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Studia Psychologica nr 9, 91-103

2009

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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SUB-CULTURAL DIFFERENTIATION OF FAMILY ETHOS IN TERMS OF VALUES RELATED TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

The research refers to the cross-cultural paradigm in family studies. It was aimed to test an influence of two important cultural factors on the values connected with the child rearing process. The first factor is a nationality (the German minority or the Polish majority). The second factor is religiousness (affiliation to Jehova-sect or to Roman Catholics). Each of the compared groups live in the same society – in Poland. Two other demographic variables have been controlled: an educational level of parents and a family residence (a city or rural area). The values which direct the child rearing process within a family were diagnosed with a use of a technique based on toys advertisements. The issues indicate some important differences in that domain. For example: Polish Roman Catholics living in a rural area pay attention to an intellectual development of children, while Polish Roman Catholics of the city appreciate spiritual, artistic and physical development. Both minority groups take care of a social development but, what is interesting, members of the Jehova-sect neglect an importance of spiritual development. The conclusions of that study contribute to the understanding of the cultural impact in socialization within family surrounding.

1. PROBLEM

Family is, without doubt, the most important developmental environment for human beings. Raised by its parents, the child grows to resemble them. In many ways, he/she also becomes similar to the majority of the members of the society in which he/she lives. Generation after generation, children “blend” with the culture into which they are born, implementing its dominant model personality. The family universe is an open micro-system rooted within a wider social context and communicating with the environment on multiple levels. It constitutes an ecological niche of sorts (cf. Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Barker, 1968; Magnuson, 1976; Jurczyk, 1989). Every niche may be described in terms of various characteristics (economic, demographic). From the psychological perspective, the most important one is the semantic dimension, i.e. the manner of experiencing, evaluating and making sense of phenomena – the universe of family text (in the broad, semiotic sense of the term,

cf. e.g. Wysłouch, 2001; Sulima, 2000). Views, beliefs, and values of a society permeate this inner universe through language and other carriers of meaning. Some of them form the basic set of propositions accepted unconditionally and unquestioned. Others, however, are “filtered” through the internal semantic structure – the structure of family ethos (cf. Dryll, Cierpka, 1996; Dryll, 2001; Riess, 1981; Sameroff, Fiese, 1992; Praszkie, 1992).

We may also refer to ethos as a “common language” of a family – one that carries “common texts”: opinions, preferences, relationship norms, rules of cooperation and responsibility, identity labels, scripts for daily and extraordinary events. The fact that family members share systems of meanings is clear in the analysis of their self-narratives. This was demonstrated in a study (Chądzynska, Dryll, 2004a; 2004b) of 24 families. Its aim was to compare free narratives of fathers, mothers, and their children telling about their family life. Their narratives were similar in terms of composition and length, themes, content and literary genre of episodes, as well as descriptions of characters taking part in the events. Similarities in terms of semantic fields of the narratives’ key words (persons and subsystems) were equally prominent.

Family ethos emerges as a result of the so-called semiotic mediation. Semiotic mediation, which involves clarification of meanings, is a process inextricably linked with direct communication, and as such requires at least a small group setting (a diad is the minimum). Living together, having conversations and acting in certain ways provoke family members to comment upon and evaluate events. Interpretations are a shared knowledge of the participants in this process. Communication, however, occurs in the sphere of mother tongue and behaviours accepted as socially obvious. For that reason, we may conclude that family ethos is a certain “departure” – an individual version of the ethos prevalent in the society in which the family resides. The degree of this “departure” is a question to be studied by psychologists. To what extent does family, as the primary socialising group, transform cultural patterns transmitted to children? What are the stages of this process? What constitutes the unchanging core, and what differentiates one family universe of meaning from another?

