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# *Research on lifestyle, spirituality and religious orientation of adolescents in Germany*

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### Summary

This chapter presents results from recent quantitative and qualitative empirical research designed to identify developments in the religious orientation of adolescents in Germany, which in turn can be compared with research in the United States of America. Interpretation of these results draws on German lifestyle research, especially the work of Schulze (1992), *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft (The Experience Society)*. This perspective can help to explain the rise of hedonistic attitudes in German society which may have changed the pattern of the adolescent quest for spirituality and religious identity. This indicates the importance of reflection on the relationship between lifestyle and religion. These developments are relevant not only to the conceptualization of religion and the design of research, but also to religious education. The question is: how can religious education fulfil its task and meet the challenges which are presented by developments in youth culture and in the young person's spiritual quest?

### Introduction

Here are two short portraits of adolescents which are derived, not from our own research, but from the qualitative section of the twelfth Shell survey (Shell, 1997: 105–21, 149–61).

Jana is 19 years old and lives in Munich. Jana has helped to introduce techno worship in her church and is happy that one of her dreams has become a reality. With permission from the bishop, techno-beat was heard in St John's Church in Munich on 27 October 1996.

Jana has a long Christian biography. Since her childhood, she has spent a great deal of time in the local Young Men's Christian Association, but as an adolescent she has become more critical of its organizational structures and has started to look for a form of religious involvement with which she would feel more comfortable. In the techno worship movement, she has found what she was looking for. 'We say hey, we are young Christians', says Jana, 'but we are not that much different from you. We also want to have fun, and our God does not forbid us to have fun.' Jana maintains that one ought to have fun in one's life, but that fun without meaning leads neither to fun, nor to meaning. Jana has made the decision to take the Bible as the foundation for her life.

Daniel is 18 years old and was born in Thüringen, which had been part of East Germany. Daniel is the oldest of four siblings of a rather strict and narrow Protestant family. Daniel lives with his parents; his father is an engine-driver and his mother is a cleaning lady in a home for the handicapped. Daniel has completed basic school education and goes to a vocational school to train to be a metalworker. His hobbies are going to the theatre, playing music and drinking beer.

Until he was 14 or 15 years old, Daniel went to church every Sunday. Then, recognizing the hypocrisy of the Church, he stopped going to church and joined the punk scene. For the past two years Daniel has played in several punk bands. In a song he wrote himself, he asks, 'Religion, what is your reality? Behind your mask, you are bewitched . . . Your Bible is a book full of lies; greed for money, if I look in your eyes . . . You lead yourselves into disaster! Nail your God on to the cross!'

I have chosen Jana and Daniel from the numerous biographical portraits in the Shell study because these two case-studies reflect the kind of adolescent everyday aesthetic orientation and sensation-seeking in relationship to religion. The relation to religion, however, is totally different in the two biographies. In Jana's life there is a simultaneous intensification of both religiosity and sensational experience, while in Daniel's life there is movement away from his family's religion in order to find excitement and some sense of identity.

Imagine that Jana and Daniel are students in the religious education class. What do their different life-stories mean for communication in the classroom? Will the teacher's words address the

everyday aesthetic preference of the students and their self-determined search for either a religious or a non-religious identity? Or will the classroom communication be marked by conflicting lifestyles which impede or actually prevent learning? It is my suspicion that at least some of the communication problems in the classroom can be explained by a model of 'conflicting lifestyles' which takes into account the attitudes of religious educators, as well as those of their students.

Classroom communication in religious education is only one practical application for the topic to which I wish to draw attention, namely the relationship between lifestyle, spirituality and religious orientation among adolescents. To unfold this theme, I will proceed in four steps. First, I shall start by presenting selected results from empirical research on the religious orientation and socialization of adolescents in Germany, presenting results on 'spirituality' as far as we have relevant data. Second, based on the observation of the increasing privatization and invisibility of adolescent religion, together with a significant number of self-assessments of 'being spiritual', research on the 'spiritual quest' is examined. Third, building on results from the German lifestyle research, which takes 'experience', 'event' or 'everyday aesthetical orientation' as key factors in sociological analysis, the following question is addressed: 'Has this become a significant pattern in the adolescent quest for religious identity or spirituality?' Fourth, I conclude this presentation of empirical research on religious, spiritual and lifestyle orientation of German adolescents with a discussion of questions, implications and hypotheses for further research.

## **Empirical research on adolescent religion and spirituality**

### **Quantitative evidence for the rise of invisible religion**

Since we have neither a comprehensive study of the religious landscape of Germany as a whole, nor a representative portrait of the religious socialization of German adolescents, I need to refer to results from more selective studies and from broader youth surveys. I begin with the Shell studies because they provide an outstanding youth survey in Germany that not only has a comprehensive design and large samples of thousands of adolescents, but also presents us

with longitudinal data that embrace almost half a century, as a result of regularly asking the same questions. Table 7.1 presents some data from the Shell survey (Shell, 1985, 1992, 2000) on church membership (mainly Protestant and Catholic), Sunday worship participation, youth group membership, belief in life after death and personal prayer. These results document the continuous decline of church membership in West Germany. Despite the alarming long-term effects of this decline, church membership still appears relatively high (81% in 1999), at least when compared with the data from East Germany after reunion, where the figure is about 20% church membership among adolescents.

These data agree with results from other research. In a more detailed analysis, which casts light on the socialization dynamics, Schmidtchen (1997: 149–50) talks about 48% of 15- to 30-year-old East German citizens who have never had any church affiliation in their families, plus another 25% who were never church members themselves, although their parents belong or have belonged to a church. Pollack (1996: 605–6) points to an even more problematic difference between East and West, in regard to the readiness to change one's world-view and to engage in religious mobility. While 91% of Catholics and 85% of Protestants in West Germany have kept the religious affiliation of their family of origin, only 63% of Catholics and 53% of Protestants in East Germany have remained loyal to their family tradition. The others have left the churches. The German churches, therefore, have reason to be concerned about membership stability of the younger generation, especially in the East.

