.

Another term used by Coser (1974) to describe groups exerting coercive control over its members is 'greedy institutions'. His description appears to lie somewhere in the middle between total institutions and re-inventive institutions. Coser (1974, p. 4) postulates that such institutions 'make total claims on their members and [...] attempt to encompass within their circle the whole personality [...] they seek exclusive and undivided loyalty'. He distinguishes them from total institutions, in the sense that they do not utilise physical force to control their members but use 'non-physical mechanisms to separate the insider from the outsider' (p.6).

As this paper focuses on second-generation members of religious communities, it is crucial to examine the applicability of these terms in that context. While the concept of power in re-inventive institutions, as described by Scott (2011) has merit in examining group processes in contemporary institutions or groups, the idea of 'voluntary joining' is problematic for second and later generation members of groups, as their membership has been imposed on them by being born into it. Furthermore, seen that Scott (2011) acknowledges the presence of power dynamics in these groups, it is questionable to what extent membership of those who become involved with these groups in adulthood, is truly voluntary.

While the terms 'total institutions', 're-inventive institutions' and 'greedy institutions' facilitate the understanding of these groups and even highlight the historical development of these groups, they draw limited attention to the central characteristic of these groups, namely control. For the purpose of this paper, I, therefore, choose to use the term 'high-control group', as I believe this term is the most accessible, as the key mechanism by which these groups operate and keep members dependent and obedient – control – is part of the term.

3.1.1 DEFINITION OF HIGH-CONTROL GROUP

I, therefore, define high-control groups as any group, regardless of ideology, that purposefully utilises social influence techniques to facilitate the recruitment and retainment of members, to further its own cause, disregarding its members benefits or well-being.

A crucial part of this definition, is the breadth of this definition, as it includes any group regardless of ideology. While the current paper focuses on a high-control group that can be described as being of a religious or spiritual nature, it is important to be aware that high-control groups are not limited to spiritual groups but also include groups that are political, psychotherapeutic/educational, commercial, etc. in nature.

3.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH-CONTROL GROUPS

Researchers have developed various models and checklists to describe the characteristics of high-control groups. Most notable is Lifton's model 'Eight Criteria of Thought Reform', which is based on interviews with American Prisoners of War in North Korea (Lifton, 1961). Lifton was one of the first researchers to develop a theoretical model to describe the characteristics of these groups and many subsequent models are based on this model. In fact, one of the most accessible models developed, the BITE model is based on Lifton's 'Eight Criteria of Thought Reform'. The BITE model, developed by Steven Hassan (2013,

p. 21 - 31) offers several advantages over other theoretical models: Firstly, the acronym BITE, readily describes the four key strategies (Behaviour, Information, Thought and Emotions) used to control individuals in high-control groups and/or relationships. The acronym is furthermore easy to remember and is thus an excellent educational and preventive tool due to its retainability. The BITE model is also much more concise than other models, which often list dozens of criteria for identifying controlling behaviour, making them confusing and difficult to remember.

3.2.1 THE BITE MODEL AND ITS APPLICATION TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

The following section describes Steven Hassan's (2013, p. 21 - 31) BITE model in more detail and applies its key components - behavioural control, information control, thought control and emotional control - to the Jehovah's Witnesses.

3.2.1.1 Behavioural control

Behavioural control in high-control groups is marked by control over people's environment: controlling with whom, where, when and how (friendships, romantic relationships, sexual partners) members live and associate, physical or psychological isolation from the outside world, the amount of sleep, work hours and type of occupation, dress code and food choices (Hassan, 2013).

In some groups, behavioural options may be limited due to finances available to individual members. Other groups, particularly human trafficking groups, restrict members free movement by taking away members passports and other ID documents. Many high-control groups will ask individual members to cut off contact with former friends and relatives or, if they are allowed to continue relationships, they may need to ask for permission to communicate with them. Many groups instil fear of outsiders by demonising them (Hassan, 2013).

High-control groups also operate with a system of rewards and punishments, where loyalty and strict adherence to internal rules are rewarded, and unwanted behaviour is punished to reinforce norm conformity. (Parlementair onderzoek, 1997). Each high-control group also has its own set of 'special rituals and traditions' to create a sense of unity and special bond between members.

Barker (2004) postulates that the extent of isolation that takes place in the group can be a sign of a potentially dangerous high-control group. The more isolated the members become from mainstream society and the more they internalise a world-rejecting attitude in favour of the group's ideology the more dangerous a group becomes. The most prominent examples include the suicide-murders of members of the Solar Temple in Europe

and Canada, Aum Shinrikyo and sarin gas release in Tokyo, Heaven Gates collective suicides in 1997 (Barker, 2014, p. 240) and Jonestown in 1978 (Hassan, 2015, p. 226)

In the Jehovah's Witnesses, behavioural control takes the following forms: Members are dictated with whom they can associate, become friends and romantic partners. According to Jehovah's Witness doctrine, members are encouraged to be friendly to people outside of their own community. However, they are discouraged from forming friendships or entering romantic relationships with people who are not Jehovah's Witnesses. The reason behind this is that association with non-Jehovah's Witnesses is seen by the Jehovah's Witnesses as a danger to 'Christian Integrity'. Jehovah's Witnesses are also discouraged from associating with members who have left the community either voluntarily or who have been excluded (Watchtower, 2015, p. 24).

Also, Jehovah's Witnesses clothing choices are limited by doctrine. Jehovah's Witnesses are required to wear clothes that allow for gender distinction. Women are discouraged from wearing clothing that make them look masculine (such as trousers), whereas men are discouraged from wearing feminine clothing. The reasoning behind the restriction of clothing choice is to 'make it easier for others to remain chaste and to maintain God's standards of holiness'. (Watchtower, 2016, n.p.).

Sexuality is another behavioural component that is doctrinally regulated. Members are discouraged from engaging in any premarital sexual activities (Young People Ask, n.d. Retrieved from: <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/family/teenagers/ask/explain-my-beliefs-sex/> on 31/07/2017.) Masturbation is also discouraged, as it is seen as a 'spiritually unhealthy habit, that instils attitudes that foster self-centeredness and corrupt the mind' (Gain the Victory over Masturbation, n.d. Retrieved from: <https://www.jw.org/ase/publications/books/gods-love/stop-masturbation/> retrieved on 31/07/2017). Homosexuality is another area that Jehovah's Witnesses are taught to reject, as it does, according to doctrinal rules, not live up to Jehovah's standards and constitutes sexual misconduct (Awake!, 2016, p. 7). Members are encouraged to marry only within the Jehovah's Witness community and any romantic relationships with outsiders are forbidden (Watchtower, 2015, p.30).

Career ambitions and working hours are areas that are regulated by the organization too. Jehovah's Witnesses are required to engage in proselytizing activities, and three levels of proselytising commitments exist Auxiliary pioneers, who are those that are unable to commit to full-time proselytising work. Auxiliary pioneers preach 30 to 50 hours a month. Regular pioneers engage in 70 hours of preaching work each month. Whereas special pioneers engage in 130 or more hours of preaching work each month. Jehovah's Witnesses are encouraged from spending as much time as possible on preaching work, as they believe

that this is important to save unbelievers (What is a pioneer, n.d. Retrieved from <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1102012154>, on 31/07/2017) Jehovah's Witnesses are encouraged from rejecting 'worldly' career ambitions and in fact, Jehovah's Witness are taught that career ambitions foster competitiveness and a desire to control others (Watchtower, 2017, p. 20).

The amount of time members spend on preaching work, has a direct impact on the time available for other leisure activities. On top of time restrictions, due to preaching requirements, Jehovah's Witnesses are discouraged from engaging in certain recreational activities, such as competitive sports, activities that involve excessive risks, anything involving 'violence, sadism, demonism, homosexuality, pornography, or other immoral practices'. Jehovah's Witnesses are required to put their preaching work and other congregational work first and pursue leisure activities secondary (Watchtower, 2011, p. 8-12). Another restriction on members time is due to the ritualistic character of the community. Jehovah's Witnesses meet twice a week, at the Kingdom Hall, for worship meetings. On top of these meetings, weekly Bible studies are held at members' homes, and members are required to prepare for worship meetings in advance by reading relevant Bible passages and engaging in proselytizing activities, which take a social character, as members preach in groups or pairs.

3.2.1.2 Information control

Information control, for members who are recruited, as opposed to born into the group, starts during recruitment. During the recruitment process, group members (recruiters) withhold or distort information about the group. Recruiters are being trained by the group to gain strangers trust and quickly find out personal details to use in an attempt to connect with the person they are trying to recruit.

Information control over established members is achieved through limiting members access to any media or material that is not controlled or produced by the group itself. Depending on the level of isolation of the group, this media may simply not reach the group environment or group members may be discouraged from reading any other material that the group has labelled as satanic, having a bad influence or being apostate literature. Peer-to-peer surveillance in high-control groups is encouraged, and members are required to report any rule violations to the leaders or other members higher up in the ranks.

Some high-control groups have different information materials available depending on which rank or level the member is in. Newer members may only have access to material where doctrines are presented as relatively harmless. When members share doubts or problems with leaders, they are informed that they have not yet advanced far enough to

understand this particular problem (Hassan, 2013, p. 28). Members thereby are gradually indoctrinated to the group's belief. High-control groups reinforce an image of the world that is black and white, good versus evil and produce simplistic answers to difficult and complex life questions. The use of insider terms or 'loaded language' creates a barrier between insiders and outsiders. Groups will also anticipate questions by explaining and disproving existing critical arguments.

To prevent members from engaging with former members and thereby running the risk of current members accessing negative information about the group from a former member, high-control groups utilise shunning to avoid contact between current members and ex-members.

The Jehovah's Witnesses make extensive use of insider material via the distribution of magazines, books, videos, newsletters, apps and their website. Jehovah's Witnesses are advised against reading material that is not approved by them. The organisation creates a divide between members and non-members, declaring that members are not part of the world and should not be engaging in 'worldly' matters (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2008, p. 51). This strict division of insiders and outsiders limits the amount of information members have access to.

The Jehovah's Witnesses also make use of peer to peer surveillance and members are encouraged to report other members' wrongdoings. Reporting on other members wrongdoings is seen as being loyal to Jehovah and to the member, as this will, according to doctrine standards, allow them to access help for the committed sins (Awake!, 2008, p. 19-21). Peer to peer surveillance also means that any type of relationship is conditional and subordinate to the group and its leaders.

3.2.1.3 Thought control

High-control groups promote their group as possessing the ultimate truth. These groups have simple answers for difficult questions. Group members are made to believe that the group leader is always correct and members doubts are caused by their own weaknesses. Techniques, such as thought-stopping, meditation and chanting mantras are taught to members to stop any critical thoughts from arising (Hassan, 2013, p. 29).

The Jehovah's Witnesses teach their members that they hold the ultimate truth, based on their revision of the Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses use the Bible as a definitive guide (Watchtower, 2007, p. 32). Doubts about the Bible or doctrinal rules are seen as 'spiritual weakness, spiritual unsteadiness or spiritual fatigue' and members who admit to having doubts receive 'counsel' from congregation Elders to prevent spiritual weakness from developing into serious sins (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, p. 48).

However, if members raise doubts openly in the congregation, or spread information that is contrary to Jehovah's Witnesses' Bible teachings they may face disciplinary actions, such as being disfellowshipped. Disciplinary action in regard to spreading information contrary to Jehovah's Witnesses teaching is both a way of controlling individual members behaviour, as well as limiting the kind of information members have access to (information control).

3.2.1.4 Emotional control

Emotional control is another central strategy of high-control groups. This level of control attempts to limit the members' range of emotions and proactively induce feelings, such as shame and guilt, to influence members' behaviour. Emotions and feelings are also being re-evaluated as good and bad feelings. For example, many groups use a variety of 'confession' rituals, where members are forced to confess embarrassing and shameful events in their life. These forced confessions may be used later to control members' behaviour or make them afraid of leaving the group because their secrets could be exposed (Hassan, 2013, 29 - 30).

Fear is another central emotion which is created via the introduction of an enemy. Enemies, in these groups, are people who are not part of the group or people who teach or spread information that is contrary to the group. The introduction of an outside enemy serves to instil mistrust in the outside world, and by doing so, the group prevents members from leaving the group. Fear within the group is created using peer-to-peer surveillance that evokes fear of getting caught by other members. Emotional control is additionally achieved through the control of relationships. As mentioned earlier some groups ask their members to cut ties with people in their former lives, others determine who their new friends can be, whom they can marry or have sexual relationships with (Hassan, 2013, p. 29-30).

Given that second and subsequent generation members have been born into these groups, it may be easier for the group to exert power and emotional control over them, as previous ties to mainstream society do not exist for these individuals, and thus less effort needs to be spent on breaking ties and on reforming their identity to match the group's ideology, as the individual is socialised directly by the group. Furthermore, second and subsequent generation members only know the life inside the group and take it for granted. It may also be harder for second generation and following generation members to leave the group, as they have very limited if any, knowledge of mainstream society and how to behave in it, often accompanied by the group's instilled fear(s). Converts to the group, on the other hand, have a pre-group identity and in some cases pre-group ties that, depending on their situation, they may be able to return to, if they decide to leave (Barker, 2014, p. 247).

In the Jehovah's Witnesses, emotional control is achieved through separating behaviours into acceptable and unacceptable/sinful behaviours. Members, who are acting in an unacceptable manner are encouraged to consider how Jehovah would feel about their behaviour and are advised that sinful behaviour is upsetting Jehovah. Members are also taught that Jehovah's 'beaming eyes' see everything and that no sin goes unnoticed, inducing a feeling of constantly being watched (Watchtower, 2008, p. 3-7). As mentioned above, Jehovah's Witnesses also make use of peer-to-peer surveillance which can invoke a fear of being caught by others and mistrust toward other members. Furthermore, the prohibition of friendships and relationships with non-Jehovah's Witnesses, as discussed earlier, is part of the Jehovah's Witnesses use of emotional control.

3.3 SPECTRUM OF CONTROL AND SETTINGS

It is pivotal to point out that not all non-mainstream (religious) groups are high-control groups (as defined in this paper) and that control is not always coercive or destructive. In fact, control exists on a spectrum ranging from healthy and constructive control to destructive and unhealthy/unethical or undue influence. Furthermore, abuse of power and social influence is not only a problem found in non-mainstream groups but is also present in official institutions such as officially recognised religions, residential units for children, elderly homes, etc. The difference between official institutions and secluded high-control groups is that checks and balances found in mainstream institutions are not present in non-mainstream high-control groups.

Even though control mechanisms in mainstream institutions have unfortunately not always prevented abuse, they provide greater protection for victims and vulnerable people, a system for detection and official and transparent protocols and laws are in place to ensure that abuse is addressed uniformly when it is detected (Kendall, 2011, p. 3).

Equally worth pointing out is that coercive and destructive control is not a phenomenon exclusively found in groups or institutions, but is also present in one-to-one relationships. Domestic abuse is an example of a high-control one-to-one relationship. For example, the definition England uses for the 2015 law that regulates 'Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship' (Home Office, 2015, p. 3) bears resemblance with the paragraphs above. The law defines:

Controlling behaviour as 'a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain,

depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.'

Coercive behaviour as 'a continuing act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.'

3.4 PREVALENCE AND REACTIONS TOWARDS HIGH-CONTROL GROUPS

It is difficult to estimate the number of high-control groups and its members. Several factors contribute to this difficulty, such as disagreements over defining high-control groups, oftentimes the size of high-control groups is so small that the groups are not officially known. Other groups are very secluded and removed from mainstream society and fail to register new-born children. Other difficulties arise with the accuracy of group membership statistics, which can be the case when groups publish membership numbers that are inaccurate, in an attempt to make their group appear much more popular and larger than it is in reality (Hassan, 2015, p. 41).

Several countries responded to religious high-control movements by introducing specific laws, frequently referred to as 'anti-cult' laws. Some countries, such as Belgium and France, introduced these laws as a reaction to the murder-suicides committed by the Order of the Solar Temple in the 1990s. Other countries, notably Germany and Russia, have been motivated by a desire to regulate groups that, according to them, pose a danger to the countries' public order (Stinnett, 2005, p. 431).

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia originally positioned itself as open to new religious communities and faiths, by introducing the 'On Freedom of Religious Confession' law. This law declared all religions as equals and religious groups were able to benefit from tax exemptions and were permitted to build places of worship. This religious freedom in Russia was soon curtailed by the introduction of the 1997 law known as 'On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations' (FCA). This law required religious communities to be established in Russia for at least 15 years and count a specific number of members, to register as a religious 'group' or 'organisation' (FCA, supra note 21, art. 9.1.) Only once a religious community is officially registered, may they benefit from tax exemption status, proselytizing activities, open bank accounts, own property, etc. Russia defends its position, as being in 'the defence of the country and the security of the state' (FCA, art. 3.2).

The Belgian Parliament established a special commission in 1996, to determine the danger 'sekten' (sects, as used by the Belgian Parliament) pose to society and individuals, and in particular to minors. The report distinguished between groups that were recognised and

acceptable and groups that they defined as 'harmful sectarian organisations'. The 1998 law that established the Belgian Observatory for 'harmful sectarian organisations' defined them as:

'groups having or claiming to have a philosophical or religious purpose whose organization or practice involves illegal or injurious activities harms individuals or society, or impairs human dignity.'
(*Belgisch Staatsblad*, 25/11/1998)

The Belgian Parliament also drew attention to minors who are part of 'harmful sectarian organisations', and pointed out that parents do not have the right to put their children's lives in danger based on religious doctrines, such as refusing blood transfusion in Jehovah's Witnesses.

Upon recommendation from the Belgian commission, an independent body (IACSSO/Dutch, CIAOSN/French) was set up to act as an observatory to provide information, advice, research, an archive and support regarding 'harmful sectarian organisations' to official institutions and individuals alike.

Similar to the case in Belgium, France held an inquiry into 'sectes' (sects) in 1995. While the Board of Inquiry stayed clear from defining the term sect, as it admitted that this was a difficult term to define, it proposed the following characteristics of sects:

'Mental destabilisation; exorbitant character of the financial requirements; isolation from society; danger to physical health; embrigadement [forced conscription] of the children; the more or less antisocial speech; disorders with the law and order; importance of the legal contentions; the possible diversion of the traditional economic circuits; [and] attempts at infiltration of the public authorities' (Assemblée Nationale, 1995, n.p.)

The French report also identified a list of 'sects', that include amongst others the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Scientology. However, the list has not resulted in any bans. France led two subsequent Inquiries, one concerning financial matters regarding 'sects' and one regarding minors' physical and mental health in 'movements with a sectarian character' (Assemblée Nationale, 2006, n.p.). The French Inquiry into minors argues that children living and growing up in sects, are at a disadvantage in comparison to other children as the social seclusion hinders their development and leads to an underdevelopment of their critical thinking skills. The Inquiry further postulates that children are unlikely to leave the group, as mainstream society has been depicted

throughout their childhood as 'monstrous and harmful' and even if they should decide to leave, they are maladjusted to life outside the group. If children actually leave, it is often a result of their parents leaving, divorce, where one parent is a member, and the other is not, or forced removal after statutory services become involved on child protection grounds (Lalich & Tobias, 2006, p. 253). Moreover, the Inquiry estimates that leisure time for children growing up in 'sects' is severely limited. The Inquiry estimates that Jehovah's Witnesses' eight-year-old children devote around 23 hours weekly to studying the Scriptures, preparing for meetings and proselytizing - on top of school and homework. Children's interests are limited to the group and many 'sects' such as the Jehovah's Witnesses discourage children from entering further education by denying that anything children are taught in the outside world is true or valuable to the group and its mission. Moreover, for Jehovah's Witness children school is often the only place where they interact with people and children outside their congregation. The balancing of black and white group values with outside values, such as those learnt at school and the groups instilled polarization of society as good versus evil places a burden on children's everyday lives (Lalich & Tobias, 2006, p. 253). Children are made to believe that the only important work they are doing is for the group. 'Sects', such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, further induce feelings of responsibility and guilt in children by asking them to convert as many people as possible in an attempt to save them. The Inquiry further estimates that there are approximately 100,000 children raised in 'sects' in France. However, this number is not verifiable since the report is not very clear on which 'sects' are included in that estimation and which criteria have been used to arrive at this estimation.

The introduction of specific laws to regulate religious high-control groups has been met with a big outcry of criticism. Critics argue on the basis of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, amongst other international treaties.

'[e]veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.' (The United Nations, 1948, art. 8)

It is argued that countries should abandon the often, vague, preferential religious schemes that are a direct violation of the right to freedom of religion. Countries and legislators are instead ought to focus on the specific illegal activities and individuals who are committing them (Stinnett, 2005, p. 451).

A similar point has been raised by Hassan (2015, 317 -318), who argues that the legal protection of religions is afforded to their beliefs and does not extend to behaviors and

that, with regards to high-control groups, the social influence techniques or unethical recruitment practices (behaviors) should be the subject of criminalization. He further makes the point, that targeting and banning groups specifically, will not necessarily make them disappear, but may lead them to disappear underground where the potential for abuse and harm is only increasing. Another difficulty, which arises when high-control groups are being persecuted, is that it would be difficult to account for changing group dynamics. Groups are affected by political and economic situations and general advances in society, and these may bring changes to the group (Barker, 2014, 243 - 250). Furthermore, a central characteristic of high-control groups is that they rely on a strict leadership, from either a single or a group of leaders. Thus, groups can change its makeup depending on social climates as well as the group leaders. These group dynamics would be difficult to account for in laws and legislation may be too slow to react to group changes. Furthermore, banning a group may impose a long-lasting stigma, that it can struggle to rid itself of even when it is changing.

4 PRESENT STUDY CONTEXT

The present study examines one tactic used by high-control groups to retain and control members; shunning. In the context of the BITE model, detailed above, shunning can be argued to be part of all four control areas, behaviour, information, thought and emotion. Members are taught to not associate with non-members, as well as former members of the group, which constitutes behavioural control. Due to members being allowed to freely associate only with other members, they have access to a limited amount of information, which is produced and controlled by the group itself. Dissident members who doubt group doctrine or spread contradictory beliefs are at risk of being shunned. Thus the fear of being ostracised by one's community keeps members from developing doubts/ or raising them publicly within the group – thought control. Lastly, as members are taught to associate only within the group, members circle of friends and relationships are limited to the group. Shunning would involve the severing of these ties and relationships, and members may choose to remain with a group, despite doubts or a desire to leave the group, to prevent a relationship breakdown.

The current study is interested in how members of one high-control group, the Jehovah's Witnesses, who have been shunned, experienced and dealt with being ostracised by their community. The study also investigated how former members coped with being shunned, as well as the challenges they were facing in their recovery and the long-term impact on their relationship with themselves, others and religion.

To understand the current study's findings, it is important to have a better understanding of how shunning, as a disciplinary action, has evolved in the Jehovah's Witnesses and in which cases and how it is being used. The following section aims to provide this understanding.

