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Wifely Subjection--Mental Health Issues in JW Women

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Wifely Subjection: Mental Health Issues

in Jehovah's Witness Women

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Abstract

The Watchtower Society, commonly referred to as Jehovah's Witnesses, exerts a great deal of control over the everyday life of its members. Women, in particular, suffer from psychological stresses in this high-control environment, as it is also a culture where patriarchal attitudes limit women's personal power and predominate in their relationships with men. A group of women responded to a questionnaire about their experiences during membership in the Watchtower Society and after leaving. The results indicate that while in the Watchtower Society, women experience a higher degree of mental health problems than they do after they leave the group. They also report experiencing more egalitarian attitudes in their relationships with men after exiting the group.

Little research has been done focusing on the experience of women in "high-control" or cultic groups, despite the fact that women make up a large proportion of the membership of such groups. The type of group referred to here as high-control is defined by the degree of control and restriction the group exercises over the everyday life of its membership. Such a group can be focused on religion, politics, militarism, psychotherapy, meditation, commercialism, or simply a "special" leader (Tobias & Lulich, 1994). A high-control group differs from other groups in that individual behavior is excessively limited by rules and regulations, access to information is restricted or managed (especially information critical of the group), pressure is high to conform in thought and behavior to group norms, and members must put the group's interests before their own. The leadership in this type of group is absolute and considered infallible; outsiders are generally viewed as dangerous or evil; and members leaving the group are generally punished or shunned. While all members of such groups pay a psychological price (as well as reap certain psychological dividends, such as a sense of belonging and purpose), women often face particular difficulties in groups that are patriarchally based.

This article explores the relationship between women and the high-control social climate of the Watchtower Society (WTS), commonly referred to as Jehovah's Witnesses. The article reviews literature bearing on the Watchtower Society's control practices and patriarchal organizational structure, analyzes psychological implications of WTS's social climate, and reports on the results of a survey of 20 female former members of the Watchtower Society. The survey explored three areas: (1) the degree of patriarchal versus egalitarian attitudes subjects felt existed while they were members of WTS compared to what they experienced after having left the group, (2) subjects' perceived psychological distress while in the group and after exiting, and (3) subjects' perceptions of the degree to which the group controlled everyday life and isolated members from outsiders. The latter area included a comparison group of women from other religious backgrounds.

The Watchtower Society as a High-Control Group

The Watchtower Society was founded in the late 1800s by Charles Taze Russell, a charismatic Adventist preacher who predicted that Armageddon would usher in God's kingdom in 1914. Since that time the group has predicted the end of the world numerous times (Franz, 1991), and has made its primary focus to convert as many people as it can before this end-time occurrence. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that only they will survive when God's great cataclysm arrives and that they will have the privilege of living on a perfect earth throughout eternity. Despite numerous failed prophecies as to the date of Armageddon, Jehovah's Witnesses continues to be a large and successful religious group, numbering more than five million members in 233 countries in 1996 (Watchtower Society, 1997, p. 40).

Women in WTS occupy a position of decreased personal power relative to men in the group. Women are commonly exhorted to "remain in submission" to their husbands, and are banned from instructing baptized male members about spiritual matters and from addressing the congregation from the pulpit. A woman is regarded as a "weaker vessel" who should manage her household "under her husband's approval and direction," owing to her "duty of submission to her husband" (Watchtower Society, 1971, p. 1665). The seminal WTS text just cited goes on to define a wife's role as "caring for the family--prepare nutritious meals, keep the home clean and neat and share in instructing their children--subjecting themselves to their own husbands" (p. 242).

In addition to a relative lack of power compared to their male compatriots in the congregation and in relationship with their husbands in the home, women as well as men must cope with a community gestalt that discourages "independent thinking" ("Fight Against," 1983), mistrusts higher education, controls access to information critical of the group, restricts members from expressing doubts, discourages diversity, and severely punishes nonconformists.

Not all groups exert this level of control on their members. In many groups, both religious and otherwise, guidelines for living and doctrinal wisdom are provided, yet individuals may retain a great deal of control over their lives on many levels. In a high-control group, the individual relinquishes her control to the group's zeitgeist. Individuals are seen as incapable of directing their own lives and are in constant need of direction and structure from those who are more capable and wise or who are more in touch with "God's will."

In speaking about the structure of fundamentalist families in general, which some might consider to be a form of high-control group, one author relates her experience:

The primary goal of relationships in a rigidly religious family centers around control, because it is believed that people cannot be trusted. Obedience is stressed as a primary value. Using biblical support, fundamentalist families are usually patriarchal. Women are subject to their husbands. I was told that there had to be a hierarchy, otherwise how would decisions be made? The implication was that without such a control system there would be conflict and chaos. (Winell, 1993, p. 119)

The first author of this article defines a high-control group by the following characteristics:

1. Members experience negative consequences for nonconformist behavior or attitudes (such as questioning doctrine or disagreeing with the party line).
2. Information is controlled, especially if critical of the group.
3. Leadership is absolute and not bound by checks and balances.
4. Individual behavior is excessively limited by rules and regulations (legalism).
5. Outsiders are generally viewed as dangerous or evil, and associations with outsiders are primarily in order to convert them.
6. Members are required to give up their own interests or make sacrifices in favor of group activities.
7. Members leaving the group are punished or shunned.

According to this definition, WTS qualifies as a high-control group on a number of levels. Members' lives are bound by explicit and implicit rules governing their behavior in public as well as in private. Rules range from the insignificant, such as dress code, to the life threatening, such as the prohibition on blood transfusions. Association with outsiders ("worldly people") is discouraged, except to conduct necessary business or try to convert them. Throughout its history, WTS has encouraged its members to dedicate themselves to preaching work over other activities, "as the end is very near." For this reason, preaching work is paramount in a member's life, often to the exclusion of higher education, professional careers, and pursuit of personal interests, at times, even marriage and parenthood.

Members experience negative consequences for questioning doctrine or expressing doubts and can be severely punished if they continue to have questions after being "corrected" by the Elders. Access to information that could be construed as critical of the group is severely restricted, and members are told to "loath" ex-members who publish and speak out about why they left ("Search Through Me," 1993). In addition, members who leave are almost always subject to "disfellowshipping" or are "disassociated" (supposedly a less harsh judgment, but with essentially the same results), which involves a ban being

placed on the disfellowshipped person--that requires members to shun and avoid contact with that person for the rest of his or her life, or until the ex-member submits to a process of "reinstatement."

Legalism in Daily Life

For Jehovah's Witnesses, life is constricted by innumerable spoken and unspoken rules and regulations, that is, the locus of control for an individual's life lies almost entirely with the organization. Members are not permitted or are highly discouraged from a number of activities, including celebrating birthdays or holidays, attending other churches, working for the government, smoking cigarettes, listening to many kinds of modern music, joining the army, wearing beards, dating non-Witnesses, joining 4-H, and voting, to name just a few. Some of these "sins" result in censure or "marking" and loss of status within the group; others can lead to the cruel shunning treatment of disfellowshipping. Recently, for example, an elderly woman was disfellowshipped because she began smoking cigarettes. Instead of being helped by the congregation with this issue, she was cut off from the community and left on her own, depressed and suicidal at the age of 68 because of her "sin" (personal communication, 1992). Franz (1991), a former member of the WTS governing body (now disfellowshipped himself), cites an instance of a member who made a living installing burglar and fire alarm systems and who was disfellowshipped for providing monitoring services for a system he had installed in a local church (pp. 351B352). Doing work for a church is seen as "supporting the work of the devil" who, in the eyes of WTS, is at the head of all other religions. Franz also discusses the case of a 91-year-old man who, after 56 years of active membership, was disfellowshipped for talking about the Bible to a disfellowshipped friend (pp. 353B356). Since 1975, it is estimated that more than 40% of those who were involved with WTS have left or were forced out, and that between 1975 and 1985 alone, more than 880,000 people exited the group (Bergman, 1992, p. 308). This makes it entirely possible that there are as many or more former Jehovah's Witnesses in the world as there are current members.

