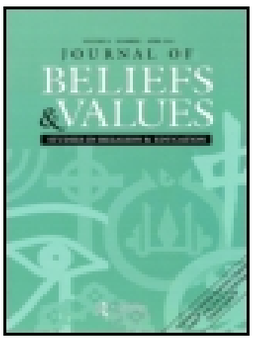

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Transmitting Religious Values in Adventist Home Education

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ABSTRACT *This article explores the process of value transmission, particularly in Adventist home education, based on a study of the religious home education experienced by young Seventh-day Adventist adults in their childhood (Kuusisto, 2000). The main aim was to find the conditions that support the successful transmission of parental values to the next generation. The method was both qualitative and quantitative, as the data were assembled with in-depth interviews (*n = *10) and supplemented with a survey (*n = *106). The most significant factors in transmitting values that stand out in the data are democratic relationship between parents and children, parental example, encouraging children to do their own thinking, and positive experiences of both religion and the social dimension of the religious community. Education that is either too severe or too permissive appears to lead to unsuccessful value transmitting.*

Introduction

Many families have had a long tradition in being members of some community such as a political party or a religious group. Such tradition may have been a part of the family's way of living for several generations and has been taken in by the younger generations with their mother's milk. Parents often hope to transmit some of the values they hold to their children, and frequently they succeed; thus most young people hold very similar values to those of their parents (Aalto, 1975, pp. 26–33). However, home education does not always induce the effects desired by the parent-educators, which often creates ruptures and regrettable tension between the generations. Forming a distinctive set of values is a significant part of becoming independent. The impact of childhood religious socialisation in this process can also be argued; in fact, Arnett and Jensen (2002, p. 461) even conclude that there is no overall correlation between childhood religious socialisation and the current beliefs of emerging adults in America.

In this article, the process of value transmission, particularly in Adventist home education, is explored from the interdisciplinary viewpoints of education, social psychology and religious psychology. The article is based on a study of the religious home education experienced by young Seventh-day Adventist adults in their child-

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hood (Kuusisto, 2000). The main aim of the study was to find the conditions that support the successful transmission of parental values to the next generation. Thus, rather than focusing on those who have *not* upheld the value system taught by parents, the data were actually gathered from young adults who *have chosen* to uphold some of the beliefs taught in their childhood home. It will be argued that the influence of parenting style and the emotional climate of the childhood home are decisive in value transmission. I will first survey previous research concerning value transmission and religious home education, and then explain my research framework, main results, and the conclusions based on them.

Previous research identifies several factors that influence the transmission of religious values in the home. First, emotional attachment relationships between parents and children (see e.g. Ainsworth, 1964) have implications for the process of transmitting Christian worldviews between generations. A secure emotional attachment pattern seems to promote parental values among the second generation while, in contrast, an insecurely attached second generation seems to value religion when their parents do not consider it important (Yli-Luoma, 1996, pp. 125–129). Secondly, religious parenting styles and the use of parental authority influence value transmission. Democratic parenting style appears to be most effective in transmitting values, whereas permissive and authoritative parenting styles seem to lead to unsuccessful value transmission: a too liberal parental style lacks limits and may give children the feeling that they can control their parents and other people while, conversely, overly strict limits make it impossible for children to make choices (Keltikangas-Järvinen, 1999, p. 66; Kinnunen, 1995; Sundén, 1985). Thirdly, the relationship between a family and the religious denomination, with its rules and expectations, affects value transmission; research on American Seventh-day Adventists suggests that value transmission is influenced by the previous number of generations of believers. The research indicates that, with the model of their parent's enthusiasm, the children of converts (i.e. the 'second generation') are strongly socialised into the denomination; however, if their children (i.e. the 'third-generation') are no longer exposed to that influence, they tend to distance themselves from the religious community in question (Bull & Lockhart, 1989 v. Kohlberg *et al.*, 1977, p. 17).