The portion of the content related to child-rearing that is directly “involved” in interactions (cf. Dryll, 2003) is contained in the semantic domain of ethos – the family system of values. The way a child is treated by adults is to a large extent determined by unquestioned cultural models of universal influence. This phenomenon is plainly visible in the comparison of ancient civilisations (to the extent that we are currently able to reconstruct the daily life of societies that no longer exist, cf. e.g. Malinowski, 1998; Świderkówna, 1983; Pałubicki, 1995; Lewis, 1984; Corcopino, 1960). Ideas related to parenting undergo changes even within one culture (Aries, 1995; Żołędz-Strzelczyk, 202), although we tend to find such changes less shocking. With the increasing pace of uniformization of values in the cultures of today, the differentiation of parenting practices tends to depend on various demographic factors which cause the family to remain in the community that shares its system of beliefs. This mechanism is demonstrated by numerous cross-cultural studies (Harkness, Super, 1992; Valsiner, 2000; Rosenthal, Bernhold, 1988; Pallacios, Gonzales, Moreno, 1992; Kagitcibasi, 1996). Cultural variation of family-related ideas prompts us to look for factors affecting the beliefs and values related to the promotion of development.

The 20th century, hailed as “the century of childhood”, left its mark in the mentality of Europeans and Americans by its emphasis on childcare. Children’s devel-

opment (especially “all-round development”) is a value in itself, the fact which was demonstrated for example in highly original studies of Lightfoot and Valsiner (1992). The two researchers focused on advertisements placed in magazines for parents, assuming that effective advertising appeals to the values active in the mentality of its target group. They analysed how the advertisers promoted the quality of products for children. Those products (as classified by the authors) were: books, cuddle toys, manipulative toys, games, computers, audio and video tapes, diapers, cosmetics, clothes, food, medicines (divided by the age of children they were aimed at). Lightfoot and Valsiner analysed what the advertisers appealed to, what is capable of “reaching” potential buyers, what is so important to parents that they would be willing to spend their hard-earned cash on it.

Some 30% of all ads (including personal hygiene products and medicines, which covered as many as 47% of all advertised products) made a direct reference to development as a value in itself. The remaining 70% contained indirect references. The authors were able to isolate specific themes related to developmental tasks for specific age groups (e.g. late kindergarten period was dominated by achieving school-readiness, and post-babyhood period by improving motor skills, which is also clearly “developmental” in character). As these studies demonstrated, those who wish to be successful parents want to feel that they are somehow contributing to the development of their child (however they understand it).

The research study quoted (Lightfoot, Valsiner, 1992) analysed newspaper ads, i.e. cultural texts, rather than “personal texts” (cf. Dryll, 2004). There is little doubt that a cultural text, by being rooted in mother tongue, constitutes a basis (background) for the system of meanings that is being processed within the family ethos. How parents implement the idea of caring for their child’s development is probably determined by the part of the system of values related to the model personality. What kind of person is it right to be? What is the ideal parents should strive to achieve? There can be some variation between families in terms “emphasis distribution” with respect to culturally accepted and promoted dimensions of model personality. By using a categorisation of human activity (and consequently areas of development), which is popular both in psychology and in commonsense thinking, we may attempt to characterise parents’ priorities as aimed at promoting: physical, intellectual, artistic (creative), social competences or spiritual development of their child. Regardless of how intent parents are on stimulating development (some probably make it more of a priority than others), they can also differ in terms of how they implement their understanding of those priorities (whether it is more important that the child does his/her homework properly or learns to roller skate well).

In the model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1976), a cultural text constitutes the broadest systemic framework (society in general), while the plain of ethos – the most confined one (“basic social unit”). Between the two, there are a number of intermediate systems (local community, specific reference groups in which the family is involved). Of course, the origins of the family’s universe of meanings, the external cultural influences that shape it, can also be studied through the content of the macro-system. However, the fact that all participants in the research process are involved in its framework, that influence would be difficult to control. On the other hand, with a proper distance it is possible to compare groups forming mesosystems. A number of studies takes into account the demographic factors typical for

a given community that determine the mesosystem niche: place of residence (Spain: Pallacios, Gonzales, Moreno, 1992), ethnicity (Australia: Rosenthal, Bartholt, 1988) or profession (together with education required to perform it, Sweden: Ninlholm, Salio, 1996). Likewise in Poland, the place of residence (rural – urban) and ethnicity (minority niches compared to indigenous population) are the constituting factors of mesosystems. In addition, the factor that appears to be crucial in our society is religious affiliation (especially for close-knit religious groups that stand out against the catholic majority).

