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PEDAGOGICAL, NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF SHAPING THE IDENTITY OF CULT GROUP FOLLOWERS

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SUMMARY

The rapidly changing world does not provide a man with a sense of stability; he intensifies confusion in fundamental matters related to everyday life. Evolving in directions that are difficult to predict, this is not conducive to the process of maturing into a responsible experience of humanity. Various “religious” organizations and societies take advantage of this situation, putting confusion in order (usually in an apparent way), thereby obtaining new adherents for their vision of a better world. Being under the influence of charismatic leaders, the members of new religious movements change their behavior diametrically, as well as their way of thinking about themselves and the world. Any former model of life is replaced by a new, i.e., collective, model of thinking, estimating and behaving. Important things lose their value. The hitherto prevailing existence, perceived as “bad”, “unenlightened”, “materialistic” or “not soulful”, is left for a new and “better” life, for purposes that are attainable only thanks to contact with the new group. The acquisition of self-identity and identification with the group requires considerable effort. Going over from one world to another brings with it numerous consequences of a psychological and social nature. Hence an immense complexity of factors forming the identity of a religious man appear. On the one hand, this is influenced by personality factors, the level of inner integration, psychical and emotional maturity, and on the other hand – a number of social conditions, i.e., the specificity of the cult group, its structure, doctrine, history and social relations. All the above makes it impossible to create a universal model of the follower’s identity within cult groups. It is only possible to indicate the conditions for the creation of the new individual, self leading to a manifestation of their participation within a definite cultic group.

Key words: personality, manipulation, spirituality, freedom,

INTRODUCTION

The rapidly changing world does not provide a man with a sense of stability, he intensifies confusion in fundamental matters related to everyday life. Evolving in directions that are difficult to predict, this is not conducive to the process of maturing into a responsible experience of humanity.

The mixing of what is positive and valuable with negative and low-value matters, doubts about the existence of basic senses and values that constitute the foundation of human choices, results in a person often making decisions without thinking, without certainty, in a pathological way he escapes from a life of responsibility, seems for a moment (not to be fully understood), a feeling determined by a simple case to which it is easiest to give in. This situation is gradually and consistently used by various “religious” organizations and associations, which in their ideology organize (unfortunately, usually in an apparent way) this confusion, and thus gain more followers for their visions of a better world.

While remaining under the influence of charismatic teachers, members of new religious movements completely change their behavior, the way they think about themselves and the world around them. The previous pattern of functioning is replaced by a new, group model of thinking, evaluation, behavior (Gajewski 2019). During indoctrination, the cult group changes the current pattern in the functioning of the potential follower, replacing it with a new, group model of thinking, evaluating, and behaving. What was important ceases to matter. The previous life, perceived as “bad”, “unenlightened”, “materialistic” or “lacking in the spiritual”, is abandoned for a new and “better life” for the sake of goals achievable only through contact with the newly encountered group. Covering areas of “new spirituality” at the turn of the 21st century, and identified with “freedom” falsely understood, it is characterized by indeterminacy, changeability, the principle of pleasure, positive aesthetics, irrationality, external attractiveness (even extravagance), no obligations, etc.

This approach to fundamental human matters, such as faith and related religiosity, leads to perversions in the practice of those hastily chosen, without any proper understanding of beliefs as such. In these situations, truth loses its meaning, and the key of choice is not a sincere search for God, but reasons that satisfy the human, often temporary, needs that are immature and disordered. Everything is relative – since everything can be given a new meaning – everything can be abandoned in favor of something new, more attractive and appealing.

SEARCHING FOR AN INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

The search for an individual and social identity, a follower’s transition from one world to another, has numerous psychological and social consequences (he must achieve a new internal coherence, assimilate with the new environment and reinterpret the current way of thinking and acting). The self-determination of

a follower from one or another cult group is determined by their personality and social factors. This is influenced by the temporal-historical, geographical and cultural dimension (Paloutzian, Richardson, Rambo 1999).

Identity – as defined by Anthony Giddens (2007) – is a reflective process. It includes self-reflection, a better understanding of oneself in breakthrough moments, in extreme situations that destroy the model of the world existing in a given person's mind (see also Pačhalska, Kaczmarek, Kropotov 2020). Any choice of new solutions and new lifestyles always involves the risk of failing to meet the hopes and expectations placed on such a choice. You need to adapt to the new situation, change old habits and accept new habits. An individual's religious identity may be disturbed when meeting an otherwise religious or non-religious person. Such a meeting may or may not result in a review of one's beliefs. As a result, there may be a strengthening of the conviction of the correctness of one's own beliefs or suspicion as to the sensibility of one's own beliefs. The question marks may lead to the choice of a religious interpretation other than the original (family) one, that is, to survive the conversion (Libiszowska-Żółtkowska 2003).

Adaptation to new conditions (shaping a new identity) depends on both external and internal factors. The family and peer environment and the workplace are the basic variables modeling any emerging new identity. They can positively support the process of change, or they can inhibit it, making its course more difficult (Saliba 2004).

To be able to determine the conditions for shaping the identity of followers of cult groups, you must first define the concept of identity, and then refer to the correlation between the individual and the cult group and the social environment. Identity is not given to man once and for all, it is created and transformed throughout his whole life. Human identity has two dimensions: on the one hand, it comprises the "soul gene" that makes me "different" from all the other people in the world; that I exist in as a unique single "copy", and on the other hand - in the social dimension - is the possibility to belong to a larger group of people connected by something that is similar, common, identical, characteristic.

It should be noted that the mere fact of being involved in a new type of worship, one often functioning in different cultural and organizational frameworks, is on the one hand an act of courage, on the other hand, it can express a strong rebellion against one's own religious and cultural traditions. An example would be the involvement of young people in occult and satanic movements, representing a clearly opposite worldview that universally accepted (Gajewski 2013).

THE ESSENCE OF HUMAN IDENTITY

The complexity of the issue of identity means that any attempt to define the term must take into account the multitude of factors defining it, which entails a multitude of definitions and a variety of definitions of its essence. The term 'identity' was introduced to social sciences in the mid-twentieth century by Erik Erikson (1968) – a psychologist referring to the post-Freudian tradition (Pačhalska, Kaczmarek and Kropotov 2020).

