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Edited by
Hans-Günter Heimbrock, Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, Bryan P. Stone,
Heinz Streib, Claire Wolfteich, Trygve Wyller

In Co-operation with
Sunhee Ahn (Seoul, Korea), Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler (Frankfurt/Main,
Germany), Wanda Deifelt (São Paolo, Brazil), Jaco S. Dreyer
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Heinz Streib/Ralph W. Hood Jr.
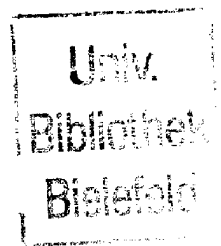Barbara Keller/Rosina-Martha Csöff
Christopher F. Silver

Deconversion

Qualitative and Quantitative Results from
Cross-Cultural Research in Germany and
the United States of America

Contents

Foreword by James T. Richardson

"Deconversion" is a timely topic indeed, and deserves the kind of thoroughly nuanced treatment that it has received in this volume. The international research team headed by noted scholars Heinz Streib and Ralph Hood has made a significant contribution to our understanding of what is happening with the large number of contemporaries who, for many different reasons, leave their religious affiliation and seek something else instead. Their sophisticated psychological approach to this area of study complements and improves upon typical more sociological studies that treat deconversion using a few structural variables such as class, status, gender, and race in studies of religious mobility. The models and typologies developed herein will, I think, become standards in this growing and important field of study.

As Streib notes in his introduction, the field of deconversion has been neglected in research efforts over the years. There has been some research on denominational "switching" in the U.S., mainly by sociologists of religion, and that research has yielded valuable even if limited results. The research area of New Religious Movements (NRMs) has given more recent impetus to the general area of deconversion research. These NRMs arose first mainly within the American context and then spread around much of the Westernized world, causing concern and even moral panics in a number of societies. The mass media had a field day, and convinced large numbers of people that NRMs were indeed a major social problem that needed to be addressed. (Richardson/Introvigne: 2007).

The focus on people leaving NRMs was, however, late in coming, as most early research focused on why and how people would join the new and sometimes rather strange religions that developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This focus often overlooked the fact that many if not most participants in the NRMs were "deconverting" from some other religious tradition in which they had been raised, and that some were embarking on a "conversion career" (Richardson: 1978) that would involve other instances of deconversion and reconversion.

Thus it was only after nearly two decades of concentration on why people join NRMs that a few scholars began to notice that although fairly large absolute numbers of young people were joining these groups and movements, they remained small in size, exaggerated claims by the groups and anti-cultists notwithstanding. If many people were joining, but the groups remained small in size, this could only mean that large numbers were not staying long and were instead leaving for other alternatives. This insight

raised questions about why this was the case, and the processes involved with leaving or deconverting. Thus a few pioneers started addressing the question of who leaves the NRMs and why they leave, as well as what they do next (Jacobs: 1989 for examples of this early work; Levine: 1984; see Skonovd: 1981; Wright: 1987). This spate of early research helped us understand that most NRMs were "pass-through" organizations (Beckford: 1978), and that this pattern of behavior was only a phase in what was sometimes a lengthy "conversion career," with about as many leavings as joinings for many if not most individual participants.

As a result of this significant insight about what was happening with participation in NRMs, it seemed to this writer that the major question was not why are so many young people joining NRMs, but why so many young people were having difficulty making a long term commitment to anything, including religion. This is a pertinent question as well for others who are not in NRMs but are involved in a life of experimentation in the religious realm.

The research revealed in this volume addresses that issue, but does so with a much broader focus, asking questions of members and former members of a number of religious groups of various kinds. The approach taken herein offers an in depth look at what happens as people consider whether to leave or stay in a religious group, and it makes use of various methodologies across the spectrum of quantitative and qualitative research in the psychology and social psychology of religion. I am not aware of any research in this area of study that approaches the thoroughness with which this long-in-the-making project deals with its subject matter.

There is no treatment of deconversion of which I am aware that presents such a sophisticated approach, both theoretically and methodologically, to the topic of leaving religious groups. This research has put much flesh on the bare bones of some insights derived from earlier studies of religious mobility and joining and leaving NRMs. The use of "sequence analysis" and "narrative analysis" herein is creative and obviously has been a fruitful way to proceed with research within this genre. The development of the criteria used in the study that culminate in the description of the four major types of deconversion trajectories is quite innovative, and while some might argue with specific aspects of the approach, all scholars should welcome the effort and the new knowledge that this very serious comparative research effort has produced.

I would close this forward with three other comments. One concerns the comparative nature of this research, which is clearly one of its strengths. The very intriguing differences found between German and American deconversion stories is quite notable, and makes us aware that there are contextual variables of great import when studying a phenomenon such as

deconversion. Most studies of conversion and deconversion are specific to one society, and the conclusions drawn from such research may be, as shown herein, quite limited and not generalizable beyond the time and place of the research. Another comment concerns the usefulness of this research report for other disciplines, particularly the sociology of religion. The researchers are well informed of relevant sociological research and relate their work to that literature where appropriate. Particularly their discussion of groups in high tension with their societal environment will be of interest to sociologists of religion, as will other aspects of their work reported herein.

A final comment perhaps is more personal in nature. As I read the rich narratives included in this research report I was struck by how some of the stories seemed to illustrate aspects of some earlier theoretical work (Richardson/van der Lans/Derks: 1984) done on the issues of how people account for their having left a religious group, and how other key actors such as parents, friends, and leaders of the religious group themselves account for the act of someone leaving the group. In that earlier work we examined three major types of leaving: voluntary "exiting," expulsion, and extraction ("deprogramming"), all of which were occurring with NRMs to differing degrees, with "exiting" being by far the foremost such action being taken by NRM participants. While expulsion and extraction are not germane to the research reported herein, certainly exiting is, as are the processing of accounting for the actions by the major actors involved. In the sociological literature an account is an explanation or justification of an action that is negotiated between key actors in whatever problematic behavior develops that requires an explanation (Scott/Lyman: 1968). These accounts may not be true in an absolute sense of the term, but they do represent what people think about what they have done or what has happened to them. Accounts can be, and often are, self-serving, as the person attempts to put forward the best possible interpretation of their past behaviors.

Thus the research reported herein should also contribute to the sociological study of accounts, a fertile area for research indeed. My saying this is not to suggest that the accounts reported herein are questionable or lack validity. Indeed, the multiple methods used in this sophisticated approach undercuts any such effort to discount what the respondents say. Indeed, the broad triangulation approach used by the researchers has indeed yielded much that should be of interest to those studying accounts and the processes whereby they are developed.

With those comments I close, with a strong recommendation that many within the fields of psychology, social psychology, and sociology of religion can gain much from a careful reading results of the research effort that professors Streib and Hood have led. Policy makers can also learn from this

research, as a careful reading will perhaps help quell the tendencies toward moral panic that sometimes develop when people decide to change their religious affiliation.