4.1 JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND SHUNNING

The Jehovah's Witnesses are most known by outsiders for their proselytizing activities, refusal of blood transfusions and political neutrality. However, as Knox (2011, p. 158) points out, the general public knows little else about the Witnesses. Furthermore, Knox (2011, p. 158) demonstrates that researchers have shown limited interest in studying this group. The majority of academic research on Jehovah's Witnesses, society? comes from the medical field, which is particularly pre-occupied with the group's stance on blood transfusions and from the legal field, an interest that has been sparked as a result of law suits Jehovah's Witnesses have filed worldwide and the impact they have had on the law (Stinnett, 2005, 439 - 440). Another difficulty with literature regarding the Jehovah's

Witnesses, is that the majority of literature arises from three different stances, first there is the literature published by the society itself, secondly literature is available from disassociated (members who have left the movement voluntarily, or committed a sin that is equaled as voluntary abandonment) or disfellowshipped (members who have been excommunicated and are subsequently shunned by active Witnesses) members, thirdly literature from critics, oftentimes referred to as 'anti-cult movement'. This makes it difficult to find academic, unbiased sources of knowledge.

It is worth noting that recently the Jehovah's Witnesses (hereafter interchangeably referred to as society, abbreviated form of legal entity name 'Watchtower and Bible Tract Society') have attracted considerable international attention. The Australian Royal Commission has launched an Inquiry in 2016 to examine the policies and procedures of the society in relation to child-protection and child-safety standards, as well as allegations of child sexual abuse. The Royal Commission has been critical of the society's policies in relation to handling child-sexual abuse cases and has made several recommendations. In particular, they have recommended revision of the society's 'two Witness rule' requirement (the society will only investigate abuse cases if two witnesses can testify to the abuse, or if the perpetrator confesses to the abuse). The Australian Royal Commission (2016) also showed criticism regarding the society's stance toward secular authorities. According to the Royal Commission, the society had records of 1,006 child sexual abuses in Australia, relating to at least 1,800 alleged victims, but none had been reported to secular authorities in Australia. Furthermore, the Royal Commission found that many perpetrators had been disfellowshipped (excommunicated) and later been reinstated (rejoined), without introducing necessary risk management policies or informing the members of the abuse thereby placing children at risk. Lastly, the Australian Royal Commission has also criticised the Jehovah's Witness policy of shunning, referring to the removal of disassociated or disfellowshipped members complete 'social structure' as 'cruel' (Australian Royal Commission, 10/03/2017, p. 26542). The Australian Royal Commission criticises the shunning policy in particular for victims of sexual abuse:

'The Royal Commission found that members of the organisation who no longer wanted to be subject to its rules and discipline have no alternative but to actively leave or disassociate from the organisation, and that it found that the Jehovah's Witnesses' practice of shunning members who disassociate from the organisation potentially puts survivors in the untenable position of having to choose between constant re-traumatisation and having to share a community with their abuser or losing their entire community.' (Royal Australian Commission, 10/03/2017, 26536)

'The practice of 'shunning' anyone, including a victim of child sexual abuse, who wishes to leave the Jehovah's Witnesses was considered to be one of the most damaging practices. Great concern was also expressed over the practice of reproof, which allows a repentant perpetrator to remain within a congregation and consequently at risk of re-offending.' (Australian Royal Commission, 10/03/2017, 26495)

The society has recently (March 2017) also been involved in a case in the Russian Supreme Court, where their activities have been banned due to being labelled an extremist organization (The Human Rights Watch, 2017, n.p). In the United Kingdom (UK), the charity commission for England and Wales launched a statutory inquiry into the society's safeguarding policies (The Charity Commission, 2014, n.p.). This current international interest may lead to further research regarding Jehovah's Witnesses society being conducted.

4.2 HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF SHUNNING PRACTICES IN THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

The Jehovah's Witnesses initially started as a loosely organised Bible study group, set up by Charles Taze Russell in the 1870s. Charles Taze Russell was raised Presbyterian but became disillusioned by his faith when he was unable to find explanations for certain doctrines of Protestantism. It was only after meeting a Second Day Adventist preacher, Jonas Wendell, that his interest in religion resurfaced. His interests were centred around the end of days, and he set out to study the events that would lead up to Armageddon, when, as he believed, Christ would resurrect the dead and establish his new kingdom of heaven and earth. Russell believed that he had found the true meaning of the Bible, which previously had been obscured by mainstream Christians. He initially spread the 'truth' he found in the scriptures through printed material, which led to groups of men joining him and together they were known as Bible students. In 1877, Russell and his Bible students started publishing the first periodicals, under which most notably the Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence (since 1939 'The Watchtower'). Seven years later, in 1884, the Bible students established themselves as a legal entity - the Zion's Watch Tower and Tract Society, later renamed to 'Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society'. It was around that time when Russell and a small group of his students began their proselytizing travels, which led them to America, Europe, Russia and Japan. Russell soon started to send supporters and students overseas to establish international branches, the first of which was opened in London in 1900. Russell's main influences visible in today's group are his proselytizing

activities worldwide and his usage of printed materials to spread his message. Russell died on October 31st, 1916 and was followed in leadership by Joseph Franklin Rutherford 1917. Rutherford's work led to significant changes in the group many of which remain unchanged until today. Under Rutherford, a new magazine 'The Golden Age' was established (from 1937 known as Consolation and since 1946 as Awake!). He further introduced the door-to-door ministry, where 'publishers' and 'pioneers' would spread the 'good news' and encourage the public to join the group. Following Rutherford's death, his successor Nathan Knorr established the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead, a missionary Academy, where Witnesses would not only be taught on Scriptural matters but also learn how to deliver sceptical talks to various audiences. During Knorr's time, the Witnesses broadened their geographic scope by spreading beyond Anglophone countries. By the time of Knorr's death in 1977, the society was already firmly established and solely little changes have taken place since, with his successors' (Frederick W. Franz (1977–1992), Milton George Henschel (1992–2000), Don Alden Adams (2000–present)) focus being mainly on growing the society through attracting new members (Knox, 2011, p. 159 – 163).

From an organizational point of view, the society is highly centralized (Knox, 2011, p. 163; Australian Royal, 2016, p. 24687 - 24688). At the very top reside its president and the Governing Body. The Governing Body is based in the United States (US) and oversees the branches that exist worldwide. It is responsible for providing definitive spiritual guidance and developing the organizational policies. All countries, in which the society is operating, have individual branch offices, which are responsible for overseeing the national congregations (local communities of Witnesses). Congregations are made up of publishers (ordinary members), ministerial servants (practical assistance to the congregation) and Elders (responsible for spiritual matters). The position of ministerial servants and Elders are exclusive to men and is in line with the society's' strict patriarchal structure, with men at the head of the family and organisation.

Each Elder, upon being appointed, is provided with an internal handbook entitled 'Shepherd and the Flock of God' (2010). This handbook details Elders responsibilities in the congregation, with their main duty being spiritual guides to its members. Spiritual guidance includes assisting those members who are perceived as 'spiritually weak' since spiritual weakness is believed to be able to develop into bad trends that may lead to 'disfellowshipping'; the society's' term for excommunication. The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society stipulates a policy of shunning former members of the society. This also extends to former members who have left voluntarily, in other terms 'disassociated' themselves. Disassociation is regarded as an action taken by an individual member, who no longer wishes to be part of it. However, there are some instances where certain actions are treated as equal to voluntary disassociation, and the member will be shunned, regardless of whether the member wishes to be part of the society. The Elders' handbook

outlines the actions that are cause for disassociation. The following information on disfellowshipping policies and treatment of disfellowshipped members is based on literature from the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society's Elders' handbook, the Society's magazine 'Awake!' and the Watchtower. The Elders' handbook is proclaimed by the society as reference material only intended for Elders of the congregation and distribution is strictly prohibited. A copy of this book has been given to the researcher by a participant. However, the handbook is also circulating online as former members have made it available to the public.

Reasons for disassociation include but are not limited to (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, 111-112):

- *Making known a firm decision to be known no longer as one of Jehovah's Witnesses*
- *Joining another religious organisation and making known his intention to remain with it*
- *Willingly and unrepentantly taking blood*
- *Taking a course contrary to the neutral position of the Christian congregation (through joining or through employment with a non-neutral organisation)'*

Contrary to disfellowshipping offences, where individual members have a right to appeal a Judicial's Committee decision, individuals who have disassociated or are understood to have disassociated themselves through an action, as stated above, do not have this right. The Elders of the congregation will make an announcement at the next meeting to make other members aware that a member has left the society. The announcement is a way of letting active Witnesses know that this individual should no longer be associated with (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, p. 112).

It is interesting to note that the society has not always disfellowshipped and shunned members who had committed doctrinal wrongdoings. In fact, in 1947, the 'Awake!' magazine described the practice of excommunication as being unfounded according to the Bible and argued that excommunication became a 'weapon', 'by which the clergy attained a combination of ecclesiastical power and secular tyranny that finds no parallel in history' (Awake!, 1947, p.27) It was only in 1952 that the society officially introduced disfellowshipping. The society argued that their decision came as a consequence of 'moral corruption' that, according to them, had been on the increase since World War Two.

'During the years following World War II the moral corruption of the world began to reach frightful proportions. The possibility existed that God's clean organization could become contaminated by such corruptive influences. But Jehovah was interested in his people, just as in times past, so through his channel of communication he lovingly brought forward information to counteract the filth that could tarnish or cause his people to become unholy.' (Watchtower, 1976, p. 122).

Until recently, loopholes in the shunning policy have existed, making it possible for members to simply fade or drift from the society, without officially disassociation themselves. This meant that members who wanted to leave the congregation and did so without drawing attention to themselves were able to avoid being shunned. However, recent policy changes (Watchtower, 11/15, 2015, n.p) meant that inactive members are now being shunned too. In practice, these recent policy changes meant that people who became inactive several years, or even decades ago and who were still able to have contact with their families and friends, have had these relationship ties severed as a result. Thus, current shunning policies regulate that regardless of how members leave the society – disfellowshipped, disassociated, or inactive - they will be shunned as a consequence of doing so.

4.3 LIST OF OFFENCES THAT MAY RESULT IN DISFELLOWSHIPPING

The Elders' handbook (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010) provides a list of 'offences' (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, 58), for which members may be disfellowshipped. The handbook states that the list provided is not exhaustive (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, 59 – 71):

Manslaughter

Attempted Suicide (In most cases a judicial hearing is not required)

Porneia (immoral use of the genitals. There must have been another party to the immorality – a human of either sex or a beast. Willing participation incurs guilt and requires judicial action)

Brazen conduct, loose conduct (not an exhaustive list: association with disfellowshipped, non-relatives sexual abuse, continuing to

date or pursue a romantic relationship with a person thought not legally or scripturally free to marry)

Staying in the same house with a person of the opposite sex (or in the same house with a known homosexual) under improper circumstances (exceptions are unexpected emergency or extenuating circumstances)

Gross uncleanness, uncleanness with greediness (not exhaustive list: passion arousing heavy petting or caressing of breasts on numerous occasions between individuals not married to each other, practice of engaging in immoral conversation by telephone, in internet chat rooms, or through similar electronic means, an entrenched practice of viewing, perhaps for years, abhorrent forms of pornography that is sexually degrading, misuse of tobacco, extreme physical uncleanness)

Misuse of addictive drugs (use of addictive drugs under medical supervision would not necessarily require judicial review)

Apostasy (Celebrating false religious holidays, participation in interfaith activities, deliberately spreading teachings contrary to Bible truth as taught by Jehovah's Witnesses, causing divisions and promoting sects, continuing in employment that makes one an accomplice to or a promoter of false worship, spiritism, idolatry)

Drunkenness (practice of drunkenness or a single incident of drunkenness that bring notoriety)

Gluttony (showing a lack of restraint. Gluttony is determined, not by someone's size, but by his attitude toward food)

Stealing, thievery

Deliberate, malicious lying, bearing false witness

Fraud, slander

Reviling (involves 'subjecting a person to insulting speech, heaping abuse upon him')

Obscene speech (involves sexually explicit, filthy expressions, sexually explicit and persistent despite counsel both in written and in oral communication)

Greed – gambling, extortion (also employment directly involved with gambling)

Adamant refusal to provide materially for one's own family, leaving wife and children destitute when having the means to provide (elders should consider the person's financial means and whether the family is destitute, because they have rejected the family head's provisions by choosing to live apart from him)

Fits of anger, violence (also includes professional boxing)

Exceptions to the above list include mental illnesses and cases where the 'wrongdoer may have been a victim of some type of abuse in the past' (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, 94).

4.4 THE JUDICIAL COMMITTEE

Before a Witness can be disfellowshipped, a Judicial Committee, an internal disciplinary board consisting of Elders from the relevant congregation, is formed to establish which sin, also referred to as 'offense', has been committed and whether the individual member is 'genuinely repentant' (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, p. 38). If an individual member can prove that he/she is truly repentant for the sin he/she committed, he/she may be forgiven. As a disciplinary consequence, repentant Witnesses will still have special privileges removed, referred to as 'judicial reproof'. Special privileges include: 'Pioneering, offering prayer, sharing in service meeting, until he has made further spiritual progress. Judicial restriction: not commenting at congregation meetings and not giving student talks in the Theocratic Ministry School.' (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, p. 97).

In the case of a 'judicial reproof', the body of Elders will decide whether an announcement should be made to the congregation. An announcement is a way of letting the congregation know that a member has committed an 'offence' and is currently working on being fully integrated into the congregation again.

If an individual, who has committed a disfellowshipping offence, is unable to prove that he/she is 'genuinely repentant', the individual may be disfellowshipped. Elders are directed, via the Handbook (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, p. 100), to be kind and

reassuring with the individual member and to remind him/her that forgiveness (reinstatement) is possible. Elders are also required to inform disfellowshipped individuals that they have a right to appeal the process. The appeal is then heard by another Body of Elders, usually from a different congregation. The appeal Body of Elders will re-establish that a disfellowshipping 'offence' has been committed and examine whether the individual member was 'genuinely repentant' at the time of the original Judicial Committee. If the appeal committee comes to a different conclusion, they are ought to send a letter to the branch office for further direction. The appeal committee should not inform the individual member that it disagrees with the original committee's decision.

If the committee decides to disfellowship an individual member, an announcement to the congregation will be made at the next meeting. The announcement is a way of letting the congregation know that a person has committed a disfellowshipping offence and is no longer a member of the congregation, meaning that the member should no longer be associated with. This announcement takes the following format (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, p. 112):

'[name of person], is no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses'

Disfellowshipping, according to the Elders' handbook, is not a permanent condition. Individual members who have been disfellowshipped may be re-instated in the future, provided they can prove 'genuine repentance'. The Handbook provides a list of actions that may be indicative of someone who is 'genuinely repentant', such as voluntary confession, truthfulness, praying to Jehovah for forgiveness, apologizing to offended ones, showing sadness about hurting Jehovah, accepting responsibility etc. (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, p. 91).

The disfellowshipped member, who wishes to be reinstated, is given the opportunity to prepare a written statement to demonstrate his repentance and proof the positive actions she/he has taken since being disfellowshipped. The Elders' Handbook is vague on the time frame for reinstatement, referring to it as 'sufficient time': 'perhaps many months, a year, or even longer' (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, p. 119).

4.5 INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO TREAT SHUNNED MEMBERS

Several Watch Tower and Bible Tract Society resources offer instructions on how to treat shunned members. For example, the Elders' handbook 'Shepherd the Flock of God' (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, p. 116) outlines how members should treat disassociated and disfellowshipped members:

'There should be no fraternizing or conversing with the disfellowshipped or disassociated person'

Members also must abstain from having *'undue association with disfellowshipped or disassociated relatives who are not in the household'* (The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 2010, p. 116). Having a 'persistent spiritual association' with the disassociated or disfellowshipped member, 'or openly criticizing the disfellowshipping decision', may lead to a disciplinary action being taken against that individual member. The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society's magazines 'Awake!' and 'The Watchtower' offer further guidance on how members are ought to treat disassociated or disfellowshipped members:

'... a simple 'Hello' to someone can be the first step that develops into a conversation and maybe even a friendship. Would we want to take that first step with a disfellowshipped person?' (Watchtower, 1981, p.25)

The society uses various reasons to justify their decision to shun disassociated or disfellowshipped members. The society refers to disfellowshipping as a 'loving provision' (Watchtower, 2015, p.29)

'By cutting off contact with the disfellowshipped or disassociated one, you are showing that you hate the attitudes and actions that led to that outcome. However, you are also showing that you love the wrongdoer enough to do what is best for him or her. Your loyalty to Jehovah may increase the likelihood that the disciplined one will repent and return to Jehovah.' (Watchtower, 2011, p. 32)

'Cooperating with the Scriptural arrangement to disfellowship and shun unrepentant wrongdoers is beneficial. It preserves the cleanness of the congregation and distinguishes us as upholders of the Bible's high moral standards. (1 Pet. 1:14-16) It protects us from corrupting influences. (Gal. 5:7-9) It also affords the

wrongdoer an opportunity to benefit fully from the discipline received. (Kingdom Ministry, 2002, p. 3)

'We might wonder, then, since this congregation which God is developing or bringing into existence is based on love, why anyone should ever want to talk about disfellowshipping or putting people out of this congregation. There certainly must be some reason. Well, the reason for disfellowshipping is that some persons get into this congregation of God that do not love Christ. Those who are acquainted with the situation in the congregation should never say Hello or Goodbye to him. He is not welcome in our midst, we avoid him. Such an individual has no place in the clean organization or congregation of God. He should go back to the wicked group that he once came from and die with that wicked group with Satan's organization.' (Watchtower, 1952, p. 131)

Having 'unnecessary association' is not limited to face-to-face encounters. The shunning policy has been adapted to encompass technological advances:

'Really, what your beloved family member needs to see is your resolute stance to put Jehovah above everything else - including the family bond. [...] Do not look for excuses to associate with a disfellowshipped family member, for example, through e-mail.' (Watchtower, 2013, p. 16)

Members must put Jehovah first, and this includes breaking ties with close relatives, such as children:

'But what will those dear parents do? Will they obey Jehovah's clear direction? Or will they rationalize that they can have regular association with the disfellowshipped son and call it 'necessary family business'? In making their decision, they must not fail to consider how Jehovah feels about what they are doing. [...] Today, Jehovah does not immediately execute those who violate his laws. He lovingly gives them an opportunity to repent from their unrighteous works. How would Jehovah feel, though, if the parents of an unrepentant wrongdoer kept putting Him to the test by having unnecessary association with their disfellowshipped son or daughter?' (Watchtower, 2011, p. 31-32)

An exception to shunning close relatives is permitted, if the person is living in the same household, such as children or partner:

'If the child is a minor and is living at home, you will naturally continue to take care of his physical needs. He also requires moral training and discipline, and you have the responsibility to provide these.' (Watchtower, 2007, p. 20)

'Thus, a man who is disfellowshipped or who disassociates himself may still live at home with his Christian wife and faithful children. The situation is different if the disfellowshipped or disassociated one is a relative living outside the immediate family circle and home. It might be possible to have almost no contact at all with the relative.' (Watchtower, 1988, p. 27).

The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society does not only require of its members to shun former members, but to actively hate them:

'Jesus encouraged his followers to love their enemies, but God's Word also says to "hate what is bad". When a person persists in a way of badness after knowing what is right, when the bad becomes so ingrained that it is an inseparable part of his makeup, then in order to hate what is bad a Christian must hate the person with whom the badness is inseparably linked.' (Watchtower, 1961, p. 420).

It is difficult to estimate how many people are affected by this policy. This difficulty arises from several angles: The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society does not keep statistics on how many members disassociate, are disfellowshipped or become inactive. The society does, however, publish annual statistics on the number of active members (publishers) and of new members (baptisms). By subtracting the amount of currently active publishers from the total amount of members (newly baptized and already active) of the previous year, we derive a number of Witnesses that are 'missing' from the annual statistics. 'Missing' does not equal disfellowshipped but also includes members who have been disassociated or become inactive. Furthermore, the number of 'missing' Witnesses does not account for a mortality rate. It also does not account for former members being reinstated. Moreover, the society does not specify how they arrive at the numbers presented in the annual statistics; it is, therefore, uncertain how reliable the society's statistical data are in the first place. Putting these limitations aside, we arrive at a number of 1,451,737 'missing' Witnesses between the years 2000-2016. It is also crucial, to keep

in mind that it was not until 2015, that the congregation shunned inactive members. Therefore, the number of missing members does not necessarily equal the amount of shunned members. For the annual reports on membership as provided by The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society for the years 2000 to 2016 see Worldwide report Grand Totals for each year on the Jehovah's Witnesses official website. (<https://www.jw.org/en/>)

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The following section provides a rationale for the choice of methodology and method adopted for the current research project. Methodology, as a research strategy is underpinned by the kind of research questions a study is aiming to answer and the nature of the phenomenon being investigated. The methodology is also embedded into the researchers ontological and epistemological perspective, and the researchers own ontological and epistemological stance will be addressed. This section will also explore the methodological orientation, how? philosophical underpinnings of the chosen methodologies, criteria for evaluating qualitative research, ethical considerations, followed by the research design of the current study, limitations and reflexion.

5.2 METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

The present study has been built on a qualitative research framework, based on the type of research question the current study aims to investigate, as well as reflecting the researcher's own ontological and epistemological orientation of social constructivism.

5.2.1 ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, whereas epistemology is concerned with how we can learn and know more about the nature of reality (Decorte and Zaitch, 2010, p. 121). Within this framework, researchers distinguish between two paradigms, positivism and constructivism. The positivist paradigm states that there is an external objective reality that can be observed and measured by researchers without the researcher influencing the object of inquiry. According to this paradigm the phenomenon or object under investigation exists in itself, undisturbed by the surrounding context.

Constructivism on the other hand, in which the present study is rooted, states that an external reality that can be objectively observed and studied by researchers does not exist. In contrast, each individual has a different viewpoint and perception, based on their experiences and as such, there does not exist one reality, but multiple realities as we are all the creators of our own reality.

As this study is rooted in constructivism, it is important to acknowledge that the process through which information and knowledge have been gathered, has been a collaboration between the researcher and the participants.

5.3 PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The current study combined two research approaches, narrative methodology and interpretative phenomenological analysis.

5.3.1 INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The current study aims to explore the lived experience of former members of Jehovah's Witnesses and their sense making after being excommunicated and shunned by their former community. One research approach that stands central in the exploration of lived experiences and meaning making is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The key characteristic of IPA is that it offers in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation, as a reflection of how it is experienced and lived through by individuals. IPA is concerned how individuals experience and give meaning to life changing events. IPA has been chosen as research frame for the current study, as its exploratory nature allows for an in-depth analysis of shunning as it is experienced by the individual. This is particularly useful in this context, as research in this area is scarce and IPA could offer much insight into this under-researched area. IPA is ideally suited for the questions this study wishes to address, the experiential and sense making nature of individuals in the face of adversity. Furthermore, IPA was particularly appealing to the researcher, due to her training in counselling, as it allowed for a detailed exploration of the needs and issues former members of Jehovah's Witnesses face in their recovery from abuse.