Neuroscientists pay attention to the conditions of identity formation that define its essence in a specific way. Therefore we have:

1. *relational I / You/Others*, because during interaction individuals and groups receive and give their partners certain qualities, entering them into existing categories, thus creating a symbolic (conceptual) model of the world that serves as the basis for thinking and acting (MacQueen 2008);
2. *interactions in the social group*, which means that identity can be and is changeable, dynamic, because it depends on the context related “more to the situation than to the permanent state of ownership”; may be the goal rather than the property of mental activity (Kłoskowska 1996).

Identity is a multidimensional process. Thanks to personal identity, man ensures himself an awareness of continuity and coherence, and a sense of individual uniqueness (Gałdowa 2004). Changing life circumstances, entering into new roles, participation in social groups redefine the concept of yourself, allow you to answer the question of who you are for yourself and how you are perceived by others.

Grochmal-Bach and Pačalska (2004) state that identity can be understood as a function of dependence between:

- *coherence*, that is the requirement that the parts constituting identity form a meaningful whole, *and compliance*, that is the requirement that identity relates to reality;
- *unity*, that is the fact that we have one identity, *and complexity*, that is the fact that identity consists of many elements;
- *continuity*, that is being still the same, *and changeability*, which is an inseparable part of the existence of every being in the real world;
- *belonging*, that is the identity of the individual as a part of a larger whole, *and separateness*, that is the belief that my identity depends on the fact that I am someone other than everyone else.

Pačalska, Bednarek and Kaczmarek (2020) have proposed a twofold essence of human identity:

- 1) *a mental process* that develops in connection with the self as the subject and the self as the subject of its own cognition and takes place differently in different circumstances, depending on the course of the changes taking place within an individual and in their social and cultural environment with which they enter into relations in during their life (Pačalska 2007c).
- 2) *a specific state of mind* resulting from this process.

A more detailed discussion of this interesting view will be presented below.

INDIVIDUAL (PERSONAL) IDENTITY AS A MENTAL PROCESS

The first factor conditioning the existence of identity is the mental process, which emerges against the background of the conscious interactions of a given person with their environment, something confirmed by the results of research

into this area (Brown 2015). Although this definition seems to be based on a social psychological approach, it is worth emphasizing that Brown closely links the development of identity with the current state of consciousness, which in turn is a product of the body's physiological state, i.e., the ability to receive and process information from internal (own activity) and external sources of stimulation (social group activity).

The processuality of individual identity means that its development is associated with being yourself (objectively) and having the self-awareness of being and becoming yourself (subjectively). In turn, being yourself means knowing the person as an organism, knowing what they are part of or belong to, and what is a part of, and belongs to, other people and the outside world. This person remains in feedback with the outside world, defining their place in the group, social roles and the prevalent value system.

At first glance, it may seem that we are returning to the thesis that identity consists in the accumulation of all the judgments the subject of which is the self. However, being yourself cannot rely solely on belonging to certain categories deemed the subject, for this is integral to the process of becoming. The phrase "I am myself" means that I am the person who is currently speaking in the first person singular who perceives the world. It also means that I am "here inside" this body, while the world and all other persons and objects residing in it are "out there", outside of my body. And it is around me as a person that my identity develops and changes during my life.

INDIVIDUAL (PERSONAL) IDENTITY AS A SPECIFIC STATE OF MIND

The second factor conditioning the existence of identity is the specific state of mind that arises as a result of the process of identity formation. The path of shaping such a specific mental state is consistent with the serial order, which means that this state occurs:

1. *in the space of brain structures*, where it can develop from covert processes to the level of the threshold of consciousness (ascending mental state) and disappear (disappearance of the mental state) or exceed this threshold (development of the mental state) and rise even higher to the appearance of full consciousness and conscious cognition (the culmination of the mental state);
2. *in time, in the form of pulsating individual mental states*, which ensures the cyclical renewal of these states. This allows you to become more fully aware of identity and to maintain the continuity of the self. The time it takes to realize identity can be but relatively short for healthy people with a properly functioning brain, while for people with brain damage due to the destabilization of the neural networks it may be more or less slow or accelerate, leading in each case to identity disorders (Pačalska 2007a,b,c).

The phenomenon of the development of the mental state during T1 and the renewal of this state during T2 allows us to grasp the essence of identity as a spe-

cific mental state (cf. Fig. 1). The renewal of mental states and the formation of new neuronal connections in the brain is associated with the birth of a specific state of minimal (working) identity (see also Pačhalska, Kaczmarek and Kropotov 2020). Thanks to memory processes, the transition from identity as a state to identity as a process begins.

The explanation of the phenomenon of identity formation from the point of view of microgeny should be sought in the way in which mental processes and states of mind are a consequence of them, at the same time dependent on various dimensions of time: they are formed and run in milliseconds, and they can be represented on the arrow of time by referring to the past, present and future. Understanding the essence of individual human identity in accordance with microgenetic theory and the theory of chaos may mean the beginning of a new look, enabling one not only to develop a deeper understanding of the mental process and the specific state of mind that follows it, i.e., the conditions necessary for the occurrence of individual identity, but also to shine a new light on the workings of the human brain and the relationship between the brain and mind.

First of all, this should enable a more thorough and convincing interpretation of the scientific discoveries so numerous in the neurosciences today, thanks to an understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between individual mental processes and states of mind. Obviously this requires a lot of additional research and reflection. In our opinion, the presentation of a new paradigm in neuroscience can contribute to a kind of scientific revolution. Particularly useful is the application of this theory in the interpretation of the course and symptomatology of some mental and organic diseases of the brain as well as the associated underdevelopment or breakdown of self and identity disorders.

And also the opportunity to use these insights to better understand the workings of the brain and related mental processes; though an understanding of the functioning of the mind equally requires a consideration of social and cultural factors (Gazzaniga 2013; Graziano 2013).

