SALUTARY, PATHOGENIC, AND PATHOPLASTIC ASPECTS OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESS CULTURE

Igor J. Pietkiewicz
University of Social Sciences & Humanities
Faculty of psychology in Katowice, Poland

Email: ipietkiewicz@swsp.edu.pl

Abstract

The aim of this study was to gather information about religious values, beliefs, and normative practices in the Jehovah's Witness community to observe how these affect individual and family lives or well-being. Fifteen semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 participants (six women and four men, aged between 19 and 62), who were active or former members of the community. Interview transcripts were analyzed together with the community's official website contents and publications used for religious socialization, with Nvivo10, using the procedures of the constructivist grounded theory. Pathways for becoming a Jehovah's Witness and numerous social norms are discussed in the paper with reference to their potentially salutogenic, pathogenic, or pathoplastic aspect. Special attention is paid to cultural shifts associated with conversion, expected acculturation styles, and the consequences of potential social exclusion when accepted norms are broken. It is claimed that understanding the culture of this specific religious group is crucial for healthcare providers, counselors and teachers who come into contact with community members in order to recognize risk factors and potential areas of conflict.

Religious Involvement and Well-Being

Religious systems affect social and individual functioning, health and well-being in a number of ways. They shape practitioners' mental and emotional states, inform and influence general values, social axioms, and practices, and are often referred to when making important decisions. They also have an impact on health behavior, including hygiene, dieting, proper patterns of work and recreation, sexuality, and substance use (Pietkiewicz, 2008). This is why religiosity and spirituality have long been explored by sociologists, psychiatrists, health psychologists or psychologists of religion.

Religious involvement can affect mental and emotional states, coping strategies, and social life in both positive and negative ways (Pargament, 1997). For example, it has been associated with reduced alcohol and substance use, as well as lower spousal abuse (Oman & Thoresen, 2002), incidence to carry or use weapons, fight, exhibit violent behavior, or participate in risky sexual activity. Subsequently, religiously involved individuals may suffer less stressors such as marital or family problems, legal hassles, or work troubles compared with less religious counterparts (Hummer, Ellison, Rogers, Moulton, & Romero, 2004). Other potential benefits may include improved health, survivorship, economic opportunities, sense of community, psychological well-being, assistance during crises, mating opportunities, and fertility (Sosis & Alcorta, 2003). Religious beliefs and practices are also associated with lower suicide rates, less anxiety, less depression and faster recovery from depression, greater well-being, hope, optimism, higher morale, more purpose and meaning in life, higher social support, greater happiness and stability (Koenig & Larson, 2001; Koenig, 2004). Various authors note that people use religious coping strategies to find comfort, hope, and meaning (Koenig, 2004; Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996; Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998; Koenig, George, & Titus, 2004). A significant coping strategy relates to religious community support. Group solidarity is usually promoted in such communities by expressing and reaffirming shared beliefs, norms, and values, which guarantees group stability (Sosis & Alcorta, 2003).

Apart from these salutary aspects, various pathoplastic and pathogenic functions are also evident. The former refers to religion as expression of deviant thinking and behavior, which is more easily accepted in a religious context (e.g. fanatic involvement with actions or manifestations promoting 'decency', addressed against ethnic or sexual minorities, or different lifestyles, which may viewed as a defense mechanism and associated with personality disorders or mania (Pietkiewicz, 2008). However, religion can induce stress, trigger and develop pathology (e.g. obsessive thoughts about guilt and sin). Pargament, Koenig, and Perez (2000) note cases in which religious coping is ineffective and causes dysfunction (e.g. punishing God reappraisals, demonic reappraisals, interpersonal religious discontent). Pargament, Zinnbauer, Scott, Zerowin, and Stanik (2003) define three interesting types of ineffective religious coping which pertain to conflicts between an individual and his or her interpersonal and ideological systems: overemphasizing religious, congregational or spiritual values and neglecting other needs; forming faulty appraisals based on religious beliefs and neglecting other potentially appropriate explanations; and experiencing conflicts with others (family, friends, or fellow congregation members), with God, or within oneself (conflicts with religious axioms expressed by the church or the clergy, as well as personal religious doubts and confusion in coping with events).

How religious involvement affects health and well-being has also been explored by researchers who have studied new religious movements (NRMs). Lilliston and Shepherd (1999) note that NRMs are often viewed as not 'authentic' religions and are characterized by mental illness. They see such imagery as unsupported by scientific evidence, yet strengthened by media, anti-cult movements, or even mental health professionals. They refer to studies that

refute the notion that NRMs recruit mentally ill members, induce mental disorders in their members, or contribute to mental illness of children who are raised among cult members. Indeed, they provide examples of how NRMs' experience can be potentially therapeutic.

So religion – as a system of values, social norms and practices – can be a valuable source of coping strategies, and promote health and social stability, but it can also produce intrapersonal and interpersonal challenges, conflicts and hazards. Evidence referring to the relationship between religion and mental health is inconsistent and confusing. Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis (1993) discuss this complex problem and its methodological challenges, in particular how different researchers operationalize and measure both religious involvement and health. Similarly, it is difficult to draw simple conclusions on how experience in NRMs affects individuals or families, because such movements are highly diverse in terms of their individual cultures. Only a detailed exploration of particular groups can give us a better understanding of their salutary potential or risk factors. This study concentrates on one such group, Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Religious Community of Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) are a worldwide religious community, known for proselytism (aiming to convert non-believers), refusing military service and blood transfusion. They are the subject of positive and negative stereotypes and are greeted with respect or hostility (Wah, 2001; Beckford, 1999). Originally known as 'Bible Students', they adopted their current name in 1931. Their doctrine is based on both the Old and New Testament. Members of the Jehovah's Witness Community (JWC) are expected to study verses from the Bible meticulously, strictly adhere to rigid religious norms, promote the principles of faith, and convert others. The community has a hierarchical structure based upon the 'theocratic principle', and they meet at least twice a week in places of worship (called Kingdom Halls) for biblical studies and proselytic training. Regional and national assemblies are organized systematically (Piegza, 1994). The organization is supervised by the Governing Body registered in New York, and local committees and branch offices. According to Beckford (1975) its totalizing character is reflected by assertive, centralized leadership, specific and narrow objectives, and rigorous control over competing demands on members' time or aspirations. Two bi-weekly magazines are published in over 150 languages: *The Watchtower* (overall circulation about 42 million copies) and *Awake!* (41 million). The Watchtower organization estimates that there are about 7,538,994 'publishers' around the world, who live and worship in 239 countries (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2013). Publishers are community members who have been publicly baptized and are formally referred to as Jehovah's Witnesses.