IPA as a qualitative research method is designed to allow researchers to investigate individuals subjective lived experiences and sense making. Sense making, making sense of our experiences, is central to our human experience. Reflecting, most commonly retrospectively, on our experiences and evaluating how they shape our identities and how we perceive ourselves to be in the world and in relationships with others, allow us to gain a sense of certainty and control. It makes it possible to gain ownership of our own life story.

IPA has been designed as a unique research method in psychology and has initially been used by health psychologists. Over time, it has come to be employed in various other disciplines, such as clinical and counselling psychology as well as social sciences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p.1).

The IPA approach is informed by three major philosophical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 362). Phenomenology refers to an individuals' perception of an experience, event or object. Oftentimes, the things individuals are taking for granted can take centre stage of phenomenological inquiry, and it is an attitude of curiosity for these things that are taken for granted, that is at the heart of phenomenological inquiry (Finlay, 2015, p. 16). Edmund Husserl, who is regarded as the father of phenomenology, looked at phenomenological inquiry as an opportunity to challenge scientific positivism by embracing the study of subjective experiences and discovering how the 'things themselves' present themselves to us. Husserl believed that this could be best achieved if researchers were 'bracketing' their previous experiences in order to examine the 'things themselves' in a non-judgmental manner, free of any preconceptions (Finlay, 2015, p. 45).

Phenomenologists are interested in the way individuals experience and make sense of the world around them, in particular events that are of particular significance to them (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 1). However, IPA is also founded on the principle of hermeneutics, the study of interpretation, which reminds us that the way we experience things and events around us is not objective, but informed by our previous experiences and is thus inherently subjective. This presents researchers who choose to use IPA with what is referred to a 'double hermeneutics' (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 3). The individual interprets and makes sense of his/her own experience, according to previous experiences and knowledge. The researcher, on the other hand, tries to make sense of someone else's sense making. However, the researcher's interpretation of the respondent's experiences is also guided by his own pre-existing experiences and knowledge. The researcher, therefore, plays a central role in the construction process of the data, and it is thus vital for the research to be aware of these existing dynamics (Finlay, 2011, p. 24). This is balanced with hermeneutics of empathy or faith and critical or suspicious hermeneutics (Josselson, 2014, p. 3). The researcher is caught between aiming to gain 'closeness', an 'insider perspective', to learn and try to understand the experience from the individual's viewpoint, and 'distance' that allows him or her to critically examine how individuals give meaning to their experience (Todres, 2007, p. 58). To remain 'scientifically aware' while entering participants subjective lifeworlds is challenging. Finlay (2015, p. 23) states that as phenomenological researchers 'we do not access an 'inner world' so much as an individual's relationship to the world'. For example, things respondents choose not to tell about their experiences may be just as important as the things they do tell.

The third major philosophical underpinning, idiography, refers to the investigation of single cases and individual experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 29). The aim of IPA is not to come to general conclusions or to test hypotheses, but to present a detailed

picture, a 'thick description' of an individual's experience. While researchers using IPA, search for similarities and differences between the respondents' individual accounts, the results generally do not lend themselves to generalization, due to small sizes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

5.3.2 NARRATIVE RESEARCH

The current study combined IPA with narrative research, life histories. The researcher hypothesised that the individual's experiences and sense making of their shunning experience would differ depending on the individual's upbringing and life experiences prior to being excommunicated. Therefore, the combination of life history interviews and IPA allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of how the shunning experience is embedded in the individuals' life story.

The narrative approach focuses on the individuals' life histories and is thus biographic in nature. While narrative research has traditionally focused on oral or written accounts, researchers in recent years have come to define the scope of narrative research more broadly by including various forms of visual humanistic expression, paintings, photos, etc. Howard Becker (2009, p.7) compared the life history approach to crafting a 'mosaic', each piece increases our understanding of the total picture and only after a certain number of pieces have been added, are we able to identify what the mosaic portrays. The metaphor of the mosaic is particularly useful to this study as by focusing exclusively on the interpretive stance and neglecting the narrative; we may be missing vital 'mosaic' pieces that hinder or blur our understanding of the total human experience. Furthermore, conducting life history interviews with all respondents allows us to get a better understanding of how similar or different the individual respondents and the environments in which they grew up are.

While these are distinct research methods, they still share a set of commonalities. The main similarity lies in the way they view research respondents. While other research methodologies view research respondents more passively, studying 'them', the narrative and interpretive approach both place the research respondent at the centre of the study. The respondent is the expert in his/her life story and is given the utmost flexibility and space to recount his/her story. The respondent is empowered by giving him/her the opportunity to raise his/her voice and recount a specific episode in his/her life that was of significance to him/her. Moreover, both approaches are not interested in participants' subjective experiences. The difference between the two methods lies in their 'state of information' – the narrative approach can be seen as yielding 'raw data', relatively untouched by outside influences, recounted as the individual remembers it in that very

moment. The interpretive approach, on the other hand, goes one step further, as it 'processes' the 'raw data' obtained in the 'natural state' of the individual.

5.4 EVALUATION OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Research inquiries and researchers are guided by worldviews and paradigms. Paradigms inform us about how researchers view and think about the external world and what methods they use to investigate and study it. Besides debates over the accessibility of the external world, debates around how to evaluate qualitative research have existed for decades. With some researchers arguing that qualitative research should be evaluated using the same criteria as quantitative researchers and others proposing criteria unique to qualitative research. Lucy Yardley (2007) proposes four criteria to assess the quality and validity of qualitative research, that have been used to guide the current study:

- Sensitivity to context; this is demonstrated by showing empathy to the respondents, putting them at ease and being sensitive to power balances (research expert versus experiential expert) as well as being non-judgemental so as not to influence respondents' answers or data analysis. Another way of displaying sensitivity to context is by including verbatim quotes so that readers can get as close as possible to the respondents' world. This also allows readers of the paper to critically agree or disagree with interpretations the researcher made.
- Commitment and rigour; commitment is shown by paying close attention to the respondents throughout data collection as well as careful analysis. Rigour, on the other hand, refers to how thorough the research is. This can be demonstrated by selecting a homogenous sample and by conducting a comprehensive and in-depth interview. IPA research, in particular, needs to be in-depth and this requires the researcher to empathise with the respondent, as well as remain separate to critically examine respondents' answers.
- Transparency and coherence; transparency is demonstrated by detailing research stages – selection and interview - in order to allow the reader to follow the process closely. Coherence, as it relates to IPA, is demonstrated by a commitment to its principles phenomenology, idiography and hermeneutics.
- Impact and importance; Good qualitative research must have an impact on the reader and tell him something new.

5.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

5.5.1 STUDY POPULATION

5.5.1.1 Inclusion Criteria

IPA involves purposive sampling in order to obtain a homogeneous sample (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 3) and to allow the researcher to search for similarities and differences between people who have experienced similar events. For the current study, the researcher decided on a sample size of six participants, as this is the maximum number of participants recommended for student projects (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 51). The following criteria for inclusion were handled: participants were required to have either been born to a family/ or parent who were/was an active Jehovah Witness(es). Participants whose families or parent had not been active Jehovah's Witness(es), but joined before the participants reached an age where they formed lasting memories they were able to recall, were considered too. Participants who fell into the latter group were asked before the interview whether they had any recollection of their childhood prior to their family/parent joining the Jehovah's Witnesses. Only prospective participants who answered this question in the negative were considered eligible for inclusion. This criterion was handled to ensure homogeneity between the two groups (born in/ vs. raised in).

As IPA aims to study the characteristics of an individual's experience in-depth, it is indispensable to have a verbatim transcript of the interview, as note taking would limit the amount of information that can be captured. Therefore, only respondents who agreed to an audio-record of the interview were selected.

5.5.1.2 Recruitment

Participants were recruited via a pre-existing online peer support group for former Jehovah's Witnesses on the social media platform 'Facebook®'. The researcher contacted the group's administrators, who posted the request on the group's Facebook® page. Originally, the request was directed towards people living in Scotland because of convenient access to the researcher. However, due to few responses, the area was expanded to include the whole of UK. The request that was posted by the group's administrators included the researcher's contact details, to allow participants to ask further questions regarding the study. Interested parties received an invitation to join the interview (see appendix 7.1). Interviews were conducted after respondents had provided written informed consent.

5.5.2 DATA COLLECTION AND STORAGE

5.5.2.1 Recording and Situation/Place

Respondents were interviewed twice. The first interview took the form of a life story interview. Participants were instructed on what life story interviews are and were informed that they were able to choose in which form or order they wanted to tell their life story. This interview was unstructured, and questions were only asked for clarification purposes.

The second interview was aimed at exploring participants sense-making of their excommunication, as well as events leading up to it and the aftermath of it. The second interview was conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009, p. 79) provide a detailed guide in the handbook 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Theory, Method and Research', which provided the foundation for the construction of the interview schedule of this study. Respondents were asked five questions in the second interview (see interview schedule in appendix 7.2). Jehovah's Witnesses are trained to respond to questions asked by non-Jehovah's Witnesses in a set way, either repeating Bible verse or other Jehovah's Witness literature. The first two questions were formulated with the intention of observing whether their explanation of the terms 'Jehovah's Witnesses' and 'shunning' to a non-Jehovah's Witness (the researcher) had undergone a shift. The third question was formulated to gain an insight into how shunning affected participants on a practical everyday level. The coping questions were formulated to understand the coping mechanisms used by Jehovah's Witness and if possible apply it within the broader research area of coping strategies surrounding ostracism. The last question 'How would your life be different now, if you would not have been disfellowshipped?' was formulated with the intent to allow participants to put their discrete experience of being shunned into the perspective of their overarching life story.

To allow respondents to feel more comfortable, the researcher asked the respondents who were living close enough for face-to-face visits to choose a location of their liking. Respondents who lived too far away for face-to-face interviews were offered to be interviewed via Skype™. Four respondents were interviewed via Skype™, while two were interviewed face-to-face. One interview took place at the participant's house, the second one in a café the respondent chose. The other interviews took place via Skype™, using a webcam. The interviews took anywhere between thirty minutes to six hours in length. All life story interviews took longer than the semi-structured IPA interviews.

The researcher took precautionary steps when conducting the face-to face interviews by making her partner aware of the location of the interview and the approximate time it would take.

Interview schedules can be found in appendix 7.2.

5.5.2.2 Storage

Verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were completed by the researcher, using 'inqscribe' a digital media transcription software. Respondents names were replaced with pseudonyms, chosen by the researcher at random, and pseudonyms were used to identify audio recordings and transcripts. Pseudonyms were culturally sensitive, to reflect the origin of participants. The researcher created a separate file, that connected pseudonyms and the respondents' real names as well as any other identifiable information, such as contact details or the names of small towns, names of relatives or friends, work place, etc. The file containing identifiable information was stored on an encrypted and password protected partition of a removable (external) hard-drive in a locked filing cabinet, to which only the researcher had access to. No third party had access to the data used in this study.

5.5.3 ANALYSIS

During the analysis stage, the researcher transcribed all interviews and studied each transcript individually. While there is no strict guideline for analysis in IPA, the process of working and analysing the data is considered to be iterative (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 28). Transcripts were read multiple times to gain familiarity with the text. Margins on both sides of the document were added, the left margin was used to note interesting and significant comments, and the right margin was used to make notes of emergent topics and themes that are characteristic of the experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 87). Themes that occurred in at least half of the transcripts were categorised as recurrent themes. This was done to counterbalance the idiosyncratic aspect of IPA and to allow the emergence of a broader understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. Recurrent themes were organised in a table and structured using themes and subthemes.

The findings or analysis section for IPA research projects is generally done without making references to literature, and instead, presents a narrative account of what has been learnt from the participant and his/her experience. For clarification purposes, the current study does include some references in the analysis section. IPA is a joint product of the researcher and the participant, due to IPA 'double hermeneutics'. Therefore, both the researcher's and the participants' voice is present in the analysis of the IPA research projects. In order to ensure that readers are able to follow the interpretations, researchers using IPA, make use of participants extracts.

5.5.4 LIMITATIONS

While IPA is an innovative approach in qualitative research, there are, as with any other methodology, certain limitations.

As IPA relies heavily upon interpretation and a person's sense making of his/her own experience and then the researcher's interpretation of a third-person's data, this can lead to misinterpretations. The researcher is not merely re-telling the individuals' accounts, but also interpreting, thus creating the risk that research results may be misinterpreted and too 'researcher heavy'.

Another factor that may be interpreted as a disadvantage is the fact that IPA does not lend itself to generalizations, due to using small sample sizes. However, the depth that can be achieved through IPA analysis can add certain values that other methodologies cannot.

Furthermore, the quality of an IPA research relies heavily on the researcher's experience of conducting interviews. A researcher using IPA must be empathic and critical at the same time. He must be an attentive listener to ask the right probing questions and flexible enough to let the respondent shape the interview process, while at the same time making sure that the interview stays on track (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 4). During the analysing stages, the researcher must be aware of his/her preconceptions and try to 'put aside' his/her own opinions and pre-existing knowledge to fully immerse himself/herself in the data. This is referred to as 'emic perspective', gaining an 'insiders' understanding (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The current study used a sample of six participants, to keep the study manageable. The researcher had previous knowledge of qualitative research from her undergraduate studies. The researcher joined the 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Research Interest Group', an online e-mail based research interest group, that allows members to gain an in-depth knowledge of the methodology and to allow interactions between researchers with the possibility to ask and answer questions. The researcher took advantage of the interactive functions (e-mailing other group members) on numerous occasions.

Due to the study's methodology, the research questions and the researcher's background and training in psychotherapy, the dissertation has taken a psychological focus. This may be regarded as a limitation of the present study, as it has been conducted as part of a Criminology Master's degree.

The fact that participants for the current study have been recruited via an online group that was specifically aimed at peer support may have skewed some of the findings of this

study. This may suggest that participants involved in this study, had been more adversely affected than other former Jehovah's Witnesses who do not join these groups.

A limitation in regard to the interview schedule used was the heavy focus on retrospective sense making. In hindsight, it may have proved valuable to ask one or two future orientated questions.

Another limitation of the current research was the use of Skype™ to conduct four interviews. While the software enabled the research to take place in the first instance, it brought limitations such as cutting off during conversation due to poor internet connection, difficulty in establishing a relationship with the participant and one participant stated that she felt it was 'weird' for her to conduct the interview via Skype™ as she normally uses it for work purposes, thus participants use of Skype™ in everyday life may have impacted their perception of the interview process. Another aspect of conducting the interviews via Skype™ was that they were much more focused on the topic and there was little deviation from the central topic discussed. While this meant that time was optimally used and the interview process itself could be regarded as efficient, it was more difficult to build a positive relationship with participants, as the interview process felt more like a 'tick-box' exercise.

5.6 REFLEXION

Reflexivity in qualitative research is concerned with the motivations and preconceptions researchers have about their chosen topic. These affect researchers' decision making throughout the research process, and it is thus vital to be openly reflexive. A starting point is the motivation behind the research topic. I had started this research project based on curiosity that was evoked when I was a child, and two Jehovah's Witnesses came to my childhood home for their proselytising work. During this visit, my family's adverse reaction to the two women took me by surprise and instilled a mix of fear and curiosity. Only several years later, when I was a student in secondary school, I learnt who the women were, and my interest resurfaced. Since then, I regularly read their magazines when I came across them. Growing up in a Catholic family without personally identifying myself as a religious person, caused conflict with my family and within myself on numerous occasions. My family would regularly tell me that non-believers were not afforded salvation after death and prayed that I would eventually start practising, so that I too, could be saved. Even though I never identified myself as a religious person, I always had a keen interest in religion and spirituality, and the people practising it.

When I started researching the Jehovah's Witnesses more closely, there was one main aspect I found intriguing about the group, which was the 'delayed' baptism. As I had been raised as a Catholic, I had been baptised a few weeks after birth and thus was unable to consent to my baptism. I found it liberating to learn that in theory, members need to have studied the Bible (Watch Tower and Bible Tract Society's version) carefully and lived by its rules before being eligible to baptism. Only after meeting several participants, did I start to understand the subtle control mechanisms, such as social pressure from peers, family and the congregation, underlying baptism in the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Another preconception I had and struggled with until I spoke with several participants, was a sharp dichotomy between victims and perpetrators. I formerly regarded excommunicated members as victims and friends and family members who remained active Witnesses and actively shunned former members as perpetrators of a cruel act. It was only after I met with several former members, that I came to see both sides as victims. While generalisations cannot be made, it appeared to me that Jehovah's Witnesses who shun former members, truly believe that they are doing the right thing by ostracising them, as they believe that this would lead them to return to the group and be reunited with family and friends. Thus, over the course of this research, I have shifted this dichotomy to include a broader picture, namely that of institutional control. An institutional system that dictates strict rules or as the Watch Tower and Bible Tract Society proclaims, 'the Truth', that loyal members are taught to put before ties with family and friends.

During the research process, there were several occasions, where I experienced outrage and anger at the treatment that some of the participants experienced. One participant, in particular, was excommunicated and shunned by his family, friends and the wider congregation, at age thirteen. I found it difficult to listen to his story as he recalled it almost thirty years later, his voice, at times, still filled with sadness and disappointment about the isolation he experienced as a young teenager. Another participant, a victim of sexual assault, was told by Elders of the congregation that she had provoked the assault by entering a friendship with a non-Jehovah's Witness and was subsequently excommunicated. It was moments like these during the process of this research, that I felt sad, outraged or angry, and sometimes all three emotions simultaneously. Even though the process of interviewing and analysing transcripts had a strong emotional impact on me and sometimes left me feeling overwhelmed, it also reaffirmed the need for this research, as little knowledge exists among the general population.

Part of a researchers' skills is the ability to enter and understand the participants lived world, with language forming an integral part of their lived world and to convey this lived world to other outsiders through the use of language. Even though I had completed a fair amount of research on Jehovah's Witnesses prior to interviewing participants, I struggled,

particularly during the initial interviews with the participant's sociolect, also referred to as 'loaded language' (Hassan, 2013). Although participants explained insider terms, it still remained a 'learnt vocabulary' to me, learnt in an environment that was 'unnatural' for the particular setting. This was especially interesting from my perspective, as I speak several languages and the process of familiarising myself with this loaded language, was indeed very similar to learning new vocabulary – hearing or reading a word that I did not understand and that carried no meaning for me, to a word that I could understand and then use myself. Even when the theoretical understanding, the knowing what the word stood for, surfaced, the word still did not carry the same meaning for me, as an outsider, as it did for someone who grew up hearing, learning, using and experiencing that vocabulary.

6 FINDINGS

6.1 STUDY POPULATION

The current study involved six participants, four females and two males. The age of participants ranged from 35 to 54. Four participants were of British origin, with three participants from England and one participant from Scotland. Two participants were of Polish origin, whose mother tongue was not English, but who had a good level of English.

Four participants (Michael, Christina, Urszula and Agnieszka) were interviewed via Skype™ due to the distance. Two participants (Philip and Isabel) were interviewed face to face. One respondent who lived close to the researcher was met at his home and interviewed there. A second respondent was interviewed in a café. The interview in the café took place early morning, in a quiet corner without outsiders being present. Respondents who were interviewed via Skype™ chose a time of their convenience. Conducting the interview in the participants home was very insightful, as the researcher gathered much more information as various personal items, including pictures, books and other memorable items that were linked to the research were revealed. Home interviews were previously suggested to be more insightful by Elwood and Martin (2000), who found that conducting interviews at participants home may yield extra information by observation of the house's décor, people living with the respondent, the neighbourhood and city in which the respondent lives.

Four participants specifically mentioned at the end of the interviews that the opportunity to speak about their life and shunning experience has been cathartic, as they had rarely spoken about their experience in such a detailed manner. Two participants mentioned that the academic interest in their experience instilled hope for a better understanding of people who go through this experience and better support for former members in the long-term.

Four participants were disfellowshipped in their teens, one participant in his early twenties and one participant in her early thirties. Three participants were reinstated after being disfellowshipped, with two participants actively working toward reinstatement and one participant was reinstated due to changes in doctrine. One participant had been reinstated three times, two times after being disfellowshipped and one time after disassociating herself. At the time of interviews, five participants had the status of 'disfellowshipped' Jehovah's Witnesses and one participant was an 'inactive' Jehovah's Witness.

Appendix 7.3 provides a table with information per participant. All participants names have been replaced with a pseudonym, that is sensitive to their country of origin.

6.2 DISFELLOWSHIPPING

6.2.1 JUDICIAL COMMITTEE

Before a decision on whether an individual member is to be disfellowshipped is made, an internal disciplinary board, called the Judicial Committee is formed, that will investigate the 'offence' the member has committed and evaluate whether the member shows 'genuine repentance'. There are several common themes among participants in regard to their experience of the Judicial Committee, such as members in the congregation spying and informing on each other, the formality and seriousness of the initial meeting and a lack of control. Female participants described how their gender influenced their experience, as one female participant was questioned by the Elders (men) in relation to being raped by a co-worker, while another female participant compared the experience to the aristocracy, a time where power was condensed in a small group of men. While some members had been reported to the Elders by other peer members, some Judicial Committees were formed after members had self-confessed. Self-confession in this context, is particularly interesting, as it may serve as a way of controlling or influencing the consequences of the wrongdoing, as self-confession is one way Jehovah's Witnesses can prove 'genuine repentance'. In cases where self-confession does not directly influence the Elders decision, it may offer some control and alleviation of the guilt and shame members experienced.

In this segment Philip, who was disfellowshipped age thirteen, recounts being interviewed by two Elders after two members of the congregation had witnessed him smoking:

'I was thirteen you know, or twelve at the time, so anyway, when the second witness saw me, they then pulled the wheels into motion in the church, and two Elders came out to interview me. That's the Judicial Committee, and it's like being questioned by the cops, it's totally - they go good cop and bad cop and all that ridiculous stuff, - they really kind of went at me.' [Philip]

Comparing the Elders of the congregation to police officers, 'good cop and bad cop', conveys a position of authority and officiality. There is a lack of control and helplessness in Philip's description of how he experienced the interview process ('they really kind of went at me'). Philip's disfellowshipping relied on two witnesses' accounts, which are needed if an accused member does not confess.

Urszula shares a similar experience:

'Between 15 and 19 years of age, I did a lot of things which most teenagers did. Even though I knew that any bad behaviour was forbidden by the church, I drank alcohol, smoked cigarettes and went to parties with my schoolmates. I lived in a small city, so most likely I was seen by someone doing one of these things and the church was informed about it. One evening two Elders came to my family home and told me that I was seen behaving badly. I neither denied nor repented so in result I was disfellowshipped.' [Urszula]

This segment highlights a distinction, a sense of separateness of being a Jehovah's Witness teenager and a non-Jehovah's Witness teenager, in contrast to 'most teenagers', who drank and smoked cigarettes and went to parties, Urszula encountered disciplinary actions to something which she perceived to be normal teenage behaviour. Her perception of being sold out to the congregation conveys a sense of constant surveillance and unease, which was heightened in part due to the rural area Urszula grew up in. This extract highlights the behavioural control element of peer to peer surveillance, as discussed earlier (Hassan, 2015), in which peer to peer surveillance is used as a mechanism to keep members obedient, due to the threat of detection.