The Watchtower Society puts forth innumerable "suggestions" as to what members should wear, whom they should date and marry, what medical procedures they may not have, how they should wear their hair, what kinds of jobs they should perform, how many hours a month they should preach, how many meetings they must attend, what kind of people they should spend their time with, how much and what kind of education is acceptable, what material to read and not to read, and so on. Many of these edicts are put in the form of suggestion, yet are actually disguised rules. For an example of how this is accomplished, note how Awake! magazine (one of WTS's two primary publications, along with The Watchtower magazine) basically bans the computer game Doom in the following statements: "Many computer games are thinly disguised violence, bloody massacres, or even blatant pornography". Is this type of game appropriate for peace-loving Christians?. Parents, have you checked the home computer games your children use lately? Need we say more?" (Als This the Game," 1995, p. 25).

Some statements can be very influential without actually prohibiting an activity, such as "The latest movie, video or disc may look appealing". How might it affect you to expose yourself to such entertainment?" ("Young People Ask: How Can I Get," 1994, p. 17). A well-trained Jehovah's Witness knows the answer without having to ponder the question further.

Another example of how WTS sets rules for the membership is found in an Awake! article in which "heavy metal" music is defined as a satanically-inspired activity: "Heavy metal is to heavy drug use as lotteries are to compulsive gamblers--a youngster becomes easy prey to Satan's influence when sanity is flushed from his brain and thoughts of perversion and violence take its place" ("Satanism's Handmaidens," 1994, p. 8). This article goes on to link heavy metal music to murder, gang rape, mayhem, and drug use. Another article reminds members that "music is one of the means Satan uses to mislead young people" and intimates that the devil "is trying to poison your outlook and attitude" with modern music ("Alternative Rock," 1996, pp. 22, 23).

Another example of "rules by suggestion" is found in The Watchtower's condemnation of the celebration of birthdays, explaining that "the only two birthdays the Bible does mention were for rulers who were enemies of God...[and] included an execution" ("Birthday Celebrations," 1994, p. 25). As former Jehovah's Witness Randall Watters (1994) states:

These guidelines are never phrased in terms of rules, but rather in terminology such as "would it be wise to wear a beard..." or some other phrase that pretends to show the "choice" one has in a moral matter, whereas in reality the phrase indicates a new unspoken rule for Witnesses to follow. Fear of punishment by God and/or the organization is used to enforce these unspoken rules. (p. 1)

While marriage is not forbidden, remaining single is encouraged because single people can devote more time to preaching, the staple activity of the Jehovah's Witness. The Watchtower states this reason for preferring singleness to marriage:

Single Christians can focus on Jehovah's service with greater concentration. Compared with those who are married, single Christians are in a better position to be in "constant attendance upon the Lord" without distraction. ("Singleness," 1995, p. 29)

You may be in a better position than you would be if you were married and responsible to provide for children. The difficulties you face now are temporary; they will be done away with in God's new system. (p. 30)

In this way a strong influence is exerted on members to forfeit fulfillment in their present lives in order to serve Jehovah and therefore earn their way into "God's new system" and paradise.

Relationships with Outsiders Frowned Upon

WTS is generally suspicious of outsiders, referring to them as "worldly people." Jehovah's Witnesses tend to avoid associating with nonmembers except as necessity demands, or to try to convert them. A popular and common WTS saying is "Bad associations spoil useful habits." Witness children are warned not to develop friendships with "worldly" children and are not allowed to participate in many clubs, activities, or celebrations (birthday and holiday) that would bring them into contact with non-Witnesses. Adults are encouraged to keep their necessary relationships with outsiders on superficial levels, yet are expected to always keep an eye out for an opportunity to "bear witness" to try to convert outsiders.

The freedom to choose one's mate is also restricted. Awake! magazine is very clear about who is not to be chosen: "It would displease God for one of his servants to get romantically involved with someone who has not dedicated his or her life to Jehovah" ("Young People Ask: What If," 1994, p. 19). In a discussion about romances with unbelievers, WTS states that "such a relationship is not only displeasing to God but also a serious threat to one's happiness and well-being" ("Young People Ask: How Can I Stop," 1994, p. 17). One former member wrote in her survey response that she resented "the restrictions on friends and dating" that she experienced during her membership. Another said, "Having children was strongly discouraged as Armageddon was coming. Because my husband was not--a Witness, I was doubly looked down upon for having children." This woman also poignantly stated her fears "that because my husband wasn't a Witness, God was going to kill him, that I would fail and God would kill my children."

Professionalism Discouraged in Favor of Group Activities

An example of how the group discourages professional careers is found in the following excerpt from The Watchtower:

Peter 'realized that it would not be wrong for him to study with a view to becoming a neurosurgeon. But what was most important to him? It was his activity in the Christian ministry, considering the urgency of this work'. Peter decided to specialize in radiology and to do ultrasound scans. Some might consider this a less prestigious position, but it would allow him more time to devote to spiritual pursuits. ("Seize This Unique," 1996, p. 22)

Many times former members have expressed their anger and disappointment over the fact that they gave up career opportunities while in WTS. "I feel like those years are wasted, now I have to start all over with a career and I feel like it's too late," one former member stated. One woman wrote that she had difficulty working while a Witness because she was "afraid [my] job would take me away from God." The Watchtower discourages career advancement by providing examples such as the following:

[He] continued to follow the popular course--striving to get rich and get ahead [which] led to his going out on drinking sprees [which] soon led to a stroke. [Later he] put on the Christian personality and adjust[ed] his view of material possessions. As a result his values changed, and his health improved. ("Principle or Popularity," 1993, p. 28)

One former Witness woman wrote that "females weren't allowed to have responsibility." Women do work outside the home, but as a married member of a group for ex-Jehovah's Witnesses stated in a counseling session, "Getting a job was something I had to do out of necessity; when we caught up financially, I felt pressured to quit my job so I could spend more time in service (preaching). People considered it strange that I would actually want to continue to work, when my husband could support us both." Another survey respondent wrote that she "was encouraged to not work while a single parent--[but to] pioneer [preach full-time] instead." Because WTS women are not as active in the workforce as are the men, women tend to perform the lion's share of door-to-door preaching activities. A married woman who chooses to work when her husband can support her financially is often seen as taking time away from God's work and perhaps even lacking in faith.

