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AUTHOR Dueck, Kathryn
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to assess the relative impact on Mennonite high school students of various orientation sources toward the issues of war and peace. Sixteen sources of orientation such as family, religion, and media are coordinated with variables such as school attended, grade level, and sex differences on a 10 page survey containing both closed and open-ended questions. The data from 438 Mennonite students participating in the research is limited by several factors, including a lack of genuine opinions among students on issues of war and peace. The following conclusions, however, are drawn from the data: religion is the most important source of orientation; experiences gained at school are second with emphasis on teacher's impact; the peer group is of next importance; the minister is fourth; mass media is fifth; and the family plays no significant role with respect to this issue. Open-ended questions about war and peace elicit responses of frustration and aggression, a conventional view of war, the passive nature of peace, and general pessimism about obtaining peace. Tables of data, a sample from the questionnaire, and a bibliography complete this report. (JH)

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LEARNING RESOURCES IN FORMATION OF
ORIENTATIONS BY STUDENTS

IN A SUBCULTURE

By Kathryn Dueck

During the past decade, political socialization has become an area of increasing concern. Many research studies have been conducted to identify the opinions, concepts and attitudes held by children, adolescents and adults in regard to political institutions and issues. The process by which this socialization occurs seems to be nurtured by a variety of developmental as well as environmental factors.

A comprehensive theory of political socialization has yet to be devised. However, it is possible to classify the research into several categories. First, one may distinguish between research designed to measure attitudes, opinions and concepts versus research intended to analyze the process by which these attitudes, opinions and concepts are formed. Second, a distinction may be made between research on national versus international institutions and issues. Research categories could be further subdivided according to which dependent and independent variables are being measured. In this study one

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subclassification was selected for further analysis: the source of orientation of preadults toward issues of peace and war.

Very few studies are available, which focus on the question of where the opinions and valuations regarding war and peace issues are learned. In West Berlin, a study (Haavelsrud, 1970, pp. 99-120) was conducted to explore the development of views on peace and war in children between the ages of ten and seventeen. The Berlin study focused on the attitudes of peace, war, causes of war and prevention of war as well as on attitudes and beliefs held by subjects about future wars. A second study conducted by the same investigator attempted to assess the relative impact of various sources of orientation on the acquisition of certain views toward peace and war and to identify relationships between source usage and types of opinions and valuations displayed by the subjects.

Previous research and theory (Cooper, 1965; Rosell, 1968; Alvik, 1968) identified the following variables as being influential in the acquisition of orientations toward issues of war and peace: (1) age; (2) sex; (3) socioeconomic level; (4) IQ; (5) ability to do

reciprocal reasoning; (6) political participation; and (7) sources of orientation.

The paucity of research on the impact of differences in source usage called for a study to explore this area. A review of the literature suggested the taxonomy of possible sources of orientation to include: Father, Mother, Others in the family, Peers, Television at home, Radio, Newspapers, Magazines, Books, Movies in a theatre, Teacher, Textbooks, Television, Movies, Minister and content of religion.

The purpose of this study was to assess the relative impact on Mennonite high school students of various sources of orientation on the acquisition of views toward issues of war and peace. A lack of theory does not warrant formulation of specific statistical hypotheses, therefore the following question was posed.

Is there a significant relationship between each of the sixteen sources listed in the instruments, which measure source utilization in acquiring orientations toward war and peace issues and each of the following variables: school attended; grade level; sex differences; chronological age; number of years in attendance at school; Mennonite parentage.

METHODOLOGY

The Instrument

The data collecting device was a ten-page questionnaire. Each page contained questions to measure the orientations of the individual, and devices to measure the source utilization in acquiring that orientation. (See Figure 1)

Several procedures were attempted to measure source utilization. It was concluded that the dimension of source utilization should be postponed until all the big "orientation" questions on each of the first nine pages had been answered. In this way it was assumed that the orientations would not be influenced by pondering answers on the source utilization (the latter were hidden by a cover sheet for the first nine pages).