Church membership is only one factor and, especially for the West German adolescents, a rather formal one. The Sunday worship participation figures indicate this very clearly. The percentage of adolescents who go to church at least once a month has dropped from 59% in the 1953 study to 16% at the end of the century. In East Germany Sunday worship participation is higher relative to church membership (which still reflects the tradition of a minority church situation), but only 7% of adolescents attend church at least once a month. Compared with formal church membership and Sunday worship participation, membership in church youth groups has been relatively stable over the decades; this perhaps indicates that, for adolescents, youth groups are a more attractive way of participating in church life.

Table 7.1 Results for the Shell studies from 1953, 1984, 1991 and 1999

Item	West 1953	West 1984	West 1991	East 1991	West 1999	East 1999
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Are you a member of a Christian church?	97	94	90	21	81	20
Have you worshipped in the last four weeks?	59	27	21	10	16	7
Are you a member of a church youth group?	10	6	7	3	7	4
Do you believe in life after death?	43	49	56	22	32	18
Do you pray sometimes or regularly?	50	36	39	17	28	11

A different dynamic is seen in the data about belief in life after death and personal prayer. In contrast to the enormous decline in worship participation, personal prayer has declined more slowly; the number of adolescents who confess that they 'pray sometimes or regularly' has even increased slightly between 1984 and 1991. Adolescents who pray occasionally or regularly amount to almost twice the number of adolescent worshippers. Indeed, as Fuchs-Heinritz (2000: 163) reports, in 1999 8% of the male and 26% of the female adolescents who never go to church reported that they prayed sometimes or regularly. Thus, despite some decline, personal prayer among adolescents outside any official religious context has emerged as a factor that needs to be taken seriously. There has also been an increase in belief in life after death from the 1953 survey to the 1991 survey, but there is some reason to assume that beliefs about reincarnation, inspired by eastern religions, may have influenced these results.

These results regarding personal prayer can be examined alongside other facets of religion which appear to be part of the present-day adolescents' orientation toward religion. The Shell study in 2000 asked additional questions, 'Do you intend to raise your children religiously?' and 'Do you believe in a higher justice?' I have compiled the results in Table 7.2. This not only indicates the close relationship to scores on personal prayer, but also the significant difference between male and female adolescents with regard to religion. Since this Shell survey has, for the first time, included samples of immigrant youth (including those without a German passport), we have some data which allow for a comparison. The data demonstrate that Italian and Turkish immigrant adolescents have higher scores in all items, the female Turkish adolescents being the most religious.

These results on the religious membership, participation, private practice, intentions and beliefs of adolescents in Germany can be checked against a single question in the Shell survey, 'Do you consider yourself as religious?' Just over half the total sample (52%) responded that they did not consider themselves religious. Despite some differences between males (57%) and females (47%), which are not particularly surprising, and also between East Germany (78%) and West Germany (47%), the real surprise is the total number of adolescents who say that they are 'not religious'. Looked at from the other perspective, however, these data mean that 48% of German adolescents still, more or less, declare themselves as being religious.

**Table 7.2 Religiosity of German, Italian and Turkish adolescents from the Shell study 2000**

Item	German male %	German female %	Italian male %	Italian female %	Turkish male %	Turkish female %
Do you pray sometimes or regularly?	18	31	30	50	41	52
Do you intend to raise children religiously?	29	37	49	56	64	74
Do you believe in <i>higher</i> justice?	36	44	58	68	72	78

As we can see from these results, a decline of participation in worship and in religious groups does not necessarily mean a decline in private religious practice and in religious orientation. Even terminating membership of the Church does not mean giving up private religion or the search for religious meaning. On the contrary, as the 1993 survey of Protestant church members (Engelhardt, von Loewenich and Steinacker, 1997: 327) documents, 52% of West Germans and 31% of East Germans who have left the Protestant Church maintain that they 'can be Christian without the Church', and about 20% (East and West) deny that they have left the Church because they 'did not need religion in their lives'.

These results can be taken as evidence that religiosity among German adolescents has more stability and continuity than may be inferred from the decline of church membership and church participation. These results certainly contradict any general secularization hypothesis that assumes the decline and eventual disappearance of religion in Western societies. Rather, these results indicate that the religiosity of German adolescents may have changed significantly. Religion has become a matter of individual practice and preference. The religion of adolescents, because of its retreat from the public sphere, has become more invisible: that is, invisible to the public sphere and to the type of surveys that ask questions about membership and participation on the institutional and macro-sociological level. Religious orientation, belief and practice continue to be a dimension of some importance in adolescents' lives and self-understanding, although in a different way.

### **Biographical research and new types of religious socialization**

Quantitative survey data document supposedly reliable surface indicators for a solid and supposedly representative number of subjects, but they are not designed to tell us much about motivational conditions and biographical developments. Therefore, we need the complementary help of qualitative analysis. Qualitative approaches have become increasingly utilized in German research on religious socialization and development, since, despite their very small samples, they yield valuable insights into the depth dimension of a person's life. This method can help us to understand better



the motivational and developmental dynamics of religious identity formation and transformation (see, for example, Schöll, 1992; Comenius-Institut, 1993; Fischer and Schöll, 1994; Klein, 1994; Sandt, 1996; Sommer, 1997; Schöll, 1998; Streib, 1998; Fuchs-Heinritz, Heinritz and Kolvenbach, 1998; Augst, 2000; Tietze, 2001). Drawing on these studies, how can we characterize the new way of searching for religion or of being religious, and what is the better label: religion or spirituality?

The gradual development of Albrecht Schöll's typology can be taken as an example of how qualitative research is engaged in the struggle to come to terms with religious identity formation in an ever-changing environment.