James T. Richardson
University of Nevada, Reno

Introduction

Many people, especially in the United States and Europe make use of their religious freedom: they choose their religious affiliation – and a growing number makes more than one choice. This also involves that a growing number of contemporaries *leave* religious orientations and affiliations. This is what we call deconversion and define as intellectual, experiential, emotional and moral disengagement from a religion which, in most cases, leads to the termination of membership.

This book presents conceptualizations and results of the Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study of Deconversion for the academic and public audience. Our research aims at resolving a series of questions such as the following: What is it that motivates deconversion? Are there different kinds of deconversion depending on the type of religious organization – be it a disaffiliation from a fundamentalist or from a new religious group or from a mainline religious tradition? What is the impact of the cultural background and of the biographical history? How is deconversion linked to faith styles? How does it relate to personality traits and to psychological well-being?

With the publication of our results, a long process of field work and evaluation comes to a close. During a sabbatical in the winter semester 2000/2001 which H. Streib partially spent in the United States, he visited with colleagues and discussed with them the design of this cross-cultural research project on deconversion. J.W. Fowler at Emory University, Atlanta and J.T. Richardson, University of Nevada at Reno were very responsive to the research plans and directed attention to many other colleagues. Both Fowler and Richardson served as advisors for this project. And this is the proper place to express our gratitude. With H.N. Malony, Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, J. Snarey, Emory University and R.W. Hood plans were made to cooperate in the research with deconverts from new religious fundamentalist organizations (the first phase of our project): H.N. Malony supervised field work and advised the dissertation of R. Swanson who completed part of the research in California; J. Snarey supervised field work and advised the dissertation of A. Green, who conducted research in the Atlanta area; and R.W. Hood supervised the field work in Tennessee and Georgia and invited a team of his students to participate in field work – and it was especially C. Silver, who invested so much of his time and energy to make the project move well and succeed.

The project started with research on deconverts from new religious fundamentalist organizations with an initial work shop in Atlanta in July 2002. B. Keller joined the Bielefeld research team and continued to work as a post-doc and project coordinator through both project phases. The project owes much to her expertise, energy, organizational talent, and patience. B. Keller was joined by R.-M. Csöff who also continued to work as a research assistant through both project phases; she not only invested much energy into the field work, but specialized in and has become an expert for faith development research. Together, the Bielefeld team had the final lead in the organization of the field work – regular video conferences have helped to improve the communication and the coordination greatly. At the same time, the Bielefeld team completed all of the field work in Germany. This would not have been that easy without the help of a team of student assistants: N. Hinney, S. Wandschneider, T. Zimmermann and R. Bullik. Many thanks also to the Bielefeld team! Furthermore, we would like to thank V. Gramley for her support in proofreading the manuscript.

With the beginning of the second phase of the research project (January, 2004–October, 2005), in which we have enlarged the research focus to include, aside from new religious fundamentalist deconverts also deconverts from accommodating and integrated, i.e. more accepted and mainline religious organizations, also some organizational changes were implemented: The team at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga became the key partner location for the project in the United States: R.W. Hood not only continued to supervise and coordinate field work in the South East of the United States – together with C. Silver; also a kind of division of labor was planned in prospect of the upcoming data evaluation. For quantitative analyses, Chattanooga was supposed to be the primary location, while, for narrative analysis and faith development evaluation, Bielefeld was supposed to be responsible. Thus, the analysis of quantitative results owes much to the expertise of R.W. Hood.

The two phases of our study of deconversion were made possible through third-party funding from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) [German Research Council], Bonn. We would like to express our gratitude for this funding. Our thanks also go to Bielefeld University where the project was hosted and supported in regard to overhead costs and financial administration.

The argument in this volume follows a movement from conceptualization to empirical research and then back to draw conclusions. In Chapter One we introduce a conceptualization of deconversion, develop a perspective of the relation of deconversion and faith styles, and relate deconversion to the context in the religious field; all of this cumulates in a typology. In our research we paid special attention to the deconversion from fundamen-

talism and new religious orientations as part of a variety of options in the religious field. In Chapter Two we summarize previous research on deconversion, and Chapter Three presents an outline of our own research design.

In Chapter Four quantitative analyses of our data are presented as they relate to and prepare the qualitative analysis. Results are based on a core sample of about one hundred narrative interviews and faith development interviews with deconverts from Germany and the United States. In addition, our database contains results from more than 1,000 questionnaires and about 180 faith development interviews with members of the religious groups that were left by the deconverts – which we term "in-tradition members." The research strategy in this project combined qualitative instruments such as the biographical interview, the classical faith development interview, and quantitative measures such as the Religious Fundamentalism Scale, the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale, the "Big Five" personality factors (NEO-FFI), and the Ryff Scale on Psychological Well-Being and Growth. These instruments are used to systematically explore contexts, conditions, and outcomes of deconversions.

In Chapters Five through Nine we present our case studies. Narrative interviews with deconverts constitute the core of our data. These chapters present a selection of case studies in the framework of the typology that has emerged. It is not only impossible to present one hundred case studies in equal depth and detail without boring the reader; it is also unnecessary, since the qualitative method suggests working with similarities and contrasts, i.e. to construct types. The case studies presented in these chapters therefore represent exemplary types. The fact that we have faith development interviews from all deconverts and even a higher number of faith development interviews with in-tradition members, allows us to draw conclusion about the relation between faith development and deconversion on a case-to-case basis. We also relate quantitative results to the single case.

In the final step, the concluding chapter of the book presents the integration of qualitative and quantitative evaluation. The triangulation of methodological approaches is one of the specialties of our research design. Thus, we are able to demonstrate how the typology of deconversion narratives resulting from qualitative evaluation falls into sharp contrast against the background of – mostly quantitative – the evaluation of the religious tradition which the deconverts left behind. We also discuss the consequences of our results, summarizing answers to our research questions and evaluate them with reference to previous research.

We assume that our results are a contribution for answering questions regarding the cross-cultural differences of religious fields on the American and the European continent and thus speak to the puzzle of the so-called Eurosecularity, but, at the same time, open up a new puzzle: that of cross-

culturally rather high numbers of "more spiritual than religious" self-identifications. Finally, our data speak to the question of whether deconversion includes a crisis and whether there is a need for intervention and counseling in the deconversion situation.

We did our best to summarize our research results in a readable size. And we shortened and edited quotes from narrative and faith development interviews for easier reading. The expert in empirical research may still wish to see more detail. For this purpose, we suggest to consult our web site (www.uni-bielefeld.de/deconversion) on which results are presented in a more comprehensive form including many tables and the full text of all interviews which we elaborated in the case studies.

This study had a specific group of persons it focuses on, namely the *deconverts*. Without their openness to talk to us and to share very intimate and decisive experiences of transformation, we would not have been able to present anything here. We would like to express our deep gratitude especially to them. We also are very thankful to the hundreds of in-tradition members who completed a faith development interview or filled out our questionnaire.