Stark and Iannaccone (1997) report the lack of empirical research into JWs' culture, and not much has changed in recent decades. James Beckford (1975, 1978) carried out some sociological studies in Great Britain and, more recently, Andrew Holden (2002) published an ethnographic account, which provided a detailed picture of the JWC in England. Most academic databases relating to JWs address clinical challenges such as protocols for: approaching patients who decline blood transfusion (Massiah, 2006); addressing legal and ethical issues associated with blood refusal (Macdougall, 2010; Milligan & Bellam, 2004; Wilson, 2005); discussing applicability of bloodless techniques and strategies (El-Essawi et al., 2012; Nagarsheth & Sasan, 2009; Remmers & Speer, 2006); presenting successful case studies about treating anemia or bleeding with alternatives to transfusion (Donahue et al., 2010; Lindstrom & Johnstone, 2010); or presenting other clinical practices potentially conflicting with the religious beliefs of JWs (Grubb, Muramoto, & Matson, 2011). However, there are few academic studies on social norms in the JWC, and how they affect individual

and family decision-making in relation to important issues (e.g. marriage, intimate life), or how they may aid, as well as challenge, effective coping and acculturation of this group in a larger, diversified, and multicultural society. The community is also severely underrepresented in psychological research, although an exploration of psychological mechanisms associated with conversion or leaving the community, how JWs negotiate decisions with out-group members, or what their personality profiles are, justifies detailed psychological examination. Such studies may be rare because JWs are reluctant to take part in scientific analysis. They may seem willing to make new acquaintances, but communication is primarily determined by proselytic ends and limited to discussing biblical verses. Wah (2001), an active JW, maintains that information on this group is voluminous, detailed, and readily accessible, but he only refers to JWC materials. Collecting larger amounts of data involving live accounts of people's experiences requires establishing good rapport and trust during consecutive meetings.

Study Context and Research Problems

According to the Central Statistical Office (2002, 2012), the JWC is the third largest religious denomination in Poland after the Roman Catholic Church (baptized individuals 34,608,967 in the year 2000 and 33,523,358 in 2011), and the Orthodox Church (509,500 faithful recorded in 2000, and 504,150 in 2011). JW publishers in Poland was provisionally estimated at 122,575 in 2000, and 129,270 in 2011. Polish JWs belong to one of 1806 congregations. There may be fewer adherents affiliated with churches where infant baptism is practiced, because some may identify themselves as inactive practitioners, non-believers, or converted to other faiths. Baptism records are not verified against active involvement.

Attitudes towards the JWC and other NRMs in Poland have changed in recent decades. Doktór (2004) notes that the collapse of the atheistically-oriented communist regime has led to a greater religious freedom. The Catholic Church gained influence, but also participated in the development of anti-cult and counter-cult movements. Local priests and Catholic press warned people against such sects as dangerous phenomena. An established network of the Dominican Information Centre on Sects and New Religious Movements published information about such communities on their website (www.badzwolny.eu), claiming they do not intend to create a catalogue of sects, but list movements, churches or groups about which they have received alarming information or enquiries from the general public. The list includes entries such as: Satanism, Scientology, Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, and JWs, together with healing modalities (Reiki), relaxation training (Silva Mind Control), and Amway network marketing. According to the report of the Public Opinion Research Centre (Roguska, 2012) the homogeneity of Polish society leads to a general tendency not to know representatives of other religions or religious movements, with the exception of JWs. Sixty per cent of their surveyed sample personally knew at least one JW. Most participants declared no objection to working with representatives of other religions (even those less known to them, like Hare Krishna) or having them as neighbors. However, they expressed discomfort contemplating marriage of their own child with someone from another faith. Forty-two per cent were against inter-faith relationships with a JW.

A global dearth of contemporary empirical studies on JWs, especially from a psychological perspective, was the main motive for conducting this exploratory research on values, beliefs, and normative practices of JWs living in Poland, to shed light on their potential salutary, pathogenic, or pathoplastic dimensions. It aims to answer the following questions: What are the commonly shared values, norms, and practices in the JWC? How do they affect individual functioning and family life? What potential challenges do community

members face with regard to living in a larger cultural context? How can these aspects of the JWC culture relate to maintaining health and well-being?

Method

The study was conducted in 2012 and 2013 in Poland by the author, an academic teacher and researcher, psychotherapist and supervisor, with considerable clinical and interviewing experience. His theoretical understanding of human behavior is primarily influenced by his psychodynamic background and practice. He used principles of the constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) in sampling, data collection and analysis. The study was approved by the University Research Ethics Committee.

Participants

Ten adults aged 19-62 took part in the study (six women and four men). All were Caucasian, with over 10 years' experience in JWC. One participant (Victor) was an Elder. Four were born and raised in JW families, three converted in adolescence, and the remaining three as adults; seven were active JWC members, and three were excluded from the group. They came from different cities and attended different Kingdom Halls (see table 1). Participants' names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Sampling Procedures

Participants were initially recruited from members of the JWC who approached the researcher intending to fulfill their proselytic duties. The researcher informed them about his professional background, his interests to learn more about the community, its values, norms, and impact on family and social life. All participants were informed about the aims of the study, agreed to be included in it, and signed their informed consent. As hypotheses appeared during data analysis, the researcher used the snowball method to recruit new members for theoretical sampling by asking participants to recommend people who could share more information about particular experiences, and he used personal networks to find people excluded from JWC. A heterogeneous sample was used intentionally and consistently with the spirit of grounded theory, as looking for unusual cases or exceptions to the rule helps researchers formulate hypotheses about factors leading to different responses in people.