In 1992 Schöll identified a new emerging type of religious socialization in which the pluralization of religious meaning was influential, but at the same time he identified ways in which religion was being used for crisis prevention. Interviewees who were members of new religious movements inspired the construction of this new type (see Schöll, 1998). But already in 1994, in a new and larger research project on adolescents' religion, Schöll felt the need to expand the typology and include what he then called the 'occasional' type of religious socialization. The reason for this was a number of case studies of people for whom religion had in fact the function of structuring life, not as a permanent commitment to one religion, but as occasional appropriations of religious meaning selected from a plural supply.

This can be taken as an example of how qualitative biographical-reconstructive research is learning and progressing as a result of its attempt to embrace the biographies under investigation. In this way a new type of religious socialization has emerged and come into the foreground. We are very likely to encounter this new type of religious socialization, as consumer attitudes increasingly influence religious meaning-making. Such emergence and development of a new type may help to interpret the quantitative data from the surveys outlined above. While, from the quantitative results, we derive some indication about a tendency of adolescent religiosity toward individualization and privatization, qualitative analysis helps us to differentiate various types of individualized religious search and to understand more clearly some of the dynamics of such religious searching. The new type of 'occasional' appropriation could be characterized as *bricolage* type, since the

*bricoleur*, in contrast to the professional or experienced expert, looks around 'occasionally' to find material for the project under construction. This search may be focused on one's own religious tradition, but it is not necessarily limited to one's own religion.

In my own research on 'So-called sects and psycho-groups' for the Enquête Commission of the thirteenth German Parliament I have identified a similar type of religious biographical trajectory which I have called the 'accumulative heretic' (Streib, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001b). The obvious characteristic of the accumulative heretic is a tour through various religious orientations. Conversion here is not a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence that leads to commitment; conversions and deconversions may occur more than once. The motivations and biographical dynamics for this accumulative search are not so obvious and need to be discovered by careful interpretation. On closer scrutiny, we may discover that the religious search is structured by biographical forces and desires, rather than by concern with religious truth claims, belief systems or cognitive dissonance. Biography is determining religion. We may also identify, as major factors, the availability of a variety of religious orientations and respective groups, the access to the religious marketplace, and the customer competence necessary for shopping for religion. Eventually our accumulative-heretical subjects may identify themselves as searchers, not for religion, but for *spirituality*: as people on a *spiritual quest*. There is thus some evidence for the emergence and rise of a new type of religious socialization for German adolescents.

In closing my sketch of qualitative research on religious orientation in Germany, I should mention briefly another project, the study on the *Religion of Religious Educators* ('*Religion*' bei ReligionslehrerInnen) reported by Feige, Dressler, Lukatis and Schöll (2000). This study is interesting not only because it gives us biographical studies of seventeen religious educators, but also because it provides a portrait of their teaching which gives us some insight into, and allows for some prognosis about, the future influence of religious education on adolescents' biographies. The 'lived religion' (*die gelebte religion*) of these seventeen religious educators differs greatly and includes cases of close association with traditional religion and the Church. In my reading, however, I would label at least four of these cases as a 'search for spirituality', since they characterize their 'lived religion' as a search for 'aesthetic enjoyment

of religious feelings', for 'a holding wholeness' or for 'future possibilities of a divine power', or describe themselves as 'vagabonds in search of intact life' (see portraits in Feige, Dressler, Lukatis and Schöll, 2000: 179-86).

The typology which has emerged from these seventeen case-studies contains three types of religious biographies and related teaching habits in religious education: type A takes 'institution' and 'tradition' as regulative principle; type B features 'self-guidance' with the occasional inclusion of religious resources; whereas type C features 'experience-rational' preference in their incorporation of religious resources. These biographical developments of religious educators, I conclude, reflect the dynamics of change in religious socialization which can be characterized as a tendency to include a search for spirituality rather than religion, a feature of the *bricoleur* who 'occasionally' includes the religious resources at hand. In the absence of any longitudinal study on the effect of religious educators on the religious socialization of their students, I can only speculate that this new type of religious educator will also have a long-term effect, increasing the number of adolescents who understand religion as spiritual quest and *bricolage*.

### **'Being spiritual' and 'being religious' among adolescents in Germany**

Results from our own research supports the occurrence of a type of religious socialization among German adolescents that can be characterized as 'spiritual quest' and provides some first indications about the incidence of its occurrence. Since these data have been collected simultaneously in Germany and the United States of America, the results allow for a comparison. The questionnaire with 158 questions included some demographic questions, the 'Big Five' personality factors, the Religious Fundamentalism Scale (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 1992), and the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer, 1996). It was administered to 202 German university students who were just beginning their course of study and to 295 freshmen in the United States of America. In the demographic section subjects were asked to mark one of the following statements: *I am more religious than spiritual, I am more spiritual than religious, I am equally religious and spiritual and I am neither religious nor spiritual*. Leaving aside many aspects of our

results, I focus here on the religious/spiritual assessment. The results are shown in Table 7.3.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 7.3 Self-assessment of adolescents in the United States of America and the Federal Republic of Germany of being spiritual/religious**

Item	United States	Germany
	of America	
	%	%
I am neither religious nor spiritual	5.8	32.8
I am more spiritual than religious	31.3	20.7
I am equally religious and spiritual	48.2	16.7
I am more religious than spiritual	14.8	29.8

Table 7.3 shows that 21% of the German adolescents identify themselves as being more spiritual than religious. In comparison with the American adolescents, it stands out that almost one-third of the German adolescents describe themselves as neither spiritual nor religious, and the number of subjects who describe themselves as *more religious than spiritual* is twice as many in the German sample. Therefore the percentage of self-identified 'more spiritual' adolescents in the American sample is significantly higher (31%) than in the German sample (21%).