Christina, who was disfellowshipped age sixteen for having sex outside of marriage, recounts her experience:

'I felt so much shame. I knew it was wrong; I could get disfellowshipped, you know. So, I did eventually tell my mum, that I had committed fornication and she told the Elders. So, the Elders had a meeting with me, a Judicial Committee and I went there on my own, my mum didn't go with me. It was just me and three Elders, and they disfellowshipped me [pause]. Because I had stayed with him because I had sex more than once with him, that showed that I was not repentant [pause] I didn't argue with it, I accepted it, I felt so guilty at the time. [...] There was no doubt in my mind, at the age of 16, that this was the right thing that had happened.' [Christina]

Christina's emotional response to her perceived wrong-doing compelled her to 'come clean' to her mother, who reported her to the congregation's Elders. Christina's account conveys a surrender to a group of men perceived as powerful and righteous. There is a struggle with her own feelings of guilt in coming to terms with the past behaviour, that constituted the 'offence', while at the same time being faced with the future emotional turmoil of dealing with the aftermath of disciplinary sanctions. Christina's account also carries a sense

of powerlessness and loss of control, as the fact that she had sex outside of marriage more than once was automatically interpreted by Elders as signifying unrepentance, and prevented her from being reproofed. Christina's guilt appears to be lifted slightly, as she states that, at the time, she felt that the right sanctions had been put in place.

Isabel was disfellowshipped age nineteen after being raped by a colleague at work who was a non-Jehovah's Witness. She had told one of her friends about the assault, who reported it to the Elders. The Judicial Committee interpreted the fact that she was friendly with him at work and met him for coffee as a lead-up and wrong-doing on her part:

Meeting up having a coffee and just chatting, you know. It was all just [um] social.' [Isabel].

'The only way you can be repentant is if you admit to it. I was repentant and sorry for doing all the lead-up to it. I realised that that was wrong, but the actual event I was still adamant that this is not what I wanted. They were so obsessed with 'were you not tempted at the time?'. So, because I wouldn't admit to it, therefore I was not repentant, so it would have been easier if I had turned around and said 'yeah, we just got carried away and I am really sorry' they would have given sanctions and restrictions, but they probably wouldn't have disfellowshipped me. It was their own sort of language.' [Isabel]

This speech, like others above, conveys a sense of powerlessness and loss of control, as an honest account of the event led to a decision of unrepentance. It further minimises the impact of the sexual assault on her, as she was pressured to admitting to a 'moment of weakness'. Isabel describes how the organisation's rules translate into a language of its own, with the effect here, of disempowering her and taking away her understanding of the process. Isabel further describes the difficulty she experienced in speaking to a group of Elders, a position reserved only for men:

'You have the original three Elders, probably the worst Elders out of the Congregation, looking back now, it was absolutely horrendous, because you got like a nineteen-year-old being questioned by three men who got no training in anything to do [with sexual assault], they are just men, you know what I mean. It was really horrible, you know, really horrible, intrusive questions, with no reason for it.' [Isabel]

Here, Isabel specifically points out the lack of education Elders have in dealing with complex and sensitive topics such as sexual assault. There is an awareness of a gender imbalance, a sense of not being understood by a group of men. This gender imbalance is further illustrated by 'you know what I mean', directed at the female researcher, perhaps in an attempt to highlight a shared understanding of what it is like to talk about sensitive and private affairs with someone of the opposite gender. The last sentence portrays a glimpse of vulnerability, exposedness and meaninglessness, experienced in the face of injustice 'with no reason for it'.

Michael, another participant, was disfellowshipped at age twenty-one for having sex outside of marriage. He went to an Elders' house the next morning, to confess his wrongdoings, after which a Judicial Committee was formed:

'And I'm asked uhm "am I repentant?" And I'm "well I'm very, very sorry because I can imagine the hurt this is gonna cause people." And they said, "yeah but do you hate what you did?" I'm like "God didn't design it to be unpleasant. You know. Of course, I don't hate it" "Yeah but can you guarantee you're never going to do that again?" and I said, "of course I can't". So, it was judged that I was not repentant and I was disfellowshipped.' [Michael]

In contrast to the above Judicial Committees, this committee was formed after a self-confession. It illustrates a discomfort toward sexuality and a sense of 'uncleanliness' of sexual intercourse. Even though the intercourse was consensual, Michael expresses guilt and regret at causing harm to other people. The latter part, again, highlights a point of no-return, a promise forced upon Michael, to not repeat the same behaviour again and a suggested intertwining of emotional and physical sensations 'do you hate what you did'.

Agnieszka who wanted to divorce her ex-husband lied about having an affair, which would guarantee quick divorce proceedings. The affair, which never took place, in reality, led to her being disfellowshipped. Here, she recounts the anger experienced and the unequal distribution of disciplinary action, dependent on a member's status within the Congregation:

'Depends on the person, depends on the money, the position ... not everyone is treated the same, it all depends on the Elders within the Congregation ... mentally you are a slave to those people, that little group that's going to decide about if you are going to suffer or if you are pardoned, so and that's probably the most, where my anger came from. It's like in medieval times, few people deciding about your future.' [Agnieszka]

This segment, again, illustrates a position of powerlessness at the hand of a group of men, with a direct reference to aristocracy. Particularly the mention of a 'mental slave' is interesting in this context, as she explains:

'In your mind, you are your own prisoner, but the bars are controlled by someone else, and you leave it that way, and you don't know any other way, you don't know any other behaviours.' [Agnieszka]

There is a sense of despair and urgency in this statement of someone wanting to leave their mentally created prison, but unaware of how to do so. The powerlessness of the participant is poignantly illustrated by describing how outsiders govern this proclaimed self-inflicted prison. This mental prison, even though painful, is the only certainty existing for her, because she 'doesn't know any other way'. This is a beautifully descriptive account of first-generation high-control group members. Growing up in a high-control group, severely limits people's exposure to new environments, as outsiders are often regarded as enemies, and thus opportunities for social learning outside the group are highly restricted. According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1999), we learn from observing other people, and we learn to accept or reject their behaviours depending on the observed consequences (reward or punishment). As high-control groups reward conformity and punish nonconformity, first generation members observe and learn to behave according to group norms.

This section described the process by which members were disfellowshipped. These segments highlight the reflexive response stage, as described in Williams and Zardo's (2005) ostracism model. Participants specifically described feelings of distress and loss of control, as they were unable to influence the situation they were in. Some participants experienced feelings of shame and guilt, as they had internalised the group's norms of unacceptable behaviour, a way by which high-control groups hold control over members (Hassan, 2013, 29-30).

6.2.2 ANNOUNCEMENT

After a Judicial Committee has reached the decision to disfellowship a member, one of the Elders of the Congregation makes a formal announcement at the next meeting to make active Witnesses aware of the disciplinary action taken. This is a way of informing active members to stop associating with (e.g. shun) the disciplined person. Three participants were present at the meeting when their disciplinary action was announced to the congregation. One member, Philip, was unable to decide whether he wanted to attend the announcement, as due to his age his parents made the decision for him. The other two

participants who attended the meeting attended it in an attempt to demonstrate that they wished to be reinstated.

Philip recounts his experience:

'Usually, they all disappeared, somebody got disfellowshipped, and they just left, and you never saw them again, but it was different with me, I was too young. So, I couldn't leave. So, because I was only a kid, and I wasn't allowed to leave home until I was 16, uh, [my stepdad] said, 'you are still under my roof, so you still have to go to the Kingdom Hall.' So, even on the night that it was announced, I was there. They sat me in the Hall and then one of the Elders went up and made the announced '[Philip] is now disassociated [the term has historically changed in meaning]. Please view him as such.' They didn't even sit me at the back.' [Philip]

This segment illustrates the powerless situation Philip was in. As a minor, he was not able to leave and had to follow his parents' instructions of going to the meetings. The last part highlights his sense of exposure and visibility sitting in the front row that he might have been able to escape, was he seated in the back. The emphasis on 'they', again highlights his powerlessness of not being able to choose his own place, but also conveys a sense of anger and resentment toward his parents, who made this decision for him and, as he describes, had not acted in his best interest.

Isabel, who went to her announcement voluntarily, recounts her experience of the meeting:

'I went the night it was announced that I was disfellowshipped, which I don't think many people had actually gone to that. So, I went along, which was quite harsh, [pause] because you go from like walking in when everybody is a friend, to walking away from it, thinking 'that's the end of it'.' [Isabel]

For her, the announcement marked a finality, the end of friendships with people whom she had known all her life. There is a feeling of abandonment as it is her friends who are 'ending' this relationship. Isabel's statement highlights her thwarted sense of belonging (William & Zardo, 2015).

Christina recounts going along to the announcement voluntarily and continuing to go to meetings in general:

'I kept going to the meetings. I was actually there on the night when the announcement was made, on my own, because my mum did not go.' [Christina]

Christina highlights that she went to the meeting by herself, without the support of her mother. The word 'actually' adds an element of surprise, as though her coming to the announcement was not something that would ordinarily happen. The fact that Christina in particular mentions the absence of her mother, as a supportive figure in her life, suggests an expectation of her mother or an appreciation of her need to have a support person present to help her face this difficult meeting.

The above statements highlight the thwarted need of control and belonging respondents experienced as a result of being disfellowshipped. Despite knowing that people would no longer associate with them, Isabel and Christina went to the announcement. Both respondents specifically mentioned other people's reaction to their disfellowshipping, suggesting a thwarted need of belonging. As described earlier, individuals whose sense of belonging has been thwarted are more likely to respond in a prosocial manner, seeking to repair their relationship and being reincluded in the group (Gomez, Morales, Hart, Vazquez & Swann, 2011, p. 1575). Disfellowshipping is not a permanent condition and individuals can prove themselves to be 'genuinely repentant' and make efforts to be reinstated.

6.2.3 GOING BACK

Jehovah's Witnesses who are disfellowshipped lose their relationships with friends and families and their faith. However, disfellowshipping is not a permanent state and individuals who have been disfellowshipped may re-join and become active Jehovah's Witnesses again. Individuals who are re-instated by the organization, are welcomed back by family, friends and the extended congregation and can be freely associated with again. Participants reported that for many disfellowshipped members shunning becomes too difficult to bear and they return in an attempt to regain what they had lost.

Two participants of the current study re-joined after being disfellowshipped the first time and one member re-joined twice after being disfellowshipped and once after disassociating herself. Here, they describe their experience of re-joining the Jehovah's Witnesses.

When Philip turned sixteen, the Watch Tower and Bible Tract Society had changed their rules on disfellowshipping. Unbaptised publishers (members who were not yet baptised) could no longer be disfellowshipped. As Philip had not been baptised at age thirteen, when he was disfellowshipped, his disciplinary action was revoked, and he was welcomed back:

'The fact that I went back in when I was 16 was only because they love bombed me, only because of that. I felt so happy to be welcomed back,[...] I was 15 and a half when they opened the doors again, it just felt awesome to have got out of that prison, to be released and not having to run about and be sneaky. And then I realised, what I had to do not to be sneaky anymore, which is going back to what they wanted to me to do. And so, I was still living a double life and then obviously got caught again.' [Philip]

This extract illustrates the impact of 'love bombing', a behaviour where members shower new members with attention and praise, creating an emotional high in new members that increases their likelihood of joining the group in an attempt to prolong these positive emotions (Hassan, 2013, p. 27). Philip compares his experience of being welcomed back to a prison release. He experiences a feeling of freedom and relief, a moment where he can be himself and once again enjoy the positive emotions of being cared for and accepted by the congregation. However, in the same vein, he realises that this new-found freedom is only temporarily, as once again he is restricted by the congregation's rules. Caught between his desire to be his true self and receiving the attention from members of the congregation. He continues to live a double life, one life where he is his true self and another one where he puts on a mask in front of the congregation. Yet again, he is only able to sustain this dichotomy temporarily, as the congregation catches up with his 'double life' and once again disfellowships and shuns him. There is an interesting parallel between his description of his 'disfellowshipped self', and his 'active Jehovah's Witness' self – both selves are living in restriction, as he describes his 'disfellowshipped self' as one living the life of a prisoner, yet his life as an active member is restrictive too, as it forces him to be 'sneaky' and to hide his authentic self. The prison, he describes, appears to be one of these mental restrictions.

In the following extract, Isabel describes her experience of continuing to go to meetings and how she made sense of her disciplinary action. For Isabel, the religious aspect was the main motivator for her continued attendance:

'It was always my intention to keep going and just thinking 'I'll just wait Jehovah will sort something out'. So, it was just like a test, just keep going to the meetings and see what happens [...]. There is a story in the Bible, the book of Job, where it talks about, in the Old Testament, that God's favourite people who the devil tests. It's like a test between good and evil, and I was like I'm just Job, and the Devil is testing me, and I just gotta stay strong, and eventually, God will just say right, I approve you, and everything will be taken care

of. So, I don't think it left me with that finality of like that's it, I've left. It was almost like this is just all a big test to see how strong I am.' [Isabel]

Gomez, Morales, Hart, Vazquez & Swann (2011, p. 1575) found that individuals who believed that the group was likely to re-include them were more likely to act in a social manner. Here, Isabel's comparison of herself to Job induces faith that she will eventually be re-instated in the congregation and thus serves as a motivation to keep attending meetings and behaving in a manner that the organisation approves of. The fact that she is working towards being a reinstated member of the Congregation also prevents her from experiencing the loss and grief associated with leaving behind the congregation and her former self.

Isabel's desire to be reinstated and her prosocial manner is further highlighted in this section, as she describes how she went out of her way to behave in a manner that would be accepted by the congregation:

'I think, because the first time, I was really, committed to being reaccepted into it, I sort of, probably went really out of my way to be seen as not doing anything wrong.' [Isabel].

Reinstatement is a long and challenging process. As mentioned earlier, there is no specific time limit for when disfellowshipped members may be reinstated, and this can carry a lot of uncertainty. Furthermore, members who want to be reinstated are required to attend meetings, and, as participants have reported, may have to follow specific guidelines such as arriving later and leaving earlier than active members, to prevent any form of association between active and shunned members. Disfellowshipped members are also not allowed to speak during meetings and are often required to sit at the back of the Kingdom Hall. This means that disfellowshipped members who want to be reinstated have to actively face their ostracism.

Agnieszka did not attempt to be reinstated after she had been disfellowshipped, but had a difficult experience of being married to a ministerial servant and faced with the social pressure of being an exemplary wife to her husband. Here she describes the difficulty she experienced, living as a member of the congregation:

'I kind of treat the religion part of my life like living in an abusive relationship. When women, sometimes, they come back to [the] husband, because they don't believe they deserve anything except being punched and punished and whatever raped, and that is how

it was, you don't believe that you deserve anything else, you don't believe that you can be something else.' [Agnieszka]

Her poignant comparison between being a member of a high-control group and an abusive intimate relationship describes an intense sense of entrapment. Agnieszka describes how she devalued her former self, as being someone who was unworthy and undeserving of a better life. In Agnieszka's description, there is also a sensation of comfort within the discomfort, the certainty of knowing whom she deserves to be or who she can be, as leaving this relationship would be associated with uncertainty about her own personhood. Staying in an abusive relationship, or abusive group setting, even though painful 'punched and punished and whatever raped', meant for Agnieszka that there was a continuation of herself and her identity. In Agnieszka's description of leaving this relationship, there is uncertainty about who she would be without the group. This extract echoes earlier findings, as suggested by Gomez, Morales, Hart, Vazquez & Swann (2011, p. 1583), that individual's whose identity has fused with that of the group, may experience an identity crisis after being rejected by the group, as one is no longer able to connect with the group.

For others, significant life events may be catalysts for disfellowshipped members to return to their congregation. Christina's story demonstrates how such life altering events can be a motivating factor in re-joining:

'My mum died, and that made me think about things, life and the future and my own mortality and I wanted to go back into 'the truth'.' [Christina]

Christina's rumination about death and mortality invoked a desire in her to be re-instated into the Jehovah's Witnesses. Christina appears to find comfort and safety in being a member of the 'the truth'.

This segment on reinstatement highlights the powerful nature of belonging and being part of a group and relationships. Even though the participants had been excluded and shunned by the group, the desire to be reinstated was so strong that they continued to attend meetings and to behave in a prosocial manner, in the face of ostracism. The feelings of belonging, being accepted and loved was for several participants, in the case of Philip the only, motivating factor for the participants to return to the group. For Christina, the need for a meaningful existence (Williams and Zardo, 2005) in the context of her mother's death and her own mortality was a driving factor to return to the group. For Agnieszka, on the other hand, her identity had become embedded with the group, to a point where she was no longer able to see who she could be without the group.

As discussed earlier, the prosocial behaviour may also be motivated by a cost-benefit analysis, where losing a relationship would incur a higher cost (Van Beest & Williams, 2006, p. 919). Since the participants in this study have all been raised as Jehovah's Witnesses, their social ties outside the congregation were limited and for some even non-existent. This meant that the costs for participants leaving the group were higher than the benefits, as they had no social network to fall back on once they left the group. Furthermore, due to the group's depiction of the world outside and the fears instilled by the group (Hassan, 2015) the costs of becoming part of mainstream society are high for former members of high-control groups.

6.3 SHUNNING

6.3.1 IMPACT ON SELF

Participants described various ways in which the exclusion and ostracism affected them. Most notably, participants experienced a decrease in their psychological well-being and some developed psychological disorders during or following the disfellowshipping. Several participants spoke about a lifelong lasting effect.

In this extract, Philip shares the hurt and pain he experienced following his first disfellowshipping:

'When I got disassociated [term has historically changed] at thirteen, that was a massive trauma, massive. It's impacted the rest of my life, and it will continue to impact the rest of my life. There is a pain; there is a level of pain that's different from physical pain, the emotional pain, the psychological pain even. I remember that pain. I think it does stuff to you, that kind of pain. That was without a shadow of a doubt, the most hurtful, painful, traumatic experience of my whole life.' [Philip]

Philip, who is now in his early forties, reflects on the pain he experienced as a young teenager. This extract is particularly poignant in his description of 'remembering' the pain. In fact, Wesselmann, Nairne & Williams (2012, p. 314) suggest that social pain, or as described by Philip 'emotional and psychological pain' can be re-experienced by individuals as they reflect on it, in opposition to physical pain that ceases to exist. Philip personifies his experience with pain 'it does stuff to you'. Pain here becomes a living entity. Philip describes how the pain he experiences will never fully cease, 'it will continue to impact the rest of my life'. This is further echoed in his description of the period in which he experienced the ostracism:

'The psychological torture on a daily basis, the weekly torture on the group basis, the shunning, the treating me like a pariah, the fact that I was some devil inside like I was the spawn of Satan.' [Philip]

'I would class it as a prison sentence. It was an open prison, where my accusers, detractors and so on, were the ones that were guarding me, I wasn't with other inmates. At least if I'd been in with other inmates, they were the same like me, and we could have gone on fine, we would have hated the pressure, but we would have had

the solidarity, there wasn't any of that. The solidarity was within myself.' [Philip]

In the following segment where Philip offers a comparable experience:

'We can all associate with someone getting bullied at school. So, imagine school is your whole life, and you can't go home. And everybody in the school, the teachers, fellow pupils, everybody is against you, that's what it's like.' [Philip]

The home, a place that children should experience as safe and welcoming, as a place where they can be themselves, becomes a continuation of the 'psychological torture' Philip experiences. The contrast between a child being bullied at school that sees his home as an escape, and himself who has nowhere to turn for safety and security.

Philip, who was disfellowshipped for the first time at age thirteen and for the second time around his seventeenth birthday, reflects on the difference between the experiences:

'I'd say they were both the same. [...] The only real difference between the two experiences is, the first time they maintained it as a torturous event throughout a whole two and half year because they were able to keep me captive. The way I was able to react, was different because I was bigger.' [Philip]

Again, there is a theme of loss of control in his first experience as he was unable to make his own decisions as a minor being subjected to his parent's guidance 'keep me captive'. As he is older, we observe a shift in his ability to control his situation and to influence his experience.

Urszula, who was age sixteen when she was disfellowshipped, fell into a depression following the announcement:

'It [disfellowshipping] was a massive shock because I used to get a lot of attention from my parents, but my parents stopped talking to me. I felt like I had to move out of my family home, because of this, I became depressed quite quickly, I have been depressed on and off since I left, so it kind of never went away. The shunning has affected my entire adult life, I think. I definitely lost a lot of confidence because of it; I have to kind of fight the feeling that, loneliness, and emptiness, and longing for a family, every day.' [Urszula]

Here, Urszula describes the impact disfellowshipping had on her everyday life. Communication with her parents ceased, and she felt that she was no longer welcome in her family home. Even though the Watch Tower and Bible Tract Society does not currently have any concrete rules that require family members to leave the family home after disfellowshipping, members may still feel unable to live in the same home, as many activities families would have shared in the past may no longer be possible. Similar to Philip's experience, Urszula speaks about a life-long, daily impact of her disfellowshipping and shunning by her family.

Isabel, who attempted to be reinstated following the first disfellowshipping announcement, recounts the difference she experienced between her first disfellowshipping and the second time, for marrying in a mainstream domination church:

'Initially, I thought, I'll go back into it, so the first time, I thought, this was just this period in between and then I'd go back into it, that I just kept as busy as possible, to just block everything out. The second time, was more just like closure. That was the door closing on it, and you knew then, that was it all left behind. So that was more of a [pause], I think it was sad because there were people that I knew that were never going to speak or see me again, but then on the other side it was, like the start of a new life.' [Isabel]

Isabel recounts a mixed set of feelings. The first time, she tried to suppress her feelings ('block everything out'), as she was waiting to be welcomed back. The desire to be reinstated almost acts as a pause button, putting her feelings on 'hold' until she was back in again. The second time, (disfellowshipping without the desire to be reinstated) she describes in terms of a finality and 'closure'. The metaphor of the door marks a sharp discontinuity of her old life, a life in which friends and family were left behind, and the start of a new life, which, in Isabel's case, meant marriage with her new partner. Isabel describes this new life in positive terms. The fact that she was not facing an entirely uncertain future, due to her new partner and the upcoming wedding, may have allowed her to welcome this new life with optimism.

Agnieszka, who was torn between remaining a Jehovah's Witness and being married to her ex-husband, describes the effect of the social pressure she experienced from other members of the leading up to her disfellowshipping:

'I felt very lonely. I was not a good wife, I was not good this and that and pressure, pressure, pressure. I went into kind of coping mechanism, destruction, like walking my dog for ridiculous hours, I didn't sleep much, stopped eating as well, I was around 60 kilos, I

dropped down to 47. I was drinking a lot, just to numb the pain. I had panic attacks, to the point that I was paralysed. [...] because everything [everyone] was pointing out that I wasn't eating, [...] I started bingeing, so from anorexia, I went to bulimia. Then when it went to the stage that it was really showing, someone was making a comment like 'pull yourself together, what are you doing? You are not good example for anyone, you are doing wrong, if you pray to Jehovah everything will be fixed, just put your marriage first [...].' So, I kind of gave up, basically. I took the bottle of wine; I took the knife, I took the pills and um, went for a bath.' [Agnieszka]

Agnieszka describes how the social pressure of being an exemplary wife to her husband, who held a highly regarded position in the Congregation, became too much for her to bear and how she developed destructive, harmful and ultimately life-threatening coping mechanisms. Suicide ultimately appeared to be the only viable option to Agnieszka to end the social pressure and criticism she was exposed to.