The purpose of the present study was to find out whether ethos-related content produced by semiotic mediation within a micro-system (family) depends on that system's position within a broader cultural context – a social mesosystem. Its variability, following the mesosystems' constitutive demographic factors reflects the influence of cultural texts on the semantic structure of family ethos. By looking at studies conducted in other European countries, as well as projections for Poland, three socio-demographic factors constituting social mesosystems in Poland were taken into account: place of residence, religious affiliation, and ethnicity.

According to studies from Spain (Pallacios, Gonzales, Moreno, 1992) and comparative research on societies in Spain, Portugal, Austria, and Germany (Pallacios, Oliva, 1999), attitudes towards main developmental goals and the parenting process represented by residents of large cities should differ from those exhibited by inhabitants of rural areas. Particularly in the areas where there are disproportions in the standard of living and education, people in the countryside tend to adhere to traditional beliefs. In large cities, attitudes are more susceptible to change due to the proximity of opinion-forming groups, and consequently, participation in those groups, aspiring to join them, better education, being required to broaden one's knowledge for work-related purposes, easier access to channels of cultural transmission more sophisticated than television. However, it would be difficult to determine unequivocally what in the Polish society constitutes the components of a traditional model personality and traditional attitudes towards raising children, and what is the core of the more "modern" view.

Ethnicity is a factor addressing the changeability of the content of beliefs about various aspects of everyday existence, including parenting, to the mentality of the original nationality ethnic group members. In Poland, now predominantly a mono-ethnic country, the most prominent non-Polish group is the German minority inhabiting Masuria. When formulating hypotheses reflecting the stereotype of "German upbringing" as compared to "Polish upbringing", one would expect differences in the attitude towards work, and therefore the development of skills related to the work performed (both intellectual and physical abilities). Furthermore, we might expect that in a closed society of the "Little Homeland" of an ethnic minority, parents will prioritise those abilities in their children that are related to the harmonious existence of the community, i.e. the development of social skills.

Religious affiliation, particularly being a member of a closely-knit minority opposed to the majority, which makes that opposition the cornerstone of its identity (as is the case with Jehova's Witnesses in Poland) should produce a different mentality, resulting from religious beliefs held by that group: being more inclined towards spiritual and moral development, and less towards physical, intellectual, and artistic development. Social skills, due to the nature of Jehova's Witnesses' activities

(going door to door) and the fact of belonging to a minority, should also, in all probability, rank high on the parents' hierarchy of values.

2. METHOD

The present study was quasi-experimental. It compared parameters of a dependent (explained) variable in groups selected according to independent (explanatory) variables. The independent variables were: family's place of residence and its status according to education (in at least two generations in both parents), being a member of the German minority or being a Jehova's Witness. The first of those variables divided the group of practicing Catholics of Polish origin into inhabitants of a small village (near Kielce) with secondary education or less, and residents of a large city (Warsaw) with a higher education. Members of the German minority – inhabitants of a village near Olsztyn, with a lower level of education, were compared to Polish rural residents. The Jehova's Witnesses group, due to problems reaching its members and obtaining their consent to participate in the study, consisted predominantly of the inhabitants of a small town near Warsaw and of Warsaw itself, but none of them had higher education, and most had primary or vocational education. They were compared with both groups of Poles (keeping in mind poorer credibility of conclusions drawn from those comparisons).

The dependent variable – prioritizing the child's development and parents' preferences in terms of the particularly important areas of development was measured using a tool inspired by the aforementioned work of Lightfoot and Valsiner (1992). A series of advertisements that demonstrated advantages of various toys was prepared (Gołabek, 2001). The ads contained drawings with text. For each of the five age levels for which the toys were intended (2-, 5-, 9-, 12-, and 15-year olds) there were 7 ads, each one with a different justification of the product's advantages. In five cases, these justifications were concerned with promoting various areas of development (physical, intellectual, artistic, social or spiritual). The two remaining justifications quoted non-development-related benefits of buying the toy. These were: providing fun for the child or securing time off for parents (with the child playing on its own). The subjects were to select the best toy from each set, and to evaluate all the remaining toys. The first choice scored 7 points, followed by 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 point. After adding up five series, each area of development (as well as the two non-development areas) were given a score (from 1 to 35) indicating their level of preference.