1 What is Deconversion? – Profiling the Concept

Religion may involve change, biographical change. In the Christian tradition, many narratives exemplify this: Jesus calling his disciples, Saul who became Paul, Augustin who describes his radical change in his *Confessiones*, to mention only a few. We call these changes "conversion" and certainly in the foreground stands the change into a new faith and a new commitment. What is less visible and rather in the background is the process of leaving a former belief system, religious praxis, morality, and, eventually, an affiliation with a religious community. Thus, we may start with the claim that disaffiliation processes – which we shall call "deconversion" – are as old as conversion. But why call it "deconversion" and what justifies a special focus on disaffiliation?

Certainly, a search for "deconversion" in electronic databases results in a relatively small number of hits or references – and even less when we limit our search to empirical studies. Deconversion is not a well-established keyword in the literature, neither in the psychology or sociology of religion nor in practical theology, and even less so in religious communities. There is research on disaffiliation, apostasy, defection, religious switching, church-leaving and exiting, but not much can be found in association with the keyword "deconversion."

Even though "deconversion" is not a term very commonly and widely used, we claim that there are good reasons for using the word. "Deconversion" avoids the negative connotations which are almost unavoidable in "apostasy" or "defection" – terms which associate blaming the individual for a break of loyalty. "Deconversion" allows for less prejudice and suggests that deconversion has similar legitimacy as conversion. Further, labeling the process under investigation as conversion with a negative prefix, as a conversion in the opposite direction, suggests that both could possibly have comparable dynamics in biographical change. Thus understanding deconversion is associated with the discussion and the results about conversion. Deconversion research has emerged from conversion research.

This leads to the key question in the beginning of this book: How can deconversion be defined? What are its characteristics? Which aspects deserve attention in empirical research on deconversion? With reference to previous contributions on the understanding of deconversion – and of conversion –, we need to clarify which dimensions and characteristics need to

be included in our conceptualization. This will be the first step in this chapter.

For a more detailed understanding of the biographical change which we call deconversion, we also need to look at its relation to another conceptualization of biographical-religious change: to the kind of transformation which Fowler's (1981) model of faith development suggested and which advanced in Streib's (2001) model of faith styles. What happens with faith styles upon deconversion? Since development in faith, or change in faith styles can be understood as opposition to or a way beyond fundamentalist orientation, the expectation could be that deconversion from fundamentalist affiliation involves changes in faith style. In any case, we think that we had good reason for including the faith development instruments in our research design. But this needs more detailed justification and reflective preparation in a second step in this chapter.

There is, however, one more dimension in which we need to flash out and profile the concept of deconversion: *context*. The understanding of deconversion, like the understanding of conversion, depends on the characteristics of the religious field in a specific culture at a specific point in time. Thus, it is subject to changes over time. We may even assume that the rise of interest in deconversion is an effect of these changes.

Concluding our conceptualization and integrating the perspectives, we suggest a typology of possible deconversion trajectories. The plurality of options in the religious field in modern times and the variety of faith style options suggests reckoning with a variety of avenues which deconverts may take. This typology should help us understand the disaffiliation processes in the religious fields in both of our geographical foci in which our research took place, the United States of America and Germany.

1.1   From Conversion to Deconversion

Conversion is the common term to describe a process of individual change in regard to religion from which we usually expect the constitution of a long-lasting new commitment and new conduct according to the rules of the new affiliation. Thus, we can speak of conversion as a kind of biographical-religious turning point. Biography is re-written according to the conversion story which is typical within the new religious community. Thereby conversion is the decisive turning point in the new construction of the biographical plot. Conversion stories are commonly characterized by a sharp contrast between before and after, or even more specifically between living in sin

and a life in holiness, between darkness and light, between living in the reign of Satan and dwelling in the reign of God. This has become the most common and prevalent understanding in Western religious and (certain parts of) theological culture.

To focus more precisely on the birth place of our scientific concept of conversion, we need to take into account its development in modern Protestantism in the New World. Puritan, Methodist, and Anabaptist traditions, Pietistic influences, Great Awakenings, the extraordinary rise of Methodist and Baptist churches – all of them have, differences notwithstanding, contributed to and promoted a "theory" of conversion. Its prototype can be identified in the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus: a sudden change of beliefs brought about by divine intervention, leading to a new self and new conduct in holiness, conversion as a one-time and supposedly permanent turning to the one and only true Christian faith. Conversion had become a rather important and central issue in the religious field in the United States in the 19th and early 20th century.

It therefore comes with little surprise that conversion has been a prominent focus of theorizing and research in the early days of the psychology of religion. This focus on conversion can be understood as attention to the lived religion of that time in the North American religious landscape. Thus it appears as no surprise that, with some variation, we find the Saul-Paul model of conversion in the works of the early psychologists of religion, G.S. Hall (1904), J.H. Leuba (1904; 1896), E.D. Starbuck (1899) or W. James (1902). It is an interesting – and perhaps ironic – episode in the history of the psychology of religion that this model has made its way into conceptualization of conversion and that it took a relatively long time before the crisis paradigm of conversion was actually questioned, qualified, and modified. The prominence of the crisis paradigm of sudden conversion was exposed by James Pratt (Pratt: 1920) as submission to evangelical theology. In Pratt's line of thought, Elmer Clark (1929) engaged in empirical investigation and documented the marginal occurrence of crisis conversion.

In his review of a century of research on conversion, D. Wulff (2002) describes several conceptual changes: While in the early times of the psychology of religion, the taken-for-granted model of conversion was the conversion of Paul before Damascus, it took quite some time to realize that conversion can also be a gradual process. Later, in the second half of the 20th century, the older models were replaced by still another paradigm which suggests that conversion is characterized by an active subject making meaning. This change of focus is associated with the increasing pluralization in the religious landscape. In the United States we first and foremost see the rise of new religious movements and high rates of secularization; while in

European societies there is the dominance of an individualistic approach toward religion in Western societies which Berger (1979) termed "heretical imperative." This has contributed to an increasing religious mobility.

Along the lines of pluralization and individualization, also the understanding and the centrality of conversion has changed: today only certain minority groups in the religious field aim at and require the type of conversion the way it used to be in the late 19th century: the once-in-a-lifetime, sudden and powerful religious key experience.

The new predominant paradigm of conversion features the active, meaning-making subject. Conversion is understood as a rather rational process, as acquisition and testing of a new behavior and new beliefs. Especially in regard to new religious movements, J. Richardson (1985) elaborated on the distinction between the active and passive convert and argued, in agreement with many scholars in the scientific study of new religions, in favor of an interpretation of NRM conversions as active.[1] J. Lofland and L.N. Skonovd's (1981) compilations of conversion motifs include and attend to the new types of non-crisis induced conversion and display a new effort to come to terms with and systematize the variety of forms of religious changes.