Agnieszka, who entered therapy to recover from her experience, explains how she was unable to identify her own feelings:

'You are always doing everything so that your husband looks good. [...] So, your feelings, your needs, your kind of wishes are completely not important in it. And when I started therapy, they asked me questions, about what I feel - and I felt nothing, I couldn't even realise if I felt something or not.' [Agnieszka].

The emotional control employed by high-control groups means that members are required to put other people's needs, the group's leader(s) or the supernatural being the group believes in, before their own (Hassan, 2015, p. 27-28). Being a high-control group member led Agnieszka to suppress and disengage from her own feelings and needs. This went so far that she was unable to detect and describe her own feelings.

An important aspect to understand about Jehovah's Witnesses, in relation to mental health, is that Jehovah's Witnesses teach their members that any member who disassociates from them or is disfellowshipped is 'mentally ill'. Being labelled as mentally ill, on top of an indoctrinated fear of secular authorities, presents a barrier for shunned individuals to seek help from mental health professionals during their adjustment process.

6.3.2 IMPACT ON FAMILY AND FRIENDS

While not all participants experienced the same level of ostracism from their families, each participant's family and social ties were deeply affected by their excommunication. The effects of ostracism were not limited to the participants' family of upbringing, but also affected their own parenting styles, as well as future generations, as decisions needed to be made about whether and how their own children could have a relationship with their grandparents and extended family.

Philip speaks about his experience living with his family while being excommunicated the first time:

'I hated the world, and I hated reality because everything in my reality turned against me, isolated me [...] I was even ostracised in the house. Uhm, while living there, my brother and sister still communicated with me fully, as did my mom and step-dad, conversationally, but still, there was their Jehovah stuff, and I didn't want anything to do with that, so I took part in that separation, this is your world, and this is mine. I suppose I didn't really see that as ostracised at that point, but again in hindsight that is what that was.'
[Philip]

Philip shares how he felt isolated and ostracised against a backdrop of 'full communication'. Philip describes a divided family life, one where communication occurs normally and conversationally, and one that is religious in nature and from which excommunicated members are excluded. This arrangement is typical for what in Jehovah's Witnesses terms is referred to as a 'divided household', one in which non-Jehovah's Witnesses and Jehovah's Witnesses live together. The Congregations typically instruct this arrangement.

Philip describes his own active role in this separation, caused by his desire to be left out of the religious aspect of his family's life. Even though he states that this separation is partially self-inflicted, this does not prevent him from feeling isolated and ostracised in his family home. It is only on reflection that he labels his family's behaviour as ostracism.

There is a sensation of him reliving his own childhood through his children, as he describes how, through raising his own children, he has gained a deeper insight into his own lack of security as a child:

'The removal of security, the security that you get from leaning on someone that you know you can trust. I have seen it in my own kids when they needed that security and I provided it. I have been acutely aware that I didn't get that.' [Philip]

Philip was similarly isolated and ostracised in school, for a duration of two and a half years:

'I wasn't allowed to hang around them [non-Jehovah's Witness children]. I was pushed out of the general population into them [Jehovah's Witness children], but then they weren't allowed to talk to me, so from first year for two and a half years until third year.'
[Philip]

This extract describes how he was trying to find a peer group where he was able to fit in and be accepted, without finding one. Not being allowed to spend time with non-Jehovah's Witness children meant that he was only permitted to associate with other Jehovah's Witness children, something that was no longer an option after he became disfellowshipped. Thereby rendering him completely isolated at school. As mentioned previously, the school environment is often the only source of outside contact Jehovah's Witness children have. Thus, the experiences these children make at school in their interaction with non-Jehovah's Witnesses may play a crucial part in their adjustment process to life outside the group, hypothesising that positive experiences from interacting with outsiders may lessen or weaken the instilled fear of outsiders imposed on them by the group.

Philip's experience as a teenager later impacted his own parenting style:

'Anything that I saw as a big influence in a negative way, that was in my childhood and the stuff from her [wife] childhood, anything that our parents collectively have done that harmed us or that caused us issues, that we as adults had to try and fix, I made sure that we didn't impose those things on our own children. Breaking the chain, breaking the cycle.' [Philip]

Philip's extract evokes a sense of drive and responsibility, of learning from ones' own parents' mistakes and of not repeating similar patterns. Furthermore, there is a desire of providing his children with something that he lacked in his own childhood. There is pride in the way Philip speaks about his parenting ('I made sure'). Philip speaks about fixing 'issues' from the past as an adult. This extract is filled with positivity and possibility of being an active agent in the process of changing and 'breaking a cycle' and turning a traumatic experience into something positive. This positivity is re-iterated in the way he speaks of himself and his wife collectively, as a strong, forged bond.

As Philip's wife fell pregnant, he was presented with another challenge: What would it mean for his own children and their relationship with their grandparents that the family ostracised their dad? While his parents and extended family were not allowed to associate with him,

they were able to build a relationship with his children as his children were unbaptised and thus regarded by the organisation as potential future members.

'When we were pregnant with her [daughter], there was a decision to be made, do we tell them, do we let them have any association with them [grandparents], because they chose not to have any association with me, but they are their grandparents. I had a choice back then; I could have said to [wife] 'they are not getting to see the kids'. But that would have created a mystery, you know, who are those people, we don't know who they are? Like conjuring up an idea of what they wanted them to be like.' [Philip]

Philip's extract describes the difficult choice of whether to allow his parents to have a relationship with his own children. Trapped between his own feelings of being ostracised by his parents and wanting his children to have a relationship and realistic view of their grandparents. There is uncertainty or even fear of what might happen if he allowed this 'mystery' to happen. Is there simply a fear of his children missing something if he prevents a relationship between his parents and children, or is there a fear that his children may develop an idealist or romantic idea of their grandparents and the Jehovah's Witnesses as a group? While his children were able to form a relationship with his parents, Philip's interaction with his own parents was purely of a logistic nature, to arrange dates and times for meetings. His parents would not interact with him when picking up the grandchildren for the visits.

Isabel shares a similar effect on her parenting style:

'I have always been conscious that they have to be allowed everything that the other kids are doing. So you know, even to extremes like, if they had been invited to a party 'he has to go to that party, because he can't be missing out', so if we were doing something else, I'd be like 'no, no he has to go, I don't want him to miss out'.' [Isabel]

Being aware of the restrictions she experienced in her own childhood growing up as a Jehovah's Witness, she now finds the idea of her own kids being restricted and 'missing out' intolerable. There is a sense of attempting to seal the gap between what her own children are allowed to and what the other kids are doing.

Other participants spoke about the effect disfellowshipping had on their desire to become parents themselves:

'My girlfriend has this huge extended family. It's like family life is important. Whereas I never ... been brought up to believe that family life is important, being a Jehovah's Witness family is important, but being a family isn't so important. And that's one of my big regrets I suppose... I suppose if I had believed more in families, I may be more interested in having one myself.' [Michael]

'I'm not really a children-orientated person, but probably because I don't trust anyone [...]. I think that would be too much for me to bear, just in case if anything happens, if I make a wrong decision like it has been made in my case, that kid will suffer. So, it's better not to have it, and make mistakes.' [Agnieszka]

These extracts describe how their own experience of childhood and family life has impacted their perception of families and in turn their desire to build a family of their own. In Michael's description, there is a dichotomy between being a Jehovah's Witness family and being a family. Being a Jehovah's Witness family was something he perceived as important and something that was to be aspired to. Whereas being a family, as in family life being an end in itself, was not something he was brought up to value. This devaluation of ordinary family life influenced his struggle to find value and meaning in having a family of his own. Agnieszka describes the impact on her desire to be a parent as a fear of making mistakes. As with other participants, there is a sense of reliving and healing their own childhood in their children. However, whereas other participants found a means of repair and restoration through raising their own children, Agnieszka is confronted with a blocking fear of repeating her mother's mistakes and what this would ultimately mean for a child.

Not everyone strictly adhered to the Watch Tower and Bible Tract Society's rules regarding friendships with non-Jehovah's Witnesses.

'I lied a lot about my friends to my mum, because I wanted to be involved in a social life and because my mum worked long hours, I just sneaked into the house before she actually came home, so she didn't even know about what I was doing. And probably that kept me a bit sane because I could still manage as a social person.'
[Agnieszka]

Agnieszka here describes what she believes to be her source of sanity, growing up as a Jehovah's Witness child. She describes herself as a social person, who longed for contact with other people. Her sanity is only possible through a veil of secretiveness, going behind her mother's back and 'sneaking' in and out of the house during her mother's absence. Having had contact with non-Jehovah's Witnesses also provided some support out with the

Congregation and fostered the building of trusting relationships with what is in Jehovah's Witness terms labelled 'worldly people' or 'worldlings'.

This was different for Christina, who did not have any friends outside the Jehovah's Witnesses:

'I completely shut down [after being disfellowshipped], because the only thing I had were the Witnesses, so that was gone. My brother to whom I was very, very close to, couldn't associate with me anymore, my mum was scared to walk around town with me. She felt so guilty about doing that, because the Elders if they saw you mixing with a disfellowshipped person unnecessarily, it shows that you condone what they have done.' [Christina]

This extract highlights the isolation and separateness Jehovah's Witnesses experience from the mainstream population. After Christina had been disfellowshipped, she was left without a support network. While she was still living with her mother who had continued normal conversation within the house, her brother broke all communication with her. Outside the house, she experienced, even more, isolation, as her mother feared the repercussion of openly associating with her daughter in public.

Urszula speaks about the situational circumstances that forced her to move out of her family home at age sixteen:

'The situation became very difficult, it wasn't for me, mentally, good to stay at home and live with my parents. I had to stay in the kitchen and eat dinner on my own, or when I was told that I can't access my room because there was a meeting of JW's [Jehovah's Witnesses] and so I had to stay again in the kitchen. It was like psychologically it was unbearable, and my parents communicated me that, it's their house and that they'd behave as JW's [Jehovah's Witnesses] and that, it was my decision to leave JW's [Jehovah's Witnesses] so therefore, I had to carry on with the consequences of it. So, I'm not sure if I'd say it was my decision, I was forced to it. Yeah, I was forced to move out.' [Urszula]

This extract highlights how Urszula's everyday living was impacted by her being disfellowshipped. Mundane tasks, such as eating dinner or accessing her own room, were no longer ordinary and in fact became tasks that she experienced as mentally challenging and exhausting. Urszula was deprived of the access to her own room, at times, a place where otherwise she could have sought refuge. This sensation of being without possessions is further reinforced when the house she has grown up in as a child, is no longer regarded

as her family home ('their house'). Again, there is a sense of houses being places where one cannot be and behave like themselves ('they'd behave as JW's'). Urszula was being robbed of the place where she can be most like herself, in her family home and in her own room. The restrictions and ramifications following her disfellowshipping ultimately pressure her to leave.

Michael had a different experience with his close family with whom he was living at the time he was disfellowshipped:

'I do remember that I used to go home every weekend for the next couple of years. Even then, my mum was perfectly pleased and happy to see me every weekend. So, there was no, back in the early 80s, there was no close up shunning of family members basically. They would just say don't have spiritual association with them.'
[Michael]

This extract shows that individual differences exist in the application of shunning rules, across time, congregations and individual families. However, even though his family continued to associate with him normally, his family relations and living situation were affected by other members of the Congregations, as he explained how he experienced pressure to leave his parental home:

'The thing that made me move away from home, in the first instance was because I was being shunned. So, nobody could be near the house. So, my parents got shunned as well. So, it made sense for me to move, get a job away from home. So, at least the Congregation would stop ignoring my parents. They wouldn't ignore them at the meetings or out, but they wouldn't come by the house anymore in case they came across me.' [Michael]

This extract highlights how the effects of shunning do not halt at the disfellowshipped individual, but similarly affect their broader environment. He experienced sorrow at the way his parents were affected by his shunning and found it intolerable that active members of the Congregations avoided his parents' due to the possibility of running into him. He rationalises his move away from home as a means of enabling his parent's lives to resume normally.

Agnieszka shares the impact shunning had on her social network:

'It was bitter-sweet because I was glad that no one is nudging me, no one is constantly telling me how bad I am and that I should

repent, putting me down as a person, but on another side, I lost everything. I had no community, no social life, no friends, obviously, the worst thing, no husband, from renting a flat that was kind of my space, I started renting a room, everything was different. You feel that literally, you have to run. You feel like a fugitive.' [Agnieszka]

Agnieszka experienced contradictory emotions. While she was glad to have escaped the constant criticism of the Congregation, she had also 'lost everything'. Agnieszka shares an urgency of leaving behind her home and finding another place to live. This urgency is coupled with the feeling of being a fugitive, of being on the run and escaping a situation that was unbearable.

Urszula describes a complex relationship with her sister, who faded from the Jehovah's Witnesses after she had been disfellowshipped:

'Me and my sister had lots of ups and downs when it comes to our relationship; we are both very troubled by what happened to us. We feel a lot of pressure on our relationship because we know that we have only each other. We felt the pressure to be close, to be very close because we have got only ourselves when it comes to family members. So, probably because of this pressure we weren't able to sort certain things, we were kind of brushing things under the carpet, things were building up.' [Urszula]

This extract shows how family reunions and family recovery from high-control groups can be very challenging. The pressure of being a family in the backdrop of being shunned by the extended family meant for Urszula and her sister that they were unwilling or unable to be open about their experiences with each other. The segment describes an urgency to leave difficult moments and emotionally loaded memories behind in order to experience the positive emotions of being a family again. There are hesitancy and fear in lifting 'the carpet' and revealing 'certain things', due to an uncertainty of what this would mean to their relationship. Would lifting the 'carpet' allow for closure to take place, or would it drive the only family member they were able to associate with away?

For some children who are raised in a divided household, having a parent that isn't a Jehovah's Witness may offer respite from shunning. Philip here shares his feelings towards his biological dad, who had died by the time he was disfellowshipped:

'I was too young. So, I couldn't leave. I wanted to leave, but my only choice was to run away from home. That was it. This is one of these things, I hated my dad, my original dad, because him dying,

took one of my escape routes, which is frustrating. His parents died, and my mum's parents died, they all died, while I was between 9 and 15-16. During that time period, where I could have done with them, they were old people suffering through cancer and all the various illnesses, that eventually killed them, so they weren't capable of looking after me. So, none of my escape routes were there.' [Philip]

Seeing no 'escape routes', Philip perceives running away from home as his only escape from the constant shunning he was subjected to while living at home and being forced by his parents to attend meetings.

This theme explored how shunning affected each participant on an individual, social and familial level. Participants struggled with the isolation and loneliness shunning brought about and adversely impacted their mental health, with some falling into depression and attempting suicide. The effects participants experienced went beyond their individual circumstances and impacted upon the lives of future generations, such as their children and their relationship with the extended family who shunned their parent. One participant also recollected her experience of rebuilding and recovering her relationship with her sister and the challenges they faced.

As we now revealed the immediate impact of disfellowshipping and shunning, we turn to discussing how participants managed to adjust and build new lives outside the Jehovah's Witnesses community.

6.4 ADJUSTING TO LIFE OUTSIDE

6.4.1 'FITTING IN'

A central theme in participants experiences of adjusting to life outside of the high-control group was a perception of being different from everyone else, of not fitting in and not knowing how to navigate in the world.

'I moved to the city - I was taking home 350 pounds a month and paying 200 pounds a month in rent. I was skint, had no friends, knew nobody... I remember just sitting in my company car on the edge of the road thinking, what's the point? Why am I staying alive, you know? This is dreadful I don't know anybody, and I don't understand how the world works.' [Michael]

In this extract, Michael describes his early experiences after moving away from his family home and restarting his new life in the city. Faced with financial problems and isolation, he struggled to find meaning in a world that he perceived as strange. Michael reflects on his reasons to stay alive.

Christina describes her struggles of making friends and jelling with other people, whom she perceived as very different to herself:

'You are so different to anybody on the rest of the planet, you know, you haven't much in common with other people. You don't find it easy to make friends because you got nothing to talk about. You haven't grown up with the usual things, having Birthdays, Christmas, things like that. You know. Your values are all different; your beliefs are all different. So, you don't jell with people very much.' [Christina]

The word 'planet' describes a sense of being overwhelmed, of being one person in a world full of strangers. Christina describes what she believes to be things that help people bond: similar things to talk about, 'growing up with the usual things', having similar values. It is these commonalities amongst 'the rest of planet' that she perceives to be the successful ingredient in making friends. It is interesting that she does not use 'I' throughout this extract and refers to a more general population. It appears to be an attempt at describing what she perceives other former Jehovah's Witnesses must feel. There is a sense of solidarity and connectedness in the way she refers to the experience as 'you', as perhaps she feels less alone referring to the broader community of former Jehovah's Witnesses.

Urszula describes how her experience of being a Jehovah's Witness child, that did not fit in with other Jehovah's Witnesses, affected her relationship to the world outside:

'I was scared, I was, for years, I struggled feeling part of anything, part of any community, I didn't know how to. I never felt part of JW's; I never had any JW friends. I always felt like an odd one out. It still affects me until now. I find it quite hard to; I don't know, feel part of society, see good things in the world. I don't believe that world is a good place.' [Urszula]

This extract reveals another source of disconnection with the world outside, a lack of knowledge of how to be in this 'outside' world. Urszula describes this lack of knowledge as a way of comparison with her life as a child growing up with other Jehovah's Witness children, where she did not feel she fitted in either. She does not know where she belongs, she feels like she did not belong to the Jehovah's Witness community, but she also does not feel like she belongs to the 'outside' society. There is a sensation of being trapped, in between. Urszula is looking for a place where she fits in, as she describes the challenges she faces trying. The last part is very poignant, as she describes the world to be a bad place. As we have seen earlier, this is what Jehovah's Witness children are raised to believe. Jehovah's Witnesses are raised in fear of the outside world, a world that they consider being inhabited by wicked people, living under Satanic rule. This appears to be a fear that Urszula has been unable to shake.

Isabel also describes her experience of not fitting in and feeling separate from other people:

'I do feel like as if you are there, but you are not quite fitting in with it. As if like, you are different to the other mums at school. I would always think that I am that little bit different. You are still separate in your mind, you might participate in all the things, doing cakes and do everything that you need to do to be seen as socially acceptable, but then in your mind, you are still separate to it all.'
[Isabel]

Isabel describes how she feels different, but how the difference is invisible - while on the outside she is there, present in the moment, she does not feel like everyone else. She further elaborates on this invisibility, when she refers to this separateness as existing only in her mind. She explains how she does things, like everyone else, mundane things that mother's do for their kids at school like baking cakes, but despite the behavioural effort she still is not at the same level as everyone else. In this extract, she expresses a need in behaving like others, as being seen to be conforming to mainstream societal rules. This need seems to stem from an external source ('you need to do'). By putting in extra effort

in mundane tasks, she may manage to reach a level where she is accepted by the society and appears to fit in on the outside while remaining just somewhat separated from it all on an emotional level.

Two participants, Philip and Michael, recall rebuilding their lives in the outside world, as naïve young men:

'It was a very interesting time. I was meeting a lot of eclectic people, but I was really naïve. I got robbed constantly. I had been brought up in a group, although there were a lot of lies in the church, there was the promotion of truth, and they want you to tell the truth all the time. In my family, we were all pretty honest with each other, and then in the collective of other families, in our clique, as we called it, it was honesty. So, to go out in the big bad world, I was so naïve and to then step into the drugs world, from that, you can imagine how naïve I was.' [Philip]

'They just do not encourage critical thinking at all! And... I'm... I still [takes a long audible breath] I'm so bad for just accepting things at face value... Even now, if somebody tells me that something is the case, I just believe them. I would never stop [and] think about it critically. So, you end up being a bit more gullible than the average person.' [Michael]

Philip's life as Jehovah's Witness stands in sharp contrast to the outside world, which he describes as a 'big bad world', filled with dishonesty. There is a sense of leaving behind a world that promoted honesty and integrity. His lack of exposure to any adverse circumstances meant that he was unprepared to enter a world where not everyone's interests were in his favour. A steep learning curve lay ahead for the innocent young man he was when he left his home. Entering the drugs' world in an attempt to deal with the trauma he experienced, being shunned by his family and leaving behind his family home, opened him up to new adverse experiences ('I got robbed constantly').

Michael explains how the discouragement of critical thinking in the Jehovah's Witnesses still affects his judgment of other people to this day. There is a sense of danger in Michael's statement about being more gullible than other people, of potential exploitation from others. As in previous extracts, there is a theme of not knowing how to be or behave differently. Even though Michael is aware of his own naivety or gullibility, he seems unable to change it ('I would never stop to think about it critically').

Christina shares a similar experience:

'You don't believe critical thinking skills as you are growing up as a teenager and as child. You don't develop that part of the brain because you are just told what to believe.' [Christina]

The encouragement Jehovah's Witness' children and teenagers experience to follow along with orders and to conform to group norms, meant that some participants were unable to reflect critically and too trustworthy when they left this high-control group, ultimately rendering them more vulnerable to exploitation than others.

6.4.2 FEARS

Jehovah's Witness' children are raised in fear of the outside world, to promote group cohesion and reduce the risk of members leaving the group. Members are made to believe that anyone who is not a Jehovah's Witness is a wicked person that lives under Satanic rule. Jehovah's Witnesses are also made aware of looking out for possible signs of Armageddon, a battle that according to the Watch Tower and Bible Tract Society will end governments ruled by humankind and give rise to a Godly rule. In this fight, anyone opposing Jehovah ('unbelievers') will be killed, and even Jehovah's Witnesses themselves are not guaranteed survival. These possible warning signs include earthquakes, adverse weather conditions, fire, diseases and wars. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that if they survive Armageddon, they will continue to live in a transformed Paradise on Earth. Members who died before Armageddon will be resurrected. Therefore, Jehovah's Witness' children are exposed to a specific set of teachings about the nature of life and death.

Isabel recounts how she experienced being prepared for Armageddon as a child:

'You live it every day, thinking every time there is a thunderstorm like is this the start of Armageddon? Because they keep it, you keep it fresh every meeting, so it could be like, Armageddon is coming, deep in the night, it's gonna be sudden, it's gonna be really quick.' [Isabel]

'I would have a genuine concern that people were going to die. And I was just like, vivid moments of like, being in a public place and then going into a panic, looking around and thinking if Armageddon would come tomorrow all these people are going to die, you know, and then I would see the images of what I had seen in the magazines where people were lying around, killed.' [Isabel]

Isabel recounts how she was swept by a feeling of urgency as she was prepared for Armageddon ('it's gonna be really quick'). There is a sense of remorse of knowing that

people around her would be dead, as she recounts seeing flashes of vivid imagery that were used to educate members in the organisation's magazines.