Table 1
Participants characteristics (N=10)

Coded name	Gender	Age	Marital status	Children	Pathways to JWC	Current status in JWC
Isabella	F	37	married	yes	converted in adulthood	active member
Stephanie	F	62	divorced	yes	converted in adulthood	excluded
Kate	F	30	married	no	converted in adolescence	active member
Margaret	F	35	married	yes	converted in adulthood	excluded
Teresa	F	42	married	yes	born in JW family	active member
Julia	F	43	married	yes	born in JW family	active member
John	M	29	single	no	converted in adolescence	excluded
Victor	M	42	married	yes	born in JW family	active member
Alex	M	19	single	no	converted in adolescence	active member
Chris	M	22	single	no	born in JW family	active member

Measures

Data was collected using audiotaped, semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Only two participants withheld consent for their meetings to be recorded, and the researcher then took extensive notes. Recordings were later transcribed verbatim and incorporated with written materials such as publications and website contents using Nvivo10 (software for qualitative data analysis). There were 15 interviews altogether and 11 transcripts. Open-ended questions included: "What do you find distinguishable about JW families?", "What principles are especially meaningful for you?", "How do they affect your social life and relationships?", "What happens when someone breaks these principles?" Additional in-depth questions explored material shared in greater depth. Official literature used for religious socialization was also analyzed to examine its consistence with participants' narratives. Being a non-Witness determined the researcher's *etic* approach. However, the participants' own words are intentionally included in the results to show an *emic* perspective and avoid the error of ethnocentrism as much as possible.

Research Design

Following ethical approval, participants were recruited from active JWs or former community members. Interviews were held at the researcher's home office and no fee was offered for participation. Each participant attended one to three meetings lasting 60-90 minutes. In four interviews people participated in pairs, and 11 interviews took place one-to-one with the researcher. The researcher monitored participants' emotional state and, when they exhibited emotions evoked by the discussed topics, he offered support with clarifications and emphatic statements.

A modified grounded theory framework developed by Charmaz (2006) was used to guide the process of analysis. This involved open coding of each interview transcript and website information; meaningful chunks of data were labeled with conceptual names. Similarities and differences within each transcript and between participants were then explored to distinguish broader categories and affecting conditions. At the axial coding stage, major categories were identified, and relationships between them analyzed at a more abstract level. Memos created during the process of analysis captured emergent ideas and relationships between codes. The researcher often revisited the data to check the consistency of his observations. In keeping with grounded theory methodology, theoretical sampling was used alongside data analysis (new questions were asked during follow-up interviews to uncover additional variation). Saturation of data was reached after eight interviews as subsequent interviews only confirmed what previous participants said. Memos were edited during the write-up stage to present the analytical process. Participants' own words illustrate concepts and demonstrate the grounded-in-data nature of this study.

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Results

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The opening question was: "What differentiates a family where one or more family member is affiliated with the JWC?" Various data sources provided knowledge about core values, beliefs and practices specific to this group. Information in *Watchtower*, accompanying literature, and the official website www.jw.org, was checked against information provided by participants during interviews. The meanings JWs ascribed to certain practices and social norms was consistent between these sources. The community's governing body and Elders were ascribed with an 'inspiration' (blessing) to translate the meaning of Bible passages so that they are understandable, straightforward, and clear. Active JWs typically quoted from the Bible or JW publications during communications, creating an impression that they were 'speaking by the book' or using clichés, but obtaining personal reflections or observations

was more challenging and required building trust during meetings. JWs expressed concern that their understanding might not be accurate enough to reflect the organization's official viewpoint.

There was some social control, as JWs prefer to attend meetings in twos and often object to having one-to-one encounters. Former members were more critical about the JWC, offering insights from both the insider's and outsider's perspective, and reflecting upon advantages and disadvantages associated with involvement with the group and its dynamics. Complying with religious principles was heavily emphasized, determined social values, and provided guidelines for personal conduct. The first two categories analyzed were: 'Becoming a JW' and 'Sharing group values, beliefs, and practices'.

Becoming a Jehovah's Witness
Initial analysis of qualitative data identified three groups referred to by participants: 1. Non-Witnesses, 2. Active JWs, and 3. Former JWC members. The first category (non-Witnesses) represented anyone not yet baptized as JWs, who are seen as potential converts, including unbelievers and those interested in the religious principles. Proselytic activity is typically addressed at this target group. Active JWs are those who formally joined the community by baptism. The third group were once active JWs but had now left the community. They experience all the consequences of exclusion from the community (described later).

According to field data, individuals can become formal members of the JWC after receiving religious socialization, and upon understanding the principles of faith, as well as wishing to adhere to them. They are formally baptized during religious assemblies held in Kingdom Halls. Baptism must be preceded by some experience in proselytism.

> Kate (age 30): You need to be involved in preaching before you can be baptized. This tests your motivation and shows that you value faith and want to pass it on to others. [...] Being a JW is a declaration of will. Baptism means you are saying: "Jehovah, I am at your service."

There is no age limit for becoming a JW. However, new members must understand and accept shared values, beliefs, and practices as egosyntonic. They should have no doubt that they represent ultimate truth. Infant baptism is therefore not practiced, although children are raised according to JWC principles and norms. Once ready to give informed consent, they follow the ritual of passage described earlier. The decision is often reinforced by positive responses from JW parents and other community members.

> Victor (age 42): Baptism must result from conscious will to become a JW, even in young people. I know children who were baptized at 10 years of age … We set an example for both our kids; we took them to meetings regularly, and had religious conversations at home. This is the most precious thing I can give them.

Participants were either born in JW families and received religious socialization since early childhood, or became interested in JWC in adolescence or adulthood. Motivation for joining might involve seeking answers to existential questions, wanting support from others, wishing to meet the expectations of a JW partner, or seeking an alternative identification (those who wanted to manifest their autonomy from Catholic or agnostic parents). Children in JW families may also want to please significant others or follow the example of peers living in other JW families.

> Isabella (age 37): I used to feel lost and made decisions headlong, not considering the consequences. I was looking for … a user manual … on how to live my life. The Bible turned out to be such a manual. [...] Our children may see friends expressing the joy associated with baptism and, feeling despondent, may want to experience similar joy, despite not identifying themselves with the Faith. If parents see that their child is not ready, they should advise them to wait.

Margaret (age 35): I was a contrary teenager. When I came back from my aunt with these brochures, my parents did not approve. I had to show the decision was mine alone! Following this ideology strengthened my sense of identity, even though it meant going against my parents.

Sharing Group Values, Beliefs, and Practices

Shared norms and values cherished by JWs are expounded *expressis verbis* in *Watchtower* and accompanying literature; for example: "The secret of family happiness" or "Questions young people ask. Answers that work." These publications discuss a variety of topics – always with reference to the Bible – and touch upon problems such as family structure and communication, creating one's identity, establishing relationships with others, engaging in mundane activities, organizing free time, and coping with temptation to behave in disrespectful ways. Participants' answers to questions about common norms and practices were consistent with information provided in these sources and were based on religious axioms. Unanimity in interpreting the principles of faith and absolute conformity with religious norms is an essential part of being a JW, with little opportunity to find alternative ways of interpreting biblical principles. Bible parables are often taken literally instead of exploring symbolic meanings, with little tolerance for hesitation, uncertainty or inner conflicts.