However, when we compare our results with the Shell survey results, which document a 52% agreement with the self-assessment of being 'not religious', an interesting issue emerges. Either our sample contains fewer self-declared non-religious (33%) and more self-declared religious (67%) adolescents, or we have to draw the line between self-declared religious and self-declared non-religious adolescents in the middle of the column, which means that the subjects who describe themselves as *more spiritual than religious* would answer *no* when they were asked in the Shell survey if they were religious. Surprisingly, the 'neither/nor' and the 'more spiritual' group, when taken together, amount to the same percentage as we have for self-declared non-religious adolescents in the Shell survey: 52% and 54% are very close. From these results, the question emerges whether self-declared 'spiritual' adolescents have been invisible to research so far which has asked for a self-assessment of

'being religious' only. Tentatively, we advance the hypothesis that there is a new type of German adolescent religiosity which has been neglected in research and which we were able to identify and preliminarily quantify: the type of 'spiritual seeker' who self-describes as 'more spiritual than religious'.

Our sub-sample from the United States of America can be compared with many findings of surveys on the spirituality/religion question. Table 7.4 brings together these research results (Zinnbauer, Pargament, Cole, Rye, Butter, Belavich, Hipp, Scott and Kadar, 1997; Roof, 1999; Scott, 2001; Marler and Hadaway, 2002). It shows that there is an overall correspondence with our results, when we take into account that, in these studies, the statements read: *I am neither spiritual nor religious, I am spiritual but not religious, I am spiritual and religious and I am religious but not spiritual.*

**Table 7.4 Being religious and being spiritual (five studies in the United States of America)**

Item	Boomers (Roof) 1995-1996 %	Institutional (Zinnbauer) 1995 %	National (Scott) 2001 %	Protestants (Scott) 2001 %	Protestants (Marler/Hadaway) 1991 %
Religious and spiritual	59	74	61	67	64
Spiritual only	14	19	20	18	18
Religious only	15	4	8	9	9
Neither	12	3	11	6	8
<i>N</i>	409	346	487	270	1,884

Adapted from Marler and Hadaway (2002: 292).

These quantitative results allow for an initial résumé on the question of the religious and spiritual orientation of German adolescents. Though, as the data suggest, German adolescents differ from their American peers in that they have more of a traditional attitude toward 'religion', at the same time they distance themselves in greater numbers from both spirituality and religion. We can conclude, nevertheless, that the developments in the religiosity of adolescents in Germany follow the same path as we see in the United States of America, although with some delay: there

is a certain portion of German adolescents who identify themselves as 'more spiritual than religious'. Further research may confirm or correct the exact percentage, but it is justified to assume that between a fifth and a third of German adolescents redefine or explicate their religious search as a *spiritual quest*.

### **Spiritual quest**

Most of what has been discussed so far of the results from empirical research on adolescent religiosity in Germany can be understood as 'invisible religion', as defined by Luckmann (1963, 1967, 1991). Or, referring to a more recent proposal, much of our German adolescents' religious orientation can be understood along the lines of the 'neosecularization paradigm' (Yamane, 1997), since it displays the declining influence of religious authority structures. This may be an adequate characterization of German adolescent religiosity, but it states primarily what it is not and uses negative propositions. We should, however, be able to indicate the direction of such religious transformation and what characterizes the new type of adolescent religious search. What are present-day adolescents searching for when they search for religion? And what are the reasons for their new type of religious search? Is it appropriate to adopt a new label and call this a 'spiritual quest'?

To talk about 'spiritual quest' is not my invention. Recent book titles such as *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (Beaudoin, 1998), *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (Roof, 1993), or *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Roof, 1999) suggest such a label for certain developments in the religious landscape of the United States of America. In these titles the time of this turning point is also specified: it is the 'baby boomer' generation or the cohort called Generation X who supposedly inaugurate a new era of religious socialization. Roughly speaking, persons in the United States of America who are now in their late twenties and thirties belong to cohorts for which pop music (for example, the Woodstock festival), television and increasing virtual reality have been at least as influential in their socialization as has traditional religion.

Wade Clark Roof presents us with results from a large number of interviews, partially in longitudinal research. Roof proposes to redraw the map of the religious landscape: 'the boundaries of popular religious communities are now being redrawn, encouraged by the quest of the large, post-World War II generations, and facilitated by the rise of an expanded spiritual marketplace' (1999: 10). His characterization of the new situation reads as follows:

A great variety of terms now in vogue signal such a shift in the centre of religious energy: inwardness, subjectivity, the experiential, the expressive, the spiritual. Inherited forms of religion persist and still influence people but, as Marty says, 'the individual seeker and chooser has come increasingly to be in control'. Nowhere is this greater emphasis upon the seeker more apparent than in the large chain bookstore: the old 'religion' section is gone and in its place is a growing set of more specific rubrics catering to popular topics such as angels, Sufism, journey, recovery, meditation, magic, inspiration, Judaica, astrology, gurus, Bible, prophecy, Evangelicalism, Mary, Buddhism, Catholicism, esoterica, and the like. Words like *soul*, *sacred*, and *spiritual* resonate to a curious public. The discourse on spiritual 'journeys' and 'growth' is now a province not just of theologians and journalists, but of ordinary people in cafés, coffee bars, and bookstores across the country. (Roof, 1999: 7)

Spirituality, Roof wrote (1993: 64) by way of definition, 'gives expression to the being that is in us; it has to do with feelings, with the power that comes from within, with knowing our deepest selves and what is sacred to us'.

Roof's new map of the religious landscape includes five major subcultures: as well as dogmatists, mainstream believers, and born-again Christians, he identifies metaphysical believers/spiritual seekers and secularists. And Roof explicitly divides the different types of religious orientations along the axes of 'religious identity' and 'spiritual identity'.