Participants recount how these instilled fears followed them as they were rebuilding their new lives:

'The next few years I still had the old Armageddon panic. Tom Robinson had a song in the mid-eighties called "War Baby", and there's a line in it where he says, "my friends talk and joke and laugh about Armageddon, but like a nightmare, it's still waiting there at the end of each and every day". And that was pretty much it, you know. [...] It [the fear] took about 5 years to start to stop and about 10 years to disappear completely.' [Michael]

Michael describes how he empathises with a song, which talked about Armageddon. There is a notion of a constant, overhanging gloom of something terrible waiting to happen. The fear of Armageddon appears to have crystallised in Michael's mind particularly strong after being disfellowshipped as his chances of surviving Armageddon dropped to zero. Michael is plagued by his fear of waiting for mortality:

'It tore me apart. Just [pause], just now, you know that God's going to kill you. It's not, as a Witness child, you think there is a strong chance that God is gonna kill you because you know that you are not perfect enough. But once you are disfellowshipped you know that God's gonna kill you, and that's it, your life is over, and you cry yourself to sleep.' [Michael]

The period in which Michael was disfellowshipped fed into his fears of Armageddon and his perceived certainty of finding death:

'That was when AIDS [auto-immune deficiency syndrome] was just being discovered. So, I was convinced that I was gonna catch AIDS because God would kill me.' [Michael]

However, not all fears were supernatural or disease related. Here, Michael describes how the portrayal of society, with which he had been raised, affected his perception of and interaction with non-Jehovah's Witnesses ('worldlings'):

'It probably took about six months to a year, until I even approached worldlings, because they were these big bad people who sinned. And you didn't want to tie yourself by association with them. Even though you were now a worldling yourself, you were still better,

because at least you once were a Witness [laughs]. The arrogance it instils is frightening, yah, and you slowly begin to realise that Witnesses and worldlings are both just humans, and for the most part, they are actually nicer people than Witnesses.' [Michael]

For Philip, fear was a different experience. He was fearful of the uncertainty that awaited him in a world that he was not used to:

'I suppose even though I have never been a fearful person, there was a bit of fear in there if I'm honest. Fear of the unknown. Because all I knew was that, so everything that was outwith that, was unknown and the fear of the unknown is the biggest fear that you can have. Once you gain the knowledge, you lose the fear.' [Philip]

Again, we observe the theme of a lack of knowledge, and the effects this lack of knowledge had on participants' experiences in the outside world. Philip's differentiation of what he learnt as a Jehovah's Witnesses and which experiences he was exposed to. A barrier beyond which he could not step and that controlled his exposure and experiences. Philip's extract is filled with positivity, though, as he explains the possibility of reducing and eliminating this fear, through the gathering of new knowledge. There is also an element of autonomy and empowerment in actively being able to reduce or eliminate this fear.

It would appear that members who identified and believed in the religious nature of the group, were more affected by the superstitious fears than members who stated that the religious aspect never rang true for them. It may be that the non-identification with the religious aspect prevented these fears from manifesting themselves and thus, once these members had left they did not re-live them.

6.4.3 COPING MECHANISMS

Participants used a variety of helpful and unhelpful coping mechanisms to deal with the emotional impact of their trauma. While it was beyond the scope of this analysis, it is worth mentioning that several participants had not only been exposed to the trauma of being shunned by their families but had been the victims of other traumatic events, such as physical or sexual violence committed within the Congregation and kept secret by the Elders. Thus, several participants had to learn how to come to terms with being shunned, left without a support network, without education or job prospects, sometimes homeless and the effects of physical and/or sexual abuse. A common theme amongst participants, particularly present in the immediacy after being disfellowshipped, was the use of coping mechanisms to escape painful emotions, such as fears, confusion, low self-esteem, post-

traumatic stress and suppression of memories of what had happened. Some of the coping mechanisms employed by participants were destructive and unhelpful in nature (e.g. avoidance, drug use), others were experienced as destructive due to the rigidity of the way they were used to (e.g. workaholism). Participants also used healthy coping strategies, particularly as a means of making sense of their trauma and promoting healing: counselling, peer support and forgiveness.

Here, three participants share how they developed addictions to block out painful memories and to feel good in the moment:

'I never had any interest in taking drugs before. Even before, when it was around me, amongst my friends, I had no interest in taking drugs at all, but after shunning the situation changed. I didn't see a point in saying 'no' to drugs, I was searching for anything that could make me feel better. I think altogether; I was using drugs for over three years. Before I left Jehovah's Witnesses, I used to consider myself an optimistic person. After I was shunned by my family, life stopped having any meaning to me. I behaved recklessly and even overdosed a few times. After I had an episode of some kind of mental breakdown, I decided myself to stop using drugs, turn my life upside down and come to the UK.' [Urszula]

Urszula shares how her attitude towards drugs changed after she had been disfellowshipped and shunned by her family. She explains how she used drugs to 'feel better'. There is a notion of trying to hold on to the person she was before ('I used to consider myself an optimistic person'), and the use of drugs appears to be a way for her to reclaim her previous 'optimistic' self. Her perceived lack of meaning in life is reinforced as she describes how the shunning affected her behaviour ('I behaved recklessly') - with nothing to lose, she took unprecedented risks with her own life. As Urszula describes how she turned her life upside down and made the decision to come to the UK, there is a sense of fresh start, of leaving behind her old self and discover who she can be. There are elements of optimism and empowerment as Urszula describes how she decided to stop drugs, which is underlined by the word 'myself'. Moving abroad appears to be a way for Urszula to leave some of the pain behind and distance herself from her experience at home and her former self.

Philip shares a similar experience:

'When I was 13, and it happened [disfellowshipped], I don't know how I coped. I was very aggressive towards my step-dad and really tried to create this barrier, which would stop him coming close to

me. I created a fantasy world in my head, which allowed me room to have communication and conversations, Space within the isolation, to deal with it [pause]. That helped me coping in the moment because I was escaping the reality of it. I recognise later, that when I was taking acid and ecstasy and MDMA [Methylenedioxymethamphetamine] and methamphetamines, I was taking them to do the same thing, to stake out reality because I didn't like it.' [Philip]

Philip describes how his coping mechanisms changed over the years as he has been disfellowshipped twice. As a young teenager, he created a 'barrier' between himself and his stepfather, who forced him to attend Kingdom Hall meetings. It appears that this barrier allowed him to find some space that he could claim for himself. As other participants described earlier, Philip's everyday life at home had changed, and he was no longer able to behave as carefree at home as he could before he was disfellowshipped. As he was living under pressure, his 'fantasy world' gave him a space that was his alone, that no one else could access and where he felt safe. When he was disfellowshipped the second time, he started to use drugs, in an attempt to reclaim that earlier experience of his 'fantasy world'. Drugs offered him an escape from the 'reality' he was living in. Drugs allowed him to recreate the fantasy world he had created and escaped to earlier on.

Agnieszka developed several destructive coping mechanisms while she was still a Jehovah's Witness fighting against the social pressure she was exposed to in the Congregation:

'Destruction, like walking my dog for ridiculous hours, I didn't sleep much, stopped eating as well, I was around 60 kilo. I dropped down to 47. I was drinking a lot, just to numb the pain. I had panic attacks, to the point that I was paralysed. I collapsed, I started because everything was pointing out that I wasn't eating, but I started bingeing, so from anorexia, I went to bulimia.' [Agnieszka]

Similar to other participants, her coping mechanisms were a way of blocking the feelings she experienced in relation to how she felt treated by the Congregation. This extract shows the effect external comments had on her coping mechanisms, as she went from one extreme to the other (anorexia to bulimia). Agnieszka sustained these strategies after she was disfellowshipped and shunned. It was only after she met her current husband that she sought help from a therapist.

Two participants dealt with the impact of shunning by going back to the Congregation and being re-instated:

'The fact that I went back in when I was 16 was only because they love bombed me, only because of that. I felt so happy to be welcomed back.' [Philip]

'Initially, I thought, I'll go back into it, so the first time, I thought, this was just this period in between, and then I'd go back into it, that I just kept as busy as possible, to just block everything out.'
[Isabel]

For Isabel, the hope of being reinstated meant that she was able to block out her feelings of abandonment, as she perceived her current state as a disfellowshipped member as only lasting temporarily. The temporality of it also meant that she was not exposed to the uncertainty that building a life outside of the Jehovah's Witnesses would have brought about. Philip's experience is similar. After his disfellowshipping had been overturned due to doctrinal changes, Philip experienced love and attention from the Congregation. As he had been shunned for two and a half years, he was overwhelmed by the positive attention he received and was set on staying a Jehovah's Witness in an attempt to avoid reliving the feelings associated with shunning.

Two participants coped with the effects of shunning by throwing themselves into work and study:

'You're so used to, on a Tuesday, Thursday, Sunday and Saturday morning, being in field service or meeting. So, you've got all this spare time; you don't know what to do with. So bizarrely, IBM PC [International Business Machines Corporation personal computers] had just come out, so computers were very new. So, I threw myself headlong in learning, all there was to learn. I've just been reading books and learning it. So, in that respect, it was a good thing. It sort of launched my career in a sense. I just - the big regret is "what would my life have been if I had been gone to university?" It's not a bad life now, but how much better might it have been?' [Michael]

'Initially, it probably made me more determined, to be successful, to try to prove that I wasn't this unworthy, worthless person. [...] I was a workaholic. I do believe that half of it, was trying to make something of your life. In the Witnesses, you are told that you are unworthy as if somehow you are not good enough. They are up here, and you are there, and you are just this outcast. By being successful, you could be like 'I'm feeling good about myself', but underneath it all, you don't feel good about yourself.' [Isabel]

Michael describes how as a newly excommunicated Jehovah's Witness, he was left with much idle time as he was no longer attending several Kingdom Hall meetings a week. As in earlier extracts, the period in which he was disfellowshipped impacted on his future prospects, as computers were just being developed. There is both a sense of optimism and regret as he reflects on this time. While he appreciates the positive influence his determination to develop computer skills has had on his life, he also shares the regret that he did not continue with further education, something that he was discouraged from as a child due to doctrinal stance against higher-education.

In relation to employment, it is interesting to note, from the research findings, that several participants are now self-employed. While the current study can only hypothesise about the reasons for the high self-employment rate, it is worth pointing out that participants have reported that many active Jehovah's Witnesses are self-employed, as this offers them more flexibility to determine their own hours and to fit them around their preaching work. Self-employment after disfellowshipping, could thus simply be a continuation of a pre-existing pattern. However, another possibility may be that participants struggle to accept the power relationship with employers and choose self-employment as an alternative to a contract with an employer.

Christina developed a defensive coping mechanism through which she actively seeks to recreate situations that resemble the original shunning situation. Albeit, in this situation, she is the one actively creating the situation and, as such, retains a level of control. There is a notion of wanting to prove to herself that through her experience of being an excommunicated Jehovah's Witness, she has learnt to come to terms with being shunned and to be able to be on her own. On some level, a certain level of comfort appears to be associated with these recreations as she states that she can better cope this way. There are elements of vulnerability and isolation in her statement when she describes how she has learnt to rely on herself for survival. There is a fear of what might happen if she does not actively create these situations and loses control over the relationship. As such, this coping mechanism ultimately serves as a means of self-preservation.

'This might sound a bit bizarre but in certain situation ... I think I create ... I create situations to turn people against me, so they stop talking to me, and I cope better that way. I don't seek to repair things, I don't seek to repair relationships with people, if they go wrong, I just let them go wrong, if they want to hate me, if they stop talking to me, then that's just it, because I know I can cope with it, and that's what disfellowshipping has taught me. It taught me to survive on my own, and that's not healthy, it's not healthy at all. And if things go wrong, if I've done something wrong, I'm back

out, I don't often seek to put it right, because I'm doomed kind of thing [laughs nervously].' [Christina]

Four participants have sought professional therapy to deal with the aftermath of the disfellowshipping:

'I don't remember what happened, it wasn't anything massive like two years ago, I was like I can't do this anymore. I started having trouble sleeping and having nightmares and flashbacks. Eventually, I did go to some counselling, and I do understand it more, trying to understand the reason why I do certain things, and what I am trying to achieve from them.' [Isabel]

For Isabel, counselling was an important step in gaining an understanding and awareness of her behaviours and the motivating factors behind them. The fact that she does not recall what started the decline in her psychological well-being suggests that at the time she was not aware of factors and triggers that impacted her mental health. As Isabel explains, it is important for her to understand herself and to make sense of her experience ('trying to understand the reason'). This is further reinforced as she states:

'The biggest part of it, for me, was just to make sense of it all. I always think everything needs to have a meaning and make sense.'
[Isabel]

Making sense of her experience and finding the meaning in it appears to give Isabel some clarity on how and why things happened. It may be that gaining this understanding and the ability to make sense of her experience allows her to gain some control over her life, some predictability over her future.

Urszula shares a similar experience, as she, too, finds solace in understanding the reasons behind her family's treatment. There is a notion of comfort in knowing that there are reasons and psychological motivators behind her family's behaviour towards her. Perhaps, as she learnt about coercive control and how it is affecting her family, she may have come to see her parents as victims herself.

'I attended counselling, it was, one was private counselling, and one was from the NHS [National Health Service], actually three counselling, how do you say [pause], not sessions, [pause] therapies. So that was, oh and I read Steven Hassan's book about cults as well, 'Combatting Mind Control,' so that was, these things kind of helped me to uh, understand things and understand why my family is shunning me and all of this.' [Urszula]

Michael, who saw three different therapists and had an unsatisfactory experience with one of them, explains how talking to a professional counsellor helped him to gain a deeper understanding of his emotions:

'That was productive counselling, and it wasn't Youngian it wasn't lying down, just sitting opposite each other and talking so [...] Yeah... just to re-align the viewpoints on things, it's like, you know, why do you feel that way?' [Michael]

A theme of understanding oneself, of gaining clarity over one's own emotions and cognitions, is again central in Michael's experience of therapy, which is similar to Agnieszka, who had to learn how to listen to her inner state of mind and to identify her own emotions:

'When I started, therapy, they asked me questions, about what I feel, and I felt nothing, I couldn't even realise if I felt something or not. Whatever I have been told to believe, I still applied to every single situation in my life. So, I have to undo what I have been told for 25 years; I have to undo everything, literally reset my brain.'
[Agnieszka]

In Agnieszka's description of therapy, there is a third element, a behavioural aspect. Of 'undoing' what she had been told to believe, or told to do. The word 'undo' evokes a notion of freeing or 'resetting' her 'brain', starting with a clean slate. Interestingly, this segment demonstrates, how living in abusive relationships can leave people vulnerable to entering similar relationships again, as her behaviour and her belief system had not automatically shifted. In fact, as her experience suggests, it takes commitment and effort to 'undo', relearn and adapt to a new 'culture's' or mainstream society's rules.

Albeit participants received help from professional counsellors, there was a common consensus around participants' experiences of counselling services as not being adept or having insufficient knowledge of coercive control. Members found that they had to educate the counsellor on coercive control and often had to 'translate' the 'loaded language' for the counsellor:

'There has to be more professional support because some of the people who join [ex-JW peer support group on Facebook®] have got real issues, that you are not equipped to deal with. You need proper counselling, like counselling that understands mind control. There is a definite sort of need for that.' [Isabel]

'It's a very specialist field; I think in the UK there is only one that I know of who specialises in ex-Witnesses.' [Michael]

Another way, how participants found closure in a therapeutic sense, was through creative expression. Three participants, Isabel, Christina and Philip, wrote about their experiences, shared their story via blog posts and one participant wrote a book about her experience to help others understand what some Jehovah's Witness might experience.

Philip found closure in an artistic way:

'I've an ex-JW tattoo. When Jehovah's Witnesses are allowing someone back in who has been disfellowshipped, they have to repent. Big word. You have to repent your sins. Well, [laughs and shows tattoo across chest] 'Forever unrepentant'. What I noticed was, that the instant I got this done, the reasons that I got it done weren't there anymore. The act of doing it sealed it all.' [Philip]

Christina explained how bringing her brother, who had raped her when she was a teenager, to justice was a turning point in dealing with her former life as a Jehovah's Witness:

'I decided [...] that I needed to get this sorted out, what had happened to me when I was sixteen. I needed to take it to court, to report it to the police and really get it sorted out. So that was what I did. And it went to trial in 2010 and my abuser, my brother, got an 11 years prison sentence. That was the turning point for me, yeah.' [Christina]

Another major form of support for former members are peer support networks that are available both locally and online, and offer friendship and support in the recovery from their trauma. Here, the participants share their experiences of meeting other former members:

'It's [making friends outside] very hard. It's such a big thing, that has affected my life. I felt that it was quite a big barrier to making friends. Because they wouldn't understand, they wouldn't understand what I have been through [...]. The people on the Facebook page have been brilliant; you don't even have to explain, they just know.' [Christina]

Christina describes how the lack of understanding in society has been an obstacle for her in forming friendships. Being part of an online peer support group allowed her to feel

connected and to be understood by people who have had similarly traumatic experiences. Christina experiences a comfort in not having to explain herself and potentially mentally reliving her experience.

Urszula shares a similar experience:

'I feel I am not alone basically; there are other people who went through stuff like this. It's kind of; it helps me to gain distance to my own problems.' [Urszula]

Meeting other people who have lived through similar situations instils hope in Urszula. In earlier extracts, we saw how she and others felt that they did not quite fit into mainstream society, or even within their former Congregation as they were growing up. Knowing that others have had a similar experience evokes a notion of arrival, at a point, where she finally fits in. Being aware of the universality of this experience and her peers' stories, allows Urszula to view her own story from a broader perspective and gain an emotional distance.

Michael and Philip explain how peer support played a major role in their recovery:

'There was this ex-Witness meet up, and I was like, 'Oh ok, I'll come along', and suddenly you're in a room with forty ex-witnesses in a pub and it's like, wow, this is weird because you instantly have so much in common. [...] I didn't seek out the company of ex-Witnesses, which is something that I regret, purely because it would have helped to regain sanity sooner.' [Michael]

'When we go and speak to people, as ex-JW and speaking to someone who is not an ex-JW, as you are learning, there is a whole vocabulary, I can speak in certain words, that you'd go 'what?' [...] All these words that are unique to that cult, so that's the whole part of your language. That when you are trying to communicate with other people, they go 'what? What does that mean? What's that an Elder, what's this, what's that?' And then you have to constantly explain, so when you have other people, who have been through the same and you don't need to explain, that's like coming home and putting your slippers on. It's comfort.' [Philip]

The commonalities that former Jehovah's Witnesses share appear to be the main binding ingredient in their friendships. Michael experiences this universality of experiences as refreshing, hopeful and therapeutic. People who experience traumatic events and subsequently socially isolate themselves experience an increased sense of uniqueness

which is further heightened as they are retracting and isolating themselves from others. Thus, meeting peers serves as an opportunity to disprove this sense of uniqueness and to experience validation and acceptance from others (Yalom, 2005, p. 6). This is particularly important in the context of shunning as this experience can easily lead individuals to feel undeserving of love and acceptance. Philip experiences a comfort from being understood without the need for 'translation'. As we have seen in earlier extracts of different participants, the word 'home' takes on a different meaning, as many participants had felt the need to leave their home in order to cope with the traumatic experiences following the disfellowshipping. Meeting other peers appears to become a new home, a place where they can be themselves, where they belong or fit in and can 'put [their] slippers on'.

Isabel shares, how, as a Facebook® peer support group administrator, she actively supports and instils hope in newly excommunicated Jehovah's Witnesses:

'I will talk to people who come out, and I will be like you just got through all of this, and it might last for 3 years, 4 years, 5 years and it's horrendous, but you will, there will be a point, the turning point where you look back on it and say I'm glad that happened.'
[Isabel]

While peer networks are perceived as an invaluable source of support, people administering these groups can also experience a flip side. Here, Isabel and Philip, two administrators of peer support groups, share how being a peer supporter can be an overwhelming and consuming task:

'There was a little group that was sort of forming, like an ex-JW group and I thought it'd be really good to get involved in, it was really interesting and really nice to meet other people who had gone through similar things. Then after a while, I realised that this was just going from one extreme to the other. They were sort of forming their own little following. It's almost like you have to replace something with another thing. So, after a while, I was just like you know what, I just need to cut off from this whole thing, because I'm not an ex-JW. I am just me.' [Isabel]

'I gave too much of the time, and because of that the rest of my life suffered or began to suffer. There was an imbalance and because, because it's such a passionate subject for me, when I was a younger man, that passion would almost boil over and I was wrapped into it. I wasn't willing to let that go, and so I spent all my time. I was spending 24 hours as an ex-JW, not 24 hours as [Philip].' [Philip]

Isabel and Philip both share a very similar experience. Albeit they both resumed their work as volunteer peer supporters, they had to reconsider the amount of involvement they were able to offer in order to achieve a healthy balance. Both describe how their participation overshadowed and eventually claimed their perspective identities. They became consumed by an identity that was living in opposition to their former identity, from a Jehovah's Witness to an ex-Jehovah's Witness. By turning their suffering and their passion for helping others into a role, they lost control of their 'whole' self and were reduced to a 'part' of themselves. Their past had caught up with them, in a new way. The way in which Isabel describes former Jehovah's Witnesses desire to replace their previous life with something new, elicits notions of a need for certainty, a longing for something new to hold on to. Former members are perhaps anxious and overwhelmed about the many possibilities and opportunities this fresh start brings with it.

Another coping mechanism that was central to participants experiences was forgiveness. Participants share their experiences of forgiveness:

'There is this wonderful phrase, 'holding on to anger is like drinking poison and expecting someone else to die.' So I don't hold on to my anger. I've let go, and this is where it ties in with this belief, that I chose the childhood so that I wanted to give myself the lessons that I need, to give myself the opportunity to learn from those lessons and become the person that I needed to become. Whether this is just me taking it for solace or not [pause], I really don't care actually.' [Philip]

Philip employs one of the ways of dealing with forgiveness, by creating a new narrative about the injustice he experienced. He rationalises his experience as being something he chose for himself. He believes that the trauma he experienced was necessary to become the person that he was meant to be. There is a sense of pre-determinacy, a decision made before he was born. Philip finds comfort in his interpretation of events when he describes that his viewpoint may, in fact, serve to provide 'solace'. He continues by stating that it does not matter to him, whether his belief is true or not, all that matters to him is that this belief makes sense to him. There is a level of control in his statement, as he explains his belief that his trauma was something that he has chosen for himself. Following his interpretation, it revokes the power of the people who shunned him and puts him in the powerful position, as the people who shunned him simply followed what he had planned for himself all along. He thereby creates a deeper meaning of the trauma he experienced. He did not experience trauma for trauma's sake, but for a greater purpose – the one of becoming his authentic self. As such, his interpretation turns his experience into something

positive as it allowed him to become his true self. Part of Philip's acceptance, as he states further on, is influenced by his view of the people who shunned him:

'I have come to this stage where, and I have for some years, where I completely forgive him. I completely forgive my mom. I completely forgive those Elders and all the others who took part in any and all bits of the abuse that I went through as a child, but also the continued shunning and its effects as an adult. I accept it as being behaviour that they were coerced into doing, indoctrinated by a money making cult, so why wouldn't I see them as victims?' [Philip]

His empathy towards his detractors appears to allow him to let go of the hurt and anger he has experienced as a child, teenager and adult. This segment highlights, how Philip experienced both parties, himself and the people shunning him, as being victims. The traditional boundaries between perpetrator and victim become blurred in his interpretation of his shunners being victims of a 'money making cult'. The position of the perpetrator or transgressor is displaced, in his interpretation, as it shifts to a more complex place, that of institutional control and power. Seeing his family as being victims themselves, who were forced to shun him in order to remain members themselves, rather than perpetrators, perhaps enables him to find forgiveness for them, as he understands their behaviour as being outside of their control. Amy Siskind (2001, p. 420) writes about parents in high-control groups: 'parents are not parents in the same sense that mainstream parents are. The parents do not decide where they or their children will live, what they will eat, when they will go to sleep, or when and where they will go to school. In some cases [...] parents have input into some of the decisions, but overall, they are much less likely to exercise power over a large part of their own lives, let alone those of their children'. Philip's ability to understand his parent's decisions and behaviours in this context, allows him to shift and transform his anger into forgiveness.