The measurement of parental preferences using the above method was part of a procedure analysing a number of other variables (cf. Gołabek, 2001, Krogulska, 2001, Garczewska, 2002, Sieczkowska, 2005). There were 100 subjects in the group of Polish rural and urban residents. The German minority and Jehova's Witnesses were 50 subjects each. The study measurements were performed at the homes of the participants, on an individual basis.

3. RESULTS

The comparison between the groups of Poles living in the country and in the city revealed a significant difference in terms of priority ascribed to promoting development and preferred areas to be promoted (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of indices of priority ascribed to the promotion of development and preference for areas of development among the Poles living in the country and in the city (df = 98)

Areas of development	MEAN		F	p
	COUNTRY	CITY		
physical development	19.51	<u>22.40</u>	7.904	.006
intellectual development	<u>24.71</u>	21.76	6.963	.000
artistic development	18.20	<u>21.46</u>	13.038	.000
social development	18.24	<u>20.30</u>	4.721	.032
spiritual development	21.37	<u>24.56</u>	6.274	.014
NON-DEVELOPMENTAL	<u>20.63</u>	17.38	9.971	.002
PARENTS' TIME OFF	<u>17.61</u>	12.78	19.116	.000

As can be seen in Table 1, there is a clear difference between the attitudes towards promotion of development between families living in the country, with parents having secondary education or lower, and those living in the city with parents having a higher education. Urban families react positively to toys advertised as conducive to developing children's competences in various areas, as demonstrated by a markedly higher preference for four out of five categories of justifications referring to the stimulation of physical, artistic, social, and spiritual development, with a significantly lower preference for justifications not concerned with development. Parents in this group are not persuaded by the "time off" or "fun for the child" arguments for buying a toy.

By contrast, parents living in the country would rather buy a toy simply to please the child or give it something to do. The one exception is their interest in toys promoting the child's intellectual development (learning aides, puzzles, teaching games). Surprising as this result may seem, it is consistent with the findings obtained in other studies (Baraniak, 1997; Żuk, 1999). In the former study (Baraniak, 1997), although the diagnostic tools were different, the level of education did not yield significant differences between mothers in terms of practices aimed at intellectual stimulation of their 6-year old children. The factor that explained the differences turned out to be more general expectations with respect to parent-child relationship, i.e. the presence or absence of parenting problems. In the study of Żuk (1999) on the patterns of interactions in school-related situations among 9-year old children, parents with secondary education or lower, compared to parents with higher education, were more willing to organise their children's activities with intellectual development in mind. Moreover, these parents reported more interest in their children's school results, helping their children with homework, etc. We can assume that this group of parents perceives intellectual development as a factor contribut-

ing to educational success. And that is something that parents with a higher education are not too worried about, treating good school results as something desirable, but also taking them for granted. Probably, by spontaneously learning their parents' everyday thought patterns, children of parents with better cognitive and meta-cognitive skills demonstrate a higher level of intellectual development (as evidenced by numerous studies, cf. e.g. Firkowska-Mankiewicz, 1993). This is why better-educated parents do not make additional, conscious efforts to stimulate their children's cognitive development.

The preferences of parents from the German minority, those living in the country and having secondary education, compared with the group of rural Poles, are similar, with some exceptions, to the urban group (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of indices of priority ascribed to the promotion of development and preference for areas of development among the Poles and the German minority (living in the country)

Areas of development	MEAN		F	p
	POLES	GERMANS		
physical development	19,51	<u>24,22</u>	27,328	.000
intellectual development	<u>24,71</u>	21,55	8,287	.005
artistic development	18,20	<u>20,27</u>	5,272	.024
social development	18,24	<u>20,18</u>	4,883	.029
spiritual development	21.36 TOWN <u>24.39</u>	20.51	TOWN 14.582	TOWN .000
NON-DEVELOPMENTAL	<u>20,63</u>	17,69	8,856	.004
PARENTS' TIME OFF	<u>17,61</u>	15,69	2,787	.098

Germans would also rather buy their child a "developmental" toy than just please the child or secure some time off for themselves. In the second of the two categories of justifications, however, the results of Germans rate between those obtained by rural and urban Poles. The difference with respect to the Polish rural group suggests lower significance (trend), but it is more significant when compared with the urban group (significant: $F=7,823$; $p=.006$). Nevertheless, the mean values of the majority of categories focusing on promoting development, with the exception of cognitive development, are higher (the difference is significant).