Tom Beaudoin's book makes a valuable contribution to a 'thick description' of the type of spiritual seeker. Beaudoin does not present a single statistic, but provides a well-done characterization of this spiritual quest of Generation X (GenX). Beaudoin (1998: 36) claims the 'emerging GenX theology, a lived theology', cannot be understood apart from its context in a culture heavily prone to simulating reality. Generation X uses the wider culture's fascination

with 'virtual' reality as we practise religiousness. It is appropriate, then, to turn to a discussion of the 'virtually' religious. Additionally, ambiguity is central to the faith of Generation X. According to Beaudoin (1998: 121) 'Xers make great heretics.' Then he continues:

When Madonna – and Xers – practice their religiosity with sacramentals, from prayer cards and holy water to ripped jeans, piercings, crucifixes, and dark makeup, they challenge the authority of the official sacraments and the institution that 'dispenses' them. They threaten to displace the centre with the margins. This is just the beginning of a larger blurring of what is considered orthodox with what was considered heterodox, or heretical. (Beaudoin 1998: 122)

However, in the midst of such heretical adventure, Beaudoin identifies a search for a unique spirituality, a 'spiritual quest', which nevertheless is characterized by irreverence:

A central dynamic and challenge emerging for Generation X is that of 'bricolating' their own spirituality and carrying forward religious traditions. *Bricolage* means making do with the materials at hand to solve particular (in this case religious) problems and questions. This term describes the way GenX pop culture brings together diverse religious symbols and images, forever recombining and forming new spiritualities. GenX pop culture does not respect the boundaries of tradition or religious dogma. At the same time that such bricolating and reassembling become even more widespread in GenX pop culture, Xers are challenged to renew their own spiritualities and those of their religious traditions by giving the concept of tradition itself a fresh look. (Beaudoin, 1998: 178)

Roof and Beaudoin have advanced an interesting thesis which may be helpful for a better understanding of our German subjects: it is in the younger generations of baby boomers and Generation X that greater numbers of adolescents have departed from the religious ways of their parents and transformed their religious orientation and practice. Their results suggest that this emerging type of 'spiritual seeker' has some affinity to the lifestyle of the cohort which finds such new avenues. Religion and lifestyle have at least some kind of 'family resemblance'. We may even ask if religion, at least this type of religious or spiritual quest, has



become a question of preference, a question of lifestyle. It can be hypothesized that the typical irreverence and *bricolage* model has influenced the handling of religion and spirituality in a market-place type of situation.

This hypothesis calls for detailed empirical investigation in the European and German context, which, to my knowledge, has not been completed so far. Research on religious *bricolage* in adolescence is one of the important tasks of empirical theology in the coming years; but we need to attend closely to the motivations of adolescents who turn away from the religion or the world-view of their families of origin and to the trajectories which they develop in their own search for their own religion and in their own spiritual quest. Thereby, a more decisive focus on *motivation* and *biographical trajectories*, which could lead beyond the interpretation proposals of Roof and Beaudoin, should be implemented in the research design. From German lifestyle research we derive a suggestive proposal for understanding this motivational aspect. To assess the question of whether this search for religion or spirituality has become a question of style, and is motivated like lifestyle preference, lifestyle research could be valuable. Lifestyle research will be my next point of discussion here, because we find there some evidence about the motivations and attitudes which characterize this cultural change.

### **Lifestyle research**

There are some indications that religious socialization has changed significantly in recent years. The question now is how to explain this and how to shed some light on the motivational forces of such change. I believe that lifestyle research has a contribution to make. Of course, lifestyle research does not focus exclusively on contemporary adolescents, nor on religion. What makes these results interesting, however, is that they describe cultural changes for which we are tempted to use a new vocabulary. 'Spiritual quest' is one such term in the new vocabulary; another interpretative phrase is 'religion as everyday aesthetical preference', or perhaps 'experience-religion' (in German, '*Erlebnisreligion*').

Contemporary lifestyle research is a prominent branch of research in sociology (see, for example, Garhammer, 2000;

Hartmann, 1999). Usually we do not expect results about leisure activities or consumer behaviour to elicit much attention beyond the community of researchers and the interest groups who fund such research. However, this changed in 1992 with Gerhard Schulze's *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft* (Schulze, 1992). Now, not only sociological and psychological literature databases, but also databases in the field of religious studies, produce a considerable number of references when you search for 'Erlebnisgesellschaft' (experience society).<sup>2</sup> What is associated with this new catchphrase?

Schulze's portrait of *Erlebnisgesellschaft* (experience society) is based upon a comprehensive survey and its interpretation in a book of more than 750 pages. More than 1,000 persons aged from 18 to 70 in the city of Nuremberg were interviewed in the spring of 1985, using an extensive questionnaire which had been designed to investigate leisure activities, music preferences, favourite books, favourite television shows, political affiliations, inclinations and so on. The focus of this research rests upon 'everyday aesthetical preferences', as Schulze calls them. 'Everyday aesthetics' embraces everything a person enjoys, what elevates him or her from the grey everyday, what makes life worthwhile.

More interesting and more important than the mere statistical registration and presentation of everyday aesthetical preferences is their interpretation. Schulze is determined to provide a thoroughgoing interpretation of his data when he seeks to identify a depth structure or, as he calls it, a 'fundamental semantic of cultural codes'.

At the surface, we can identify the 'styles'. Schulze defines 'style' as the 'commonalities of repetitions in the everyday aesthetical episodes of a person'. Beneath the surface, he constructs the everyday aesthetical schemata in which the interpreter condenses or reduces the plurality of styles into a number of 'types of styles': 'high culture schema', 'trivial schema', and 'tension schema' (see Schulze, 1992: 124ff.). 'Tension schema' is the youngest and most interesting development.

In this depth structure the fundamental semantics of our times comes to light: 'experience orientation' or 'experience rationality'. This is an 'inward orientation', which means that the person no longer relates him or herself to the world to find status, conformity or security, but relates the world to the self and attempts to utilize the world for self-realization and stimulation (see Schulze, 1992:

261). Though this happens in an immense variety of ways, Schulze is able to design a clearly arranged map of milieus.

