Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

JESSICA PRATEZINA

BCYC (University of Victoria, 2017)

“‘Disciples by Default’: Women’s Narratives of Leaving Alternative Religious Movements”

School of Child and Youth Care

Wednesday, April 14, 2021
3:00 P.M.
Remote Defence

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Marie Hoskins, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Jennifer White, School of Child and Youth Care, UVic (Member)
Dr. Paul Bramadat, Department of History, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. John Healy, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Charles Sturt University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Kelli Stajduhar, School of Nursing, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

The study of alternative religious movements (ARMs) encompasses a wide range of groups, from Fundamentalist Mormons to Scientologists to Jehovah’s Witnesses. There is, however, little research, and almost none of it from a therapeutic perspective, on the experiences of children who are raised in these groups. This leads me to wonder about the stories of women who are raised in and then exit ARM and how these stories might inform the work of helping professionals. This thesis provides a narrative analysis of memoirs written by women who were raised in and then left alternative religions. Through the lens of deconstruction and post-structuralist feminism, it considers the ways in which women who have left ARM narrate their experiences and how their stories might inform practice. Findings indicate that the women experienced a life marked by a pervasive sense of difference (though not always expressed in a negative sense). Long periods of managing doubt, dissonance, and disenchantment resulted in exhaustion. In the context of an expanding world and motivated by relationships with those outside their religious groups, they experienced deconversion and, eventually, disaffiliated. Disaffiliation was experienced both as frightening and liberating, resulting in the need to construct new identities and sites of belonging outside their religious groups. I have displayed these findings in the form of a model of religious deconversion and disaffiliation. This research may help child and youth care workers, therapists, social workers, and other helpers develop wise practices when working with those who have been raised in ARM.