But then, also the possibility of "conversion careers" (Richardson 1978) comes into sight: people may convert more than once in their life. Then however, affiliation involves disaffiliation, deconversion precedes conversion. And we can consequently state with Wulff (2002, 55) that "deconversion thus becomes a new phenomenon to be understood in its own right." Thus, there is a consistent line of development from conversion to deconversion research.

Moreover, after a century of studying conversion in the psychology of religion, we have good reasons for shift in the focus: for studying deconversion in its own right (Streib: 2003c). This is the assumption on which our research project is based. Our particular research focus on deconversion, to be sure, does not ignore that deconversion could at the same time involve conversion to a new orientation or affiliation. But there is a variety of deconversions without new affiliation: the older pattern – which can be observed more frequently in European countries – is deconversion into secular orientation, the more recent pattern is deconversion leading to a variety of unspecified new affiliations like the participation in spiritual networks or to an open search for spirituality. Which are the most popular avenues that deconverts take? We have to leave this to the empirical investigation and make this one of our research questions.

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[1] Cf. also J. Richardson's (1985; 1992; 1995) research and evaluation of extant empirical investigation on new religious movements and conversion in this contexts.

Taken together, it is the basic assumption of this research project that, by focusing on deconversion rather than on conversion, we capture a characteristic of contemporary religion which has been ignored for too long, and could be further neglected only at the risk of missing major segments of the religious fields in the United States and Europe. But by referring to this process by using the term "de-conversion" rather than by any other name, we aim at a thick or general description of a multi-dimensional biographical process – as pre-structured in the discourse on conversion. It is open for and requires psychological analysis, includes a narrative-evaluative perspective, and needs to be based on a multi-dimensional definition, to which we will now turn our attention.

1.2   Conceptualizing Deconversion

For theoretical clarity and in respect to empirical research, it is necessary to systematize the dimensions or elements of deconversion. Even though, as mentioned above, "deconversion" is no well-established keyword and we cannot refer to an extensive body of literature, there are, however, some lines we can begin with and we can expand.

For our conceptualization of deconversion (which we have first published in Streib/Keller: 2004) we consider an excellent previous attempt at defining the concept of deconversion in the context of qualitative analysis: J.D. Barbour's (1994) *Versions of Deconversion* in which he presents an analysis of published autobiographies of leading theologians, philosophers, and other writers. Barbour interprets the rise of and interest in deconversion as the growing out of the increasing individualism and religious pluralism in modernity. Using the term "deconversion" in a broad meaning of "loss or deprivation of religious faith", he identified criteria of deconversion which, as he attempts to demonstrate, occur in most deconversions. Barbour distinguishes four characteristics: (1) intellectual doubt or denial in regard to the truth of a system of beliefs; (2) moral criticism, including the rejection of the entire way of life of a religious group; (3) emotional suffering which consists in grief, guilt, loneliness, and despair; and finally (4) disaffiliation from the community. Barbour found his four most significant elements involved in deconversion to be sufficient.

Closer scrutiny may allow us, however, to find elements which Barbour did not account for in his analysis. Comparing Barbour's (1994) definition

with Glock's (1962) five dimensions[2] or with J. Lofland's and L.N. Skonovd's (1981) conversion motifs,[3] we may miss in Barbour's list the *experiential* dimension. It may, however, be important for understanding the process of deconversion to attend to the loss of specific religious experiences which deconverts talk about in their interviews. The loss of religious experiences or the attraction to a new kind of religious experience may be elements of deconversion which occur as early in the deconversion process and are just as important for this process as intellectual doubt and denial or moral criticism. For this reason we added this to our list of elements in our conceptualization of deconversion.

Thus, in our approach to a definition of deconversion, we propose a set of five characteristics which were advanced from Barbour's definition:

1. Loss of specific religious experiences;
2. intellectual doubt, denial or disagreement with specific beliefs;
3. moral criticism;
4. emotional suffering;
5. disaffiliation from the community.

From this list of criteria it becomes obvious, but it still should be noted explicitly that our understanding of deconversion radically differs from a simple way of identifying disaffiliation with termination of membership. Already our fifth criterion, disaffiliation from the community, does not exclusively evaluate membership and its termination – which eventually and in many cases is the outcome of deconversion, but "disaffiliation" can consist of a withdrawal from participation in meetings or in a retreat from observance of religious practices; this is especially important in regard to religious orientations without formal membership such as Islam. Moreover, the variety of *five* criteria aims at a more open and multi-perspective interpretation of deconversion.

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[2] When we relate Barbour's list to Glock's (1962) five dimensions of religion, we find some correspondence, but also open ends: Barbour's intellectual doubt and denial corresponds to Glock's ideological dimension and may have some relation with the intellectual dimension; moral criticism can be associated with the ritualistic dimension; emotional suffering has to do with the consequential dimension. Since Glock, together with Stark (Stark/Glock: 1968), has changed two aspects (they excluded the consequential dimension and split the ritual dimension), correspondences are less obvious – and prayer and church attendance come more into the foreground. But it is obvious from this comparison that the experiential dimension is missing in Barbour's list.

[3] If we take seriously that 'deconversion' is a derivate of 'conversion,' it may be advisable to take into account the conversion motifs as discussed by J. Lofland and L.N. Skonovd (1981). Their compilation of the motives remind us to pay attention to a variety of dimensions such as the cognitive, experiential, and emotional dimension, but their inclusion of revivalistic and coercive motifs indicates that they are aiming rather at a typology of *conversions* – with strong focus on NRM conversions.

It is also obvious especially from two characteristics of our list, intellectual doubt and moral criticism, that our conceptualization of deconversion is open to account for the active, meaning-making subject, while, at the same time, not excluding a crisis pattern of deconversion which may involve more emotional suffering and loss of religious experience. The question remains as to which of the criteria comes first and may be more important. This way, specific profiles of deconversion emerge.

We used this set of five characteristics of deconversion to structure our empirical research. They can be used as criteria for identifying biographical accounts *as* deconversion stories. It is also interesting to see which of the five criteria are most salient in a deconversion story. This way, this set of characteristics has, as a differential perspective, become a key aspect for the construction of a typology of deconversion narratives in chapters five through nine.

1.3   The Religious Styles Perspective on Deconversion

Deconversion is biographical change. Thereby, as especially two of our five deconversion criteria, "intellectual doubt" and "moral criticism", highlight, the process of deconversion may involve moving out of a state of naïveté and taken-for-granted-ness, raising questions and developing criticism. Thus, deconversion is the change of a person's religious orientation in a specific biographical time which involves re-writing one's religious identity, revising one's system of beliefs and world views, and re-structuring one's way of thinking, moral judgment, and dealing with authority – with a special focus on the act of leaving the old and searching for something different. In more structural terms, one could also say: Deconversion involves criticism and abandonment of cognitive schemata, exiting from a style of being religious. This suggests that we look at deconversion from a perspective of faith schemata and styles – which understands itself as an advancement of Fowler's faith development theory.