In many countries there is an ongoing debate on the justification of teaching religious education in public schools and kindergartens (see e.g. Blain & Revell, 2002, p. 179), and the rationalisation of religious home education could be questioned as well. Whether parental beliefs are closer to fundamental or evangelical perspectives obviously makes a significant difference in educational practices (Badley, 2002, pp. 135, 139). After all, the borderline between strict religious education and indoctrination is ambiguous and raises the general question of the necessity of value education: is some explicit religious education crucial in providing a child with the necessary foundations for life, or should every bit of religious education be condemned as indoctrination? Doret J. De Ruyter (2002, pp. 34, 38) argues that children do have a right to a 'meaningful education', defined as 'education that assists children to find their meaning in life'; De Ruyter claims that children need to be raised in a coherent primary culture, being able to use the conception of the 'good' offered by

parents, but being free to explore other conceptions, too, as the strength of parental beliefs might decrease when growing up.

Studying value transmission in a modern, pluralistic society is rather complicated, because the number and differences between value systems has increased dramatically. This has led to both an increased conflict between value systems (and their holders) and to a greater concern for the role of values in contemporary life. Therefore, in order to be able to compare experiences of value education and to find predictors of successful value transmission, I decided to concentrate on one particular value system and to study the intergenerational value transmission among this religious minority. Finnish Seventh-day Adventists form a relatively small (5677 baptised members in June 2001) and homogenous religious group, which is also interesting and easily accessible for me, being a church member myself, so it was a natural choice for the study framework.

More precisely, this article aims to answer the following questions. First, how was Adventist home education experienced among the young adults studied? Secondly, did the number of Adventist generations in their family history influence value transmission for them? Thirdly, what is their current relationship to the Adventist denomination like? Fourthly, what kinds of experiences do they have concerning the influence of authoritative, permissive and democratic parenting styles on value transmission?

Having chosen to concentrate on this particular value system, it was essential to find some measure to indicate an individual's commitment to it. Studying the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual and the writings of the pioneer and authority of the denomination's early years, Ellen G. White (1827–1915), Sabbath observance stood out as rather an extensive indicator. To illustrate, White (1948, p. 350) writes that those who obey the fourth commandment will obey the whole law, and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (1986, pp. 28–29) it is stated that 'In a special sense the observance of the Sabbath is a test of obedience'.

Method

The method of the study was both qualitative and quantitative, as the data were assembled with in-depth interviews ($n = 10$) and supplemented with a survey ($n = 106$). Triangulation, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches and reflecting the data with previous research, was used in order to get a more holistic picture of the selected issues. In addition, it was beneficial to conduct the interviews first, so that the survey questionnaires could be made on the basis of the interview data and, therefore, the issues brought up by the interviewees could also be covered in the larger data. All data were gathered among young Finnish Seventh-day Adventists representing heterogeneous socio-economic backgrounds and different residential environments around the country. Most of the participants of the study had been brought up in Adventist homes.

Interview Protocol and Questionnaires

As the questionnaires were based on the interview protocol questions, the following main features of the contents will cover both. First, the participants' background was

charted by means of questions dealing with family size, occupation and schooling—their own as well as that of the parents. Secondly, religious, social, economic and/or educational ties to the Adventist church were studied by asking about the received Adventist schooling, possible church employment, Adventist generations in family history, the amount of Adventist friends and relatives, present beliefs and church involvement. Thirdly, their relationships with non-Adventists and the attitudes towards some issues not commonly endorsed by the church and its members were queried. The questions in this area covered young adults' attitudes towards, for example, alcohol, cigarettes, discos, pop-music and premarital sex. Fourthly, the practices of the received religious home education were studied. The questions included memories of family worships as well as the Sabbath observation more generally, and the opinions about the experienced home education. Finally, parental authority styles, concerning religious home education in particular and their assumed effects on value transmission, were traced by asking, for example, if these young adults had been able to decide by themselves whether or not to go to church every week.