Understanding their parents' and in some cases, grandparents' history and reasons for joining the Jehovah's Witnesses, eliminated some of the anger and blame that participants may otherwise have experienced:

'You cannot blame people like three hundred years ago for not having laptops and computers. It's the knowledge that they don't have. So, I know because she [mother], lost her husband at the age of 24, she was glad that she had a community and they helped her a lot. She is my hero, and I was trying to explain to her that I have no blame for anyone.' [Agnieszka]

'I don't blame her because I think, the whole history of this [...] She was brought up by her father because her mother left her when they were quite little [...]' [Isabel]

As this theme illustrates, former members of Jehovah's Witnesses may use a variety of coping strategies to deal with the emotional trauma they experienced in the aftermath of disfellowshipping and shunning. Some coping mechanisms had adverse effects on participants mental health and became additional obstacles, which participants had to overcome and recover from. Other coping mechanisms were not unhealthy per se but caused participants' distress through over-reliance and rigidity. Again, other coping mechanisms, such as counselling and peer support allowed participants to understand themselves and their life stories better, as well as decrease their isolation and promote connectedness and hope by interacting with peers who had lived through and survived similar experiences. What all their stories and coping mechanisms show, is how difficult and challenging it was for them to come to terms with their experiences, and to adjust to their new life.

6.4.4 AN 'ECLECTIC JOURNEY OF KNOWLEDGE GATHERING'

As we have seen earlier, a theme among participants is the need and desire to understand their life stories, in particular, to understand why their families treated them the way they did, and why they behaved a certain way after they had left the Jehovah's Witnesses. Participants achieved this understanding through seeking professional help such as therapy and self-study of material that they were previously prohibited from reading.

Here, Philip shares how he fulfilled his desire to learn more about different religions:

'I never stopped researching about religion, I have studied comparative religion, and while all my friends were watching movies, I would still watch, but I would get a book out, stuff on the Freemasons, the Bible, whatever, things that interested me, this whole eclectic journey of knowledge gathering.' [Philip]

There is something interesting in the way Philip describes his passion for learning and studying. The word 'gathering' contributes to a desire to collect something, to bring things together. This is further reinforced by the adjective 'eclectic'. He experiences a thirst for gaining an insight into as many diverse topics and viewpoints as possible. Perhaps, studying different religions and different views, allows him to make sense of his upbringing, to find a new narrative for himself or to choose for himself, what he wants to believe. This

segment is filled with emotions of drive, passion, perhaps even urgency, as he describes how he would read books while he was watching movies with friends.

It is important to note that Jehovah's Witnesses are prohibited from reading, listening, watching or otherwise engaging with any media that is not published by the Watch Tower and Bible Tract Society. Outside media is also referred to as 'Apostate Literature'. Jehovah's Witnesses are taught that reading 'Apostate Literature' causes 'spiritual harm' and 'contaminate' their faith like 'rapidly spreading gangrene' (Watchtower, 2004, p.28). Children attending school are taught that the information in school books is false and designed to weaken their faith in God. It is therefore unsurprising that this instilled fear of outside media creates a barrier for disfellowshipped members from researching their faith via outside resources.

'When you got freedom of reading whatever you want because as a JW, you are not allowed to read any 'Apostate Literature'. Even if you are at school, you are kind of in this belief, that this is Satan rubbish. So, when I had the freedom, freedom of opinion, my own opinion, and I had to make my own decisions about what I actually think, it was so liberating. I started to like wanting to know everything, about everything, I wanted to be everywhere.'
[Agnieszka]

Agnieszka shares how being allowed to read whatever she was interested in, allowed her to experience a sense of relief and freedom. There is a notion of being stuck or being restricted in her prior life. Similarly, there is a sensation of exploring your true self and finding your identity, discovering who you truly are as she explains how she allowed herself to find out what she actually believes. She is taking control of her own mind. Leaving behind the old self that was restricted by the beliefs of the congregation, and meeting her new self. There is a sense of adventure in this discovery of herself, as she describes her desire to know 'everything, about everything' and an urge to be everywhere. She poignantly summarises her desire for experiential learning:

'I don't want to believe in cake; I want to try it. I want to taste it, instead of just imagining how it'll taste.' [Agnieszka]

When Urszula was asked what she believes would have happened if she hadn't been disfellowshipped, she explained how she would have left the Jehovah's Witnesses eventually, to fulfil her desire to explore the world without restrictions:

'I was just, too interested in the world around me. The limitations that were imposed by them, I didn't feel alive because of them, I didn't feel like I was able to explore life as I wanted.' [Urszula]

Again, we observe a desire to learn, to discover and to 'explore'. Urszula appears curious in this statement, taking off on an adventure to find out what else there is in the world beyond the experiences she had made as a Jehovah's Witness.

For disfellowshipped members and particularly for those whose faith in the organization had remained strong, conducting their own independent research was a powerful tool in their recovery, as it allowed them to gain a different perspective of the disciplinary sanctions they had received. In this extract Christina describes how conducting her own research and re-looking at things had been a major topic in the past four to five years of her life:

'Up to that point, I still believed it all, even though I was not doing it properly, I still believed all of it. You know, I still believed that the Elders were right in what they said, but it was slowly dawning on me that they had actually been very wrong and very cruel to me. And I came to realise that this is what happens all around the world, you know. And it can't be right; it can't be right, you know. So since then, the last four, five years, I have been on a bit of a journey, emotionally. Sorting through my feelings, looking again at everything that I have ever believed. Making up my own mind after doing research.' [Christina]

The theme of learning and exploration highlights how accessing literature and material, that wasn't available to participants while they were part of the high-control group, was a way for former members to re-invent themselves and to re-evaluate their old beliefs. The journey of learning and exploration opened new possibilities and understandings.

6.4.5 NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

For some participants, their relationship with religion and faith changed after being excommunicated. It is important to remember that the examination of religion and belief systems is not a light-hearted endeavour as many life altering aspects are linked to them: ethics or codes of behaviour, social structures, the meaning of life, death and mortality. Thus, the close examination of one's belief system can be a challenging and distressing experience for individuals. In the current study, one participant joined a Protestant church after being invited to attend mass by her flatmate. Another participant 'shopped' around

and looked at various religious and spiritual groups and decided that she no longer had the need to belong to such a group.

One member, Philip, strictly separates religion and spirituality describing himself as a 'spiritual being'.

'I don't really like labels, but if somebody would push me and say, I would suggest that I am a spiritual atheist, because I don't believe in any God, but I am a very spiritual being. [...] as far as I can see it, religion is collective of people who think the same in regards to a, to a spiritual understanding of God, or who they want to worship. I don't want to worship anybody, nor do I want anybody to worship me, I think we are all on an equal foot.' [Philip]

In this extract, Philip differentiates between spirituality and religion on the basis of equality. His interpretation of religion is one in which people, acting as a group, worship someone or something supernatural. There is a relationship of power in his portrayal of religion as being a 'collective' of people with different roles and hierarchies. Following this interpretation, Philip experiences equality and individuality in his practice of spiritualism.

Christina explains how she felt a need to replace what was taken from her, to fill a hole that was ripped open after she was excommunicated. Here, she explains how she was eventually able to develop a personal relationship with God:

'At some point, I thought that I had to replace my religion. I felt that I still needed to go and attend a church, or join a group of spiritual people and so a couple of years I searched around, but now, I have got over that. I don't feel that I need to belong to a group, you know. I can have my own spiritual relationship with God. I still believe in God. You know, I have separated what the Witnesses do from what God does.' [Christina]

Similar to Philip's extract, Christina managed to separate collectivism from individualism. There is a notion in breaking an association, the association between what Jehovah's Witnesses do and believe as a collective from what an individual relationship with God can look like.

Isabel, who followed an invitation of her former flatmate to attend a Protestant church, describes her experience:

'I found the church was; there was no pressure there. I expected somebody would go alongside you and like almost like 'I'm going to convert you', but people were very much just like, sort of 'if this is where you are in life, and that's your journey'. Everybody was really friendly but not overpowering, and it was not, I suppose it's not conditional, you either go, or you don't, it was very non-pressure.'
[Isabel]

Isabel describes the dichotomy between her envisioned and the actual outcome of attending church. Contrary to her initial hesitation, she experiences a feeling of acceptance and a person-centered approach ('if this is where you are in life'). Isabel appears to be relieved and to have found a new freedom in the unconditionality of attending church, which she had not experienced before with the Jehovah's Witnesses. However, God remains a crucial part of her life:

'I do believe that there is something bigger that's in control of things, but to a degree, we got free will. I have always believed that there is a God because to believe that there is not a God would just be too much.' [Isabel]

There is a sense that, for Isabel, the world would be without meaning without the existence of God. She experiences comfort in knowing that things are 'in control'. There is a notion of various levels of control, as she describes how 'something bigger' is overseeing things, but that a personal level of control ('free will') nevertheless exists within that overarching control. In the last phrase, the non-existence of God would throw Isabel into a sense of despair, reinforcing the feelings of comfort and relief she experiences in her belief in the existence of God.

After researching religion and attempting to discover her own beliefs, Agnieszka discovered that not only did she not want to attach herself to religion, she did not believe in it at all:

'I was doing my research about religion and I kind of look in myself. I had a conversation with my husband about it, a lot, I was trying to explain to him, what kind of environment I was put into and I was trying to find out what actually is my belief, and I said to him, you know, I asked him, do you believe in God? Do you believe in all of that? He said that he wouldn't attach himself to religion itself, but he believes that it's something there and I just, it took me barely a month or two to admit to myself that I just don't believe it, I am hundred percent atheist.' [Agnieszka]

Michael, similar to Agnieszka, considers himself an atheist:

'But I'm not particularly in [getting] people out of the Witnesses. If they believe it works for them, then it works for them. I happen to think it's a cult, but I happen to believe all religions are cults ... so I remain atheist.' [Michael]

In Michael's description of being an atheist lays a sense of atheism being a cure or vaccine against falling into the traps of high-control groups. Even though he believes that organised religions all share similar aspects to high-control groups, he also appreciates that individuals may benefit from their religious affiliation ('if they believe it works for them').

In all of the above extracts, there is a common theme or consensus around spirituality or religion as being an individual and personal experience. Being excluded from a religion based high-control group, for the participants meant to study and research the nature of religion and various religious groups in order to clarify for themselves what their personally held beliefs are. Several participants no longer desired to be part of a religious group, which for some was partially motivated by a perception of religious groups as holding power and control over its members.

6.4.6 ADAPTING TO 'WORLDLY' TRADITIONS

One of the aspects of the Jehovah's Witnesses that is commonly known to outsiders besides the refusal of blood donations is the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate events such as birthdays, Christmas, Easter or other mainstream western holidays and traditions. These traditions, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses are 'worldly' or pagan rituals, that bring offence against Jehovah. The non-partaking in these celebrations means that Jehovah's Witnesses are excluded from these traditions that constitute important events for social bonding in western culture. Particularly for children growing up and going to school, it can create a gap between the surrounding society and Jehovah's Witnesses and contribute to feelings of 'otherness', social isolation and loneliness (Pietkiewicz, 2014, p. 10).

Here, participants share their experiences of growing up without these celebrations:

'I think as a child the biggest difference is you don't celebrate Christmas or birthdays, so um probably the things in the year that people gear towards and look forward to, and it's like you have to take a stand against it at an early age. I think that, obviously, they instil in you what the reasons are, even though the reasons don't

make any sense for you when you look at it from a logical viewpoint. It's all like; it's like a bizarre type of pride that they put in you, it's almost as if you look down on other people because they are doing it.' [Isabel]

Isabel shared how she not only experienced a childhood without these traditions but how she felt that she had to actively and openly disagree with them. There is a sense of sadness and a feeling of missing out, as she explains how other people would 'look forward' to these celebrations. Furthermore, Isabel shares that the reasons she was given on why these traditions were not to be celebrated, did not make sense to her. Perhaps Isabel experiences a confusion, as to why, as a child, she was not allowed to partake in something that other people appeared to be so excited about. Celebrations naturally create a hierarchy and differentiation between people who celebrate and people who do not celebrate. Isabel explains that by not celebrating she felt that she was projecting an attitude that she stood above such mundane things.

Agnieszka describes how celebrations are something that Jehovah's Witness believe that humans are not worthy of. There is a notion of celebrations to be exclusively reserved in honour of Jehovah. Following this interpretation, the desire to celebrate these traditions almost becomes something selfish and grandiose as if someone believed himself to be God-like:

'JW they make it about, if you have a birthday, someone is worshipping you, which means that Jehovah is angry with you.'
[Agnieszka]

Some families, however, would choose arbitrary days to celebrate traditions that they were not officially allowed to participate in:

'We got presents from our family, who wouldn't listen, but the presents were given in brown paper. We got presents from within the family, from my mom and stepdad, they picked a day, which many JW's parents do, they give it some arbitrary name - we called it 'surprise day'. It was very similar, and psychologically, we told ourselves that we get it early, but still, Christmas day you were kind of looking out the window, watching all the neighbouring kids.'
[Philip]

This extract captures how families perhaps tried to alleviate some of the disappointment their children experienced on celebration days. By giving it a different name, families were able to pretend that they were not partaking in 'worldly' events. Even though Philip appears

to have enjoyed these celebrations and found a way for himself to justify them, it appears that, when the actual holiday period came around, he still felt sad and left out. There is a longing in the way he describes how he was looking out the window, hoping to be able to join the neighbourhood's children who were playing and celebrating outside.

As participants left the Jehovah's Witness, they were exposed to these celebrations. Particularly, participants who married partners who were never Jehovah's Witnesses were affected by the diverse cultural upbringing:

'I don't really like Christmas [laugh]. That's for the girls. I've never really enjoyed Christmas, other than when my children were young, and I enjoyed it, wholeheartedly taking part, well, I have always felt like a stranger in a strange land.' [Philip]

Here, Philip describes how he celebrated Christmas with his children. It is interesting how he explains that, on the one hand, he used to enjoy celebrating it with his daughters, but on the other hand, felt like a stranger doing so. Perhaps he experiences joy in knowing that he is giving his children the childhood he did not have himself, knowing that his daughters would not be sitting at the window, looking outside and wishing to be the other kids like he was when he was a child. Perhaps there is even a true sense of joy in being able to immerse himself in this forbidden celebration. Perhaps it is the conscious reflection on it that makes him feel misplaced, as he remembers all these childhood years without these celebrations.

Agnieszka illustrates how celebrations caused friction between her and her husband:

'We had so many ... discussions and arguments about celebrations, birthdays. I kind of felt that this was again getting into, someone is telling me what to do, and what to believe and how to behave, that I became very upset about that. Because I love him, I wanted him to understand that I just can't share the excitement with you. I never had childhood memories like you have, or the fairy tales, or whatever it is. I was told that this is evil.' [Agnieszka]

Agnieszka appears to feel torn between wanting to make her husband happy and her own adverse feelings towards celebrations. She experiences the force of celebrations being imposed on her. Her husband choosing something for her that she does not want herself. She describes a sensation of despair and urgency, in trying to explain to her husband how she was not allowed to experience the same things as he had been. In addition to simply not being allowed to celebrate these holidays, the Congregation instilled fear about these celebrations 'this is evil'. In order to compromise with her partner, she started their own Christmas traditions. These new traditions appear to enable her to put aside certain fears:

'We started to have our own traditions like we've always got champagne breakfast on Christmas, and we walk with the dog in the morning after all the champagne, and then we see the family, so I am glad about it. It's a good feeling that someone is compromising for you.' [Agnieszka]

Christina, who was still an active and practicing Jehovah's Witness when her own children were growing up, describes how she celebrated birthdays and Christmas with her children despite doctrinally being forbidden to do so:

'I never pushed anything on them. I always bought them Christmas presents, you know. I didn't want them to have what I had when I was a child, and that was going to school and your classmates 'oh what did your mum get you for Christmas this year?' and they would have had to say 'nothing'. Like I had to say. You know, I didn't want that for them. So, I did buy them Christmas presents, definitely.' [Christina]

There is sadness in the way Christina describes her own experience as a child, as she walked up to her class mates who were discussing their Christmas presents. Christina appears sad, disappointed and perhaps embarrassed by her answer 'nothing'. This cultural difference seems to create a differentiation and social isolation between Christina and her school mates. Her emotional experience of not being gifted presents as a child means that, as she becomes a mother herself, she puts the emotional needs of her children above the doctrinal rules of the Congregation. The word 'definitely' at the end reinforces her desire to do everything possible so that her children fit in and live a life as similar to other kids as possible.

Isabel shares how not celebrating birthdays as a child meant that she did not learn the social and behavioural scripts of how to behave at a birthday party:

'People will say I've got a birthday party to go to and I don't really know what to do. And it's like, that's when you are like 25, and you have never been to a birthday party, it's a big thing.' [Isabel]

This extract illustrates how events that are perceived as mundane by mainstream society can be challenging for people leaving high-control groups in which certain behaviours were discouraged, frowned upon, or, at the extreme, forbidden. Isabel appears to feel anxious and confused as she states that she does not know how to behave. Perhaps she is afraid that she would not fit in, that not knowing the socially acceptable behaviour of how to

conduct herself at a birthday party may mean that she will embarrass herself or that others would not accept her in their social circle.

Michael experienced a similar situation as he explains how he had to learn how to celebrate Christmas and birthdays:

‘There are some things that you never even realise as issues. It’s like [pause] I still don’t properly celebrate my birthday, because I’ve never [pause] because you’re growing up not celebrating birthdays. It’s not that I feel bad about celebrating, it’s just that I don’t know how to celebrate. You know, I don’t know how to celebrate Christmas. I’ve learned over the years but, you know, I don’t have a tree at Christmas, I don’t put up decorations... I eat black pudding - pretty damn awesome! You know, I’ve signed up as an organ donor, I [pause] But there are just some things you don’t think to do, that non-Witnesses would sort of take for granted I suppose.’
[Michael]

Michael appears to perceive his lack of knowledge on how to celebrate Christmas and birthdays as a problem. As he explains, over the years, he has learnt how to celebrate them: the items involved in the celebrations (Christmas tree, decorations), the behavioural scripts, etc. It seems that for Michael, celebrating is something that needs to be learnt, perhaps even rehearsed. Michael's description evokes a sense of confusion as he explains that as raised Jehovah's Witness there are things that he does not think of doing. In the last part of this segment ('that non-Witnesses would take for granted'), Michael appears appreciative of things; he believes non-Jehovah's Witnesses would perceive as mundane. There is a curiosity in his own experiential learning, as he describes several decisions he has made, such as eating black pudding and signing up as an organ donor. It would seem that not having grown up with these things, makes the world more exciting for him.

6.5 THE TRANSFORMATION INTO SOMETHING POSITIVE

Each participant in this study underwent traumatic events while being part of and after leaving the Jehovah's Witnesses. Many of the participants underwent these traumatic experiences in childhood and early adulthood. While participants shared how being disfellowshipped negatively affected their experiences of self, friends and families, as well as the adjustment to life outside the group, each individual participant has been able to turn their experience into something positive. Shared themes in this transformation are: becoming more attuned and sensitive to other people's needs, becoming peer mentors, educators and advocates for former members of Jehovah's Witnesses, increased resilience and the rewriting of personal narratives. What stands out from each participants' experience, is that regardless of the amount of pain and trauma they have experienced, they all share the belief that having left is better than the alternative life they would live as an active Jehovah's Witness. Philip shares how being shunned by the family and friends he grew up with has made him stronger and resilient as through losing both emotional and financial sources of support after leaving his parental home; his survival depended solely on himself. His own experiences made him attuned to negative interpersonal behaviours. There is a part of the young teenager who he was, in this extract, as he describes his desire to defend the undefended. As he told in earlier extracts, being shunned at the age of thirteen meant that he was unable to make his own decisions about remaining or leaving the group, he was unable to defend himself against and stand up to his parents' authority. Perhaps, his desire and passion for helping others is a way to regain some of the power he lacked as a teenager. Perhaps, by helping others, he does not only try to defend others, but he is also able to heal his own inner child.

'It made me contemplate, learn and understand what it is like to be alone. To become comfortable with myself. It made me strong willed; it made me very very independent. Being shunned has made me acutely aware of the effect of how we treat other people, particularly as groups, and, I have from that day to this, at my own risk, defended the undefended. I swore back then if I knew someone who needed a hand and wasn't getting a hand, and I could see it, then I would do it [Philip].

Isabel shares how being disfellowshipped, even though painful, was her only means of rescue. Her commitment to the group and the shared belief in Jehovah was so powerful that it would have overshadowed any doubts. The metaphor of the bubble conveys, on the one hand, sensations of floating protection and bliss, but on the other hand, also depicts something that is fragile and in danger of bursting at any given time. Her commitment appears to have existed in a protected vacuum that prevented any uncertainties or critical

questions from manifesting themselves. Her description of her alternative life, in which she would still be a loyal and active Jehovah's Witness, is filled with horror and fear. There are echoes of earlier extracts, in which other participants compared their involvement in the group to prisoners living in a closed prison system. Isabel justifies the trauma and pain that had been inflicted by an external source as being an enabling force in the life she has come to live. Isabel appears to be weighing the scales with her current life winning over the pain she experienced.

'I am a big believer in things happen for a reason. When I look at it, I can still remember, for quite a number of years afterwards thinking, do you know what? If that hadn't happened, I'd still be in there now, and to me, that is more horrific. I was so into it that nothing what anybody would have said would have burst my bubble. I do believe that I would just be in it, like for my whole life. I don't know how I would ever have gotten out. So that this happened, somebody literally had to come along and literally drag me out.'
[Isabel]

Urszula describes how being disfellowshipped allowed her to escape from a life of unhappiness and regain personal freedom:

'I think [if she would not have been disfellowshipped] ... I would be unhappy to the core. I think I would be unhappy and in a big conflict with myself. I feel I am much better of right now. I never for once, even for a second, regretted my decision of not reconciling with them.' [Urszula]

Her life outside the Jehovah's Witnesses appears to have allowed her to live a life that is aligned with her own personal values, and find her authentic self.