Already Fowler (1981) addressed the relation between faith development and *conversion* in his theory of faith development. He raised the question of whether conversion involves faith development and how. Thereby, he introduced the basic distinction between structural and lateral conversion: structural conversion involves stage transformation, while lateral conversion does not. Thus, Fowler took into account that the conversion process may involve progress in terms of faith development, but that in specific cases there is conversion without a change in faith stage. We can conclude

from this and assume that also *deconversion* may be associated with changes in faith development, but not in each and every case. We consider this an interesting question for our research: Under which circumstances does deconversion involve progress in terms of faith development?

Jamieson (2002) presented the first study on deconversion in association with faith development. His typology of leavers from Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches in New Zealand includes characterizations on the basis of Fowler's (1981) model of faith development. Interviewees were located through a snowballing technique. Also deduced from Fowler's work is that leavers are categorized in a typology with four groups: disillusioned followers, reflexive exiles, transitional explorers, and integrated way-finders. Jamieson shows that some interviewees moved from being a member of a Pentecostal church at Stage Three to other stages of faith, some of them going from being reflexive exiles to being transitional explorers (Stage Four) or directly to being integrated way-finders (Stage Five), some of them remaining disillusioned followers or any of the "less advanced" groups. Jamieson also maintains that some of his respondents have directly reached a level more than one stage above the stage of the church they had left. Thus, Jamieson's study is an example which shows that this faith development model can be successfully applied in deconversion research – even when research remains in the framework of Fowler's model.

The religious styles perspective (Streib: 2001; 2003b; 2003c; 2005a) suggests a model of religious development which includes a broader variety of perspectives such as life span developmental psychology, life style research, and psychoanalysis. The life span perspective, to highlight one aspect, may advance theoretical reasoning and empirical research on religious development in order to view religious development as an adaptive, multidimensional process which is situated in context, and which may involve gains and losses throughout the life span. By inviting the life span perspective with its multi-factorial and polyvalent understanding of biographical change, it becomes obvious that there is no room for an exclusive key position of the mono-directional, teleological "logic of development" which used to be plausible in the family of structural-developmental theories. Instead, the religious styles perspective is open to account for gains and losses – also in the deconversion processes. Styles, in contrast to stages, are more flexible, have less precise boundaries and allow for more options of biographical change. Going more into detail this means that the religious styles perspective understands styles as consisting of one or more schemata. Examples for schemata are: holding on to the truth of texts and teachings of one's own religion, or being open for the truth of the other. Working with such detailed components (schemata) which constitute the fabric of

religious orientations (styles) may help to better understand and interpret the variety of deconversion trajectories in terms of religious development.

In sum this means that from the previously given account on faith development and religious styles in relation to deconversion, it should be plausible that we included the classical faith development interview in our research, but have also developed and used an instrument for the assessment of faith schemata. Fowler's model and Jamieson's research support the assumption and expectation that deconversion involves transformation in terms of faith development theory in a majority of cases – especially for deconverts from religious organizations which are in opposition to the rest of society.[4] This should not foreclose attention to other options, namely that deconverts from mainline religious organizations may affiliate with a fundamentalist tradition and experience some sort of regression in terms of faith development. Thus, there is also the possibility that deconversion for some may not involve faith development at all ("lateral deconversion"). Here, the assessment of religious schemata and religious styles may help not only to reconfirm or correct the faith development interview results, but also to establish a perspective of its own: It may open the perspective on detailed, focused, perhaps domain-specific, revisions of a person's way of thinking and being religious in the process of leaving the old and setting out for something different.

1.4   The Variety of Deconversion Trajectories

It is obvious that deconversion may be different depending on the place of departure and on the direction of this migration. This consideration suggests a typology of deconversion roles which we developed and will present below – but not without taking an extant proposal into consideration.

Bromley (1998) proposes a typology of exit roles based on a typology of religious organizations. His focus is on religious organizations – which he distinguishes according to their degree of legitimacy in relation to society. Against this background, he identifies the roles of people who leave: "Allegiant organizations," e.g. the mainline churches are left by "defectors" or "deserters;" "contestant organizations," e.g. Pentecostal and Charismatic

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[4] We contend that Jamieson's research result can be better understood in the framework of religious styles, because this would make it easier to explain the re-emergence of earlier forms of faith.

churches by "whistleblowers," and "subversive organizations," like new religious movements by "apostates."

Bromley has in mind a specific definition of religious organization which is characterized by rather clear boundaries, leadership structure, membership status, and legitimacy characteristics. His focus is on organizational affiliation and disaffiliation. Exit in this case means the termination of membership. In his description of exit roles, Bromley particularly attends to public reaction and public exit roles, rather than to the religious beliefs or practices of the leave-taker. Thus, in Bromley's perspective, we miss some of our criteria for deconversion (as detailed in 1.2), but also the characterization of the religious field, as outlined above. Nevertheless, the discussion of Bromley's proposal did play a role for profiling our own.

For the construction of our typology of religious organizations, we have seen the need to focus more clearly on the criterion of *integration*. We came to distinguish between integrated, accommodating, and oppositional religious organizations. Thereby we propose to understand "integrated" as having no or only marginal tension with society, 'oppositional' and 'accommodating' as being in tension with society; "accommodating" religious organizations, in contrast to "oppositional" organizations, are on their way and work for integration. This typological differentiation has been necessary for a classification of religious groups which the deconverts and in-tradition members identify with when filling out our questionnaire.

Thus, we have to take into account a variety of deconversion avenues and directions: Deconversions which are moves and changes within the zone of organized religion, those which are moves into the periphery without organizational structure, and those which are exiting the religious field altogether. Further differentiating according to the type of religious organization and accumulative heresy, we come to propose the variety of options of deconversion trajectories (which is also visualized in Figure 1):

1. *Secularizing exit:* Termination of (concern with) religious belief and praxis, termination of membership in organized religion;

2. *Oppositional exit:* Adopting a different belief system of, or engaging in different ritual praxis in, or affiliation with, a higher-tension, more oppositional religious organization, which could mean e.g. conversion into a fundamentalist or new religious group;

3. *Religious switching:* Switching to a religious organization with a similar system of beliefs and rituals and with no difference in terms of integration;

4. *Integrating exit:* Adopting a different belief system of, or engaging in different ritual praxis in, and affiliation with, an integrated or more accommodated religious organization;

Figure 1. The Variety of Deconversion Trajectories

Individual heretical appropriation of new belief system(s) or engagement in different religious praxis (syncretistic, invisible religion, spiritual quest – without new organizational affiliation)

Termination of formal membership, but continuity of private religious belief and private religious praxis – invisible religion

More integrated or accommodated religious organization with a different belief system and different ritual praxis (re-conversion light)

Religious organization with a similar belief system and ritual praxis

More oppositional religious organization with a different belief system and different ritual praxis (e.g. conversion in fundamentalist or new religious group)

Termination of (concern with) religious belief and praxis / Termination of membership in organized religion

Heretical exit

Privatizing exit

Integrating exit

Religious switching

Oppositional exit

Secularizing exit

Religious Organizations

Accomo-dating

Integrated

Oppo-sitional

5. *Privatizing exit:* Termination of membership, but continuity of private religious belief and private religious praxis; this is what is meant by "invisible religion";

6. *Heretical exit:* Individual heretical appropriation of new belief system(s) or engagement in different religious praxis (syncretistic, invisible religion, spiritual quest) without new organizational affiliation.

