THE FORMATION OF A WORLD VIEW AND THE RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

A Longitudinal Study among Finnish Youth

SUMMARY

This paper is based on a longitudinal study encompassing two age groups, people born in 1965 and in 1968. Data were collected from the same young people in four phases, in 1975-76, 1982-83, 1984-85, and 1991-92. The first sample consisted of 125 elementary school students and their parents, 66 of them participated all phases of the study at ages of 8 and 11, 14 and 17, 17 and 20, and 24 and 27. The data were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods and projective tests. In terms of theories of cognitive development, social learning and socialization a new theory of world view socialization was developed. The young people perceived the world in ways classifiable as religious, magic-metaphysical and scientific — quasi-scientific. Most of them had elements of all three types. The formation of the personal world view was a process which involved some permanent elements resulting from socialization in childhood. Religious attitudes at home and the significance of Sunday School in influencing of a religious world view were evident. The implications of these results are discussed.

1. The theoretical background of the research and an introduction to the problem

1.1 Theoretical background

1.1.1 The concept of ‘world view’

As a concept ‘world view’ has many meanings, sometimes being used as a synonym for such concepts as ‘Weltanschauung’, ‘meaning system’ or ‘belief system’ (Stark-Bainbridge 1985, 366). The term is most often used to refer to a systemized totality of beliefs about the world.

Beliefs about the world do not reside in the human mind in chaotic disorder, but rather they form a latent system. Nevertheless, the world view of young people cannot be considered to be a well-organized map of cognitive models.
or a static collection of values, but rather should be regarded as a process with both a historical and a social perspective.

1.1.2 The structure and classification of a world view

A world view contains observations about the individual and other people with respect to the self, as well as about time and space, the natural and the supernatural, the sacred and the profane. A world view of everyday life is socialized in childhood from one's own culture (Dundes 1971).

The philosophical basis of this study for classifying the types of world view held by young people is the theory of religious, metaphysical, and scientific world views expounded by Niiniluoto (Niiniluoto 1984, 79-83). A world view is scientific when the world is explained using scientific methods which have been tested and proven. A scientific world view is open and self-correcting in accordance with scientific developments. A religious world view is based upon religious authority (for example, the Bible) or religious experiences and feelings relating to the supernatural such as God. Each religion has its beliefs about the world, mankind and existence which are above human experience. A metaphysical (non-scientific) view of the world, interprets it using philosophical arguments rather than the empirical arguments of science. Many philosophers, for example, have believed that they were capable of explaining the existence of God and the immortality of the soul by deduction (inter alia Descartes).

The classification of world views is problematic. When formulating a typology of this sort there is a danger of simplifying the object under investigation. For example, in addition to these three types of formulation of world view, one could distinguish an ideological (political) world view which is dogmatic like its religious counterpart.

1.1.3 The formation of a world view

Only a few studies of the formation of world views have been made and they are characterized by conceptual fragmentation. A theoretical framework for studying world view needs to be developed, as do research methods suitable for studying empirically world views. Different theoretical formulations dealing with the socialization process and human development throughout a person's life-span present varied perspectives, e.g. on the linkage of parental religious patterns to adolescent and adult religiosity. The formation of young people's world view from childhood to adulthood has only been