Michael poignantly illustrates how he took ownership of his experience:

'Whilst I am a victim of my upbringing, I'm not going to identify myself as a victim. I have overcome it, and while I will never completely remove the harm it has done, but people have had much worse things, and they still have to live.' [Michael]

Michael shares how being raised as a Jehovah's Witness was an upbringing not of his choosing. Michael describes how he has transformed his experience, by becoming a survivor and fighting against the label of victimhood. The irremovability of his past is what characterises the quintessentiality in his personal re-written narrative of a survivor. The realisation that his past made him to the person he is now and continues to be. Michael

describes a sense of closure in the way he says that he has 'overcome' his past. The irrevocability of his childhood and upbringing are reinforced in the acknowledgement that the negative effect has a lasting impact. His comparison to other people's traumas forms an intriguing aspect of this extract. It seems that his perception of the severity of other people's trauma may help him to rationalise his experience.

Christina, who regularly comes in contact with Jehovah's Witness children through her work in schools, describes how she used her personal experience in writing a book about her experience in order to educate others about the unique environment Jehovah's Witness children grow up in:

'I have written a book recently, [...]. Because I have been working in a school, I am a medical officer in a school, and so I come in contact with Jehovah's children, and it struck me that you know, teachers and student counsellors don't know what is going on. So, I have written a small, a short guide, it's very simple, about what children that have been brought up as Witnesses actually have to put up with. The pressure they got on them, that no other children have got.' [Christina]

This extract illustrates how Christina uses her personal experience to advocate on behalf of Jehovah's Witness children. By educating others about the situations children growing up in this high-control group face, she creates her own positive narrative of a survivor imparting information on others to positively impact future generations of Jehovah's Witness children.

7 DISCUSSION

This overriding purpose of this study was to explore the experience of former Jehovah's Witnesses who were born into or were raised in a Jehovah's Witness Congregation and subsequently disfellowshipped for a variety of reasons. Two sets of qualitative interviews were conducted with six former members, four female participants and two male participants, to gain an in-depth understanding of how being disfellowshipped and shunned, as a result, affected the participants sense-making of this disciplinary action and how they coped with being excluded from their former community.

7.1 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The chosen themes disfellowshipping, shunning, adjustment and transformation into something positive aimed to capture former Jehovah's Witnesses lived experiences of ostracism at the hand of a high-control group. Participants descriptions of each subtheme were poignantly expressive and vivid.

7.1.1 DISFELLOWSHIPPING

Disfellowshipping was commonly perceived as an additional punishment to the emotional turmoil participants already experienced as a result of the events leading up to the disfellowshipping. Several descriptions illustrated how Elders and the wider Congregation neglected the emotional needs of their members, minimised, ignored or actively covered up crimes, thus, creating an environment in which members were exposed to further risk. Instead of offering support and guidance to lessen participants emotional burden, Jehovah's Witnesses Elders partook in a blaming game, holding victims responsible for the own victimhood. In other instances, teenage curiosity was demonised and punished with full force. The most striking element of this theme, as one of the participants pointed out, is the power structure of this high-control group that is governed by a small privileged group of men, who are making decisions based on self-serving principles. A central aspect of this theme, in the detection of disfellowshipping offences, was peer-to-peer surveillance, a control mechanism central to high-control groups. While some participants left the Jehovah's Witnesses immediately after being disfellowshipped, others continued to attend meetings in an attempt to regain group membership. Motivators behind regaining group memberships, for those participants, were centered around an interpretation of a higher purpose in the punishment (e.g. divine challenge), the desire to re-experience the group's love and acceptance, external triggers such as parental death and questions about

mortality as well as issues around identity fusion with the group and the inability to break the vicious cycle of control.

7.1.2 SHUNNING

The second overarching theme 'shunning', illustrated the impact ostracism had on participants in the aftermath of being disfellowshipping. This impact was centred around two core themes, the effect on the individual's self and to his/her relationship ties with families and friends. Participants described their personal experiences of ostracism in terms of serving time in solitary confinement, like being bullied at school or mental slavery. Central to participants feelings of isolation were elements of powerlessness, uncontrollability and inescapability. Particularly participants who were too young to leave their parental home described their experience as a constant, never-ceasing psychological torture. Others, who were old enough to live on their own, described how the treatment they experienced by their parents drove them to leave their parental home as they were psychologically unable to cope with the changed circumstances. The meaning of home was a pivotal element in participants experiences of ostracism across the themes. The value of the home as a place where one can be authentic, a place of comfort, became a place of psychological torture. Participants who lived in smaller houses were denied access to their own bedrooms at times as Bible studies or other group meetings were held in those rooms. Others were not allowed to share meals with their family. As ostracism was an immediate consequence of being disfellowshipped, participants had no means of growing accustomed to the psychological effects of it. From one day to the next, their whole lives had turned upside down. The social isolation, the breaking of ties with friends and family, uncertainties and fears about the future took their toll on participants mental health. Members reported falling into a depression as they had to leave the homes they grew up in, not being able to navigate in the 'world' outside the group. They experienced panic attacks, eating disorders, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. In regard to family ties and friends, some members described how parents, brothers and sisters and their larger social network completely vanished as a result of being disfellowshipped. Others reported that even though conversations with family members, who were living in the same house, continued, the emotional affection was lost. Some members described how they actively partook in socially isolating themselves from their families as a means of self-preservation. Another member described how different rules in his congregation at the time of his disfellowshipping meant that his parents would still have a normal relationship with him, but how the stigma of the wider community meant that he felt guilty about living with his parents as the Congregation stopped socialising at his parents' house. Several members described, how the impact on family relationships did not only affect themselves but also future generations in terms of their own parenting style which they adapted to be more

authoritative and nurturing in contrast to what they had experienced in their own childhood. In several extracts of participants parenting styles, there was a theme of healing their own inner child through correcting their parents' mistake. While other extracts demonstrated a determinacy in having their children participate in all social activities and perhaps leaning on the other side of the spectrum with adopting a permissive parenting style. Two participants shared how their own adverse childhood and family experiences contributed to their reluctance of having children with one participant disclosing her fear of repeating her parents' mistakes. There was also a single observation on the challenges of family recovery, as one participant shared the ups and downs of rebuilding the relationship with her sister, who left the Jehovah's Witnesses several years after her.

7.1.3 ADJUSTING TO LIFE 'OUTSIDE'

The third theme 'adjusting to life 'outside' offered an exploration of participants early and continued experiences of integrating themselves into mainstream society. Particularly, in the early stages participants perceived themselves to be different from mainstream society and reported a lack of understanding of how society worked and how to behave as part of mainstream society. Some participants explored how the low self-esteem they were raised with, as part of the group where the members' perception of themselves as unworthy and imperfect was constantly upheld led to a deflated sense of self-worth in comparison to other people. Participants shared how the fears they were raised with, such as Armageddon and a fear of the 'outside' world, magnified, as they were pushed into mainstream society themselves. Some participants feared that being a worldlying themselves meant that they would not be able to join their loved ones in Paradise and that they would die a horrible death at Armageddon. Other participants' fears were influenced by the significant events at the time such as contracting AIDS. The exploration of adjustment further focused on coping mechanisms that participants used in order to deal with the ongoing effects of social isolation from former families and friends. Several participants described how they used drugs as a means of escape from the painful emotions and memories and how, in the midst of their despair, drugs offered some momentary normalcy. Other participants drowned themselves in work and study, spending every waking moment learning about new things. Even though they drew positive conclusions for their lives from these career ambitions, one participant shared how her career goals were motivated by a desire to feed her low self-esteem in an attempt to seek approval and self-confidence in external sources. The constant need for career progression and ambitions left her feeling exhausted, although, she was unconsciously aware that no matter how hard she worked, she would not rid herself of this subtle but omnipresent feeling of just not quite fitting in and being on the same level as others. Another participant shared how she became socially avoidant, creating situations where she would turn people against her, and find comfort in being

alone and in being able to control her relationships. Vangelisti (2001), argues that social withdrawal or social avoidant coping is characteristic of people who fear future rejection or have low self-esteem and uncertainty about their own value in relationships.

A common element of coping among participants was starting psychological counselling to try to understand themselves and their experience better. The destructive coping mechanisms that participants used to overcome the pain and negative emotions associated with shunning, demonstrate a discrepancy between leaving a high-control physically versus leaving it psychologically. Even after participants had physically left the controlling and abusive environment, they still experienced the psychological distress from, amongst other aspects, being cut off from family and friends, instilled fears and not knowing how to behave or integrate themselves into mainstream society.

Participants described the impact forgiveness had on their journey to make sense of what happened to them and to heal from the negative effects of shunning. Forgiveness is an interesting coping mechanism, as it is often overlooked by researchers. Evidence suggests that unforgiveness can have adverse consequences on people's physical and mental health (Worthington and Scherer, 2004). Researchers are in agreement that forgiveness is a complex social phenomenon. Worthington and Scherer (2014)? distinguish two types of forgiveness. One that is decisional and involves an intentional behaviour on the individual's part and emotional forgiveness. The first may or may not include the second. If, however, forgiveness does not involve an emotional component, the individual may still experience negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety and depression. Emotional forgiveness, on the other hand, is a positive emotional response to a perceived injustice or boundary transgression, that leads to negative emotions being partially or fully reduced or resolved. Forgiveness thus can be viewed as an emotion-focused coping strategy, that individuals employ to reduce negative feelings, such as stress, anger, frustration or depression, arising from injustice.

The theme also uncovered a need for learning and advancing participants' understanding of religion and a desire to make sense and integrate their experience in their own narrative. A central element in these participants' journey was the discovery of the individuality of religious experiences. Some participants retained their faith in God but transformed their relationship with Him from a group experience to something that they would cultivate and nurture by themselves. Others shared, how their ability to dig deeper into various belief systems and to critically examine their own relationship with religion, led them to the realisation that they did no longer or may never have believed in God. Lastly, the theme explored participants feelings toward mainstream celebrations and traditions. Participants shared a common experience of discomfort around celebrating worldly traditions. Some described this discomfort in terms of a lack of knowledge of how to celebrate, while others'

discomfort appeared to stem from the negative connotations they had grown up associating them with.

7.1.4 TRANSFORMATION INTO SOMETHING POSITIVE

The central message of the last overarching theme disclosed by this study was the construction of positive narratives. Participants described how, despite all the heartache and suffering, they learnt valuable lessons and gained important skills as a result. In fact, research (Updegraff, 2000, p. 3) suggests that stressful and adverse life experiences can lead to positive long-term effects, as people learn more about themselves, their social network and set different priorities for themselves. Participants of this study shared how their own experience contributed to their desire to help others, for example through becoming peer supporters, or through educating others on the Jehovah's Witnesses. Using their own, lived, experience to help others, gave participants adverse experiences a new meaning. Most importantly, the last theme is a compelling exploration of hope and optimism in the face of ostracism and adversity.

8 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of former members of Jehovah's Witnesses who have been excommunicated and, as a consequence, ostracised by their family, friends and extended former community. As far as the researcher is aware, this is the first study of its kind in the field of Criminology, and a topic that has furthermore been rarely addressed by other disciplines. Due to the originality and nature of this research, a qualitative approach was adopted using two research methods, narrative research and interpretative phenomenological analysis. The study comprised twelve qualitative interviews, with six participants who were all former members of the Jehovah's Witnesses and had been excommunicated due to various doctrinal rule transgressions.

The study has provided insight into the short and long-term effects of ostracism by religious high-control groups and the sense making employed by its targets. The findings are in line with previous research in the field of ostracism, as participants' four fundamental needs of belonging, control, self-esteem and meaningful existence were thwarted. The current study explored individual impacts beyond initial reactions and found that ostracism impacted participants well-being adversely even years after they had initially been ostracized. The key findings relate to how individuals' lives were impacted on a personal level/identity and on a social level. Further emergent themes explored how participants coped with being excluded and adjusted to their lives as part of mainstream society. The long-term exploration of excommunication provided insight into how participants created new narratives of their stories and turned their adverse experiences into sources of hope and optimism.

The chosen methodological framework, IPA, allowed for valuable and novel findings to emerge. The attention IPA pays to a detailed examination of the participants' experience, allowed participants to recount their experience as fully as they wanted and were able to. Based on the participants' account the study was able to identify the needs and challenges this group is facing in their recovery from high-control abuse. The IPA framework furthermore allowed for the formulation of participant led recommendations for improved health care provision to promote recovery, as well as preventative educational, legal and political action. The broad framework and flexibility of IPA made it possible to study and investigate this particular phenomenon from various angles and allowed individuals participants to shape the interview process. This flexibility, IPA promotes, was particularly suited for this context, as it provided space for respondents to speak about a highly sensitive topic. Furthermore, the small sample size allows for a detailed exploration of each individual's experience. Even though IPA cannot offer generalisations due to small sample sizes, the level of consistency across participants, suggests that the issues and challenges

identified may be applicable to other former Jehovah's Witnesses or even across other high-control groups.

On a personal level, this study has led to a deeper understanding of the recovery process of individuals who are the targets of chronic or acute shunning from their family and peers. As a trainee counsellor working in the field of coercive control, conducting this study means that my increased understanding of this group's needs will help inform and improve my therapeutic practice with clients. This study has not only been invaluable and transformative for my personal learning but has also had transformative potential for the participants, as respondents shared the cathartic effect this study had for them, through the recounting and reflection of their life story.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study offers a range of recommendations, based on the research findings:

- One area of recommendation identified by participants is the provision of specialist support services for people who are excommunicated or are leaving high-control groups voluntarily. The study identified that individuals might be at risk of losing their accommodation, financial resources, relationship ties and may experience an identity crisis. Specialist support should thus be available in practical areas such as housing support, employability and educational support, grants to help people rebuild their lives, support in establishing new relationships and psychological support to help affected individuals understand the nature of coercive and controlling relationships, to re-build their self-esteem, regain their sense of identity and heal from the trauma they experienced.
- Specialist support services require in-depth knowledge and awareness of the unique challenges and barriers individuals recovering from high-control group abuse face, such as an indoctrinated fear of secular authorities that may prevent affected individuals from seeking help in the first place
- Raising awareness and understanding of coercive and controlling behaviour and its effects on individuals. This is particularly important for any professionals who encounter children or young people who are raised in these relationships and environments, to enable early intervention and the reduction of psychological and physical harm to children. Other groups that need to receive training are policy makers and legislators. Effective legal interventions need to be implemented to protect the public from becoming susceptible to these groups, as well as addressing unethical behaviour and recruitment practices amongst these groups through legal channels.
- As pointed out, schools have a unique role in this context, as they are often the only source of outside contact for individuals in high-control groups. As such, being aware of the impact school can have on these children is pivotal. Furthermore, schools also play a unique preventative role, as they have the possibility of offering tailored classes or modules to teach students to recognise and identify signs of high-control groups, as well as develop critical thinking skills
- Further research is needed in this field to develop a better insight into how these groups operate and on preventative actions for individuals who are targeted by them.

- While the current study offers a starting point, further research is needed to determine if and in how far these findings are relevant to other high-control groups or high-control relationships. Another area worth exploring for further research, is the impact of forgiveness as a coping mechanism, as identified earlier. Moreover, research on coercive and controlling groups and relationships is currently fragmented, with many researchers focus on one particular type of high-control group (such as psychological groups, commercial groups, self-improvement groups, human trafficking high-control groups, political high-control groups or high-control one-to-one relationships). It is important that researchers come together and share their knowledge to identify overarching themes and preventative actions.

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11 APPENDIX

11.1 INVITATION AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM



Dear Participant,

My name is Julia Gutsell. I am a Master of Science student in Criminology at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium. For my Master's thesis I am conducting a research study on the experiences of shunning and disfellowshipping among former Jehovah's Witnesses.

If you are a former Jehovah's Witness member, this invitation may be of interest to you. If you know a former Jehovah's Witness member and think he/she might be interested in participating, feel free to pass this invitation on to them.

The following paragraphs will provide more information on the nature of this research study and help you decide whether or not to take part. Please read this information carefully. At the end of this information sheet you will find contact details, which you can use to gather more information or share your interest in participating.

Study title

'A Loving Provision'? How former Jehovah's Witnesses experience shunning practices.

What is the purpose of the study and what will I be asked to do?

The purpose of this study is the exploration of experiences of former Jehovah's Witnesses, who have been disfellowshipped. The present study is trying to understand how disfellowshipping affects Jehovah's Witnesses and how they cope with being excluded and shunned by the Jehovah's Witnesses community. Participation in this study consists of two telephone interviews. The first interview involves your autobiographical account and will be split into two parts, due to the time consuming nature of these interviews. The second interview will consist of a series of open questions, aimed at getting an in-depth understanding of your experience with the Jehovah's Witnesses, of being shunned by the Jehovah's Witnesses community and the ways in which you have subsequently dealt with this exclusion. The first interview will last for approximately four hours, split into two separate interview moments. The second interview will last approximately 1.5 hours. The proposed study runs between November 2015 and June 2016.

Why have I received this invitation?

You have been informed about this study either by myself or a former Jehovah's Witness member, who has provided you with my contact details.

Am I eligible for this research study?

In order to be eligible you have to fit the following recruitment criteria:

- 1) You were born (or entered the JW community prior to age 3) and raised as part of the community of the Jehovah's Witnesses
- 2) You were baptised and subsequently disfellowshipped by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

Do I have to take part?

No. Whether or not you participate in this study is entirely your decision. You should use the information in this leaflet to help you come to a decision. Should you decide to take part in this research study, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

After you have signed a consent form, you are still able to withdraw from the research study up until the publication of the findings. You are not required to offer any reasons for withdrawing and withdrawal will not lead to any negative consequences.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be invited to attend two telephone interviews. The first interview will involve your autobiographical account and last for approximately four hours. The second interview will ask questions about your experiences in the Jehovah's Witnesses community, your subsequent disfellowshipping and your life after being disfellowshipped and will last for approximately one and a half hours.

Are there any risks or disadvantages?

There are no direct risks involved if you decide to participate. Due to the personal nature of the questions, some questions may make you feel uncomfortable and trigger negative thoughts and emotions. Please keep in mind that you are not required to answer all questions. Should you wish to skip one question entirely or come back to the question at a later point, feel free to say so at any point of the interview. The interviews also involve a certain time commitment, approximately three and a half hours.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The topic of disfellowshipping and shunning practices in the Jehovah's Witnesses community is not well known to researchers at this point in time. Your participation would help researchers to gather information on this topic. This study aims to empower former Jehovah's Witnesses, such as yourself, by offering you a voice and ensuring that your experiences are shared within the academic world. Research findings may also be used to inform policy recommendations and thereby find their way into public discussion and raise awareness of issues affecting former Jehovah's Witnesses.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

Information that you share as part of this research study will be kept confidential. Confidentiality means that only I, the researcher, will be able to link the information you have provided in the interviews to your identity. This is because the interview will take place face to face. However, a number will be allocated to your data, which only I will be able to identify. In the data analysis stage, your name and any information that will allow others to identify you will be anonymised (changed).

However, there are two exceptions to this confidentiality agreement:

- 1) If there is evidence that you are at risk of self-harm
- 2) If there is evidence that you are at risk of harming someone else

In the two mentioned instances I would ethically and legally be required to contact public authorities.

Data gained from the interviews will be stored in encrypted form on my computer. My computer is also password protected and only for my personal usage, no third party has access to it. Any information that will be shared with my promoters and used for publication will be anonymised and readers will not be able to identify you. Research data will be stored for two years, after which data will be destroyed.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you wish to participate in this study, please send a short reply to julia.gutgsell@vub.ac.be sharing your interest to participate.

What will happen with the results of the research study?

The findings of this research study will be presented in the form of a Master's thesis. The present study is part of a required module in order to gain the Master of Science degree in Criminology at the 'Vrije Universiteit Brussel'. Prior to the findings being published, I will send a copy of the findings to all participants (anonymised) to gain a last feedback on the findings. The published thesis may include direct quotations of information you have shared during the interviews. If you do not agree with having parts of your interview directly quoted please indicate this at the bottom of this page, next to your signature. Any direct quotations are anonymised, so that your identity is protected at all times.

Who is organising the research?

I am a Master's student conducting this research in order to obtain the degree Master of Science at the 'Vrije Universiteit Brussel'. I am enrolled in the 'Recht en Criminologie' (Law and Criminology) department. My supervisors are: Prof. Dr. Els Enhus and Prof. Dr. Jan Snacken.

Contact for further Information

Should you have any further questions, prior to the interview, or after the interview, do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

Julia Gutsell (researcher): julia.gutsell@vub.ac.be or phone: 07871955779

Thank you for your time and for considering to participate in this research study.

Date: 13/12/2015

Signature participant:

Date signed:.....

11.2 INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Main Interview Schedule (Interview 1) <i>Life Story Interview</i>
1. Please tell me more about your life growing up as a Jehovah's Witness, the events leading up to your disfellowshipping and your life since?

Main Interview Schedule (Interview 2)
1. How would you describe the Jehovah's Witnesses to someone who doesn't know them?
2. How would you describe shunning to outsiders (people who don't know much about the Jehovah's Witnesses)?
3. How did/ does shunning affect you in your everyday life?
4. How did you cope with being shunned?
5. How would your life be different now, if you would not have been disfellowshipped?

11.3 SUMMARY OF CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Table information participants

Participant name *	Age	Gender	Origin	Occupation	Born in/Raised in	Disfellowshipped age	Disfellowshipping offense	Detection	Reinstated **
Philip	44	Male	British (Scotland)	Self-employed	His mother joined a few weeks after his birth	First time at approx. age 13 Second time approx. years old	Smoking cigarettes (both times)	Peer to peer surveillance (both times)	Yes, once due to changes in doctrine Current status: Disfellowshipped
Michael	54	Male	British (England)	Self-employed	Born in	At age twenty-one	Sex outside of marriage	Confession	N/a
Isabel	47	Female	British (English)	Self-employed	Born in (divided household – one parent Jehovah's Witness, one parent non Jehovah's Witnesses	First time age 19 Second time age 27	Friendship with non-Jehovah's Witness, that led to sexual assault, blamed to have provoked this (Second time) Marrying in a mainstream religion church	Confessed to a friend who reported it (first time) Peer to peer surveillance (second time)	Yes, once Current status: disfellowshipped
Urszula	35	Female	Polish	Self-employed	1 ½ years old when parents joined the Jehovah's Witnesses	At age sixteen	Seen smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol with people outside of the Jehovah's Witnesses	Peer to peer surveillance	N/a

Agnieszka	36	Female	Polish	Accountant	Born in	At age thirty-two	Divorcing her Jehovah's Witness husband and previous warnings that she had not lived up to congregational standards	n/a	
Christina	50	Female	British (English)	Medical Officer	Age 2 when mother joined (father did not join) Divided household	At age 16 (first time) At age 22 (second time)	Sex outside of marriage (first time) Having an affair (second time)	Confessed to her mother, who reported it to the Elders Marrying outside the Jehovah's Witnesses	Yes, three times (once after disassociating herself) Current status: inactive

*Pseudonym selected by researcher at random, sensitive to country of origin

** If participants actively worked toward being reinstated answer yes/no, otherwise n/a