The utility¹ of a source was assessed in two ways. First the subject was asked to rate on a six-point scale (very little use to very much use) how much each of

¹"Utility" means the degree of impact a source has on an individual's cognitions and valuations. The utility of a source does not depend on agreement between the orientation of the individual and the source. High utility of a source may come about because of existing disagreement between the message of the source and the receiver's previous or subsequent orientations. (Haalvelsrud, p. 232)

the sixteen sources had been influential in his learning the answers to the questions asked on that page. Second, the respondent was asked to identify the most important source for each part of the answer by writing the number of the particular source into the box in front of the answer.

The Sample

The sample in the present study consisted of 438 Mennonite high school students drawn from the student population enrolled in three church-operated schools located in the provinces of Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. The subjects in this study were drawn from two identifiable groups of Mennonites: the General Conference and Mennonite Brethren Conferences respectively.

The teaching of nonresistance is an integral part of the doctrine of this ethnic group. Peace witness concepts have been placed into an Anabaptist-Mennonite framework that does not concede to situational ethics, but continues to insist on the norms of Biblical absolutes. Being a devoutly religious people, the Mennonites are deeply concerned that their children should be brought up in their beliefs and practices. Education has been and is considered a vital agency in the cultivation of religious principles.

The following table outlines the sample by school and by grade.

TABLE I
The Sample By School And Grade

School	Grade Nine	Grade Ten	Grade Eleven	Grade Twelve
ECC (Ontario)				43
RJC (Saskatchewan)		17	59	51
MEI (B.C.)	68	88	67	45
Total	68	105	126	139

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed in two ways. First the NUCROS program was used to calculate row and column percentages and chi-square values for each of the following variables--school, grade level, sex differences, age, number of years in the school, Mennonite parents--and the relationship to each of the sixteen sources listed in the questionnaire. The results are depicted in Table II.

Second, the answers to open-ended questions on war and peace were analyzed for content and grouped into categories. About 30 percent of the total instruments were coded.

TABLE II
SUMMARY CHI-SQUARE VALUES AMONG SIXTEEN SOURCES
AND SIX SELECTED VARIABLES

Resource	School	Grade	Sex	Age	Years in School	Mennonite
Father	14.686	21.756	5.421	10,444	21.502	1.542
Mother	11.191	20.685	1.282	16.798	35.293	8.491
Others in Family	13.422	18.305	2.788	16.366	29.198	2.686
Friends	12.966	13.195	6.776	21.094 ¹	60.988 ¹	9.127
Television (Home)	17.714	32.404 ¹	3.977	22.359 ¹	65.169 ¹	5.565
Radio	7.119	16.540	10.623	4.667	35.084	9.579
Newspaper	10.714	22.935	6.069	19.334	26.369	10.244
Magazine	10.955	18.990	.304	10.157	48.789 ¹	7.315
Books	27.608 ¹	21.990	9.300	15.036	77.588 ¹	6.978
Movies in Theatre	34.348 ¹	22.920	6.611	12.063	39.385	5.490
Teacher	25.932 ¹	22.268	9.333	16.196	34.433	8.989
Textbooks	38.868 ¹	31.492 ¹	2.624	17.068	40.674	7.364
Movies in School	49.037 ¹	23.484	5.623	14.506	45.516 ¹	9.300
Television (School)	47.847 ¹	20.612	9.241	10.344	50.479 ¹	3.102
Minister	55.526 ¹	36.773 ¹	8.419	10.258	58.373 ¹	4.078
Content of Religion	20.725 ¹	25.595 ¹	2.185	17.154	51.895 ¹	10.673

¹x² = .05

EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

Limitations and Assumptions

In evaluating the present findings it is important to bear in mind the assumptions and limitations upon which the study rests. It was assumed that the six-point rating scale employed in the data-gathering instrument allowed for a diversity of meaningfulness or intensity of evaluation for all subjects. Since this study is interested in identifying the sources of orientation toward issues of war and peace within a specific ethnic group, it was assumed that subjects attending church operated schools would reflect Mennonite norms more closely than would any other group of Mennonite youth.