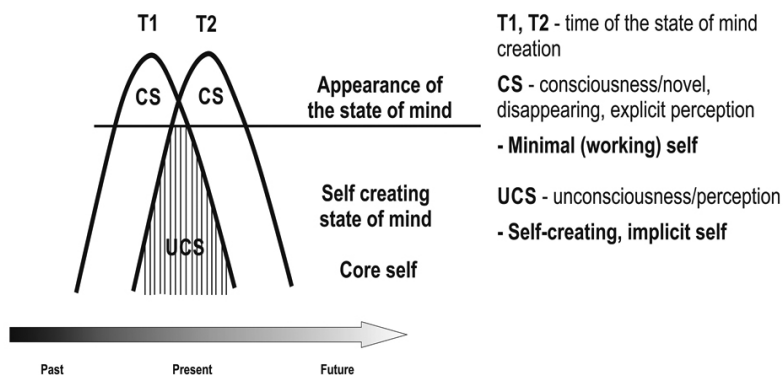


Fig. 1. Developing (T1) and renewing (T2) mental state over time: the birth of an individual identity
 Source: M. Pačhalska, with permission

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

In the process of human self-identification, religion performs various functions, in many cases it determines the basic possibility of understanding one's self. "Being Catholic" is a broad category of religious identity. A person's religious identity, developed around the self-system, embedded in the religious sphere of the cultural world in which this person was born (or to which was moved), should be considered from the perspective of:

1. *collective*, that is from the perspective of the social group forming its cultural system (and in it the religious system, i.e., beliefs, rituals, moral code);
2. *individual*, that is from the perspective of a person who, as a result of the process of religious formation consisting in shaping religious beliefs and mastering the principles of conduct in accordance with a set moral code, acquires religious competence, i.e., knowledge of their own religion, the ability to participate in religious life, the ability to feel a religious experience and the ability to follow the principles developed by religion.

If a man were asked: Who are you? in a specific situational context, he will answer that he is a Christian, Catholic, Jew, Muslim, a Jehovah's Witness, agnostic, a person who doubts or does not believe in God, etc. As equally as other ways of experiencing life's experiences, participation in religious rites relates to faith and - what is particularly important - the relevant system of ethical beliefs and related moral norms.

a) *Homo religiosus*

For centuries, people have believed in the existence of supernatural forces that are not accessible to direct cognition, and testify their existence to the supernatural power of accomplishments (creation of the world and life on Earth, direct interventions in natural and historical processes and in human fate). An important function of all such beliefs is to organize the image of the world in the minds of people and regulate their behavior through a code of ethics, thanks to which their social functioning as well as group cohesion is possible.

The creator of a modern sociology of religion Emil Durkheim noted, in his work of 1912, that religions play an important role in cementing the group by shaping the sense of spiritual community and influencing social life (Durkheim 1990). Religious practices (rituals), such as singing, prayers, dancing, rites and liturgy, as well as a system of orders and prohibitions regulating the behavior of members of a religious group play a special role in this. This can be seen in the case of the so-called primary religions, in polytheistic religions (e.g. in Hinduism), as well as in the three largest monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).

The presence of specific forms of religion in all cultures of the world allows us to state that broadly understood religiosity as well as faith in the existence higher values are deeply rooted within the human mind. The eminent Romanian religious historian, expert on religions and cultural philosopher Mircea Eliade (1992) writes about this, in recognizing that the propensity for beliefs, ideas and

religious practices belongs to the natural equipment of the human species, something justifying the term religious man (Latin *homo religiosus*).

Among the various ways of understanding the term *homo religiosus*, the most common is the meaning introduced by Eliade (quoted after Sztajer 2010: 19):

Homo religiosus means that religion is a constitutive dimension of humanity; man is by nature a religious being.

Therefore, in every person, regardless of whether they are healthy or sick, there are, as Rudolf Otto claimed (1999: 136):

tendencies and predispositions to religion, which spontaneously can become an instinctive premonition and search for something,...

Religious man is chartered by his attitude towards the sacred and profane, emphasizing the absorption of the archetypal image of holiness. This image is constructed by the dogmas of faith and revived by symbolism and rituals (Pačhalska, Bednarek, Kaczmarek 2020). In the image of holiness as created by people, the most important is the figure of God, or the Supreme Being. In the dense network of symbols that surround the entire religious sphere, the symbols of divinity are the most important. The Divine Being is not attainable through direct knowledge, with access only be achievable through insight obtained, for example, in a mystical state. Often, these symbols are taboo, any violation of which threatens catastrophic consequences for both the group and the person who violated the taboo. In this context, Antoni Kępiński (1986: 24) writes:

A man sacrifices his life for a symbol, he can even die after exceeding the taboo symbols (voodoo death, death after eating forbidden food described in the Talmud, etc.). We are entwined with a network of signs and various meanings and we can no longer come to a "bare" life. Even in extreme conditions, when only the struggle for survival counts, e.g., in extermination camps, a specific arrangement of symbols is created (contemptuous words and kind words, bad gestures and good gestures), moreover, even in such conditions a person can oppose the cruel struggle for survival and show more human and noble than under normal conditions (that is the greatness of Father Kolbe).

It can therefore be concluded that religious symbolism sets a reference to supernatural and ultimate things and is strongly associated with the belief system of man and his identity.

As part of religious identity, there are smaller identifications, such as being a priest, someone consecrated or merely the lay faithful. Within religious life, we can speak of being a Jesuit, Dominican, Franciscan, etc. Although these three religious congregations are Catholic, each of them refers to certain characteristic values that constitute their own religious specificity that distinguishes a given congregation from others. Similarly, lay people define their religious identity through belonging to various prayer groups, by the degree of involvement in their

own parish. A similar situation occurs in the cases of other great and small religions of the world. Within Judaism, Islam or Hinduism we observe the coexistence of numerous traditions and trends that shape the identity of their followers (Bainbridge 1997). The faithfuls' dependence on their own religious tradition extends from cases of strong involvement, through relative indifference, to strong contestation.

Religion, both the one in which man grows up from childhood and the one that is the result of some subsequent conscious choice, is an important determinant of personal identity. Following this thought, talking about the identity of cult group followers has its justification. However, creating any strict profiles of follower cult identity within new religious movements seems at risk of failure. Nevertheless, one can point to the characteristic psychosocial conditions supporting this identification.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A CULT GROUP

Being a cult group follower in the perspective of the level of identification can be manifested by:

- *external practice* in the absence of a proper externalization of the values related to ethical principles and theological rules,
- *internal practice* in the presence of a proper internalization of the values: practicing at the level of a deeply aware acceptance of all the principles and values of a particular religion.

Gajewski (2009: 21) stated that the cult group has a specific structure (formal element) as well as worldview (content element), according to which the group gathers its members. Most often it arises as a result of separation from an existing Church or revelation, gathering a group of believers around a selected individual. This may also be a synthesis of many philosophical and religious traditions. In the case of a destructive sect, we observe within its members the so-called sect syndrome, which is a reflection of the destructive influence of the group on the individual in spiritual, mental and physical dimensions.