> Kate (age 30): We learn … how the world functions, what is meaningful or sacred, and what is not. There's no risk of making mistakes – the answers are clearly given to us.[…] you need to identify yourself with these views to become a JW. How can you preach about them, if you don't agree? Can you imagine if two JWs knock on your door and both said different things? They would start arguing! Those who hesitate before formally joining the JWC are treated as supporters, but are not formal members and cannot act as publishers.

> Margaret (age 35): At first I took everything without question, like most JWs. You think this is your path to salvation, the only Truth. There can be no mistake or misinterpretation … especially for an adolescent.

The JWC discourages questioning the interpretations of the Bible, ascribing it with having little faith. Participants reported this may lead to tension and doubts about the religious values of the community.

> Stephanie (age 62): When new people ask questions, JWs illustrate answers with passages from the Bible, or return with an Elder who will answer … according to the Bible, of course. Nobody asks challenging questions at meetings. That's how it is! […] The only answer I ever got was: "God inspired man to write so and so." JWs do not question because they are expected to believe their Elders, who have some kind of 'transmission', or literature which is 'inspired' by God. Nobody else asked challenging questions and, if they could not answer them, they said: "Perhaps this is not the right time for you, but the Light will surely come and you will understand."

Subjecting life to religious means. Fundamental values referred to by participants were: studying the Bible, developing faith in God, transgressing 'spiritual weaknesses', and preaching. Giving up a career to fully concentrate on spreading faith is highly valued in JWC. Participants said religious involvement helped them find meaning in life and explain adversities in terms of religious challenges. Thinking about God and salvation, or praying, enabled them to distance themselves from everyday problems, finding comfort and hope. However, investing time and energy in community activities makes people more dependent on the group. Participants stressed the importance of complying with moral norms to please Jehovah. Although authentic involvement with religious life was seen as more important than business or entertainment activities, establishing good relationships and enjoying worldly pleasures was not prohibited as long as they did not violate the principles of moral conduct.

Alex (age 19): It's OK to join a sports club, but you must decide how much time you have, especially if you have commitments … like school, house chores, and community meetings. … pleasing Jehovah is ultimately most important of all.

Participants reported that some JW parents discouraged or even forbade their children from socializing with non-Witness peers, which may threaten traditional values leading to violating biblical laws (smoking, attending discos, having premarital sex, alcohol, and drugs, watching films or magazines with erotic content). JWs believe avoiding one's non-Witness peer group may be seen by them as being shy or aloof and that, although it might initially evoke feelings of regret and loss in the younger JW generation – sometimes followed by a desire to rebel against their parents – later on, these tendencies may become disgust, moral triumph, and religious pride which help individuals rationalize and deal with exclusion from larger groups (community of pupils, students, workers).

Isabella (age 37): I told my girls they could only meet classmates when they had to (at school for instance) or when classmates wanted to talk about God with them. [...] When they broke principles ... went shopping with a classmate, for instance, I did not tell them off, but they knew they had done something wrong and I was disappointed. […] My JW friends thought I was too strict. They told their children similar things, but could not forbid them meeting peers, not being able to compensate things to them as I could. I didn't work, so I could spend more time with my daughters. [...] When my girls grew up they realized it was good for them, and thanked me for being strict. They were disappointed with people's behavior … telling lies, drinking and smoking. They realized it was better to stay away from them.

Victor (age 42): We encourage children to make friends only with those who worship God, but you cannot avoid meeting other people. When my son says he wants to go cycling or play football with classmates, I won't pick a quarrel, but I will show that I disapprove. I say: "Why don't you do that with someone from the congregation!?"

Involvement in mundane activities. Religious socialization in the JWC provides clear guidelines on what behavior is accepted and what is not. Specific instructions in narratives and publications explain how to organize family life or build social relationships in and outside the religious community. Examples referring to family life include recommendations about sharing home chores, engaging children in family activities, and teaching them responsibility. Teachings also refer to maintaining personal hygiene, a neat appearance, and order in the house. JWs are advised not to live beyond their means and to plan family budgets, organize and control expenses. They are warned to be cautious about borrowing money, using credit cards carefully, and not buying on impulse. JWs should be honest, truthful, and helpful to the community.

Chris (age 22): It is important that we behave and look decent, especially as representatives of our community. We shouldn't do anything to sully the name of the community. You won't hear that a JW has cheated someone or stolen money … I am not saying we are perfect … we are normal people, but if someone did something outrageous, against our biblical rules, he or she would probably be excluded.

These aspects of JW culture can lead to positive personal images of community members, earning good reputations as workers or neighbors, being trustworthy, helpful, and kind. As JWs cannot touch weapons or learn martial arts, this protects them from interpersonal conflicts and aids harmonious relationships with others. However, when military service was compulsory in Poland, JWs who refused were sentenced to prison.

Using entertainment. Socializing, watching films, listening to music, and reading books are accepted forms of entertainment, if they do not conflict with religious norms. JWs must keep a proper balance between activities associated with *sacrum* and

profanum. Exposure to erotic content, violence, or ideologies which might 'corrupt the mind' is strongly discouraged, so JWs are likely avoid such risks.

> Alex (age 19): If I told my [JW] brothers or sisters that I want to go to a disco, they would probably discourage me and try to explain why I should not go. We are taught to avoid parties because of the risks … alcohol, drugs and other stimulants, unknown company… You can get involved in something dangerous even unintentionally, and then suffer terrible consequences. If you say you could cope with temptation, it is like saying you will never fall down the stairs and break your arm. Who will believe you? You cannot be certain because anything might happen. […] You can listen to music, watch films or read books, unless they are heavy, depressing, indecent or satanic, or promote homosexuality or pornography.

Avoiding involvement with unhealthy activities may result in a healthier lifestyle. But, when avoiding socializing with non-Witnesses is motivated by fear of losing control over unaccepted desires and urges, or becoming victimized, JWs can also fail to recognize their own intrapsychic conflicts, or to develop and acknowledge the totality of their experience. By avoiding non-Witnesses, they may also miss valuable lessons which develop social skills, discernment, reflexivity, open-mindedness, and reduce ethnocentrism.

Birthdays, Christmas or Easter (very significant in Polish culture) or other lay holidays are perceived as against biblical laws and 'an offence to Jehovah', and JWs avoid participation in such events. This automatically excludes JWs from events where bonds are made and experience is shared between representatives of other community systems (neighbors, co-workers, or classmates celebrating someone's birthday or promotion). This may broaden the social gap for children and adolescents, and intensify their feelings of isolation from parallel groups.