Higher education has traditionally been discouraged for Jehovah's Witnesses. Statements such as that found in the Awake! are typical: "So by guiding their children away from so-called 'higher' education of today, these parents spare their children exposure to an increasingly demoralizing atmosphere, and at the same time prepare them for life in a new system as well" ("Second Thoughts," 1967, p. 5). Another article warns students that

Many schools now have student counselors who encourage one to pursue higher education after high school, to pursue a career with a future in this system of things. Do not let them "brainwash" you with the Devil's propaganda to get ahead, to make something of yourself in this world. Make pioneer service, the full-time ministry your goal. ("What Influences," 1969, p. 169)

Members who defy these instructions are not necessarily expelled from the congregation, but typically lose status among their peers and are seen as being "weak in the faith." Until recently, most of the membership did not pursue higher education, and some members dropped out of high school to pursue preaching work. In recent years WTS has stopped its wholesale discouragement of higher education and now leaves the decision to the discretion of the individual. This, of course, does nothing to comfort older Witnesses who sacrificed their chances for education because of organizational instructions such as those cited above. Even now, WTS reminds students that "your goal in pursuing an education should not be to equip yourself for some secular career. Rather, it should be to learn skills that will prove useful to you in your career as a minister of God" ("Young People Ask: What Can," 1993, p. 14).

Sacrifice of Personal Health Required

Besides the personal sacrifices involving career advancement, material success, time spent preaching, and so on, members are commanded to make another sacrifice. They are required to refuse blood transfusions for themselves and their children, regardless of the consequences, because Witnesses are taught that God prohibits the intake of blood. At one time this prohibition extended to vaccinations (Reed, 1993) and organ transplants (WTS referred to transplants as "cannibalism") ("Questions from Readers," 1967). WTS has since reversed its policy on these issues, although it is unknown how many deaths and disabilities resulted during the time period these policies were in effect.

The prohibition on blood transfusions, however, even if not having one would lead to certain death, remains in effect. It is estimated that as many as 1,150 deaths a year worldwide could be attributed to WTS's stance on blood transfusions (Reed, 1993), a figure that over time quickly outweighs even the Jonestown tragedy, where more than 900 followers of Jim Jones died. In fact, WTS regularly publishes articles that glorify the deaths of children who died refusing transfusions (see, for example, "Youths Who Have," 1994, and "Wyndham's Faith," 1992).

Any WTS member who has a transfusion or allows their child to have one is punished by disfellowshipping. Reed (1993) cites one instance where a member was disfellowshipped while still in the hospital following a blood transfusion. He died several days later, and his friends and relatives were forbidden to attend his funeral on pain of being disfellowshipped themselves (pp. 103B104). Clearly, using the threat of disfellowshipping to keep members from turning to life-saving medical procedures constitutes a very high degree of control exercised by WTS over a very personal issue in the lives of its members (whether to live or die if in need of a blood transfusion).

Control of Information

One defining characteristic of a high-control group is the prevention of access to information that can be interpreted as critical of the group in any way. Jehovah's Witnesses receive very clear instructions about exposing themselves to any kind of information, whether through written materials or in discussion, that may reveal problems or inconsistencies in WTS. WTS has a tendency to demonize and dehumanize its critics, as seen in this example:

Yes, apostates publish literature that resorts to distortions, half-truths, and outright falsehood. They even picket Witness conventions, trying to trap the unwary. Hence it would be a dangerous thing to allow our curiosity to move us to feed on such writings or to listen to their abusive speech!... What would you expect from the table of demons? ("At Which Table," 1994, p. 12)

An apostate, by WTS definition, is one who "rebels against God and rejects his truth," that is, a person who disagrees with WTS's version of "truth" (Watchtower Society, 1971, p. 91). Another article states that

Some apostates...reject teachings or requirements set out in his word. Others claim to believe the Bible, but they reject Jehovah's organization.... True Christians share Jehovah's feelings toward such apostates; they are not curious about apostate ideas. On the contrary, they feel a loathing toward those who have made themselves God's enemies, but they leave it to Jehovah to execute vengeance. ("Search Through Me," 1993, p. 19)

Members who choose to leave because of disagreement over doctrine, or who are forced out of the organization because of nonconformist behavior, are subject to disfellowshipping--a form of shunning that does not allow any current member to associate with the disfellowshipped person. The Watchtower states:

Baptized servants of Jehovah who deliberately follow a wicked course and refuse to change must be viewed as unrepentant and thus unfit for Christian fellowship.... They must be expelled....it removes from their midst one who could exercise a bad influence on them. It also protects the purity of the congregation. ("Disfellowshipping," 1995, p. 25)

If the disfellowshipped person disagrees publicly in any way with WTS teachings, he or she automatically becomes an "apostate." Since members are not allowed to associate with disfellowshipped members, information potentially critical of WTS is handily kept out of members' reach by not allowing them to discourse with former members about their reasons for leaving the organization.

Shunning as a Form of Control

Disfellowshipping in WTS does not simply bar a person from practicing religious rites, but also serves to cut the victim off from friends and family, who are not allowed to speak with that person except, in some cases, to deal with "important family business." Members are encouraged to "loathe" the individual in question. In personal and professional contacts, the first author is familiar with a number of cases in which family members--including children, grandchildren, and parents--have completely shunned a disfellowshipped person for years; she has also experienced this herself.

Members are condemned to suffer this extreme punishment for reasons that include a wide range of behaviors from adultery and criminal activity, to such things as cigarette smoking, disagreeing with doctrinal points, celebrating birthdays or holidays, attending another church's services, and accepting a blood transfusion, to name a few. One respondent expressed a common sentiment, writing, "I was never good enough, if I said the wrong thing I would be disfellowshipped, I was forced to wear a 'mask' so none would see how I really felt."

Disfellowshipping is a serious and often psychologically devastating punishment. Members of the congregation are required

to treat the disfellowshipped as if they were dead. Lifelong friends no longer acknowledge former members when they see them on the street. Eye contact is avoided. Socializing in any form with a disfellowshipped person may lead to censure and possible disfellowshipping of the current member. The disfellowshipped person is viewed as "dead to God," with no hope of salvation and as belonging now to the camp of the devil. Those who stay in the organization do so with the threat of disfellowshipping always hanging over their head. As Franz (1991) bluntly writes, "To use the threat of organizational disfellowshippment, with all its consequences, to intimidate people into conforming to a particular policy when their conscience dictates otherwise...is a form of spiritual extortion, spiritual blackmail" (p. 387).

The Issue of Patriarchy

The Concept of Patriarchy

In a patriarchal society, men are the holders of power. Patriarchy is defined as a "male dominated social system, with descent through the male line" (Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 1992, p. 653). Patriarchy is thought to have arisen in conjunction with the concept of private property and the need to pass property on to an heir (Engels, 1972), usually male. In a traditional patriarchal society, women usually do not earn wages by working outside the home, which places them in a financially dependent position to their male partner and eliminates or decreases outside contacts and information about the world at large. In a patriarchal society, women generally do not hold positions of power or influence in the community. It is the men who sit on the village counsel, who vote, instruct, police, and guide the community. A woman's primary role is to provide care and nurturance to her husband and children. Without financial resources and with little community recognition or power, a woman in this kind of society either adapts to her role and "fits in," struggles against the order of things and becomes a "problem," or, if possible, leaves in search of a society with more egalitarian values.