Gajewski (2009: 22) has pointed out, that the "sect" is an ambiguous concept. There are many discrepancies among the various definitions of a sect or cult group. This is due to their huge diversity in both doctrinal and organizational terms. The author has pointed out that cult groups are divided into:

- *psychomanipulative sects*, which violates freedom: a person becomes totally dependent on the group or its leader (leader). Such an addiction is usually accompanied by a change in the lifestyle, known as "sect syndrome."
- *destructive sects*, which violates basic human rights by using broadly understood psychomanipulation and becomes a pathological and criminal group.

Sects are classified by accentuating their individual characteristics, such as structure, worldview, attitude towards the world and style of functioning. The features that characterize a sect are illustrated in Table 1.

Gajewski (2009: 26) emphasizes that an important element (criterion) to assess the degree of manipulation used by the group is to determine the proportion be-

Table 1. The features characterizing a sect [Gajewski 2009:22]

Features	Characteristics
Membership	A group of people who broke away from one of the Churches or a religious community and adopted their own doctrinal and organizational principles, the authoritarian power of the leader.
Convictions	The sect members are usually convinced of their separation or detachment. This is the only way to preserve the truth that they think has been lost. Their attitude is, therefore, justified, in their view. They do not acknowledge that they can continue to be wrong.
Leader	The sect has a charismatic leader: to whom sect members are completely obedient. The leader is above everyone and everything; unlimited in action, the leader does whatever they want. Here is unquestionable authority. It should be remembered that the leader or "governing body" of the sect derives obvious material benefits from their position, living at the expense of the rank and file members.
Awareness of goals	In destructive sects we are dealing with spiritual deception. Through giving spiritual help an elite sect realizes its hidden goals. The faithful know nothing about these goals. The sect becomes a place where the trust of those genuinely seeking God, a better world, truth, freedom and love is used.
Indoctrination of values	Members of a sect are convinced that only within it will they find truth and freedom, as well as the answers to all their questions.
Promises	A sect offers its followers a "new religious experience," "the only truth," the ability to quickly reach "the highest states of spirituality."
Information manipulation	When recruiting, the sect does not reveal the whole truth. It conceals information about its real goals. Information provided to interested parties is provided from a single source, unclear, blurry, often false.
Manipulation of personality	In a sect, man loses what is most important to him: freedom and the ability to self-determination. There is no place for individualism and independent decision making. There is no privacy, only the group and its interests matter.
Manipulation of identity	The destructive sect, leading to the psychological and material ruin of its members, using psychological pressure renders them incapable of living in society. Belonging to a sect means hurting one's family, friends and followers
Detachment from the Church	Sects disconnected from the Catholic Church preach a different teaching than Jesus Christ preached and which the Church transmits. The main difference is the view that man must gain his own salvation by following the path indicated by the sect leader, often reaching for practices derived from other beliefs (e.g., yoga, sect work).

tween the declared offer and reality. The greater the discrepancy (often effectively masked) between what a person thinks they get and what they actually receive, the greater the degree of manipulation. An important and very dangerous variable affecting the power of a sect's influence is manipulation concerning the sphere of religiosity: therefore, when describing sects, special attention should be paid to this issue.

CULT IDENTITY AND PERSONALITY

The subject literature contains attempts to describe the cult identity. This is an extremely difficult task, because the cult identity depends on a number of factors, such as:

1. *the size of the group to which a given person belongs*: the identification of people participating in the lives of small numbers of cult groups (small,

independent Pentecostal groups) is different than that of worshipers of large traditional churches (e.g. the Orthodox or Catholic Church).

2. *type of cult group doctrine, ideological tradition*: there is a visible discrepancy in the way people and the world are interpreted by the followers of groups based on Far Eastern ideas (e.g., the Hare Krishna movement), different among the followers of communities based on the Bible (Methodists), and different among those recruited from the circles of syncretic, New Age or gnostic-magical groups.
3. *character of the cult group structure*: there is a clear difference in the way the faithful of those religions function, something which has strongly developed their own structure, creating a strong center of power, and the use of a meticulous control of the faithful (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses, the Moon Unification Church), when compared to the followers of religions who have not developed such strong control mechanisms (e.g. the broad New Age group).
4. *degree of integration of the cult group with the environment*: there are groups that are open, semi-open and completely closed to the social environment. The "besieged fortress" syndrome generates among some followers attitudes of a closing and contesting of the world around them. On the other hand, new religious movements in affirming the world support the process of the socialization of their students, without providing an excuse for the formulating of negative assessments of society.

It is difficult to indicate a direct relationship between environmental and personality variables and cult identity. Tadeusz Paleczny (1998: 124) claims that:

there is no one-way or obvious relationship between the individual and the religious group, there is no simple relationship connecting the causative causes lying in both the psyche and personality of individuals, and (...) in the group sphere, in social organization, religion, or culture.

Dariusz Kuncewicz (2005: 122) shares the thesis on the personality of members of the controversial cult groups, writing in a summary of his own research that:

the identification of persons with personality traits being predisposed to participation in controversial religious groups seems unjustified due to the fact that people can with even extremely different personality types.

In this context, however, it is worth introducing the relationships between identity and personality. Paçhalska, Kaczmarek and Kropotov (2020) emphasize that one's personality changes throughout life, both in health and in illness. Personality change was the reason for many years of in-depth discussion and research by scholars around the world. The knowledge derived from these

discussions and studies was partly used to describe the personality structure in the DSM-5 diagnostic model of mental diseases . Here, four components of personality functioning have been proposed that can be associated with the self system (see Fig. 2):

1. *Identity (in the sense of the self)* – experiencing yourself as a separate person, with clearly defined boundaries between yourself (I) and other people; stable and correct self-esteem; the ability to regulate a wide range of emotional experience (feelings and expressions);
2. *Self-regulation* – the ability to set and implement consistent and meaningful short-term and life goals; acting in accordance with constructive and pro-social internal behavioral standards; self-reflection ability;
3. *Empathy* – understanding and appreciating the experiences and motivation of others; tolerance for different views; understanding the effects of one’s own behavior towards others;
4. *Intimacy* – depth and durability of relationships with other people; willingness and ability to be close; reciprocity in relation to other people manifested in behavior.