Establishing harmonious family relationships. Families in the theocratic JWC are based on a traditional, paternalistic model, which has become less popular in modern, industrialized, and individualistic cultures. JW men are expected to make important decisions and take responsibility for the entire family, be humble, and treat their wives with kindness and respect. Only male members can hold the status of 'Elders' in the community. Women are advised to be submissive, support their husbands' decisions (unless they conflict with religious norms), and avoid criticizing or inducing shame in their partners.

> Teresa (age 42): There is an important biblical rule, according to which everything is set in the correct order of supremacy: God is on top of everything, then there is Jesus, and then there is man. This applies to all aspects of life, including family relationships and community. This has nothing to do with discrimination against women because being at the head means guiding and taking care of others.

Participants also maintained that partners should hold the same beliefs, principles, and aspirations, so establishing a relationship with a non-Witness was highly discouraged. Those brought up in JW families are thus expected to find partners in their own group. Inter-faith relationships are accepted only when they were established prior to becoming a JWC member.

> Victor (age 42): A biblical rule states: 'Marry in the Lord', meaning you should seek a partner among believers. If my daughter wants to marry outside our community I would explain that she is disloyal and crossing a biblical rule; she must seek a partner in her own group. Not only that; such a relationship would end in conflict. A non-Witness would not support her in attending meetings, getting involved in service, etc. What would you talk about with him? Serving Jehovah gives meaning to our life. That is why I talk about faith with my wife. We make plans together. All our holidays are linked to that … where can we see something interesting, but also preach about Lord Jesus to people.

JW parents must spend enough time on their children's needs, and acquaint them with religious principles as early as possible. If necessary, they should impose strict rules and limitations, and punish inappropriate behavior, by explaining the motives of punishment followed by withdrawing privileges. Exertion of rigid norms on their children may result in weakened bonds with the children's peers, and feelings of being excluded from other groups; in addition, children might experience loyalty conflicts when trying to develop bicultural identity (identifying with peers, their values and practices, yet remaining faithful to JW family tradition). JW children are expected to exercise filial piety by respecting and obeying parents and family traditions).

> Chris (age 22): Many young people associate life according to biblical rules as limiting their freedom. They have to deny themselves certain pleasures or company. […] I wanted to feel part of my peer group at school, but could not fully participate in activities. It was like … being excluded in a way. I had to choose between family and colleagues. On the other hand, we had very strong family bonds and my parents were very much present in my life. I also had friends of my own age in other JW families, but that was different. At school, I was still a minority group member.

High involvement of the community and family in personal life and decision-making, as well as sanctions against expressing individual aspirations conflicting with group norms, may foster developing submissive attitudes, fear of expressing discontent and being rejected, and looking to others for help with important decisions. In order to sustain harmonious relations and feel accepted, desires and aspirations incompatible with group values must be suppressed, denied, or dealt with using other defenses (e.g. reaction formation – when individuals control threatening impulses and drives by preaching about abstinence and self-discipline).

Using substances. Psychoactive substances are generally prohibited if they change one's behavior or affect the body in a negative way. A small intake of alcohol (but not getting drunk) is allowed, but smoking or using drugs is thought to break the biblical rule referring to keeping the body clean and healthy. For this reason, neither habitual nor incidental smoking is allowed. Adherence to these norms can be viewed as an important salutogenic aspect of the JWC culture. The same principle does not apply to diet, however. For example, participants reported they were aware of unhealthy substances in chips, popular drinks, or fast food, but there were no principles or guidelines that they should abstain from these.

> Kate (age 30): We do not smoke at all, as it means you are consciously doing something harmful to yourself. We can drink alcohol, however, but only to have a good time. You cannot get drunk and lose control of yourself … but having some beer with your barbecue is fine.

Participants spoke about biblical principles regarding the use of blood products and also fears associated with potential risks and side-effects ascribed to blood transfusion, which is prohibited. They mentioned conflicts relating to blood transfusion, as they often felt misunderstood and criticized by the rest of the society. Reports about hospital experiences included descriptions of challenging encounters with clinical personnel and administrative rules, which caused additional stress.

Maintaining 'moral purity'. Consistent with official JWC literature, participants reported that any kind of premarital or extramarital sexual activity was condemned and prohibited. The same applied to intimate relationships between people of the same sex. Adolescents who felt same-sex attraction were taught that such tendencies could occur at this developmental stage, but were usually temporary and did not determine future sexual

orientation or preferences. Examples of boys and girls who felt initially confused about their sexuality but finally 'found the right path' were given. If homosexual inclinations persisted, however, JWs were advised to pray to Jehovah for strength to resist temptation, employ self-control, and not to act on 'improper sexual urges'. Masturbation was not allowed either, and people were advised to avoid thinking about or watching erotic scenes in the media. In addition to suppressing sexual drives or using reaction formation (e.g., preaching about morality and improper conduct), participants reported applying herbal remedies to reduce sexual tension. Using contraception is allowed in JWC, but not abortifacient agents.

> Alex (age 19): To avoid sexual arousal, I avoid films, pictures, … or anything erotic. I also take melissa [lemon balm], which helps me calm down when I get overexcited. My doctor suggested this, but you cannot drink it too much or too often, because of the effect on your hormones. If you cannot control your sexual drive you can use such herbs to avoid masturbation. I still have these … 'surprises' [nocturnal emissions] at night but I treat them as something natural.

Inability to comply with strict principles associated with sexuality (e.g. abstinence from masturbation by young, healthy, yet unmarried individuals) or the coercion to suppress erotic impulses experienced by homo- and bi-sexual JWs (but rejected by the community as violating biblical laws), may result in severe intrapsychic conflicts, frustration and self-denial. However, this study provides limited data on that problem.

Analyzing qualitative data at this stage led to further questions, such as: "What happens when JWs voice or act on tendencies which conflict with shared values and norms?" and "What happens when JWs interact with individuals who represent conflicting values or actions?"

Crossing the Taboo

Participants gave examples of JWC members who could not or did not want to follow strict norms set by the community. Where people felt trapped between two conflicting beliefs or social norms, those who declared affiliation with the JWC were expected to comply with shared values and practices without exception.

> Julia (age 43): I often consider this Bible passage: "How long will you limp with two different views? If Jehovah is the true God, then follow him." You have to decide. Either you want to be a JW, or you act against God, you break the rules and you think this is alright… for example, leave your wife for someone else, smoke or go clubbing.