1.5 Deconversion as Migration in the Religious Field

Deconversion can be viewed as migration in the religious field. When we take this into account, we take the deconversion trajectories in Figure 1 a step further. This will help to contextualize and reconnect our typology within sociological theory. The religious field is not uniform, but consists of a variety of different groups and organizations. How can we mark the religious field when working towards a typological characterization of deconversion?

The religious field can be understood, with Bourdieu (1971; 1987), as an arena in which a variety of actors with different degrees of organization and different commodities interact with clients in order to keep or acquire their attraction and affiliation. With reference to M. Weber's classical distinction, Bourdieu profiles three types of actors in the religious field: priests, prophets, and magicians. This typological structuring of the religious field clarifies our typology especially in two respects.

First, it helps to understand the tensional relation between the organization of the priests and that of the prophets – traditionally referred to as the distinction between church and sect. Though we arrived at a somewhat different terminology and talk about new religious movements (NRM) instead of sects, it is still important to consider the distinction. We will interpret it as the distinction between the type of religious organization with high legitimacy, high integration and no tension with society and culture (priest), on the one hand, and the type(s) of religious organization or religious movement with low integration, low legitimacy and tension with, and sometimes opposition to, society and culture (prophet). Thus, from this perspective we stand on solid sociological ground, when we turn to a distinction between two groups (tension vs. no-tension), combining oppositional and accommodating religious groups into "tension groups", while integrated religious organizations constitute a groups of their own.

Second, Bourdieu's structuring of the religious field considers a third type of religious actor: the magician. Following Weber, Bourdieu (1987: 134) describes the magician as a practitioner of magic *coercion*, as a "small independent entrepreneur hired by private individuals on an *ad hoc* basis and exercising his office outside any recognized institution, most often in clandestine manner." To differentiate this characterization of the third type as peripheral and co-active, we may consider another sociological expertise which has also introduced a third type: Troeltsch (1911; 1912) also talks about *three* types. Next to the priest and the prophet, he profiled a third type which he called *mysticism*. Aside from the ideal types of church religion and sect religion (which both, within their realms, may embrace and nurture a kind of mystical or spiritual inward orientation), Troeltsch identifies mysticism as the type of Protestant religion that features religious individualism, develops outside of church and sect, and probably has no external organization (Daiber: 2002).[5] R. Hood (2006) is right with his reference to Troeltsch's third type of religion as an identification of a form of religion which is an alternative to, and stands in contrast to, church religion and sect religion. Hood continues by saying that in contemporary empirical research it can be identified through questions that elicit a "spiritual, but not religious" self-identification. Thus, we have to reckon with a strong presence of "spiritual" self-identification in the third terrain of the religious field.

Without the aspiration to solve the open question of whether Bourdieu's *magician* and Troeltsch's *mystic* are the same, they point to a third terrain in the religious field. Sociology will need to come to terms with that and find ways of an adequate description. In this respect proposals for characterizing social units which are *neither* institutions *nor* organizations in terms of *milieu, network,* or *scene* (Gebhardt: 2002) are a good start. Meanwhile, we go back to the classics and put up a proposal here: Both Weber and Troeltsch, despite their potential difference in characterizing the third type, contend that this type lacks organization. Bourdieu appears to agree with that. None of the three have any reservation against the assumption that this third type is part of the religious field. Thus, while we have solid, structured, well organized segments in the religious field with clear-cut (public)

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[5] Certainly, Troeltsch's early identification of religious individualism, including the variant of mysticism as a third ideal type, was thoughtful and perhaps ahead of his time. We witness today a global spread of just this kind of religious individualism. The problem with Troeltsch's expertise is that he talks about mysticism in *Protestantism* and rather in a *historical* perspective – which means that today we need some evidence of its contemporary and cross-religious validity. Second, there is a problem with sociological plausibility: Troeltsch himself appears somewhat unclear about whether mysticism is a religion without any organization or whether it develops at least some organizational structures. Also, this second question calls for more contemporary sociological clarification.

roles and established authority, there is a segment of the religious field which is fluid, un-structured, un-organized (has no recognizable organization in sociological terms) and has a more temporary authority rather for the individual client only.

While our sociological classics had in mind rather established roles such as the self-entrepreneurial magician or the mystic eremite – as *part* of the religious field, but in a segment which is considered un-organized, this needs to be developed further as culture changes, including increasing individualization, social and religious mobility, Internet use and the like. We can conclude that it is safe to assume a third vector in the religious field pointing to a segment of the religious field which features magic, mysticism and spirituality and which may be called the *un-organized periphery* of the religious field.

To characterize the un-organized periphery some more, religious mobility in the religious field emphasizes the decision of the individual. This in turn is the outcome of more recent and increasingly observable changes in the religious field and for which we can refer to sociological analyses such as Berger's (1979) claim of an "heretical imperative." This affects the readiness for mobility in the entire religious field. Today, however, the individual finds, besides Christian and other traditional products, an affluent religious market with a variety of un-churched, "invisible" (Knoblauch: 1991; 2003; Luckmann: 1963; 1967) or "implicit" (Thomas: 2001) forms of religion. Together with the decline of concern for tradition, we observe even an inclination to adopt, sequentially or simultaneously, a variety of religious orientations irrespective of boundaries between organizations and belief traditions. This appears to be a new development in the *un-organized* segment of the religious field which may be called "accumulative heresy."[6] Thus, expanding Berger's understanding of "heresy" with a more fluid and ongoing need for decision-making in religious orientation, this new development can be interpreted using Levi-Strauss' metaphor of "bricolage." The individual increasingly behaves like a home-worker (bricoleurs) who scans the material at hand in order to integrate pieces into a project which he or she has in mind. According to Beaudoin (1998; 2003), it is especially Generation X who has developed irreverence, heresy, and bricolage.

Concluding our first chapter on the conceptualization of deconversion, we can profile a variety of ways of deconversion as migrations in the religious field. Thereby the religious field is – with reference to sociological theory – characterized by the three ideal type positions (priest, prophet and

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[6] In the research for the Enquete Commission "So-called sects and psycho groups" of the thirteenth German Parliament, a new type of religious biographical trajectory called the 'accumulative heretic' has been identified (cf. Streib: 1999b; 2000a).

magician) in which the three types of oppositional, accommodating and integrated religious organizations find their place in tension and no-tension organization, but also the un-organized sector can be defined more precisely. Thus, we can present in Figure 2 a map of deconversion migrations which integrates our typology of the destinies of deconversion from Figure 1 into the dynamics of the religious field.