Historically, women have been viewed in many societies as inferior in intellectual ability and subordinate in position to men (Bullough, 1973). In many societies over the centuries, a woman's right to choose her own destiny has been limited, her ability to pursue an avocation outside the home has been restricted, and she has not always been allowed a vote. In some countries, women are still seen outside the home only when veiled from head to foot. In many societies women have, at times, been prohibited from owning property and, in some cases, have been regarded as property, useful as objects to trade in marriage contracts for benefits, alliances, cattle, or status. Similarly, daughters have been seen as a poor second choice to sons who could carry on the family name and inherit property. As recently as the 19th century, philosophers and writers were firm in their beliefs that women were unable to reason or deliberate logically and that submissiveness was good for a woman. As Chafe states, "Since women's ideal role was to be supportive of their husbands, care for their children, and provide a haven from the troubles of the outside world, the idea that they might wish an independent life or career of their own seemed unnatural" (1977, p. 7). The common view was that a woman's "natural inclination" to nurture others and her lack of logic and intelligence precluded her from participating in public life, much less adopting a leadership role in the family or society (Bullough, 1973).

In Western society, women are now able to inherit property, run for office, and develop careers that place them in competition with men. Women, for the most part, are able to guide their own destinies. Nevertheless, unequal pay, sexual harassment, "glass ceilings," and "pink ghettos" are remnants of the patriarchal system that continue with us today. As recently as 1990, authors Johnson and Ferguson stated:

The present arrangement almost guarantees that women will suffer from a disproportional amount of depression, anxiety, submerged or ineffective anger, lack of sexual fulfillment, and other emotional disturbances...the symptoms associated with these conflicts will continue until the basic inequality between women and men is addressed and changed. (p. 37)

Women are relatively powerless in a male-dominated society. Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness, futility and suppressed rage, the major ingredients of depression, are the emotional responses of anyone in a permanently subordinate position. (p. 258)

Although the feminist movement begun in the latter half of this century is commonly acknowledged as having made great strides toward creating a more egalitarian society, patriarchal attitudes continue to pervade many aspects of our society.

Patriarchy in the Watchtower Society

Having survived into the 20th century, WTS still maintains its 19th-century attitudes toward women. Women are told to be in submission" and to maintain a state of "wifely subjection" to their husbands. They are not allowed to address the congregation directly as a man does, and may not religiously instruct a baptized male member. All of the leaders-- from the Governing Body, which runs the worldwide organization, down to Elders and Ministerial Servants of the local congregation-- are male. According to WTS:

The woman, in God's arrangement for the family was always to be in subjection to her husband and not to usurp his authority. Also, in the Christian congregation, the woman is not to teach other dedicated men nor to exercise authority over them. (Watchtower Society, 1971, p. 726)

The woman, being created out of the man, was dependent upon the man for being brought into existence. Being part of the man, "one flesh" with him, and a complement and helper to him, she was subject to him as her head...Secondarily, the

woman was to obey her husband. (p. 1664)

The Watchtower states that "a God-fearing and submissive wife who is flexible and sympathetic finds it easier to manifest godly obedience" ("Godly Obedience," 1995, p. 28). The following excerpt from *Awake!* provides an example of how WTS views differences between men and women:

Dependence comes naturally to Pam. She feels loved if Jerry finds out her views before making a decision, though she wants him to take the lead. When she has to make a decision, she likes to consult her husband to show her closeness to and reliance on him.... So in marriage she is not nearly as interested in outside activities as she is in an empathetic listener with whom she may share her feelings. (*AHusbands and Wives*, 1994, pp. 5B6)

Another WTS text states:

Today female aggressiveness and competition with men have become common. But when wives push ahead, trying to take over headship, their action is almost sure to cause trouble...She may have a correct viewpoint, and the family would benefit if her husband listened to her...[but] when the husband makes a final decision on a matter, the wife should support it if doing so will not cause her to break God's law. (Watchtower Society, 1982, p. 241)

In WTS, "if a woman prays or prophesies in the congregation, occupying a position God has assigned to the man, she should...demonstrate her submissiveness and her acknowledgment of man's headship" (Watchtower Society, 1971, p. 726). Women are never allowed to address the congregation by preaching, or "giving talks," as WTS phrases it:

Similarly, there is no provision for a woman to take the lead over qualified men in the Christian congregation.... Should Christian women chafe under that restriction? No. Most are grateful to see that aspect of Christian service cared for in a theocratic manner. They are happy to benefit from the shepherding and teaching of appointed Elders and concern themselves with the vital work of preaching and making disciples. ("Do Restrictions," 1994, p. 27)

Later, in the same article, in reference to dealing with restrictions in general, WTS provides this dubious comfort: "Things may not change until Jehovah's new world is here. Nevertheless, what is to be gained from fretting because one cannot do what others can?" (p. 28). Bergman (1992), in a discussion of WTS, states that

Much concern exists over insuring that the male openly acts as the clear Ahead" of the house. If it is felt that the wife makes too many decisions, or has too much to say in the affairs of the house, the husband may not be eligible for positions of responsibility within the congregation. (p. 246)

Clearly, women are relegated to a position of less power than their male counterparts. Women are instructed to defer to men both in their personal/marital relationships, and in the social and religious life of the congregation.

Psychological Issues

Locus of Control and Cognitive Dissonance

Psychological literature refers to an individual's source of motivation as the "locus of control." Locus of control is viewed as either internal--that is, stemming from inside the self--or as external, where control is attributed to sources outside the self, such as another person, group, or adopted philosophy. Studies have shown that people with an internal locus of control tend to fare better psychologically than those whose locus of control is external (Pearce & Martin, 1993; Thompson et al., 1993). Having an internal locus of control has been found to correlate significantly with feelings of happiness and self-esteem (Kopp & Ruzicka, 1993). People with an external locus of control tend to have difficulty accepting responsibility for their lives and tend to blame forces outside themselves for difficulties when they arise (Wang & Anderson, 1994).

Those involved in high-control groups have their reality defined by the group's ideals--that is, their locus of control is external. Winell (1993), in a discussion of fundamentalist family structure, states:

Doctrinal rules are applied and fear of punishment are used for control. By adopting such a simple formula, a family can be robbed of the enormously constructive process of consciously developing family values and mores.... As a result, children often fail to learn about personal responsibility or how to make complex choices. (p. 119)

The group dictates what is acceptable behavior, what and who is good and bad, and so on. Ambivalence, uncertainty, moral struggles, and conflicting feelings are tidily resolved by the group's dictates. For the practiced member, such feelings are repressed before even being raised to consciousness.

In high-control groups such as WTS, doubt and ambivalence are seen as "moral weakness." Should doubt arise, members are exhorted to "work harder" and "have more faith." In many cases, the group defines how one should even feel. Certain feelings and thoughts are defined as "bad," while others are seen as "good." The world is perceived in black and white. Tobias and Lalich (1994) write, "Cults create a world in which all the answers are known--and the cult supposedly has them. This type of thinking also serves a protective function, saving members from the anxiety of thinking for themselves" (p. 100). The individual in a high-control group does not have to struggle to develop her own beliefs and perceptions because they are defined, interpreted, and predicated by the group. Right and wrong are known, not discovered. In fact, The Watchtower plainly states that "Adam and Eve lost Paradise because they wanted to make their own decisions about right

and wrong" ("Shepherds and Sheep," 1994, p. 16). Friesema (1995) writes:

One of the most destructive processes within fundamentalism is, paradoxically, one of the sources of its greatest appeal: The dogmatic certainty, the good/evil, right/wrong view of the world that reduces true understanding to judgmentalism, also provides an unambiguous sense of direction and righteousness.... The promise of redemption and future salvation becomes like the alcoholic fix which mollifies fears, perplexing emotions, and unpleasant realities. (pp. 29B30)