Interview Study

Interviewees were given the freedom to lead the conversation based on their own experiences, yet following the interview protocol. The interviewees were 22–30 years old and they live in either Southern or Central Finland. All ten in-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher, taped with a small cassette recorder and accurately transcribed subsequently for a qualitative analysis.

Questionnaire Study

In 1999, over 200 of the 994 Finnish Seventh-day Adventist young people aged 15–30 years old attended a summer camp. Nearly half of them answered the four-page questionnaire in an evening meeting. There were 140 questionnaires delivered and 106 returned. Since many of the non-respondents either were children or had no Adventist background, the gathered data can be regarded as a reasonably comprehensive sample of the young active members. The age scale of the respondents was relatively wide because everyone attending the meeting was given the questionnaire upon entering. Of those responding, 75% were between the ages of 15 and 30, 23% were older than 31 and 2% were younger than 15. Of the total of 106 individuals, 55% were females and 45% males. The quantitative survey data were analysed with the SPSS program.

Results

This section presents only the research findings that are most essential to the issues addressed by this article. Given that the interview and survey data covered the same basic issues and that the interviews mainly complement and detail the larger account given by the survey, the results are presented here together. This was also the initial

objective of the triangulation. Each finding, however, is presented in a similar format; first, an example statement or some other viewpoint is cited from the qualitative data (which, again, were also gathered first) and then the relevant quantitative data are summarised, often followed by some features present in both sets of data. The researcher has translated all quotations, as the data were gathered in Finnish. The percentages and frequencies mentioned are calculated from the quantitative data.

Experiences on the Childhood Religious Socialisation

The interview data portrays subjects' appreciation of both values education and the security provided by the religious education they experienced in their childhood homes. For example, a 25-year-old man states about the Adventist community:

> As a minority, it is softer than the outside world; it is possible to create a good sense of security, good values for life, and a way of living.... I appreciate the safety, I feel that I could really live my childhood, I knew nothing of the wickedness of the world—black-and-white but extremely safe; I guess black-and-white thinking is rather natural for children.

The quantitative data conveys similar viewpoints. Overall, the participants viewed the received Adventist home education as positive in four main aspects. First, 46% regarded its main value in teaching high moral standards, values and principles, and a basis for a belief system; this parental conception of the 'good' was also accentuated by De Ruyter (2002). Secondly, 11% valued most highly the security, stability, love and acceptance that religious education offered them. Thirdly, 9% considered the main contribution of Adventist home education to be the broad-mindedness and encouraging attitude they developed and experienced as a result of having the freedom to choose their values independently. Fourthly, 8% regarded good life habits and health education as the main benefits of the received home education.

When it comes to the experienced negative aspects of the childhood religious socialisation, many interviewees had strong views on the harmfulness of excessive strictness in educational practices. A 29-year-old woman states: 'If there is severity, compulsion, and legality, and so on, there is most certainly going to be a rebellion and dropping out.'

The survey participants also regarded excessively strict boundaries as the biggest obstacle in religious home education. A considerable number—27% of them—stated there were too many 'do's and don'ts'—too many restrictions and limitations—in their childhood home, which was considered authoritative and oppressive. Fifteen percent thought that they had lived their childhood in a black-and-white world with a narrow-minded view of life and that their life experiences have thus been restricted. Eleven percent felt that there were religious conflicts in their childhood home; for instance if the parents represented different religious views. The remaining 47% either wrote only about positive aspects or stated there was nothing negative in the education they received.