It should be emphasized that in the diagnostic model of DSM-5 mental diseases, the authors also see, like Higgins (2000) and Obuchowski (2000b), the basic personality dynamics in the tension between the real self and the ideal self. Of course, from the perspective of neuroscience, the obligatory self is also

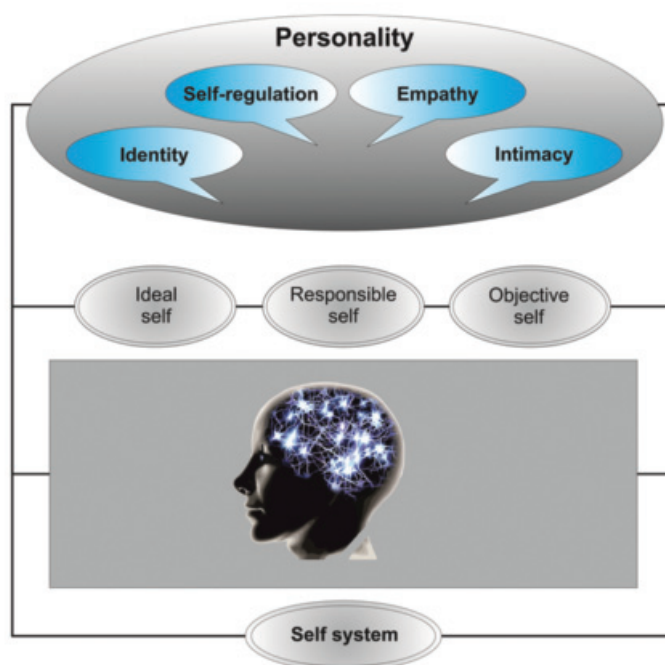


Fig. 2. Basic personality components in connection with the self system
Source: M. Pačalska, with permission

extremely important, which so often breaks down in patients with extensive damage to the frontal lobes. The model developed in this way allows for a good division of those personality changes that appear in sect members.

Tadeusz Paleczny (1998: 119–123) has proposed a typology of personality for sect members:

1. *Escapist*, characterized by a seeking of shelter from threats related to life within a social system. This category includes individuals who have problems with their identity, are stressed, alienated in anonymous networks, depersonalized social interactions, with the need to find support within a group. So they head towards a small community, replacing their family, circle of friends and loved ones. The escapist type can also be described as a “crisis” or “breakthrough” personality. Individuals with this type of personality often run away not from “somewhere” but “from something”.
2. *Seeking, experimenting*, characterized by a desire to develop a cognitive curiosity, a desire to experience something new, to experience new experiences. The motives of salvation, redemption, purification of the mind and body, and a revitalization of the soul often appear in the justifications of joining sects for those with this type of personality.
3. *Hesitating (restless)*, characterized by indefinite internal anxiety, tension, undefined fear. In this case, joining a sect is not determined by mere curiosity, by the desire to know, but by indefinite internal anxiety, tension, and undefined fear. People with this type of personality do not go towards transcendent beings, they do not want to discover the principles of human behavior or morality, but they want only one thing: to reduce anxiety, tension, fear and/or uncertainty. Usually, membership of a sect constitutes an effective remedy for such individuals tormented by uncertainty. In rare cases, under the influence of a sect, psychotic states deepen, anxiety increases, and stress levels increase.
4. *Authoritarian*, specific to competitive, depersonalized, organized industrial societies. In neuroscience literature, this type of personality underlies a high level of dopamine associated with the need to constantly fight with competition in order to win (Pačhalska, Kaczmarek, Kropotov 2020). This personality type has a lot in common with a hesitant (restless) personality. However, while hesitating people seek peace, friendship, kindness, individuals with authoritarian personality crave support, confidence and a sense of security. They easily succumb to people with leadership qualities, occupy subordinate places in power distribution systems. They are inclined to give themselves fully over to the trust of the group’s spiritual leaders until they have placed their fate completely in their hands. What suits them best is when someone else makes decisions for them, determines what is right and what is wrong, what to strive for, and what rules to follow.
5. *Dreamy-utopian*, characterized by idealizing the world. People with this personality are characterized by an artistic sensitivity, have an above-average imagination and thus mix reality with imagination. Such people crave to emboss the world better than ever before. Members of sects are by nature

predisposed to idealize phenomena: the sect provides them with a vision of community order or facilitates an acceptance of the ideas propagated.

THE “CULT” MENTALITY

Sects, having separated from various religious systems, define the cult identity of their members to varying degrees (Borowik, Doktor 2001: 118). The “cult” mentality usually comes about through various types of control, which is a limitation of individual freedom. Many contemporary controversial cult groups model the identity of their followers through:

- 1) *control of thoughts* – that is, the gradual disorganization of the current capacity of the individual to self-determination by introducing uncertainty about the value system, thoughts, reactions and behaviors. Promoting reasoning based on a black and white carbon schema.
- 2) *control of feelings* – that is, appropriate (planned) stimulation of emotions by limiting their diversity, as well as influencing their scale. The most common way for an addict to become addicted is to make the individual feel anxious and guilty.
- 3) *control of behavior* – that is, control of both the person’s external environment (place of residence, relationship with others, time to sleep, etc.), as well as the various activities they take (spending free time, dressing, etc.).
- 4) *control of information* – that is, manipulation of information (from its absence, through information from only one source, to false information). It narrows the horizons of thought, which creates a specific model of the world of a person who has no motivation to confront this information with another source. Information given by the sect to the follower is surrendered to special selection.

THE SECT SYNDROME

The subject literature within the context of the psychological impact of the sect on the mind of an individual, mentions the existence of so-called sect syndrome (Table 2). This manifests itself in various changes in the psychosocial dimension regarding people belonging to a given sect (Keizer & Keizer 1987; Dawson 1998; Gajewski 2004).

The sect syndrome presented in the model contains the most common symptoms that can be found in a person under the influence of a cult group. It should be noted that not all the symptoms listed in the model must occur simultaneously and to a similar extent. The high diversity of human personality, heterogeneity of cult groups, as well as the different and changing social context mean that recognizing the degree and nature of human dependence on a cult group requires individual differentiation and in-depth psychological, and here often also medical diagnosis.