Using educational status and age as basic parameters, Schulze constructs five milieus of present-day society: (1) entertainment milieu; (2) self-realization milieu; (3) high culture milieu ('*niveau*' milieu); (4) integration milieu; and (5) harmony milieu. These milieus are characterized by the above-average occurrence of one (or two) everyday aesthetical schemata. For example, the tension schema is over-represented in the entertainment milieu; both the tension schema and the high culture schema are over-represented in the self-realization milieu; the trivial schema is over-represented in the harmony milieu; the high culture schema and the trivial schema are over-represented in the integration milieu; and the high culture schema is over-represented in the high culture or *niveau* milieu.

Despite this rather comprehensive map of milieus in German society, Schulze's book title, *The Experience Society* (*Die Erlebnisgesellschaft*), appears to highlight particularly one of these milieus, the entertainment milieu, in relation to the tension schema for which the search for excitement, entertainment and action is most characteristic. In his book title, and in a great portion of his writings, Schulze has explicated what had been the latent awareness of many in our society: that we have become a society governed by hedonistic attitudes of sensation-seeking, event excitement and everyday aesthetical preferences. Schulze's message may be sound, despite the suspicion that this is an over-interpretation of his data.<sup>3</sup> Before addressing Schulze's provoking message, especially in respect to religion, I will address the question of milieu formation and mention some critical objections which have been voiced against Schulze's analysis.

### **Milieus in society and religion**

To what extent has Schulze inspired religious research? Schulze's research design and typology has certainly influenced further research. Within lifestyle research, a kind of experience-society research tradition is taking shape (see Hartmann, 1999; Hölscher, 1998; Walter, 2001). Things are different in research on religion, however. This is perhaps due to the fact, which is heavily under criticism, that as in most lifestyle research we find little attention

to questions of social justice or life conduct in Schulze's research.<sup>4</sup> This may be one reason why Schulze's approach has not been used so far in research on religion. Before we could use it for elaborating a map of religious milieus, Schulze's perspective would need some qualification by an implementation of socio-economic factors and dimensions. However, after such qualification, lifestyle research, and not least Schulze's approach, could help us to open the focus of research for these types of 'invisible religion', 'spiritual quest' and 'bricolage religiosity', which do not pay much attention to church affiliation, but assemble in new milieus or religious scenes.

Lifestyle-related milieu studies are important not only in respect of society, but also in respect of religion, because we should then be able to identify milieu limitations and blind-spots in church work and religious education. To my knowledge, the only milieu study on religion in Germany is Michael Vester's research project on 'Milieus in der Kirche' (Vögele, Bremer and Vester, 2002) which decidedly has *not* been based upon Schulze's approach, but on Vester's own milieu map of German society (see Vester, 1997) which in turn is based upon the SINUS lifestyle results. Vester has investigated the attitudes, expectations and participation behaviour of members of the Protestant Church of Hanover. This is a step in the right direction and could encourage further church surveys (for example, the church membership surveys in the Protestant Church/*EKD-Mitgliedschaftsuntersuchungen* which have been quoted above) to attend more closely to the milieus in society. As one of the important results of this study, a 'modernization problem' has been identified, which consists not only in the decline of the church-supporting core milieu of petty bourgeois, but also in the fact that the humanistic education milieu and the hedonistic milieus of adolescents are mainly outside the focus of church work. Here we have one of the very few results of empirical research which addresses the question whether adolescents' declining participation in established religious institutions is possibly related to their affinity to specific milieus and lifestyles. However, it also needs to be mentioned that Vester's study has severe limitations: the mapping of religion has focused on church affiliation and church-based religiosity and largely ignored the new type of religiosity or spirituality, as outlined in the first part of this chapter. Here, Schulze's milieu map could help us greatly.

### **Is the religious quest experience-oriented?**

Schulze's work contains a straightforward culture-analytic hypothesis, which is expressed in condensed form in the title of his book. *Erlebnisgesellschaft* (experience society) is defined as 'a society which (in historical and intercultural comparison) is determined by inward orientation' (1992: 54). We find a powerful statement about this new 'inward orientation' in the Introduction (Schulze, 1992: 17) where Schulze rhetorically asks if, in the 'experience society', we have entered a final state of individualization. His portrait of experience society is rather negative when he describes metaphorically a crushing machine, in which we have destroyed even the last remnants of group experience and solidarity remaining after the decline of the economic class structures and the diversification of neighbourhoods, leaving the individual as a social atom.<sup>5</sup>

It cannot be overlooked that, behind this prognosis of our culture, a developmental model comes to light which we have come to call the 'individualization theorem', and which has attained some prominence through the work of the sociologist Ulrich Beck (1986, 1992). In defending this work against those who criticize the neglect of socio-economic conditions in Beck's perspective, an 'elevator effect' has been discussed, which means that the less privileged participate increasingly in the economic resources and the freedom that comes with them. Schulze (1992: 531-53) gives a portrait of the German post-war culture and economy which has produced the egalitarian multi-dimensionality of autonomous milieus in the 1980s. According to Schulze (1992: 541), in experience society 'groups of taste exist side by side without relating to each other in their thinking'.

What does this mean for religion? While Schulze does not have much data about religion, his findings on lifestyle and milieu formation raise questions about religion. Is it not true that we have undergone a process of 'inward orientation' in the last decades? Is it not true that 'experience rationality' has spread and affected attitudes toward religion? Is it not true that the religious milieus exist side by side, with little relation to each other in their thought systems? The thesis of 'experience society' gives rise to the question of whether religion has become a matter of individual everyday aesthetical preference, and thus that Peter Berger's (1979) *Heretical Imperative* has come to its full realization with only one innovation:

the main stalls in the crowded spiritual marketplace (cf. Roof, 1999) have changed and consumers appear motivated by an inward-oriented quest for experience, event and action.