Overall, subjects reflected general satisfaction with the home education they had

received, and the majority would like to bring up their children in much the same way. However, in both sets of data, some particulars were mentioned that these young adults would like to change when educating their own children. Besides making religion more of a positive issue for the family, they would like to concentrate on what they saw as *essential* in religion, because many felt their parents had paid too much attention to irrelevant issues in their home education, such as prohibitions against buying ice cream or playing ice hockey on the Sabbath. Furthermore, they would like to emphasise the dialogue between children and parents, which they considered very significant for value transmission: as one respondent puts it, education should be conducted

> in a way that the norms are not ready-given—'This is right and that is wrong'—without explaining why, but in a way that the values behind the norms would become clearer and the children would understand that the norms are there so as to reach some goals relating to these values—means to an end. (Male, age 28)

In the interview data, many participants stated that it is essential to explain the doctrines to the children at an early age so that they would know *why* they are expected to behave in a certain way. In the survey data, 27% of the participants brought up similar issues. They would encourage their (future) children to think for themselves and teach them tolerance towards others. Seven percent of the participants held that they would like to bring religion more into the daily family life. They felt that in their childhood homes faith was separated from the everyday life and only observed on the Sabbath.

Influence of Adventist Generations in Family History

The interview data was grouped according to the Adventist generation the participants represented. The data corresponded with Bull and Lockhart's (1989) descriptions of the second and third generation mentioned earlier, which were most strongly present in the data; data from members of the fourth generation, which was not included in Bull and Lockhart's classification, corresponded with the description of the second generation. This could be regarded as a counter-reaction to the estranged relationship of third-generation parents to church (compare Yli-Luoma, 1996), but since the sample was too small in terms of quantitative validity, no consistent generalizations can be drawn.

In the quantitative data, the majority of the participants represented either the second (34%) or third (39%) Adventist generation. Eighteen percent represented the fourth and 1% were from the fifth successive Adventist generation in their family. First-generation Adventists were relatively scarce (8%) in the data, but as the survey questions focused on Adventist home education which they had not received, many of the first-generation Adventists did not return the questionnaire. Adventist-generation did not correlate significantly (–.16) with the affiliation to the church, but it did correlate slightly (.28) with the parental use of authority regarding such issues as norms and limitations in the childhood home Sabbath observance.

Relationship to Adventist Beliefs and Denomination

In the interview data, along with the descriptions of their present relationship to Adventist beliefs and to the denomination, the participants also revealed the importance of social ties within the community. A 28-year-old man says:

> Adventist practices and experiences tie to the church. Most of my friends, not all, are Adventists; I like to keep in touch with the non-Adventist ones. I work for the church and live in a church-owned apartment.

Even though Adventist beliefs and practices were widely upheld, many interviewees emphasized the importance of making individual value choices.

> I go to church regularly and believe in the doctrines, but in some cases I want to interpret them differently. I am broad-minded, I want everyone to have the freedom to think in their own way and also freedom to decide what they believe in without anyone else interfering with it. (Female, age 22)

The quantitative data also shows that the participants' present relationship to the church is mainly spiritual (78%) and social (14%). However, 7% saw this relationship as merely educational and 1% saw it as economical. The stated quality of the relationship with the denomination correlates significantly with the regularity (.32) and enjoyment (.34) of church attendance. Overall, 85% ($f = 89$) of the research participants go to church weekly, 9% monthly and 6% a few times a year. In general, the reasons for church attendance were spiritual ($f = 48$) and social ($f = 33$); other reasons ($f = 14$) included the expectations of others (e.g. parents, spouse or school authorities), whereas some who already had children went to church in order to set a good example for them. [Since categories overlap, only frequencies are mentioned.]

Forty percent of the survey participants state that most of their friends are Adventists; furthermore, a considerable one-fifth (22%) claim that they have hardly any non-Adventist friends. Social bonds between young Adventist adults are tight; 42% state that they spend most or all of their free time with other Adventists, 30% of respondents spend about half of their leisure time with Adventists, while only 28% spend more time with non-Adventists than the church members. Also, family bonds help unite this religious minority, as 71% stated that most of their relatives are Adventists, while only 12% of the participants have no Adventist relatives.

Parenting Styles and Value Transmission

Democratic, authoritative and permissive parental authority styles were considered to have a significant influence on intergenerational value transmission. In the sections below, the views concerning the three parenting styles will be introduced; first those presented in the interview data and then those of the questionnaire data.