Table 2. The Sect Syndrome

Sphere	Changes
Religiosity	A radical change of worldview: learning and accepting a new system of values, especially moral ones, functioning in a sect. Recognition of the new worldview as the only true one and the formation of an attitude of proselytism (the conversion of others).
Psychological health	Personality change (anxiety, depression, suspicion, hypersensitivity to criticism); cognitive changes (concentration, constant uncertainty and loss), a change of one's own, individual and social self (modified answer to the question "who I am" and "where I am going", subject to the evaluation and decisions of the sect), change of individual identity (rejection of previous values, such as work, school, home, for sect values).
Physical health	Change in beliefs about physical health (in some sects), including the use of low-calorie diets and discontinuation of treatment (protein and micronutrient deficiencies and associated malnutrition, weight loss, exhaustion and weakness of the body, insomnia and fatigue, susceptibility to diseases). In extreme cases deaths and suicides.
Social functioning	Loosening or breaking existing social ties (family, friendly, professional, neighborly) for new ones. Rejection of one's social and cultural heritage and an acceptance of new life patterns consistent with the sect's worldview. Inability to live normally in the current social environment (growing conflicts in the family, school, workplace) and social integration with the sect.
Lifestyle	Change of interests, thinking (lack of criticism and glorification of the group); language (vocabulary and phraseology), lifestyle (clothing, gadgets, cultural, hygienic and nutritional practices, everyday and holiday rituals). Alienation and social isolation.

Based on: Keiser &Keiser 1987; Dawson 1998; Gajewski 2004; Pačalska, Bednarek and Kaczmarek 2020.

AWARDS AND MOTIVATORS OFFERED BY RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

From the very beginning to the end of life man searches alone for his religious quest. Although he is in a social sense interdependent from others in a thousand ways, no one else is able to provide him with the faith he develops (Allport 1988: 222). Therefore, religious institutions shaping the identity of their followers support them in this search, using rewards and compensators (Table 3).

It is noteworthy that belonging to some religious groups allows believers to receive financial support for at least a time. People who carry out responsible work to acquire new followers can even systematically receive money. Important positions in the cult organization are strengthened by the social status of a person belonging to a given cult group and are associated with a change in both individual and social identity (Gajewski 2004).

RELIGIOUS MATURITY

The cult identity of a member of a given religious movement is also related to the level of the said individual's religious maturity. Man's religiosity is dynamic, changing depending on the type of group he identifies with, his own personal

Table 3. Awards and compensators offered by religious institutions

Awards	
The form of the prize	Impact on the believer
Belonging to a religious institution	A religious institution guarantees status (building a social position), legitimate place in its structures and creates the possibility of obtaining other awards (building an economic position).
Participation in religious rituals	A religious institution, by organizing religious rituals, provides believers with a sense of integration with the community and a sense of communication with the sacrum.
Participation in religious initiatives	A religious institution, by organizing various religious and non-religious initiatives, satisfies its members' cultural needs (choir, music band, language learning, lonely heart club).
Raising children	A religious institution supports the family in enculturation and socialization (transfer of the cultural and moral heritage) and in caring functions (organization of sports groups, trips, stores with religious publications and films).
Religious motivators	
The form of the motivator	Impact on the believer
Religious Doctrine (truths of faith)	A religious institution offers certain and unambiguous solutions to cognitive and moral dilemmas; provides advice and assistance in resolving conflicts and promises compensation in future life for suffering from others (enduring adversity, pain, illness).
Religious experiences	A religious institution helps to release suppressed emotions and creates the conditions to trigger a religious experience (sense of communication with God, mystical states and religious visions).
Prayer and individual piety	A religious institution teaches the believer how to seek divine help, confess guilt, and achieve inner peace.
Exclusiveness and a sense of moral superiority	A religious institution provides conviction about the uniqueness of its teaching, providing its believers with a unique religious identity (belonging to God's elect group) regardless of their social position in the temporal world.

Based on: Glock and Stark 1966; Durkheim 1990; Gajewski 2004.

characteristics and personal life history. For each man, his own religious development curve can be determined, associated more or less with his identity. As Werner Gruehn notes, this development is a gradual change, it is a transition of one form into another. In some situations it happens that one form of religiosity still persists while new ones develop (Gruehn 1966: 344).

The psychology and neuropsychology of religion offers a number of theoretical models that describe as precisely as possible the subsequent stages of human religious development and the patterns of those neural connections responsible for creating images of divine beings and important religious figures (Pačalska, Bednarek, Kaczmarek 2020). An analysis of these models allows for a better understanding of the process of shaping the identity of the followers of new religious movements. Contemporary research on the issue of the development of an individual's religiosity can be essentially considered from the point of view of four theoretical positions:

1. *developmental psychology* – identifying the stages of religious development based on the child's cognitive and emotional development. Research is conducted on the development of children's spirituality as their innate property (Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2004: 103).

2. *psychoanalytic* – demonstrating the relationship between the image of God and the image of parents in the mind of the individual,
3. *intercultural* - the presentation of religious development within various cultures and religious systems,
4. *neuropsychological* – demonstrating the relationship between brain structures and the development of neural connection patterns (language, images in the brain, including facial perception) and religious development. Research is conducted into the specific patterns of neural connections and the ability to give meaning to faces (including the image of God, and important religious figures).

Research by David Elkind (1967) carried out as part of the development model, based on classical Piaget theory, indicates the adaptive dimension of religion (according to individual stages of development), thanks to which man can be better integrated with the world around him. The task of religion is to facilitate man's adaptation to the world in which he is to function. Religion provides the individual with: the pursuit of a sense of stability within the surrounding world, to create imagination, to explore relationships between individual objects of reality, to understand their surroundings and themselves. Each of these aspirations is inscribed at a specific period of development (Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2004: 104).

The psychology of religion most often uses a 9-stage age classification of religiosity:

1. *non-religious period* (first year of life);
2. *the period of the beginning of the child's religiosity* (2-3 years of age),
3. *period of magical religiosity* (from 4 to approx. 7 years of age),
4. *period of authoritarian-moral religiosity* (from 7-8 to around 12 years of age),
5. *the period of shaping autonomous religiosity* (from about 12 to 16-17 years of age),
6. *period of shaping authentic religiosity* (from approx. 18 to approx. 25 years of age),
7. *period of religious stability* (from approx. 25 to approx. 40 years old),
8. *religious maturity period* (from around 40 to around 60-70 years of age),
9. *period of eschatological religiosity* (from around 60-70 years of age).

In this context, it is worth noting that not all people experience the development of religiosity. Numerous studies confirm the possibility of a cessation in religious development and even its regression towards psychopathology. Certain individuals lose their religious maturity. Being disintegrated, they enter into numerous internal conflicts that degrade their personal and social lives. Often, the cult group has also a destructive impact on their personality. Also, the society within which the group operates affects the process of a person's functioning. People with even minor neurodevelopmental changes or identity or personality disorders may experience major changes in the formation of religiosity (see Pačalska, Kaczmarek, Kropotov 2020).