In a high-control group, truth is presented as indisputable, solid, and reassuring fact. Questioning or deciding for oneself about right or wrong is viewed as a potentially fatal sin or as being under the influence of the devil. The danger of this "certainty of experience" occurs when a member cannot successfully dismiss doubt and ambivalence, or cannot repress unseemly emotional experiences such as envy, lust, and so forth. Cognitive dissonance is then experienced. Cognitive dissonance can be defined as a sense of unease or disharmony which occurs when feelings or reality fail to match one's beliefs or opinions (Festinger, 1957). Festinger states that

The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance... when dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance. (p. 3)

Therefore, cognitive dissonance theory predicts that once one has invested time and energy into a course of action, inconsistencies will be ignored because the advantages of continuing on course will tend to outweigh the uncertainty of changing. Festinger found that once a decision is made in a given direction, confidence that the decision is correct tends to increase, regardless of evidence to the contrary. As Friesema (1995) writes:

Either the doubt is kept hidden and an aspect of the self is split off; or there is fervent prayer and soul-searching to remove the doubt...the doubt or discontent is not seen as having validity, but as a blotch or irritant to be removed... fundamentalists do not consider perspectives that may threaten the status quo, but rather turn the dissenting voice back onto the dissenter with the injunction that he or she is "weak in the faith." The doubt then becomes self doubt, and trust in one's own perceptions is undermined. (p. 30)

A woman with an internal "locus of control" defines and interprets her experience by a set of internal judgments, comparison of prior to current experiences, and a singular set of moral values that has been refined and constructed over trial and error. The internally defined person will periodically experience cognitive dissonance and ambivalence because feelings and judgments are constantly being refined and adapted through experience. When conflict is successfully resolved for the internally defined person, personal growth and a higher level of functioning are achieved. When conflict and cognitive dissonance are not adequately resolved, the internally defined person may experience substantial psychological symptoms. He or she may then be tempted to turn to an external structuring system such as a high-control group to help quell uncertainty and provide a sense of direction.

The Dangers of Repression

For the person with an external locus of control, cognitive dissonance presents a difficult conundrum. In a high-control group, one is told what is right to feel and believe. Yet, when feelings and beliefs cannot be reconciled with the "party line," the only "safe" solution is to disavow or ignore the inconsistencies. Winell states that for the fundamentalist:

The biblical attitude toward human feelings is one of great suspicion. Feelings like anger, jealousy, and fear are condemned as of the flesh and of the devil...feelings are more likely to be punished than heard. Conflict is considered sinful instead of an opportunity for learning.... Individuals can learn self-hatred for having feelings, as well as helplessness for not knowing what to do. (1993, p. 120)

In a high-control environment, the only solution for conflict and cognitive dissonance is to repress the feelings and beliefs that do not "fit," or to abandon the external definition of self (as defined by the group's ideals) and develop an internally-based belief system. Repression as a solution does not actually eradicate the problem of conflicting feelings and thoughts, however. In the short run, repression creates a sense of superficial comfort, enabling the individual to return to the status quo to maintain membership and relationships within the group and to avoid the messy and frightening process of reexamining one's values. Repressed issues do not disappear; however, they are simply buried, like toxic waste. Buried issues invariably reappear, usually at inconvenient times (for the high-control group member, any time is inconvenient). The longer these issues remain repressed, the more toxic and potentially disruptive their reemergence. Repression usually leads to some form of anxiety, depression, or other form of emotional/mental dysfunction. At the very least, repressing conflict consumes a great deal of psychological energy, which has the tendency to become generalized--that is, one's life is not partially influenced by repression; instead, all areas of emotional and intellectual experience are affected. The woman who pushes away all feelings of dissatisfaction or pain will have a difficult time experiencing true joy and satisfaction. The woman who consistently avoids intellectual questioning will gradually lose her ability to think critically.

As repressed issues fester like a wound that has closed but never healed, dangerous psychological and behavioral symptoms can appear. These symptoms can include substance abuse, eating disorders, sexual acting out, obsessions, phobias, personality disorders, depression, and suicide. These types of symptoms, unless biologically based, are an expression of unresolved issues emerging, disguised as symptoms of mental illness. Because repressed issues are so unacceptable and

frightening, they tend to be experienced in less difficult or more bearable ways. For example, the sexually abused child may develop an eating disorder or become suicidal without consciously connecting this with her experience of sexual abuse. Her unconscious self is pressing her to resolve the emotional and psychological damage by creating symptoms, while her conscious experience may be completely disconnected from the memory of being abused. Likewise, the high-control group member who represses doubts or unacceptable feelings may develop symptoms such as phobias, depression, anxiety, or compulsions. These symptoms serve to express cognitive dissonance and conflictual feelings while enabling the member to avoid consciously confronting dangerous doubts or feelings.

If cognitive dissonance cannot be reconciled with the group's ideals, the member is placed in a position of developing psychological problems, or struggling with the possibility of abandoning an external definition of self and developing an internally-based belief system. In a group that is not high-control in nature, disagreement with the party line is not so problematic. For example, within the Republican Party, some members are pro-choice even though the general consensus of the group is anti-abortion; yet, these members do not risk expulsion from the group. They may remain Republicans. In the Catholic Church, members may support the ordination of women or openly disagree with the church's policy on birth control, yet continue to remain practicing Catholics in good standing. In a high-control group, such diversity is not acceptable. For a WTS member, any divergence from the norm can result in serious consequences. Those who express doubts about doctrinal issues (even in private) risk being "reported" by their peers to the local Elders. They are then "counseled" intensively to bring them back into line with the "understanding" promulgated by the leaders of the group. If they persist in expressing doubts, they risk censure and, eventually, disfellowshipping.

Therefore, the choices for someone in a high-control group such as WTS who is experiencing doubts are (1) repress forbidden doubts and desires and run the risk of developing psychological symptoms as repressed feelings emerge in disguised form; (2) act on doubts and unacceptable desires secretly and suffer shame and guilt, leading to low self-esteem, possible psychological problems, and the risk of being caught and expelled; or (3) openly express or act on doubts and desires, and risk expulsion from the group and shunning by friends and family members.

The Watchtower Society's Approach to Psychological Issues

Although its approach to psychological problems has changed over time to become somewhat more liberal, WTS still retains the attitude that conflicts are best disavowed and can be made to disappear through sheer willpower. One article presenting a simplistic solution to what to do about negative emotions suggests that "with sufficient effort and time, you can learn to bring your thoughts under greater control...do the same to your feelings" ("Negative Emotions," 1992, p. 4). Another encourages parents to teach their children the practice of "mental regulating," which "means regulating our thinking to conform to Jehovah's will" ("Parents, Find Pleasure," 1996, p. 11). Elsewhere, members are encouraged to seek God's help to root out "improper desires, affections, emotions, purposes, thoughts or motives...[or] painful, disquieting thoughts" ("Search Through Me," 1993, p. 20). Jehovah's Witnesses are not forbidden to consult mental health professionals, but are told that "worldly counselors and psychologists can never hope to approach the wisdom and understanding that Jehovah displays.... Rather than lean on the wisdom of prominent men of the world or on our own uninformed emotions, let us look to Jehovah, his Word and the Elders in the Christian congregation for advice" ("Trust in Jehovah," 1993, p. 13). Disturbingly, *Awake!* devoted an entire article to youth suicide without once mentioning consultation of a mental health professional as a treatment option ("Young People Ask: Is Suicide," 1994).