This series of questions conveys a strong and clear thesis, which could help us to answer the problem raised by the quantitative results and left open in most of the qualitative research. The invisible religion of adolescents (as made visible in personal prayer and tacitly held beliefs), the (sometimes irreverent) spiritual quest of younger generations and the *bricolage* character of many adolescents' religious search trigger the question of what kind of motivations and intentions, what kind of developmental dynamics and drives, determine this specific type of religious socialization (which is supposedly quite new in our culture). Schulze's bold thesis could be the answer: it is the increasingly attractive lifestyle of inward-oriented everyday aesthetical preferences in experience society which has come to dominate the religious search of adolescents. Since we have little empirical evidence for this thesis, at least from research in Germany, I restrict myself to stating this in the form of questions. Only further research can help to confirm or qualify this assumption.

### **Hedonistic orientation as religion?**

Going one step further, we could ask if experience orientation itself has a religious quality. Everyday aesthetical preference could be understood *as* religion. Schulze (1999) appears to be open to such an interpretation. In his book *Kulissen des Glücks* (*Sceneries of Luck*), the theses appear more pointed when Schulze identifies a 'universal imperative' – the rule 'Experience your life!' Here Schulze characterizes 'experience orientation' explicitly *as* religion.

In the post-metaphysical age, the highest thing for which we may call recognition in discourse, is human life. One regards one's own life as a kind of God, we should serve Him, we should take from Him our fundamental guidelines. His highest command is this: 'Do something with me!' Instead of the old concept of sin, the God 'Life' has stated the imperative: 'Don't mess me up!' . . . The discourse on luck has captured our social world like a worship. (Schulze, 1999: 9)

Schulze here explicitly describes 'experience orientation' as a kind of new religion, a cult of the individualistic-hedonistic life. If Schulze had not offered this interpretation himself, it would have been my task to suggest such an interpretation. Although the sociologist leaves it at that, it is the task of the religious educator to take this further. The sociologist could have taken this further, however, as it is from sociology that we derive approaches to a concept of religion which understand the aestheticization of the everyday as religion or, more cautiously, as *equivalent* to religion. According to Thomas Luckmann (1967, 1991), religion originates in 'everyday transcendations'. Therefore, religion has the form of experiences which are invisible both before they are communicated and again after their age of visibility in religious institutions. From this concept of religion, Luckmann was able to suggest, back in 1963, that religion has not disappeared, but in part has become invisible; and also that forms of religion outside the religious institutions could be addressed as religion. Based on this concept of religion, Hubert Knoblauch (1996) has analysed adolescent experiences and worlds of meaning, especially the experiences in Schulze's tension or action schema, such as the adolescent escape into music, drugs, risk sports and other types of sensation-seeking activities, as equivalents of religion.<sup>6</sup> From this point of view, Schulze's cult of individualistic-hedonistic life could be understood as everyday religion.

## Summary

Even though Schulze's generalization, his limited focus on leisure and consumer activity, and his marginalization of religion, might provide reasons to question the validity of his thesis, and although there could be reason to doubt that his data fully support his message, his texts pose questions and challenges for theology, religious education and church work. They also suggest some answers to the question of what motivates the religious and spiritual quest of adolescents. Four main conclusions emerge.

First, we have to pay attention to the potential danger that theology, religious education and church work have a rather limited milieu focus and exclude the milieus and scenes which have emerged in the adolescent generations.

Second, lifestyle research suggests an interpretation model for religious plurality which has not been used and tested so far, namely that the pluralization of religious orientations which we encounter in German society, especially in the younger generations, may be the effect of, and function in the same way as, the pluralization of lifestyles.

Third, from Schulze's work we derive the question regarding whether the adolescents' approach toward and their appropriation of religion are influenced and motivated by their general attitude and manner of adopting a lifestyle, namely by everyday aesthetical preference.

Fourth, Schulze characterizes the aestheticization of the everyday as having itself some kind of a religious quality; the aestheticization of the everyday could have become equivalent to religion.

Schulze's most provocative message is his interpretation of German culture and society in terms of 'experience orientation' and 'everyday aesthetical preferences'. Thereby, he appears to have articulated what many in our society feel and assume. His work, however, also appears to indicate what many in church, theology and religious education are concerned about: that the religious domain may not make an exemption here, and that 'everyday aesthetical preference' has become the motivational pattern of how a growing portion of Germans approach religion.

There are still many open questions, not only in regard to lifestyle research but also with respect to the larger field of social scientific research on religion. One of these questions is whether 'religion' has been conceptualized adequately in the present research. A second question is whether 'religion' should be considered only as a dependent variable, or whether 'religion' itself is a style-forming and transforming factor, producing or proposing a 'Protestant Style' (see Korsch, 1997). Finally, my own proposal for a modification of James Fowler's (1981) structural-developmental differentiation of 'faith', in which I propose to distinguish 'religious styles' (Streib, 1997, 2001a, forthcoming a, forthcoming b), would need to be brought into discussion.

## **Conclusion**

In closing this examination of research on the religious, spiritual and lifestyle orientation of German adolescents, I shall try to



summarize open questions, implications and hypotheses which may be important for further research, and also for reflection in theology and religious education.

The quantitative results, as they are presented in the first part of this chapter, provide empirical evidence that the religiosity of German adolescents has more stability and continuity than can be deduced from the decline of church membership and worship participation. Around 30% of adolescents reported praying privately, more than 30% intended to raise their children religiously, and almost 50% described themselves as 'being religious'. Such data indicate that affinity to religion is still widespread among German adolescents. At the same time, these results also indicate that the religiosity of German adolescents may have changed significantly, because this religiosity, to a large extent, does not take place in organized religion and has become a matter of individual practice and preference. It has become privatized religion. The religion of German adolescents, because of its retreat from the public sphere, has thus become more invisible, invisible for the public and for the type of survey which attends mainly to questions of membership and institutional participation. While these results are convincing because of their representative nature, they cannot lead us further than documenting that privatized religious orientation, belief and practice are still dimensions of some importance in adolescents' life and self-understanding; we can only speculate about what exactly these adolescents mean by 'being religious' or by 'praying'. This is one of the open questions of these quantitative results.