Democratic home education was broadly supported in the interview data. A man (age 28) states:

> I can't make faith-related decisions for my children, but I really want to give them the best I know. Every parent does—I feel this is the best and most honest faith I could teach anyone, and the first people I would like to teach it to would be my own children.

Most of the participants' positive memories of childhood Sabbaths had to do with the whole family doing something together; reading, playing games, going on picnics, trips, even tram rides. Democratic parents discussed issues with their children and supported them in making their own value choices; children were taught to consider the results of their actions. A young woman (age 25) explains the democratic home education of her own childhood home this way: 'Our parents had time for us, they explained things to us, and they did not force us, and they listened to us.' Parental example was also considered important in value transmission. A young man (age 28) states,

> Values can be taught. Values are transmitted primarily by the parents themselves living by them and the child seeing that they really are important values and not just something that the parents feel is their responsibility to teach the children.

In general, in the democratic home education experiences, knowledge and action appeared to go hand in hand.

In contrast, the interviewees concluded that authoritative home education was not supportive of successful value transmission; rather it tended to turn children away from religion and lead to rebellion against God, church and parents. Concerning religious home education, one young man (age 25) states in the interview that:

> … at its worst it can be quite oppressive, especially if you don't feel accepted without obeying certain patterns or that the way you act is not accepted. Doctrinal issues are used as a means to exercise power: if you don't do this, you'll go to hell.

Another man (age 28) says that 'a strict schedule and rules make religion boring and dull'. Yet another man of the same age mentions that parents can feel they have failed in their educational duties if children abandon their parents' value system, which can lead to feelings of guilt and a considerable tension between parents and children since the children are also very aware of this 'failure'. None of the interviewees considered the parental authority style of their childhood home to have been too permissive.

Democratic education was also highly valued in the survey data. Among participants surveyed, 20% would institute a more democratic educational atmosphere than had been the case in their own childhood homes. This is understandable, since a considerable 64% had sometimes experienced being forced to go to church, and 44% had actually quarrelled with their parents over going to church. Furthermore, 17% were 17 years of age or older when they were first allowed the freedom to decide whether or not to go to church. In both sets of data, several young adults stated that they only were allowed to decide on church attendance when they moved

away from their childhood home, or that they still go in order not to hurt their parents' feelings.

There were no actual personal experiences of what would have been regarded as a home education that was too permissive in the quantitative data, either. Thus, many young people offered their observations and conclusions about other families. Since permissive parents typically play a passive, hands-off role in education, participants argued that their children might not even know what the parents really believe in—or at least the child's own belief is on an uncertain basis because religious issues do not seem important to the parents ($f = 12$). To the contrary, eight people regarded 'free education' as a constructive factor in religious education because it emphasises the positive aspects of religion and leads to individual choice.

Perspectives in Religious Education: emphasising religious experiences v. doctrines

Many participants agreed with a young woman (age 22) who states in the interview that the Sabbath in her childhood was 'a positively exceptional day!' The parents who emphasised experiences in their religious home education made the Sabbath 'a spiritual candy-day' for their children, in the words of another respondent (female, age 25). After having breakfast, wearing the best clothes, and with beautiful religious music in the background, the whole family attended church. Afterwards there was plenty of time to go on picnics, visit friends, and play games together. As Adventists avoid working on the Sabbath, the house was usually cleaned and food prepared beforehand and, therefore, the parents could also relax and spend time with their children. Some parents really put effort into making the day exceptional; for example, on some Sabbath afternoons one family took their children to the city for tram rides.

A young man, representing the age group 21–30 in the survey data, writes about a different kind of a childhood Sabbath:

> On spring mornings, I went skiing to see birds. In the afternoons, we read the Bible lesson (Mum, Dad, big brother). Mum held a prayer (we spent a long time on our knees), and at the end Mum sang a song, sometimes Dad sang, too.