WTS somewhat grudgingly admits that members with severe mental illness might be more than they can handle through prayer and consultation with Elders, but encourages the general population of Witnesses to consult with Elders rather than professionals.

Some, suffering severely from schizophrenia, bipolar disorder...and other distressing disorders, have been able to live fairly normal lives after obtaining the right professional help, (but) in many cases the patient does not have a severe mental disorder but has difficulty coping with some situation in life. However, it is the Bible that gives the most effective help in handling the difficult problems of life...(The Bible) encourages such ones to call on the Elders for help and counsel.... The prayer of faith will make the indisposed one well. ("Questions from Readers," 1996, p. 30)

For the most part, the practice of disfellowshipping is a very effective way of controlling members' actions. The fear of such treatment keeps many silent and encourages repression of conflict. Franz (1991) writes:

Any persons among Jehovah's Witnesses who find they cannot conscientiously support fully the organization's teachings or practices live in a climate of fear, feeling they must constantly be on guard as to what they say, what they do, what they read, with whom they associate, from whom they receive letters, not feeling any sense of freedom even when among personal friends or close relatives if these are also Witnesses. (p. 383)

However, many ex-members report having secretly practiced forbidden behaviors or having worried over doubts and doctrinal discrepancies long before leaving. Bergman (1992) relates that

A common pattern is for Witnesses to be raised under very strict, rigid conditions, fully obeying the dictates of the Watchtower until the inner conflicts, resentments, aggressions, and frustrations force them to make a sudden break from the organization. What may seem simply a quick and drastic break with the Witnesses and their standards is often the result of a situation where the Witness has had emotional conflicts for years. Unable to discuss them with anyone...until some

situation, which may itself be minor, causes a "break" of some sort. He or she then acts on a set of feelings which have been building for some time. (p. 234)

Those who can repress any doubts or disagreements, and those who can keep their behavior within the bounds of WTS's rules, often do so, at great cost to personal happiness and even their mental health, as a means to stay safe and secure within the womb of the organization.

The Study

A small group of women (n'20) expatriated from WTS responded to a questionnaire comparing their experiences in the group to their postgroup experiences. Survey participants were solicited from requests in two newsletters and two support groups (one on the Internet), all specifically for former Jehovah's Witnesses. Respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire on women and high-control groups. Of the 35 sent out, 20 completed surveys (57.1%) were returned. Only former members were surveyed because of the authors' inability to access current members. (As a rule, Witnesses are unwilling to participate in research about their group conducted by outsiders.) See Table 1 (below) for demographic information. Of the respondents, 25% stated they were disfellowshipped (one for smoking, one for disagreeing with doctrine, one for premarital sex, and two not citing the reason). Because of the questionnaire's wording, more respondents may have been disfellowshipped than actually stated so. Seven left because they disagreed with doctrine or felt there was too much hypocrisy in how members were treated. Three left because they felt they had been abused or not protected from abuse (financially or sexually) by men in power in the group. Two stated they basically "drifted away," and one respondent did not say why she left.

Survey questions covered three areas: (1) the amount of control the group exerted on its members; (2) patriarchal versus egalitarian attitudes experienced while WTS members, compared to experiences after leaving the group; and (3) mental health problems experienced while in the group and after leaving. A convenience sample of 16 women from other religious backgrounds (Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Baptist, and Jewish) responded only to the Control Scale (CS) portion to serve as a comparison group. On the Patriarchal/Egalitarian Scale (P/E) and Symptoms Scale (SS), former Witnesses gave two answers to each question, indicating their current response and a retrospective response (as if they were still in WTS).

Control Scale

The first section consisted of 22 questions designed to determine the amount of control the group exercised over members. This scale was included to verify that the former Witnesses perceived WTS as a high-control group. Some of the items were the following:

- Disagreeing with group ideas could lead to expulsion from the group.
- Reading information critical of the group was strongly discouraged.
- They felt excessive peer pressure to behave and think in certain ways.
- Education was risky because of exposure to bad influences.
- Spending time with people outside of the group was discouraged unless it was to convert them.

Control Scale questions were rated on a scale of 1 to 3 (agree, somewhat agree, or disagree). A score of 22 meant complete agreement with every item, indicating a very high degree of control by the group over members' lives. A score of 66 (not agreeing with any item) would indicate a group that exercised very little control over its members.

Table 1. Demographics of Former Jehovah's Witnesses Women in the Study

Respon- dent	Current Age	Age Joined	Yrs in WTS	Yrs Since Leaving	Marital Status	Income in Thou.
1	36	Birth	15	21	Married	35B50
2	23	8	10	5	Married	20B35
3	24	7	13	4	Married	20B35
4	39	9	30	<1	Married	20B35
5	67	35	30	2	Divorced	<20
6	40	5	23	12	Married	35B50
7	47	21	22	4	Married	35B50

8	35	Birth	28	7	Divorced	<20
9	33	6	25	2	Married	20B35
10	39	20	19	<1	Divorced	<20
11	48	45	1	2	Single	<20
12	21	Birth	20	1	Single	<20
13	30	5	22	3	Married	>50
14	31	Birth	20	11	Divorced	<20
15	28	1	27	<1	Single/ Lesbian	>50
16	51	5	35	11	Divorced	<20
17	74	24	20	30	Married	20B35
18	48	22	23	3	Married	>50
19	33	Birth	31	2	Divorced	<20
20	42	18	17	7	Single	20B35
Mean	39.5	11.6	21.6	6.5		
(SD)	(13.7)	(12.8)	(7.8)	(7.5)		

Patriarchal/Egalitarian Scale

The section of the survey that dealt with Patriarchal/Egalitarian (P/E) attitudes contained items that were primarily phrased in egalitarian terms. Participants were asked to either rate the statements on a 5-point scale or indicate that the statement was not applicable. Answers were rated as follows: never (1), sometimes (2), usually (3), almost always (4), or all of the time (5). Following is a sample of some of the items:

- Men and women have similar opportunities to aspire to prestigious positions within the group/congregation.
- Men and women have equal say in how to allocate money.
- I can choose whoever I want as my husband/partner.
- I can express my spirituality as freely as men can.
- Men and women have equal input into how children are raised.
- Men and women have the same opportunities to develop a career.

A few items were expressed in patriarchal terms:

- I am comfortable having a man make decisions for me.
- Men have more power in the group/congregation.

Symptoms Scale

Participants also answered 33 questions about their relative emotional distress while in the group and their present levels of distress after having left the group. Questions addressed such symptoms as anxiety, substance abuse, domestic violence, job problems, depression, sleep problems, sexual dysfunction, low-self esteem, and compulsions, as well as whether they had difficulty expressing emotions, lacked trust in others, and felt angry, stupid, envious. Their experiences of these problems were rated as follows: not at all (0), occasionally (1), sometimes (2), quite a bit (3), or all the time (4).

Results

Statistical tests were utilized to compare the differences between former Witnesses' scores and the comparison group's scores on the Control Scale; between the former Witnesses' retrospective and current scores on the Patriarchal Scale; and between the former Witnesses' retrospective and current scores on the Symptoms Scale. Because none of the psychometric properties of these scales are known, Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency (reliability), was calculated when appropriate. The reliability of a scale is important because it determines the maximum validity of a scale. If a scale is not reliable, it cannot be valid.