This study is plagued by several limitations. A major question may be raised about obtaining all the information by direct questioning (mailed questionnaires were administered by classroom teachers). Many subjects do not have genuine opinions on the matter under consideration. Thus, many random responses will come from subjects who have no real attitudes (Converse, 1970). Kolson and Green point to the same problem when they state:

"questions designed to tap attitudes and ideas often have the effect of activating response sets."

This study is further limited to investigating the impact of various sources of orientation on the acquisition of views toward war and peace and makes no attempt to identify source usage and the type of opinion displayed.

Discussion of the Findings

The discussion will focus upon the five categories of possible sources of orientation--mass media, school, religion, friends and family.

The category of mass media included the sources TV at home, radio, newspapers, magazines, books and movies in theatres. The findings indicate that a large percentage of students in all three schools (RJC, 73%; ECC, 93%; MEI, 91%), who had been in attendance at these schools between one and six years, rate books very low on the utility dimension. Among the mass media, books were of less utility than newspapers, television and magazines. Out of the total, 29.4% of the subjects ranked as "very little use" in contrast to 22.3% of "very much use" the resources of movies in the theatre. The rating for television is consistently low on the utility dimension for

all grade and age levels, surpassed only by the lower rating for books. Similarly across all age levels, newspapers were accorded a very low rating as the utility dimension by a sizeable percentage of the sample (49.2%). More dramatically, up to 70% of the sample rated magazines very low on the utility dimension for the orientations measures.

The above findings are discrepant with the findings of previous research. Support is found for the high priority of mass media, including the television, newspapers, magazines and radio in the socialization process (Alvik, 1968; Jennings and Niemi, 1968; Langton, 1969; Rosell, 1968).

The findings may be interpreted several ways. First, many of the subjects may not have ready access to a daily newspaper and thus do not recognize this aspect of media being important in the formation orientations measured. Second, media's role is primarily that of reinforcing values and attitudes already possessed by individuals. This reinforcement role emanates from the fact that individuals "tune in" to mass media data with which they agree and ignore that with which they disagree. The religious influences in the socialization of the Mennonite

youth may cause the subjects to "tune out" much of what newspapers have to communicate.

Within the realm of school experiences, the teacher provides the greatest impact on the student orientations, with movies in school, textbooks and television in school rating generally low on the utility dimension. Although political socialization research is far from unanimous in its conclusions regarding the influence of the teacher as an aspect of political socialization in schools, good reason exists to believe that the critical variable in any school learning experiences may be mediated by the teacher (Friedenberg, 1959; Rosenthal, 1963; Hess and Torney, 1968; Haalvelsrud, 1972). The findings regarding the remaining school experiences are consistent with previous research (Haalvelsrud, 1972).

The influence of the values of the subculture can be clearly perceived in the analysis of the category of religion. The findings from this Mennonite sample indicate 42.9% of the grade nine subjects, decreasing to 37.8% and 26.4% in grades eleven and twelve respectively, rate the content of religion very high on the utility dimension. These figures imply that teachings channeled through church-operated schools are making an impact upon

the youth, as measured in the rating of religion as very high on the utility dimension for the orientation of war and peace. This finding is not supported by the findings of the Haavelrud study, but does point to a strong religious influence in a subculture.

The minister does not fare so well. The minister is perceived as a useful source by only 12.5% of the total sample in contrast to 36.5% of the subjects who ranked the minister very low on the utility dimension. A greater percentage of the younger students at the grade nine level (62.8%) rate the minister as of "very little use" in the formation of their orientations. With increasing maturity, the percentage of students making similar ratings decreases until at the grade twelve level 27.1% of the subjects rate the minister very low on the utility dimension.

It is hypothetical that an explanation of this trend might originate as the increasing maturity of the subjects leads them to seek steps to become more closely associated with the church (i.e., many young people are baptized and join the church during the middle and late teens), and thus the perceived influence of the minister

would gradually increase on the utility dimension as the student grows older.

Friends

There is no widespread consensus concerning how significant an agent of political socialization peers and peer groups are. An examination of the data (in Table XVI) indicates that peers are generally ranked low as agents in the acquirement of orientations measured. Up to 34.8% of the total sample ranked friends on the very low utility dimension. A further analysis of the data reveals that a larger percentage of younger subjects (45.4%) perceived friends of "very little use" in the acquisition of orientations as compared to the percentage of the older subjects (24.5%) making similar rankings.