We regard this map of deconversion as migrations in the religious field as being helpful for understanding deconversion trajectories. But, of course, it has also limitations and it is only half of the picture. It would not be easy to integrate in this migration map all of our deconversion criteria (see p. 22): loss of religious experience, intellectual doubt, moral criticism or emotional suffering – even though questions about their relation to the deconversion trajectories are highly interesting. Even more ambitious, if not impossible, would be to map transition in terms of faith development and religious styles. And finally, the psychological and narrative dynamics of deconversion present us with a variety which perhaps nobody can integrate in a flow chart or migration map.

This already suggests that in order to understand deconversion processes fully and in depth, we need to attend to the single case. This is the reason why qualitative, biographical case studies are the core of our study and why our book consists of several chapters presenting case studies. Thus, the design of our research, as Chapter Three will present in detail, gravitates around this focus. In this first chapter, we intended no more than, but no less either to explicate our conceptual framework for "deconversion" as the starting point. The criteria for "deconversion" and the variety of deconversion trajectories, as explicated in this chapter, will play important roles in the analysis of our rich qualitative and quantitative data: for the coding of interviews and for demarcating groups in statistical analysis.

But before we go on and detail our own design and present our own results, we now turn to Chapter Two, which will further contextualize our research by presenting a portrait of previous quantitative and qualitative research on deconversion.

Figure 2. Deconversion as Migration in the Religious Field
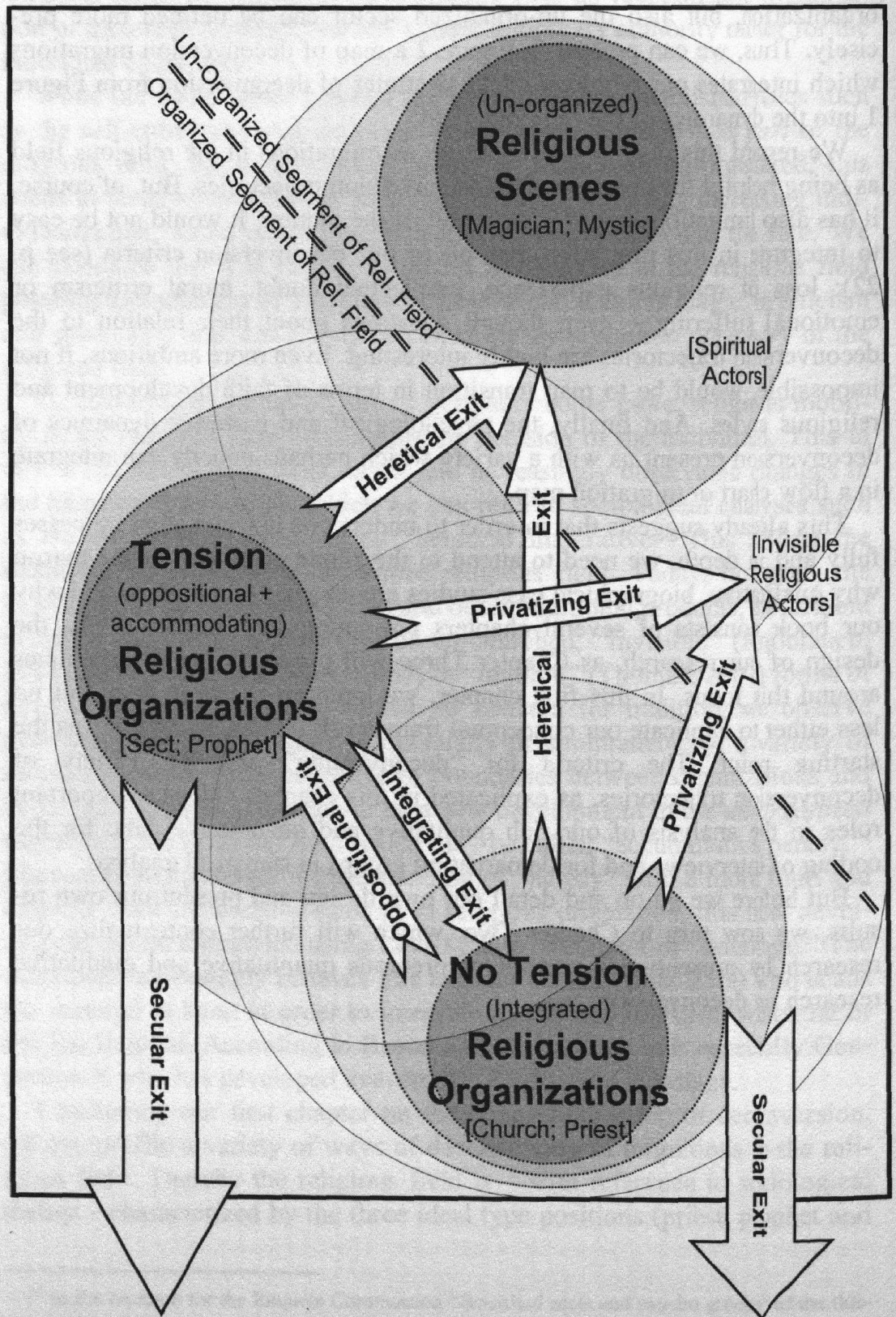
2 Empirical Studies on Deconversion

Deconversion, as defined in the previous chapter, refers to a variety of things: disaffiliation from organized religion and exit from the religious field altogether (secularizing exit), a move into the *un-organized periphery* of the religious field as a change to private religious praxis and/or heretical accumulation of religion(s) (privatizing or heretical exit), but also some versions of switching one's religious affiliation within the zone of organized religion, including changes to a lower (integrating exit) or to a higher tension type of religious organizations (oppositional exit).

Large-scale quantitative assessment of deconversion and religious migration in sufficient detail and in cross-cultural comparison is not available. But we are able to refer to results from survey data which allow inferences on disaffiliation processes – some of which allow the comparison of the United States and Germany. This report and discussion of extant survey results help to contextualize our research. One of the interesting questions will be whether we find correspondences – and perhaps some empirical evidence – for our new typology of deconversion trajectories. Also, we think that we have taken up, in our research, open questions which emerge from the survey results. Thus we concentrate on results that concern the focus of our own research.

Finally in this chapter, we will discuss previous studies on deconversion which have used primarily a qualitative design. Since our own research is also primarily qualitatively based, we can – critically and constructively – draw lines to extant research.