This is an example of a more fundamentalist home education; it emphasises doctrinal issues by concentrating on simple piety and devotion, both on the Sabbath and often in the daily family worships. These moments include reading the Bible aloud, studying it, sometimes also reading other religious books, singing hymns and praying with the whole family. The children have an active role in family worship; besides singing together, everyone prays in his or her turn and, as soon as they can read, children get to read the Bible aloud. These families also enjoyed nature walks and spent the day together; but rather than planned activities, the Sabbath was a day to quieten down.

Besides the degree of authority exerted by the family, another dimension of home education came up in both sets of data: some parents cherished the positive experiences of religion and faith in raising their children, whereas others emphasised

the importance of doctrines and had a more didactic perspective in religious home education. These differences of emphasis come rather close to the distinction between 'evangelical' and 'fundamentalist' as used to describe individual devotedness (as mentioned in Badley, 2002, p. 135); however, making such distinctions is not simple since both have the same Adventist value system as their basis.

Discussion

The most significant factors in transmitting values that stand out in the data are: (a) democratic relationship between parents and children, (b) parental example, (c) encouraging children to do their own thinking, and (d) positive experiences of both religion and the social dimension of the religious community. Education that was either too severe or too permissive was seen as leading to parallel but uninvited results; (a) unsuccessful value transmission, and (b) rebellion and counter reaction, i.e. adopting a totally opposite value system and way of life to that of the parents. The results of the present study generally support the findings on value transmission of Keltikangas-Järvinen (1999, p. 66) and Sundén (1974, 1985).

That the data include no actual personal experiences with home considered too permissive can be due to the Adventists' strong educational tradition based on Ellen G. White's writings. Another factor may be that children of permissive parents do not currently attend Adventist events, even for social reasons, and were therefore not present when the data were gathered. Also, terminology concerning permissive or 'free education' is used rather broadly or imprecisely, which may have contributed to the contrary distinctions respondents made.

The 'togetherness' of the Adventist minority seems evident: more than 70% spends at least half their spare time with other Adventists and the same proportion claims that most of their relatives are Adventists. In addition, a fifth of the young Finnish Adventists have hardly any non-Adventist friends. When taking into account the fact that there are fewer than 6000 Seventh-day Adventists in the country, these figures seem rather surprising and maybe even raise an impression of clannishness or self-isolation. However, these findings definitely indicate that Adventists form a consistent and committed religious minority in Finland; even though some only participate every now and then, the Adventist community is clearly identifiable from the outside and, especially, from within. This can make leaving the denomination difficult, especially for those who have been brought up within it. It is not only a matter of belief and culture; the choice to leave may also include the fear of losing essential social ties to friends, family and the larger Adventist community. Furthermore, the evident unity of the minority also supports the logic of planned research on Adventist identity formation.

In this study, the number of Adventist generations in family history did not correlate significantly with the likelihood of value transmission, even though category descriptions of Bull and Lockhart (1989) seemed to fit some individuals. However, as society has changed considerably since the first and second generation they describe, and since their research was conducted in America, it is not surprising that their theory might not be directly applicable to present-day Finland. Still, the

factors affecting value transmission typical to each generation do appear in the research data. Thus, perhaps the concept of Adventist generations should not be taken so literally. Rather, in order to find strong correspondence, the categories of life situation, family background, and religious devotion should be considered.

As to the justification of values education, the previous literature and the data concerning accounts of young adults about their own religious education found in this study point to the conclusion that compassion and common sense are central to child raising. Children certainly need some basis for their search for personal meaning in life (De Ruyter, 2002), whether it is religious or not and whether or not they choose to uphold similar values later in life. Children need both reasonable limits for action and freedom to explore other worldviews; that is, they need both positive experiences with a functioning way of life and enough information to question it, and parents who can provide an example of how to find—or rather, create—a meaningful way of life.

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