Several studies conclude that the peer groups have a major influence upon the political socialization process during adolescence (Prewitt and Dawson, 1969; Langton, 1969; Hess and Torney, 1972). However, in his Appalachian study, Hirsch found that peers were generally ranked low as sources of information. Both the Hirsch study and this study focus upon the political socialization process at work in a subculture. The discrepancy

in research findings demonstrates the importance of the cultural variable in the socialization process. The matriarchal structure of the Appalachian family and the patriarchal framework of the Mennonite family may account for the low utility rating awarded to peers.

The source of family (father, mother, others in family) does not relate significantly to any one of the selected variables. Overall, the subjects in this study ranked the family members lowest as sources of information. Such limited family influence may be accounted for by the complex nature of the present society. The family, which at one time had more control over the socialization of the young, is competing with other agencies.

It is also hypothesized that the nature of the questions posed to the subjects (i.e., what do you think of war? of peace?) would be perceived as moral, ethical problems. Such a mind set would direct subjects' attention to the content of religion as a source of information rather than to a family member.

The responses to the open-ended questions about war and peace were grouped into several categories. In

responding to the question on war, subjects listed a number of emotions including: hate, anger, disgust, fear, sorrow, selfishness and unbelief. A large proportion of the responses focused on the consequences of war--death, blood, hunger, destruction and killing. It is notable that the concepts listed under consequences of war dealt mainly with physical and concrete manifestations of suffering and less attention was given to the psychological and mental stress of war.

At all age and grade levels war was seen in terms of conventional war and not as a nuclear war. The image of war projected a feeling of negativism and frustration. A statement by one youth seems to summarize the feelings of many; "the old make the war and force the young to fight!"

The question of peace elicited considerably fewer responses. From the responses, several meanings of peace evolved: tranquility and stillness; a stage of not fighting; sociability and friends and symbols of peace.

From the tone of the responses, it can be inferred that many of the subjects were rather pessimistic about the possibility of achieving or maintaining peace.

The examples that follow give a taste of the comments penned throughout the instrument. Subjects wrote: "can never happen," "an incomprehensible thought," "wishful thinking," "impossible" and "claimed but never proven."

The majority of the elicited responses to the question on peace would be examples of what Galtung has described as "negative" peace (state of passivity; no war). However, a few subjects did refer to peace talks; cooperation; communication and planning between and among nations. Peace, in these examples, is an action--a process which would be considered as instances of "positive" peace in Galtung's terms.

Conclusions

Taking into account all the findings reported above, the following conclusions may be stated:

- (1) The content of religion is the source of orientation playing the most important role in the acquisition of orientations toward war and peace for the population in this study.
- (2) Experiences gained at school were second in the degree of utility. Teachers provide the most impact on student orientations with textbooks assuming secondary importance. Movies and

television in school were generally low on the utility dimension.

- (3) The influence of the peer groups was next in importance to the agency of the school.
- (4) The minister ranked fourth as an agent of socialization toward questions of war and peace.
- (5) Mass media were the least important agents in the acquisition of orientations toward war and peace for the population in this sample. Among the mass media, movies and newspapers were of more utility than magazines, television and books.
- (6) The family does not appear to be playing significant role in the acquirement of orientations toward issues of war and peace for the population in this study.
- (7) In responding to the open-ended question about war, subjects were concerned with conventional war and indicated feelings of aggression and frustration.
- (8) Most responses to the open-ended questions about peace were of the nature of "negative" peace and indicated a pessimistic outlook.

Suggestions for Further Research

A review of the study suggests areas for further research:

- (1) A study to identify the relationships between source usage and the types of ideas expressed by the subjects.
- (2) A series of studies employing a variety of methodological procedures (interview, observation instruments) to check for consistency of opinions and valuations.
- (3) A study to analyze the content presented by the various agents.
- (4) A longitudinal study to measure the persistence of opinions and valuations over time.
- (5) A study to compare the source usage and orientation of preadults in various subculture and ethnic groups from different parts of the country.

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