Participants often referred to adultery, leaving one's husband or wife to live with a new partner, or adolescents attending parties, being seen with a cigarette, or drinking. People were expected to inform the Elders about any improper behavior exercised by other community members. JWs were also expected to avoid those who set bad examples, whose behavior was seen as improper and conflicting with religious values of the JWC.

As the analysis progressed, various social, psychological and ascribed spiritual consequences to breaking the laws were examined. Anyone committing improper conduct is invited to meet with the Elders, instructed to give up improper behavior, to honestly repent and promise to do better. If reintegration fails, however, this individual is likely to be formally excluded from the JWC.

> Margaret (age 35): People are usually excluded for adultery and debauchery. Premarital sex is out of the question for JWs. I was 22 and had a boyfriend, but did not feel ready to get married. Neither did I want to end that relationship. Two Elder brothers came to talk to me and later I had to attend the judicial committee – that is what it was called. There was no humiliation or anything like that. They asked me all sorts of things – about my attitude and whether I wanted to change. They tried to convince me that I was making Jehovah sad and could be punished. Because I was unwilling to change, I was excluded. […] Decisions about exclusion depend on individual

congregations and the people in them. Sometimes there is acceptance and sometimes they are very strict, even in trivial cases.

Exclusion is often interpreted as a sign of love, and those who subsequently change their conduct are given the chance to come back. They do not regain full rights immediately; for example, they cannot act as publishers until the Elders decide the transition period is over. Members of the JWC are not usually told why someone has been excluded, but information about the change in someone's status is made public. In such cases, JWs are not allowed to talk to that person, greet him or her on the street, or sit at the same table.

> Victor (age 42): We treat such a person worse than unbelievers. We have more opportunities for social meetings, discussions, or helping individuals who are not JWs than with excluded members. They can, of course, return to our congregation because we treat exclusion as an ultimate form of rebuke. However, as long as their views and behavior do not change, we don't want to have anything to do with them.

> Stephanie (age 62): They excluded my husband first, because he kept on drinking. It was difficult for me because no brother or sister could visit me at home because they risked meeting him. Later, I excused myself from the group and finally was excluded myself. They passed me on the street and pretended not to know me.

Restrictions for family members of an excluded JW are less rigorous. However, such a situation is always associated with great tension and disturbance in family structure.

> Victor (age 42): Family relationships must change. Otherwise, the person will not feel the rebuke. We do not want to condemn someone, but make them acknowledge their mistakes and become our loving brother or sister again. However, we cannot let God's laws be broken and not react. We treat Jehovah as a living God, who is interested in our life and actions. We can cause him joy or sadness. Our relationship with Jehovah is most important. How can I be someone's friend if he is an enemy of my best friend?

People who break the taboo of sacred norms are believed to receive condemnation and cannot attain salvation. This may evoke feelings of guilt, anxiety, and conflicts associated with one's choices. Certain principles or religious axioms of the JWC may be experienced egodystonically, yet fear of losing social support and acceptance may prevent seeking autonomy, leading to self-denial. Participants excluded from the community reported problems adjusting, especially as they had previously been dependent on and highly involved with the community, at the cost of developing other social networks.

Acculturation in the Jehovah's Witnesses Family

Detailed analysis of central categories selected for this paper, and examination of relationships between codes, led to specifying some general rules relevant to the JWC. JWs are bound by religious beliefs and aspirations to form a 'family' at a gross level where all members are said to be, and referred to as, brothers and sisters joined by faith. The JWC has developed its own culture – shared values, social axioms, as well as fairly rigid norms and practices, which mark clear boundaries between this and other groups. Inevitably, this large system interacts with other systems, sub-systems and communities such as school/academic, workplace, interest groups, and family. To safeguard its development and stability, the JWC employs strict inclusion/exclusion criteria. It requires high dependability and compliance with generally accepted values and practices, which must be experienced egosyntonically. In other words, it requires incoming members to fully assimilate (accept new values and practices, and abandon all which are conflicting). The Bible and its hermeneutics provided by the governing body are believed to express the ultimate, unquestioned, truth. Anyone who reveals doubts or conflicts is re-educated and, if unable to declare unanimity and comply with

the accepted code of conduct, is excluded. Active JWC members are advised to leave systems perceived as threatening to group values and likely to encourage JWs to challenge religious axioms, experience doubt, ambivalence, and conflict. Potential consequences of assimilation to the JWC may include over-dependability on this religious network at the cost of developing alternative forms of dependence, loosening ties with former systems (including non-Witness families of JW converts), or being excluded by other communities as a member of a religious minority group.

Discussion

In this exploratory study the salutary, pathogenic, and pathoplastic aspects of the JW culture were analyzed in relation to well-being. Rather than providing evidence for interdependencies, which can only be obtained via quantitative examination, the aim was to highlight possible links and outline areas for further research. The JWC is significantly underrepresented in academic literature, and further studies – especially from the psychological perspective – could be extremely valuable for healthcare providers, as well as other professions with contact with JWs. Larry Purnel (2002) says all healthcare professionals should be aware of cultural differences, respect them, and adjust care to individual, sometimes culture-bound, needs of their patients. A similar postulate could apply to workers in other sectors, such as school and academic teachers, administrators, employers and workers in multicultural companies and institutions. Purnel's attitude is characteristic of cultural relativists, according to whom there are no better or worse cultures, and phenomena should be explained in the context in which they appear. He says cultures change over time and differences exist not only between distinct cultures, but also within themselves. He also believes that developing cultural competence reduces stereotypes and prejudice, as well as broadens individual awareness. For this reason the Council of Europe recommended introducing objective information about established religions and their variations to educational curricula. Alas, this has not been executed in Poland, where this study was carried out (Doktór, 2004).

Why People Join Jehovah's Witnesses

In his dated sociological texts, Beckford (1975, 1978) analyzed JWC structure, members' social class characteristics, and social attitudes towards it. He referred to the high rate of recruitment and membership turnover reported in the Watchtower society (Beckford, 1975). Most JWs either convert from other religions or are born in JW families. Beckford (1978) disagreed that conversion was a way of compensating for deprivation suffered by people in lower social classes. This study highlights potential motives for conversion, such as: seeking spiritual answers, need for social support, meeting someone's expectations, or manifesting autonomy from significant others by rejecting their culture, and establishing alternative relationships of dependence. Motives for becoming a JW seem to be complex and involve a variety of conscious and unconscious psychological mechanisms. That specific area requires further investigation via idiographic psychological analysis of converts.