Our own research results about the 'being spiritual/being religious' question identify and add another 20% to the group of adolescents who indicate that they are open toward and deal with religion or spirituality; but these results also may indicate the complexity and ambiguity of the more recent transformation of adolescent religiosity. It is very likely that this indicates that an even larger number of German adolescents have moved away from the religious tradition of their own culture and are sailing in their 'spiritual quest' toward new shores, in order to anchor their religious or spiritual identity and to find a different language for their ultimate concerns.

Qualitative research, as we have seen, sheds some light on the biographical developments and search strategies that adolescents employ. It is especially interesting to find qualitative evidence of

the existence of an 'occasional' type of religious orientation and praxis in German adolescents. This type of 'occasional' appropriation implements the pluralization of religious meaning and thus can be characterized as a *bricolage* type. The accumulative heretic type of religious identity formation emerges. Without being able, at this state of research, to give any quantitative account of this type of religious identity among German adolescents, this is another one of the open questions. I maintain that we need to pay attention to this rather new development in youth culture and to formulate and test the relevant hypotheses. It is my conviction that biographical-reconstructive research is the best way to bring to light the motivational and biographical dynamics involved in the development of religious socialization.

This characterization of adolescent religiosity, which has focused on the concepts religion, spirituality and *bricolage*, has so far traced the paths of the increasing ambiguity of religious quest, with an increasingly loose relation to one specific religious tradition. So far, however, less research attention has been given to the question of *motivation*. What motivates adolescents to engage in pluralistic and heretical quest for religion or spirituality? This is the point to bring lifestyle research into discussion, and it is particularly Schulze's lifestyle research that suggests some answers: 'everyday aesthetical preference' may have become the motivational pattern for how a growing portion of Germans approach religion.

In the project on the religiosity of religious educators (Feige, Dressler, Lukatis and Schöll, 2000), a type has been characterized as 'experience-rational preference and incorporation of religious resources'. Although this is research with adults, it also provides evidence about the motivational dynamics leading to the *bricolage* type of spiritual and religious quest. Explicitly, in this type characterization, Schulze's lifestyle perspective has been taken up. This recent detail from qualitative research also indicates that Schulze's perspective and proposal is gaining plausibility among German researchers, who recognize this pattern in their interpretation of religious biographies. To maintain that 'experience rationality' or 'everyday aesthetical preference' is an adequate characterization of adolescent religious or spiritual quest is an hypothesis which we may dare to advance. But the task of providing more solid empirical evidence, proof or falsification, is still ahead of us.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I thank Ralph Hood and Christopher Silver for collecting the data in Tennessee and for their work on the quantitative analysis of the data.
- <sup>2</sup> Since the author himself has decided to translate 'Erlebnis' by 'experience', I follow this path, but would like to add the connotation of 'event'. For the reception and discussion of Schulze's *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft*, see journal issues of *Wege zum Menschen* (WzM, 1996) and *Concilium* (Concilium, 1999), and also some contributions in practical theology and religious education (Wegenast, 1994; Koch, 1995; Sobiech, 1995; Schliep, 1996; Blasberg-Kuhnke and Kuhnke, 1997; Engemann, 1997; Kochanek, 1998; Kurz, 2000).
- <sup>3</sup> For Schulze it appears justified to talk about 'experience society', even if he appears to overstretch his data: as Vester and Vögele (1999: 22) note, only 25% of Schulze's subjects fall into 'experience-oriented' milieus.
- <sup>4</sup> This raises questions about Schulze's map of milieus and some have proposed to stand Schulze's design on its head. In 1994, Mörth and Fröhlich (1994) criticized the lack of attention in Schulze's research to socio-economic factors. They posed a great sociological tradition of lifestyle research against Schulze's approach, namely the work of Bourdieu (1984). We could also, with Lüdtkke (1996), propose a model in which lifestyle is only the fourth and final layer, which rests on social situation, social milieu and mentality. Alheit (1995: 94), to refer to a third critical voice, reveals 'amazing congruence' between Schulze's and Bourdieu's milieu maps and proposes to continue to work with Schulze's map, but under one condition: that we locate his milieus in Bourdieu's social space. Schulze's self-limitation on leisure activities and consumer behaviour and his ignoring questions of social justice are also the critique of Michael Vester (see Vester and Vögele, 1999: 22).
- <sup>5</sup> 'Tritt nicht durch die volle Entfaltung des Erlebnismarktes Individualisierung in ein finales Stadium ein? Geraten nicht die letzten Reste von Gruppenerfahrung und Solidarität, die übriggeblieben sind nach dem Verschwimmen ökonomischer Klassen, nach der Entstandardisierung der Lebensläufe, nach der Durchmischung der Wohngebiete, auf dem Erlebnismarkt in eine Zertrümmerungsmaschine, die nur noch den einzelnen als soziales Atom zurückläßt?' (Schulze, 1992: 17ff.).
- <sup>6</sup> In similar ways, Baacke (1990) has talked about the 'tacit ecstasies of adolescents'. The thesis that the religious educator has to attend to the religious and religion-equivalent everyday experiences of adolescents has been put forth, for example by Sauer (1990, 1995), Biehl (1998) or Heimbrock (1998). And Biehl (1998: 36) suggests that religious education should attend to 'the new and manifold forms of lived religion as not-everyday experiences in everyday'.

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*Religion, Education and  
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Edited by

LESLIE J. FRANCIS, MANDY ROBBINS and JEFF ASTLEY

on behalf of The International Seminar on  
Religious Education and Values (ISREV)



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2005