1. Introduction

There is evidence that women are more likely to be interested and involved in religion than men, since women have more religious or mystical experiences, attend more religious services than men, and are more likely than men to read the Bible. In Nordic countries there are clear and consistent differences between women and men in the attitudes towards Church and religion. Women are more religious than men in all Nordic countries, but the differences between nations are bigger than the differences between sexes. While secularization proceeded, nationality lost some of its meaning and social differentiation increased, making gendered culture all the more important. Religious profile which is found from the statistics doesn't tell as much of recent national history as gender relations do. As a result of history the Finns and Icelanders are the most religious of the Scandinavians, the Swedes and Danes the least religious. (Sundback 1994: 129-131). In sum, although the studies (e.g. Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis 1993: 33; Sundback 1994: 130) have not found the differences always to be very large, they are consistent.

Why women should be more interested in religious and spiritual matters than men is clearly an enormous subject. These differences have been explained by psychologists of religion in terms of biological differences between men and women rather than in terms of social influence.¹

¹ Freud thought that the religious stage of human development corresponded to the stage of individual development which is characterised by ambivalent feelings towards parents and particularly by displaced infantile sexual attachment to one’s father. Attachment to the father was different between boys and girls. Projecting these feelings onto a fatherlike God, women should be more attracted to God. There has been some empirical research which can been interpreted to support Freud’s view. Women’s attitudes toward God correlate more positively with attitudes toward their fathers than do men’s (Vergote, Tamayo, Pasquali, Bonami, Pattyn and Custers, 1969. On criticisms of Freud’s view see Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis 1993: 35-36).
Collective consciousness of such things as the kinds of role expectation which are directed at women arises within a social context. This consciousness is partially transmitted from parents, friends, teachers, and preceding generations (cf. Schutz 1973: 19). In addition to learning from their own experiences, children receive information from representatives of their own sex. The situations experienced by mothers, sisters, and girlfriends for instance indirectly provide girls with information about the essence and role of being a woman (see also Parsons and Bales 1955). Girls construct their own identity as future women in accordance with this collective consciousness.

The conventional everyday construction of sex roles begins in early childhood. It can be seen in role games, for example, in which girls take care of dolls and play house. Girls model their sex roles after their mothers and the other women which they imitate in their games (cf. Bandura 1977: 22, 41-42, 174-180). A woman’s role is also learned from films, television serials, and other products of the mass communication industry. A girl’s identity as a woman gradually develops as a synthesis of all previously experienced identities (cf. Erikson 1980: 95; for more detailed information on the development of identity see studies such as Liebkind 1988; Ouvinen-Birgerstam 1984).

Various theories of cultural influence claim that the media have a great influence on their audience. They create beliefs, attitudes and values through which people interpret the world. Motion pictures, television programs, and other productions of mass entertainment can contain everyday information about the surrounding reality (Dundes 1971: 101-103; 1980).

This article forms part of my 'Values, Worldviews and Gender' study. It is based on empirical longitudinal studies of world views (Helve 1993a; 1994) and the attitudes and values of young Finns (Helve 1993b). Here I focus how gender influences young people’s attitudes, values and world views in a number of respects. Religious beliefs and values also provide an insight into society’s gender ideology and attitudes to woman or man (Hackett 1992: 61).

The purpose of this paper is to look at the gender differences in the attitudes, values and world views of young boys/men and girls/women and to build up a model for studying gender ideology behind the world views and attitudinal structures of young people. The object of my research is the gender ideology and the manner in which it is formed.