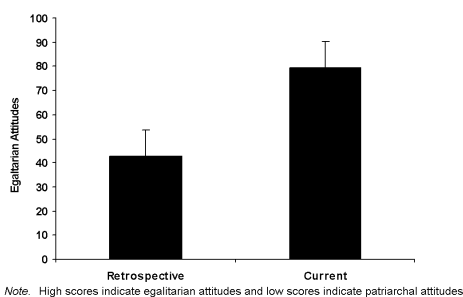
Control Scale

The 22 Control Scale items used an ordinal rating scale (agree, somewhat agree, or disagree). Because Cronbach's alpha requires interval data, it was not appropriate for this scale. A Mann-Whitney U test compared the ex-Witnesses' (n'20) answers to those of the comparison group (n'16). The former Witnesses scored significantly lower (indicating greater group control): $U'0$, $z'5.13$, $p<.001$. In fact, there was no overlap between the two groups' scores. The women from mainstream religious groups produced scores ranging from 45 through 66, with a median of 59. Women who had been WTS members produced scores ranging from 22 through 27, with a median of 23. Former Witnesses reported that WTS is a high-control group, whereas members of mainstream groups did not report such about their churches.

Patriarchal/Egalitarian Scale

Several participants gave the answer "not applicable" (NA) on some of the P/E Scale items. This happened, for example, when single women were asked about their husbands. Because a response of zero would indicate less than 1 (never) on the rating scale, all NA responses were replaced with the group mean for that item. To assess reliability, Cronbach's alpha was calculated twice, once for respondents' current scores, and once for their retrospective scores on the P/E Scale. This scale demonstrated moderate reliability for participants' retrospective scores (alpha'.74), and somewhat higher reliability for their current scores (alpha'.85). A paired samples t test was utilized to compare the former Witnesses' current scores on the P/E scale with their retrospective scores. As can be seen in Figure 1, the women's current attitudes were significantly more egalitarian and less patriarchal than were their attitudes while members of WTS: $t(19)'8.49$, $p<.001$.

Figure 1. Mean (+SD) Patriarchal/Egalitarian Scores



Symptoms Scale

The Symptoms Scale demonstrated high internal consistency for both the respondents' retrospective reports (alpha'.91) and their current reports (alpha'.93). The retrospective scores were significantly higher than the current scores: $t(19)'11.34$, $p<.001$. Next, a set of 33 paired samples t tests were run to compare specific symptoms reported currently and retrospectively. After a Holm (1979) multiple test procedure to hold the setwise probability of a Type I error at .05, all t tests significant below $p'.004$ were interpretable. Table 2 (below) gives the results of these tests. All significant tests indicated that the specific problem was worse during membership in WTS.

Discussion

The survey had several statistically significant results. The former members rated WTS as a high-control group, whereas the comparison group did not describe their mainstream churches as high-control groups. The former members reported their attitudes had become significantly more egalitarian (less patriarchal), and reported less symptoms overall after leaving the group. The respondents indicated that having left WTS, they experienced the following symptoms less frequently: worthlessness, low self-esteem, difficulty expressing emotions, feeling stupid, feeling like a failure, anxiety, anhedonia, uncertainty of preferences, difficulty concentrating, depression, difficulty with friendships, uncertainty, lack of trust, hopelessness, lack of self-trust, self-blame, phobias, envy, sleep problems, domestic violence, and isolation.

These results have some limitations, however. The scales used in the survey were not validated; therefore, it is only presumed that they accurately measure the constructs they were designed to measure. There are a variety of possible reasons that these scales may not be valid, such as participants misinterpreting some of the items. Respondents were asked to recall how they would have answered in the past. On average, participants recalled how they felt 6.5 years earlier. Human memory is not always accurate; therefore, these retrospective reports may not be accurate. Finally, the purpose of the survey was apparent. Participants could have skewed their answers to support the study's hypotheses, which could have exaggerated or driven the results of the study.

Table 2. Symptom Scores--Retrospective and Current

Symptom	Retrospective	Current	t(19)	p
Worthlessness	3.35(0.99)	0.50(0.95)	10.78	<.001
Low Self-esteem	3.35(1.09)	0.80(1.01)	8.66	<.001
Difficulty Expressing Emotions	2.85(1.39)	0.45(0.76)	8.17	<.001
Felt Stupid	2.69(1.39)	0.55(0.94)	7.43	<.001
Feel Like a Failure	3.15(0.99)	0.90(1.45)	6.22	<.001
Anxiety	3.15(1.18)	1.20(1.40)	6.09	<.001
Anhedonia	2.60(1.19)	0.70(1.38)	6.02	<.001
Not Sure of Preferences	2.00(1.34)	0.60(0.88)	5.48	<.001
Self-blame	2.95(1.43)	0.80(1.40)	4.73	<.001
Difficulty Concentrating	2.00(1.41)	0.60(1.23)	4.63	<.001
Depression	3.05(0.94)	1.45(1.36)	4.47	<.001
Difficulty w/Friendships	2.25(1.52)	0.95(1.39)	4.21	<.001
Uncertainty	2.80(1.01)	1.40(1.50)	4.17	.001
Lack of Trust	2.70(1.42)	1.10(1.45)	4.07	.001
Hopelessness	2.30(1.39)	0.80(1.54)	3.94	.001
Lack of Self-trust	2.45(1.61)	0.80(1.15)	3.94	.001
Phobias	1.75(1.68)	0.25(.79)	3.94	.001
Envy	1.55(1.50)	0.35(1.09)	3.84	.001
Sleep Problems	2.00(1.38)	0.70(1.26)	3.58	.002
Domestic Violence	1.15(1.53)	0(0)	3.36	.003
Isolation	3.05(1.34)	1.45(1.57)	3.35	.003
Suicidal Thoughts	1.85(1.63)	0.70(1.26)	3.22	.005
Compulsions	1.05(1.32)	0.20(0.70)	3.10	.006
Physical Abuse	0.85(1.35)	0(0)	2.82	.011
Nightmares	1.30(1.34)	0.40(1.05)	2.78	.012

Sexual Dysfunction	1.50(1.61)	0.55(1.28)	2.76	.012
Job Problems	1.30(1.63)	0.40(1.10)	2.65	.016
Anger	2.15(1.31)	1.25(1.29)	2.44	.025
Strange Experiences	0.60(1.19)	0(0)	2.26	.036
Suicidal Episodes	0.65(1.31)	0(0)	2.22	.039
Alcohol Problems	0.20(0.52)	0(0)	1.71	.104
Sexual Abuse	0.40(1.10)	0(0)	1.63	.119
Substance Abuse	0.60(1.27)	0.20(0.89)	1.51	.148

Note: After a Holm multiple test procedure, all tests significant below $p < .004$ are interpretable. $n = 20$.

Control Scale

From these data, it appears that WTS exercises a great degree of control over its members compared to the other religious groups sampled. From working in clinical practice with both men and women who have exited WTS, and from personal knowledge, it is fair to state that these aspects of control apply to male as well as female WTS members. Individuals give up a great deal of personal control in order to be WTS members. Not only does a woman have to deal with a community gestalt that deemphasizes personal control and decision making for all members, but also, by virtue of being female, she has considerably less influence in the congregation and must defer to her husband as her "head," allowing him the right to make the decisions in the family regardless of whether or not she agrees with him. While work outside the home and higher education are allowed, such pursuits are devalued, especially for women. Women have significantly less autonomy and control in four major areas of their lives: the primary societal group (WTS), family relationships, job or career in the "outside" world, and in their internal psychology.