Jehovah's Witnesses and Interaction with Non-believers

The Watchtower community has developed a distinct culture in which religious principles influence group values and practices. The JWC can be described as collective, with low tolerance for ambiguity, uncertainty, or conflict. The collective aspect is reflected by social control and the community's involvement in individual and family life, putting the group's end before one's own, unification, and dependence rather than developing autonomy and individual aspirations. Converts must submit to collectivistic ends and assimilate fully into

the new culture, usually at the cost of abandoning old habits and traditions if these are in conflict with the new paradigm. Their involvement, loyalty and adherence to group norms is rewarded with appreciation and support – emotional, informative and financial. In this respect, these results are similar to those obtained in Britain (Beckford, 1975; Holden, 2002).

Despites its world-renouncing aspect, JWs do not form closed groups living together, but mix with members of the larger society – they use public facilities and services (schools, hospitals, the welfare system), are employed in different institutions and live in secular neighborhoods. Because values and practices of outside groups often conflict with JWs' principles, cultural integration is discouraged or even forbidden. Holden (2002) notes that they would not join trade unions or attend birthday or national holiday celebrations at school or work.

Navas, Rojas, García, and Pumares (2007), who developed the Relative Acculturation Extended Model, note that acculturation, largely elaborated on by Berry (2001), is a multi-dimensional process and people are likely to adopt different styles simultaneously, depending on context (e.g. their attitudes in the work environment may be described in terms of integration, but they may reveal a tendency towards separation when it comes to religious beliefs and customs, marriage, or concepts about child-rearing). They also say that central areas such as religion, customs and values, undergo relatively slow changes while external areas, such as job-related or economic behavior, often undergo faster transformation. Finally, they make a distinction between real (put into practice) and ideal (expected) acculturation strategies. These insights are consistent with results in this study. JWs expect assimilation of religious values, norms, and practices from their converts, and expect separation from other groups representing alternative and conflicting values and norms. Some degree of integration is allowed in external areas only, when school participation, employment, and living in a larger society requires that one complies with local rules and regulations. Ideally, however, JWs are expected to assimilate fully with the JWC culture, rejecting other systems, and maintain contact with people outside their group only to talk about and praise God. Holden (2002) made a similar observation that JWs must manage social interaction with unbelievers according to certain rules and be selective about friends and places they visit, their choice of TV programs and entertainment. Conversion to the JWC may thus weaken ties outside the group. For this reason, Scheitle and Adamczyk (2010) classified JWC as a 'high-cost' religious group.

Salutary Aspects
Various aspects of the JW lifestyle analyzed in this study are commonly regarded as salutogenic (abstinence from smoking, risky sexual behavior, moderate intake of alcohol). Involvement with group activities such as regular meetings certainly gives structure and can provide a sense of stability and predictability, which is especially important for those with a strong need for dependence, receiving specific guidelines, and social support. Their motivation to join the JWC may be associated with the extrinsic type of religiosity described by Allport and Ross (1967). This study also stresses the high involvement of parents in their children's lives, and of the community in the lives of individuals. This can be experienced in two ways: creating strong bonds with others may lend a sense of support and affiliation but can also be viewed as rigid control and stress-inducing. The latter aspect was also highlighted by other authors (Beckford, 1975; Holden, 2002).

Religious involvement may help JWs find meaning, and subsequently make their world more understandable and controllable. It may help put things into perspective and cope with life's adversities more effectively. There are good examples of what Pargament et al. (2003) defined in terms of religious coping. Holden (2002) also notes that, because JWs do

not pursue successful careers, but instead concentrate on religious ends and proselytic activity, they may be less prone to stress associated with job competition. He also provides examples of other challenges associated with work in secular environments, which often have a contradictory effect. This area needs further elaboration, however, and further research on adaptation and work-stress in JWs from the perspective of occupational psychology is required.

Pathogenic Aspects

This study identifies a number of potentially pathogenic issues. Some of these relate to the community, while others are associated with acculturation. The alleged monopoly for truth prevents publishers from seeking alternative interpretations of biblical principles, and also discourages them from communicating their own doubts. Hesitation and concerns are ignored or silenced at best, and discontented individuals may even be excluded, shunned and deprived of all the advantages of being a JW. This illustrates a conflicting situation in which those who fear rejection or losing support must hide their true feelings and concerns. The same applies to rejecting desires or aspirations which conflict with group ideology. Masturbation, pre-marital sex, and homosexuality are severely persecuted as sinful actions. Religious principles of the JWC foster forming marital unions in one's own group only and maintaining traditional family bonds. Alternative forms of relationship, such as cohabiting unions or same-sex couples, violate shared norms and lead to exclusion (*disfellowshipment*). This gives little option for non heteronormative individuals, or those who want to stay in a relationship yet do not feel ready to formalize it. If they identify themselves with formal interpretations of biblical principles offered by the JWC, they may experience strong conflicts between the real and the expected; subsequently, they have to repress or deny part of themselves, and conform with group norms. Unfortunately, no gay or lesbian JWs could be recruited for this study to explore challenges experienced with the anti-homosexual sentiment in this religious community. Further research in this area may reveal problems similar to those reported by sexual minorities who are also members of conservative religious groups (Barton, 2010).

It also seems that JW children may be predisposed to developing dependent personality traits, although further quantitative investigation is required to verify this hypothesis. This is more likely to apply to women, from whom higher subordination is expected, whereas men have relatively more autonomy as family or congregation leaders ('shepherds'). Their intense involvement may lead to achieving high status, social respect, and some influence (obtaining the status of an 'Elder' grants responsibility and rights to make important decisions in the congregation). Some individuals may perceive such a path as an alternative to a lay career.

Potential problems are also associated with acculturation of JWs. Holden (2002) notes that reluctance to transgress boundaries, when JWs face incompatibility between their own values and those of the out-group, often leads to tension between them and representatives of the state (head-teachers, medical practitioners, public sector administrators, judicial officers). JWs seem to be model employees because they have strong work ethics, condemn idleness, and are willing to work at unpopular times of the year (during Christmas, Easter, or national holidays), but their rejection and refusal to participate in certain activities or comply with larger group's expectations may result in animosity and mocking from co-workers, leading to distress. Indeed, Holden thinks JWs are unsuited to secular working conditions and extremely prone to acculturative stress. This stress can also be reinforced by strong reluctance and negative stereotypes ascribed to JWs (Doktór, 2004; Roguska, 2012).