CRITERIA FOR MATURE RELIGIOSITY

Zdzisław Chlewiński (1991) proposes the following criteria of mature religiosity:

- 1) *autonomy of religious motivation*, that is the lack of using religiosity to meet other needs (e.g., security);
- 2) *a non-anthropomorphic concept of God* – that is the ability to distinguish between one's own image of God and the knowledge of a transcendent God, impossible to express with the help of pictorial concepts;
- 3) *the ability to distinguish between elements significant in religion and accidentally associated with it*, that is, to distinguish significant moral consequences arising from the fact of being religious from fanatical judgments on the recommendations of religion, implemented in an absolute way;
- 4) *the ability to resolve religious conflicts*, that is the ability to consciously choose or reject religion because of accepted reasons, and not for emotional reasons dictated by defense mechanisms; the authenticity of religious beliefs, i.e., their centrality in the personality structure of the individual.

In this way, the enormity of the factors that shape the identity of a religious man is drawn. On the one hand, it is determined by personality factors, the level of internal integration, mental and emotional maturity, and on the other – a whole range of social conditions, such as the nature of the cult group, its structure, doctrine, history of creation, and relations with the environment. The diversity of personality types, the multiplicity of character traits in relation to the religious projects of countless cult groups makes it virtually impossible to create a satisfactory model of cult identity. It remains only to indicate the determinants of one or another self-identification of individuals that conclude to belonging to a specific cult group (Gartrell, Shannon 1985; Hexham, Poewe 1986: 121-122).

However, solutions to this problem can be sought in the field of neuroscience. If you can help a person with a brain injury who has completely lost their individual, social and cultural identity (cf. Pačhalska, Kaczmarek and Kropotov 2020), the more you can help a person who is lost in the development of his own religiosity. In this context, it will be helpful to present the interrelationships of working brains with the individual, social and cultural self.

NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

One of the most important questions asked by authors seeking the mechanism of identity in research on a face processing mechanism is: what precedes the differentiation of an object or event? Is it detailed (consistent with connectionist theories), or maybe its holistic, general configuration (consistent with the assumptions of microgenetic theory)?

In studying the mechanism of facial processing, Bachmann (1991) and Bachmann & Kahusk (1997) have used stimuli consisting of spatially subsampled facial photographs with different exposure times (cf. Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Spatially subsampled facial photographs used in neurophysiological studies: the potential of N170 appears when recognizing each of the spatially sampled faces
Source: Hanso, Bachmann and Murd (2010), with permission

Subjects were asked to identify stimuli presented over a very short flash period – from 400 to 600 milliseconds. Usually, a longer interpretation of conventional stimuli is associated with better recognition, as it enables the recognition of both general and specific features. In the case of images consisting of the subsampled image, longer exposure times lead to poor recognition. Further research by Bachmann (2019) has shown that when recognizing subsampled faces, the potential of N170 associated with facial recognition appears (see also Hanso, Bachmann and Murd 2010). This author stated that in accordance with the assumptions of holistic microgenetic theory, the general configuration of an object or event is preceded by a gradual differentiation of the features of a given object. This is also confirmed by research on “visible speech” (MacDonald, Andersen and Bachmann 2000), facial attractiveness (Bachmann 2019) and assessment of a person’s credibility (Nurmoja, Eamets, Härma, & Bachmann 2012).

Facial recognition is one of the most important abilities from the perspective of shaping human identity (Feinberg and Keenan 2005). People who do not recognize the face or have difficulty in giving it emotional significance may develop disorders in recognizing their own face as well as that of other people and therefore may develop a variety of clinical syndromes, such as the mirror symptom, Capgras syndrome, Fregogoli syndrome, Cotard syndrome (see Paçhalska, MacQueen, Kaczmarek et al. 2011). The lack of the N170 component is found in neurophysiological studies of people with facial recognition disorders. Eimer and McCarthy (1999) analyzed the N170 component in response to the presentation of face and home photographs in 1 adult with pro-diagnosis and 24 healthy people. These authors found that healthy people have the N170 component in the process of facial perception. However, it does not occur when subjects look at other objects (see also Kropotov 2009, Paçhalska, Kaczmarek and Kropotov 2014). Kropotov (2009) conducted cohort studies of people with prosopagnosia and healthy people: the exclusion factor was vision defects or

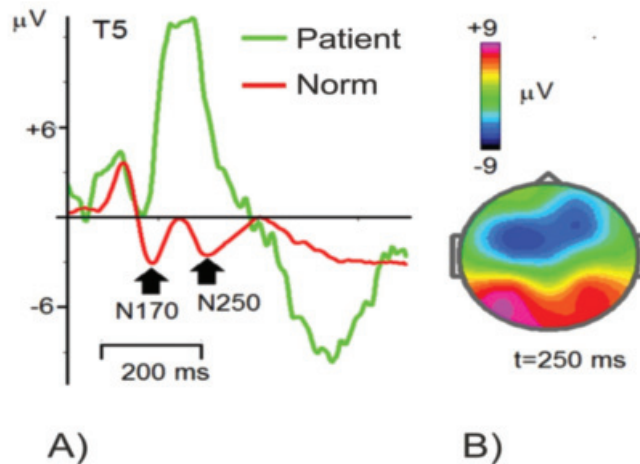


Fig. 4. Lack of negative components N170 and N250 ms in ERPs, which is an indicator of facial and object recognition disorders.

Source: Pachalska, Góral- Pórola 2020.

blurred vision. It turned out that the examined healthy people have a negative component N170 in the process of facial perception, whereas in people with prosopagnosia this component does not occur (Fig. 4).

Interestingly, frequent contact with a given face strengthens the patterns of neural connections and is closely associated with the strengthening of the negative N170 component and with the emotional significance of this face associated with the strengthening of the N250 component (Kropotov 2016).

The neuropsychological research presented above allows for a better understanding of many phenomena in the circle of the psycho-manipulation used in cult groups. This applies in particular to creating the image of a leader, idealizing his person, giving him authority, and thus strengthening the personal and group dependence of the believer on the leader. Good examples of building the image of a sect leader are the artistic representations of the Scientist Church's L. Ron Hubbard or the charismatic Hindu guru Sathya Sai Baba. The face becomes a symbol of divinity, for which one can even give one's life.

INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SELF

Individual, social and cultural self are associated with three basic self sub-systems (cf. Fig. 5):

1. *Awareness* that relates to the most frequently asked question about our identity: Who am I? In terms of civil law, this means sex, place of birth, origin, occupation, etc. This basic level of consciousness is often disturbed in the case of brain damage, as a result of which, e.g., the afflicted, after waking up from a coma, do not know who they are.