Among the "developmental" categories, the care for physical fitness comes to the fore (as predicted by the study hypothesis). The Germans not only value this category more than the Poles living in the country, but also more than the Poles living in the city ($F=3.746$; $p=.056$). By contrast, the results in the "development of cognitive skills" category did not confirm our hypothesis. This category is valued much

higher by Poles living in the country, while Germans assign to it a similar importance as Poles living in the city. Another interesting difference, which emerged due to the inclusion of urban Poles in the study, was found with respect to interest in spiritual development. Both rural groups (Germans and Poles) are similar in this respect, while being different from the urban group, which tends to highly prioritize this area of development. It should be noted though that both the method used and the name given to this category may be misleading. Justifications appealing to the promotion of spiritual development referred to books (it was difficult to find other toys “suitable” for the task). It is possible that the individuals with higher education were reacting more positively to the form that the spiritual development was to take, they knew the recommended books, and paid more attention to their children’s reading in general. On the other hand – perhaps it was not the case. Perhaps they indeed found the spiritual wisdom contained in valuable literature that important? The comparison of preferences for spiritual and intellectual development seems to suggest that better educated people tend to appreciate not only *logos*, but, even more so, *mythos* (cf. Zagórska, 2005).

There is a striking similarity in the comparisons between Poles and Germans, and those between Polish Catholics and Jehova’s Witnesses (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of indices of priority ascribed to the promotion of development and preference for areas of development among Polish Catholics (living in the country) and Jehova’s Witnesses

Areas of development	MEAN		F	p
	CATHOLICS	JEHOVA’S WITNESSES		
physical development	19,51	<u>23,50</u>	17,896	.000
intellectual development	<u>24,71</u>	20,70	11,800	.001
artistic development	18,20	<u>20,18</u>	4,904	.029
social development	18,24	<u>21,25</u>	13,043	.001
spiritual development	21,36 TOWN <u>24,39</u>	19,83	TOWN 14,582	TOWN .000
NON-DEVELOPMENTAL	<u>20,63</u>	17,25	11,366	.001
PARENTS’ TIME OFF	17,61 TOWN 12,90	<u>16,93</u>	TOWN 14,323	TOWN .000

Once again, parents were more willing to purchase toys stimulating their children’s development and less enthusiastic about those that are only a source of “fun”. The same was not the case with toys meant to give parents “time off”. They were accepted to the same degree as by Catholics living in the country, and much more so than by city residents. Perhaps the reason for that finding is the overall “strictness” of childrearing in the families of Jehova’s Witnesses, reflected in the

tendency not to “spoil” children, to motivate their development, but also to make time for one’s own affairs, which are more important.

The most important areas of development according to these parents are physical fitness, social skills, and artistic talent. Intellectual development is not among their priorities. Contrary to our expectations, neither is spiritual development. In this respect, similarly to the comparison with the German group, Jehova’s Witnesses do not differ from Catholics with primary education, however, they do differ significantly from Catholics with higher education (living in the city). This result can be explained in the same way that was used to compare Poles and Germans. Another, more convincing explanation, would be that it is the result of the extreme restrictiveness and attention to the “purity” of faith by Jehova’s Witnesses. In these families, children are forbidden from any exposure to the majority’s Catholic tradition. This applies both to family traditions (Christmas is not celebrated), and socialisation/education. Children cannot participate in the December 6 gift shower at school, their friend’s patron saint’s day parties, etc. The group’s publications (see: Garczewska, 2002) recommend strict monitoring of books read by children, limiting their access to mass media, etc.

4. CONCLUSION

As the comparisons presented here clearly demonstrate, socio-demographic factors that constitute our niches in social sub-systems greatly affect the semantic content of family ethos. The most powerful differentiating factor in that respect is the level of education and place of residence. In towns, parents emphasize the importance of development in various areas as a value in itself. Not so in the country. Their care for the child is manifested by their willingness to please them or to make schoolwork and learning easier and more appealing.