Those who are brought up in JW families, yet undergo parallel socialization in larger dominant societies – because school peers or academic communities represent other religious

and social backgrounds – are also prone to loyalty conflicts and dilemmas characteristic of ethnic minority populations acculturating in different environments, where young people need to negotiate bicultural identities. In such contexts, a desire to find and identify with peers, and receive their appreciation can clash with their sense of being disloyal to parents and their cultural values (Pietkiewicz, 2008). Exploring how young JWs negotiate their personal identities in a multicultural environment would be an interesting task for psychologists.

It is important to highlight the consequences of cultural shifts within the JWC. Expressing a tendency to integrate norms, values, and practices associated with different cultural systems is likely to evoke discord in family and community, and can be sanctioned by (seemingly voluntary) exclusion. Alternatively, adherence to expectations of one's own religious group may also result in feeling excluded from school, neighbors, and the professional community. Children who want to manifest autonomy and act against their religious upbringing, such as socializing with non-Witnesses (not complying with the expected separation), face social pressure, dissatisfaction, and disappointment from JW parents and community members. Parents may then enforce control over their children, inducing feelings of guilt or rejection by showing disappointment and indifference. The situation becomes even more challenging, and sometimes dramatic, when a JW family member is officially excluded from the community. Common norms regulating relationships with former JWs produce significant challenges to family structure and communication. Outcasts are usually deprived of social support, as a means to influence their behavior and also shield active members from those who openly express ambivalence, doubts, or conflicts. This *scapegoat mechanism* has been thoroughly described in psychology (Perera, 1986). Exclusion may have a negative impact on functioning and coping strategies, as individuals have to restore their social networks and re-negotiate their identity; in some cases, though, they may also resolve certain intrapsychic conflicts in this way.

Pathoplastic Aspects

In some cases, conversion and religious involvement may be explained in terms of pathoplasticity, as it allows members to deal with psychological problems (e.g. conflicts associated with separation-individuation, expression of anger or sexuality) in a culturally sanctioned manner. Whereas some behaviors would be associated with psychopathology in a larger, dominant culture, they may be accepted, valued as virtues, and reinforced in such a religious group. For example, some zealous practitioners may reveal high rigidity of character, obsessive-compulsive or dependent traits. The JWC also gives some members a chance to control conflicting desires or urges by involvement in proselytic activity addressed at maintaining 'moral purity' (illustrating a defense mechanism described as reaction formation in psychology), or meets needs of dependency, providing a social and cognitive framework to rely on. It may provide a substitute, external, control where there is limited autonomous control (perhaps expressed by difficulty refraining from compulsive shopping, gambling, or indulging oneself in unhealthy behaviors). There are no contemporary epidemiological studies of this group, however. The method used by John Spencer (1975) raises doubts, and his conclusions that involvement with the JWC may predispose to schizophrenia seems highly exaggerated. Indeed, such traits as low tolerance for ambiguity, discussed earlier, or dichotomous perception of the world and phenomena as 'good' or 'bad' with no ambivalence, are generally associated in clinical psychology with the use of immature defense mechanisms. A careful examination of personality profiles and application of other instruments to measure comorbidity in this population would be required to explore potential links.

Utilizing Professional Help

Previous studies have highlighted the world-renouncing aspect of the JW culture, which often discourages its members from pursuing higher studies (Holden, 2002). So, one would expect rather few JWs to become healthcare providers, and JWs are likely to seek such services from non-believers. Some medical doctors or psychologists may convert and become JWs. However, being a healthcare professional often requires spending considerable time and resources on training and continuous professional development which may conflict with expectations of involvement with Bible study and proselytic activities. Voas (2008) notes that average publishers spend between eight to ten hours per month on proselytizing, whereas pioneers promise to spend about 70 hours per month. Utilizing help from medical professionals, psychologists or counselors from an out-group may produce acculturation problems which have already been discussed.

Although JWs are frequently mentioned in case studies in medical journals referring to bloodless operations or treatments alternative to transfusion, and articles describing ethical dilemmas experienced by physicians treating JWs, the author has been unable to find any studies on *help-seeking attitudes*, *behavior* or *help-seeking pathways*. This study shows that JWs have a tendency to separate from non-believers in areas that conflict with their religious beliefs and values, and this is confirmed by Holden's study (2002). Whereas avoidance or using delayed help-seeking would be regarded as a pathogenic factor, there is no evidence that JWs are reluctant to use healthcare facilities or visit psychologists and doctors who are not Witnesses.

Conclusion

It seems crucial for everyone engaged in personal or professional contact with JWs to be aware of and sensitive to this community's culture. One should understand areas of potential cross-cultural conflict, and inner conflicts experienced by JWs who have to negotiate their identity in a multicultural context and negotiate satisfaction of their needs in a culturally legitimized way. The meanings JWs attribute to certain situations, potential gains, losses, or risks, should be skillfully explored. This study confirms the observations of other authors that the JWC is not homogeneous – it is comprised of recent converts, publishers with long experience in the movement, children born in single-faith JW families, and multi-faith families. We can expect the endorsement and internalization of religious norms to thus vary among individuals. For example, meanings attributed to blood transfusion might be different for recent converts and those brought up in the JWC. Professionals need to explore these differences and their consequences.

Attempts to persuade JWs to do anything against religious principles of the JWC but accepted in a larger dominant culture (such as agree to a blood transfusion if necessary, or masturbate when they feel sexual tension but have no partner), especially when no one from the community will know about it, suggests that professionals assume social control to be the primary and only mechanism associated with their conduct. Social control and fear of the consequences of non-adherence are unquestionably important factors which influence decision-making and behavior, but one must not forget that many JWs hold these religious principles and laws egosyntonically. Breaking them may resolve certain problems, but also evoke serious moral conflicts and emotional turbulences. This implies that patients from the JWC who have departed from the accepted principles should be treated with special attention. Counselors or psychotherapists should explore conflicting areas and how patients resolve these conflicts. This area of clinical significance and social importance indisputably deserves further investigation.

Acknowledging the strength of various social stereotypes and prejudice against members of this NRM (Beckford, 1978, 1999; Roguska, 2012) helped the author understand why patients admitted by him to group therapy never revealed their religious affiliation to other patients, possibly for fear of being mocked or rejected. Holden (2002) confirmed such reactions directed against the JWC, adding that people in secular environments often use language which JWs find offensive, which may cause interaction in a multicultural group especially challenging for JWs.

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