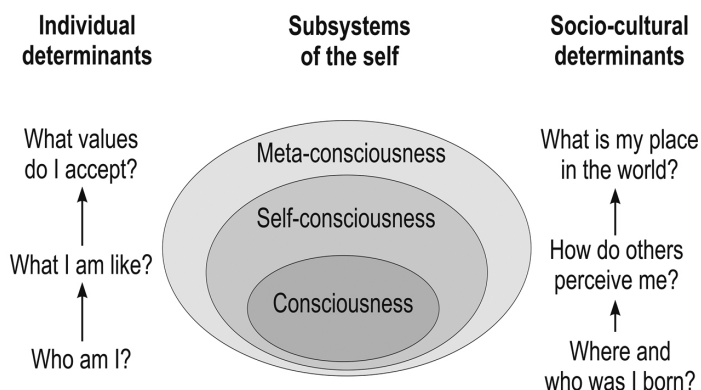


Fig. 5. Individual and cultural conditions of the self system
Source: M. Pachalska, with permission

2. *Self-awareness*, i.e., awareness of myself and the state of my own mind, which mainly involves the questions: Who am I? And how do others perceive me? Answering these questions requires a developed skill of introspection, or insight into yourself. It is also strongly associated with personality. In the cultural aspect, what is particularly important is how others see us, because this fact significantly affects our self-esteem. This process reflects the popular saying that "other people are our mirror."
3. *Meta-consciousness*, involving questions: What values do I recognize? What is my place in the world? The answer to the question about recognized values determines our perception of ourselves, the world and our behavior. In turn, the answer to the question about our place in the world has a social and cultural aspect.

Recognized values are strongly embedded in culture and next to other cultural factors influence the shaping of our meta-consciousness. However, they can constitute a kind of self-limitation, which is manifested by various types of fundamentalism. This means that our meta-consciousness is also influenced by cultural conditions, among which should be mentioned a generational and procreative family, a group of friends, belonging to a social group, nationality, regionalism (cf. Bednarek 2016), a religion, etc. It should be emphasized that meta-consciousness is closely related to the development of the language system, which was described by Basil Bernstein (1990) with the developed code concept. In Polish, the developed code concept corresponds to the literary language (Kaczmarek 2012).

It is worth noting, however, that the ability to use a literary language is not a sufficient condition to have a meta-consciousness. It also requires the skill of self-reflection and the actual interiorisation (internalization) of recognized values (Brown 2005). However, this is also not enough. It turns out that it is necessary to properly embed these skills in culture. As an example, as was proposed by

Bednarek (2016), the renaissance of the meta-consciousness can be used by people belonging to the local / regional community affiliated to larger or smaller communities with different value systems, lifestyles etc. This author notes that no culture or even subculture of narrow groups achieves such a degree of integration or absolute compulsory culture patterns, especially in today's world. Also, contemporary regional cultures will be characterized only by a certain degree of internal integration, which will always be accompanied by some degree of openness to cultural patterns outside of its system. Therefore, going along with this way of reasoning, meta-consciousness requires both the skill of self-reflection, the real interiorization (internalization) of recognized values, as well as their embedding in culture or subculture broadly understood (see also Paleczny and Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2014; Wittgenstein 2018).

WHAT DRIVES ANYONE TO CHANGE?

What goes on in our bodies and minds when we begin to explore new possibilities? What was the feeling that made a particular person want – so deeply – to do something almost randomly? What in the brain triggers the moment of “rising above” established knowledge, and why are some individuals exceptionally creative: are all questions that are still being explored. At the same time, several related factors have already been identified, specifically neurotransmitters, the mind, intelligence level, ecological niches, personality and identity attributes (Brown 2015; Pachalska 2019).

One of the most important factors, without a doubt, is social recognition variously understood, which activates and strengthening the reward system (Fig. 6).

Pleasant experiences release positive emotions (e.g., joy), because they stimulate the reward system by creating connections from the basal part of the frontal cortex to the anterior (emotional) part of the anterior cingulate cortex of

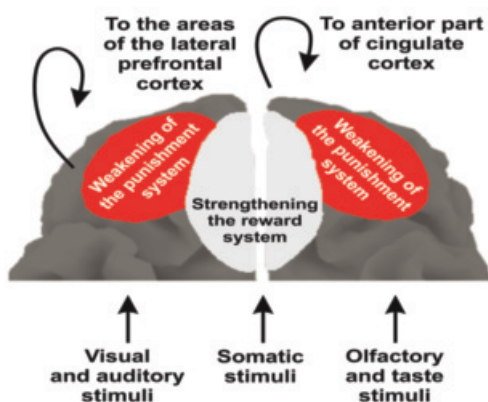


Fig. 6. The reward /punishment system.

Source: Pachalska, Kaczmarek and Kropotov 2014, modified

the right and the left hemisphere. At the same time, the punishment system is weakened. The strength and duration of these emotions are associated with the importance of the event for the artist. Therefore, exhibition, and the positive reactions of the audience, might modify the minimal (working) self, and the longitudinal (autobiographical) self, strengthening the significance of a given (negative or positive) event (see: Pachalska 2019).

Changing the identity of a cult group student results in numerous consequences in their mental and spiritual functioning, and also leads to a disruption of social relations, especially family ones. All aid interventions, including therapeutic ones, are an important element of social prevention in counteracting the pathological effects of participation in sects. It is necessary that pedagogues, educators and people working with young people particularly vulnerable to recruitment from sects are able to use neuropsychology research in their educational and educational work. Taking into account social variables as well as reference to contemporary neuropsychological theories is an important support for the pedagogical sciences. Neuropsychology allows for an understanding of many psychological processes that pedagogues encounter in their daily practice, provides evidence derived from empirical studies of the existence and pathogenic functioning of the described phenomena. It also helps in searching for optimal tools for a pedagogical influence on sect members.

Effective therapy of a person involved in a sect (enslaved) requires not only cooperation with the therapist, but above all a goal-oriented approach (Pachalska 2007). The goal is to free yourself from entanglement. Professional therapeutic assistance, maintaining the highest standards of psychological, medical and social care is the basis for all assistance to people involved in revolt groups (Gajewski 2010). From the clinical neuroscience perspective, it is particularly important to use the creative possibilities of a particular person to overcome the entanglement in a sect, and to learn about the traps set by the sect. This will be the first, but also the most important step towards regaining personal freedom and re-building religious identity.

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