Based on the results obtained by Pallacios and Oliva (1999), we can conclude that the differentiation of social mentality depending on the place of residence is typical for some, but not all European countries. In these countries’ cities, people entertain views “similar to the views of modern developmental psychology”. At their core is the belief that a human being can be changed to some degree through upbringing and is not completely predetermined by his biological makeup. This is the manifestation of “faith in development”, which can be accelerated and given a direction. Unlike in Portugal and Spain, in Austria and Germany both in the country and in the city, parents’ views “approximate those of modern psychology”, i.e. (in the opinion of psychologists) they are closer to the truth. Why is that?

Researchers point to the better financial situation of rural population in wealthier countries. However, it is difficult to believe that the level of income affects our mindset in such a direct manner. Rather, it could be a sort of “inwardness” of a small southern village community (lack of mobility, the atmosphere of waiting, being content with what you already have so typical for the Iberian culture and foreign to German-speaking countries). In a large city (Lisbon, Madrid), the community is much more open-minded. This open-mindedness is gravitating towards uniform ideas of the European mainstream while abandoning ethnic traditions, an interpretation further supported by another mechanism described by the previously quoted authors. In Spain and Portugal, the views of teachers – both those born in the city, and in the country, are “modern” in many ways. Liberal arts education, besides

knowledge, brings about a certain attitude towards the traditions acquired at one's home and in the local community. Rural teachers, even if they had originally been "permeated" by the traditional views of their local community, tend to change their opinions through exposure to an academic setting. Trusting in the authority of science, looking for answers to a consciously formed question about model personality, they have become "modernised", and their views "close to those of modern-day developmental psychology".

If the study quoted here (Pallacios, Oliva, *op. cit.*) was extended to include Poland, it would probably turn out that in all countries the views of urban residents are the same, while the ethnic mentality is still present in rural areas. This is apparently confirmed by the results obtained in the Polish study for the German minority group. Despite this community's isolation, poor education, and the place of residence (village), Germans, similarly to urban Poles, emphasized their care for the development of their children. Their ideas were more "modern", and less "traditional", similar to the ethnic population of Austria and Germany. It should be emphasised, however, that the ethnic minority in Masuria has closer ties with the culture and community of its country of origin than with the neighbouring Polish community (family ties, agrotourism aimed mostly at visitors from Germany, cultivating the language and history, celebrating holidays, sense of national identity). And indeed, German minority in Poland resembles both the rural and urban population of German-speaking countries. Its views reflect its ethnic tradition. Due to the importance of this culture in the European unification, they are also an important element of the dominant trend in the mentality of opinion-making circles.

The studies conducted in Australia (Rosenthal, Bernholt, 1988) and in the United States (Feldman, Quatman, 1988; Feldman, Wood, 1994) also demonstrate the significance of ethnicity. The everyday life and methods of raising children (born in Melbourne) in Australia, in families of the Anglo-Australian and Greek origin are different. These differences reflect the diverse mentalities of their countries of origin. The same is true of the multinational and diversity-friendly American society. Children of Latin-American, Irish, Jewish, and Asian origin are raised differently, in accordance with each tradition. And here again, differences between minorities reflect ethnic differences between the minorities' countries of origin. Such "persistence of tradition" with respect to model personality transferred to children during their upbringing proves that the intergenerational transmission of family ethos is exceptionally powerful.

The interpretation of results obtained in the case of Jehova's Witnesses is somewhat problematic. Perhaps the reason for those difficulties is the blurry place of residence of the subjects from this group (the majority of whom come neither from a large city, nor from the country). It is unlikely, however, to be the decisive factor. Jehova's Witnesses are a constantly indoctrinated community. Their identity is based on the typically sectarian sense of belonging to a small, uniform group, and the separateness from the "background", i.e. the society within which this group functions. This makes them susceptible to the influences of spiritual leaders. In training, as well as through books and pamphlets, the members of this organisation receive instructions on how to conduct their activities (social engineering, rhetoric basics), as well as their personal and family life, including how to raise children. The effectiveness of those methods was demonstrated in the studies with the

participation of Jehova's Witnesses (not described here, cf. Garczewska, 2002). A powerful, unambiguous indoctrination based on the sense of group identity seems capable of "breaking" ethnic tradition, which, after all, also taps into self-identity mechanisms.

The result of the present study is a more determined dedication to the task of looking for psychosocial factors affecting individual development in the cultural context encompassing the social micro-system of a family.

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