Patriarchal/Egalitarian Scale

When reflecting back on the time they were involved with WTS, women were more likely to endorse items that indicated patriarchal attitudes. In their current lives, having left the group, women were much more likely to indicate that they experience more egalitarian attitudes in their relationships with men. One respondent stated that "the inferiority of women was perhaps my first problem with the religion, one that I knew I could never swallow even as a little girl. Of course, then I thought I was condemned to a life of bitterness and discontent, but since realizing there is life beyond the group, the bitterness has faded to a memory." Another wrote that she "felt (the) organ(ization) was an incubation group for abusive elders--men who abused (sic) power." She went on to relate having been sexually abused by her father, stepfather, and the elders of the congregation. Another stated that the worst part of being in the group was "being second class as a female, discouraged against independent thinking/education, (and the) Group's obsession with rules." One woman wrote that "growing up as a female in the Jehovah's Witness organization kept me from gaining self-esteem, confidence and self-empowerment." Another woman stated simply and emphatically, "Misogyny."

Symptoms Scale

The most common fears reported by the women in the survey were fears of death and/or destruction of the world by God at Armageddon. Fear of abandonment was also cited in several cases. Several women reported fears of being harassed, stalked, or having their children kidnapped by WTS members. One woman stated that her greatest fear after leaving the group was "that I had sentenced myself and my daughter to death."

Another was afraid "that I was doomed to failure, misery, that I would never be happy or have a normal life." One reported being afraid of "demons--deathly afraid of them." This statement may be contextualized by noting how WTS inculcates its membership with a fear of demons:

Reports from around the world show that Satan and the demons are as malicious as ever. Some people they strike with illness. Others they harass by robbing them of sleep or giving them terrible dreams or abusing them sexually. Still others they have driven to insanity, murder, or suicide. ("Agents of Evil," 1994, p. 6)

Despite the tremendous stress of leaving a high-control group such as WTS, with all the losses it entails, it was interesting and encouraging to note that all of the women in the study, whether they were disfellowshipped or just "drifted away," reported a dramatic decrease in mental and emotional problems following their exit from WTS. For these women, leaving coincided with a significant increase in their overall mental health.

Conclusion

The survey results, in conjunction with this article's review of the literature, highlight several important issues. First, WTS appears to be a group that exercises a very high degree of control over its members' personal, family, and professional lives. Control is maintained both through direct prohibitions, such as the ban on voting, taking blood transfusions, and celebrating holidays and birthdays, and indirect methods, such as messages in articles that make statements such as "Would it be wise for a Christian to..." (wear a beard, listen to rap or heavy metal music, pursue a career, date a nonmember, etc.). Failure to comply with WTS's expectations about behavior and expression can be punishable by disfellowshipping, a severe and often devastating sentence. Second, WTS is a very patriarchal group. Not only is a Jehovah's Witness woman subject to this level of minute control over everyday decisions, but she is also "subject to the headship" of her husband, and cannot occupy positions of responsibility and authority in the congregation. The Witness woman is instructed to "remain in wifely subjection" to her husband. Third, the survey respondents generally reported a high degree of emotional and mental distress during the period of membership in WTS, which decreased dramatically after leaving the group.

This is not to say that men in the Watchtower Society do not suffer from the restrictiveness of their culture, as well as perhaps experiencing their patriarchal role as burdensome and isolating. Clinical experience in working with both men and women who have exited from WTS suggests that mental and emotional distress while in the group and when in early recovery from group influence is common to both sexes. This area would benefit from further study of a larger population sample to compare men's to women's experiences in WTS.

In addition, an inherent difficulty in this investigation is one that is intrinsically impossible to overcome given the nature of the group studied. The subjects who are most willing to respond are people who have left the group, either voluntarily or were forced out. Practicing Jehovah's Witnesses are likely to be highly suspicious of any research that raises the question that there may be problems within the organization, and either refuse to participate or be unwilling to honestly admit to mental or emotional difficulties.

The point must also be raised that it is possible that people who choose to stay in the group could be members who are well adjusted and happy, and those with mental and emotional problems are the ones that are forced out or choose to leave. Personal observation does not bear out this simplistic theory, however (although there certainly appear to be some members who are happy and well-adjusted). Over the years of personal and professional contact with WTS, the first author has observed many practicing Jehovah's Witness families with significant mental health issues. Other research supports this observation as well. Montague's study (1977) estimated that the mental illness rate of Jehovah's Witnesses is approximately 10 to 16 times higher than the rate for the general non-Witness population. Spencer (1975) found that Jehovah's Witnesses experienced a rate of diagnosable mental problems at a rate of 1.54 times the general population, and found diagnoses of paranoid schizophrenia to be 3.68 times more common in the membership than usually found. Bergman (1992) states that "The majority of Witnesses suffer from some type of emotional problem, although it may be minor in nature" (p. 20). He draws the conclusion that the rate of mental illness and suicide in the Witness population is above the average rate found in the general population. In addition, the fact that all of the respondents in this study reported better mental health after leaving the organization indicates that they are not just "people with problems" who would have difficulty in any setting. Their mental status as a whole improved dramatically after leaving the group.

Another important question that needs to be addressed is the question of whether emotionally unstable people are attracted to WTS in order to create a sense of stability (by adopting a rigid external locus of control) in their lives, thus raising the rate of mental illness in the group as a whole. A very interesting future study would be one that compared mental illness rates and rates of exit from the group between adult converts versus those raised in the religion. It would also be helpful to use standardized measures of psychological distress in future studies.

The primary difficulty in getting a full picture of the actual rate of mental illness in WTS is that Jehovah's Witnesses are generally unwilling to participate in research by outsiders, or "worldly people." Even though some individuals might consent to participate in impartial studies, it would be impossible to rule out the fatally contaminating effect of the pressure to present themselves as "the happiest people on earth." It is vital to WTS's identity that members present themselves as better than and happier than the rest of the world in order to bolster the rationale for potential converts to join. To illustrate this attitude, The Watchtower states that "the incomparable 'peace of God' is an unusual tranquillity enjoyed by Jehovah's dedicated servants even in the most trying situations.... We are not overwhelmed by anxiety, for we know that Jehovah makes all of his faithful people dwell in security" ("Throw All Your," 1994, p. 22). The same issue of The Watchtower goes on to point out that "their good reputation is precious to them because it honors their heavenly Father and can help to draw others to their way of life and to their God, Jehovah" ("If You Owe," 1994, p. 28).

Despite the inherent difficulties in studying a group such as this, the results of this study indicate that this group of women experienced positive social and mental health benefits upon leaving WTS. In general, the women in this survey reported an increase in equality in their relationships with the men in their lives after exiting the organization. In addition, after leaving, these women as a whole reported substantially better psychological adjustment, with dramatic decreases in symptoms of emotional and mental distress. These results are consistent with the hypothesis that women who do not feel a sense of efficacy and control in their lives are more likely to experience mental health problems. When subjects gained a sense of increased personal and relational freedom by leaving WTS's high-control and patriarchal environment, they reported experiencing significant positive mental health benefits. It remains to be seen whether these preliminary findings will be

supported by future studies using standardized assessment measures, more representative samples, and comparison groups.

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