2.1 Deconversion in the United States: Survey Results

People in the United States have a rather long and taken-for-granted tradition to "go shopping for a church." In 1998, 39.2% U.S. Americans say that they "shopped around for a church or synagogue" in their adult life (see: The General Social Survey, GSS 1972-2006, 475). This may not only reflect an affluent religious market in the United States, but also a corresponding individual inclination to engage in new religious affiliations. For a spotlight on the quantity of religious switching in the United States, we can

refer to results concerning a question which was asked in 1988 (GSS 1972-2006, 432): "Have you ever had another religious preference?" Unfortunately, this question was not repeated in the following surveys – which indicates that the question we deal with in our own research is not cared for enough in the surveys.

Table 1. Multiple Previous Preferences of Religious Affiliation in the United States in 1988

"Have you ever had another religious preference?"					
	Total	One previous preference	Two previous preferences	Three previous preferences	Four or more previous preferences
Yes	35.7%	23.8%	9.1%	2.2%	0.6%
No	64.3%				

(Source: GSS 1972–2006)

Answers indicate (see Table 1) that, already in 1988, a total of 35.7% U.S. Americans say that they have had a different religion before their current affiliation. This segment of people who say that they have had another religious affiliation before, can be divided further in 23.8% who speak of *one* previous religion, 9.1% report *two,* and 2.2% even speak of *three* previous religious affiliations. It is also interesting to report the age structure of changing religious affiliations: 76.3% of the first switches, and still 61.3% of the second switches are reported to have occurred when the person was under the age of 30 years.

As research shows (Hadaway/Marler: 1993; Loveland: 2003; Sherkat: 2001; Sherkat/Wilson: 1995), there are many different reasons for religious switching. From his review of research and his own study, Loveland (2003, 148) concludes that "religious switching is a complex phenomenon with many determinants." It may be due to various factors and influences, for example, childhood socialization, marriage, religious practice, gender and ethnicity. With reference to the "rational choice" paradigm, Loveland (2003) describes the deconvert as a person who makes choices in a "spiritual marketplace."

Where did deconverts go? In the past century, the freedom of choosing one's religion has caused major shifts and changes in the religious landscape in the United States. This can be seen from the growth and decline of churches over the decades. In the data collected by the *Hartford Institute for*

Religion Research (Dudley/Roozen: 2001), for example, we see that moderate Protestantism has declined in the last century from 30% before 1945 to about 7% in the 1990s. Liberal Protestant churches and also the Catholic and Orthodox churches have a similar decline on a lower level. The growth is mainly on the part of Evangelical Protestant churches and on non-Christian religious communities. This is a historical picture, but it indicates major shifts in the religious landscape of the U.S., and it also reflects that religious migration is not a new phenomenon in the United States.

A more detailed statistic-based migration map of the field of religious organizations in present-day United States is difficult to assess from the results of the survey. Certainly, there are questions about the mother's and father's religious affiliation, and this in a rather detailed way for an immense variety of denominations. But comparing childhood religious socialization with an adult's present religious belonging does not account for the potential steps and stopovers that may have occurred in late adolescence and adulthood. Further, the vast number of denominations in the United States splits even an immense survey database into such small numbers that results become questionable.

Thus it may suffice for our purpose to look for some background information for our own research about deconversion trajectories. And here we do not attend only to the migrations *within* the field of organized religion. But of interest are also the deconversion trajectories which lead to *exiting* the field – with a still open question of whether the destination is secularity and termination of concern with religion, or a move into the field segments of *un-organized* religiosity. Therefore, it may be helpful to distinguish between *membership*, *beliefs* and *religiosity/spirituality* in order to assess deconversion avenues from a comparison of these different perspectives.

Termination of membership can be assessed from results from the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP 1991; ISSP 1998).[7] From these data, we can assess life-time membership termination, when we calculate the percentage of respondents who mentioned any religious affiliation in answering the question "In which religion have you been raised?" but have answered "None" to the question "What is your current religion?" The result is what we may call the life-span disaffiliation rate. As Table 2 shows, we have 10.9% of such disaffiliates in the United States in 1998

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[7] The data from the ISSP 1991 and 1998 are also integrated in the immense integrated data set of the *General Social Survey Programme* and results are presented in their *Cumulative Codebook* (GSS 1972-2006). Furthermore, we are well aware of the ISSP 2008 third religious round with data collection in the year 2008. Unfortunately, we could not use these most recent results before the completion of this manuscript.

(and almost equal disaffiliation rates in West-Germany)[8]. We also see that life-span disaffiliation has doubled within a decade. Interesting also is the marginality of secular milieus in the United States – though with an increase during that decade.

Table 2. Life-Span Disaffiliation Rates and Secular Milieu Sizes in U.S.A and Germany in 1991 and 1998

	Today without religious affiliation, but raised in a religion 1991	Today without religious affiliation and raised without religion 1991	Today without religious affiliation, but raised in a religion 1998	Today without religious affiliation and raised without religion 1998
United States	5.4%	1.3%	10.9%	2.9%
Germany-West	7.8%	2.8%	10.5%	4.8%
Germany-East	24.6%	39.7%	18.3%	50.4%

(Source: ISSP 1991; ISSP 1998)

For an assessment of the loss of *belief in God* in the United States, we can refer to answers to an item which was also asked in the ISSP surveys: "I don't believe in God now, but I used to". Results of the 1998 ISSP survey show high rates and high stability of belief in God in the United States (see Table 3).

If we add the believers in God (the two columns on the left), we get a percentage of almost 92% of believers in God in the United States. Further, the 2.9% permanent non-believers exactly match the percentage of people who have never had any kind of religious affiliation (Table 2). But it is rather interesting that the number of U.S. respondents who say they lost belief in God (5.3%) is only half of those without present religious affiliation. Thus the assumption seems plausible that every second respondent without formal membership in a church or religious organization says to believe in God. This sheds some light on the people who exit the *organized* segment of the religious field: From an interpretation of these survey results, we may assume that half of them maintain religiosity, but believe and practice only in private – in our terms: they may have taken privatizing (or perhaps heretical) exits.

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[8] Results for Germany are included in this figure and other figures in the section on U.S. results already, though this will be relevant especially in the next section.

Table 3. Changes of Belief in God in U.S.A. and Germany in 1998

	I believe in God and I always have	I believe in God now, but I didn't used to	I don't believe in God, but I used to	I don't believe in God and I never have
United States	85.6%	6.2%	5.3%	2,9%
Germany-West	51.7%	10.6%	24.6%	13.2%
Germany-East	18.5%	7.3%	16.7%	57.5%

(Source: ISSP 1998)

Finally, we turn to a third perspective: to the question of *religiosity* or *spirituality*. For a most recent contribution on large-scale data, we refer to the research done by Houtman and Aupers (2007) – which is important also for our discussion about Germany. Though, in general they rightly state that "there are embarrassingly few studies that systematically map the worldviews of the unchurched," the authors present longitudinal results for the spread of people who associate with what they call "post-Christian spirituality." Houtman and Aupers witness a trend toward such post-Christian spirituality in two decades in most of the 14 countries for which they re-analyzed the huge amount of World Value Survey data (n=61,352) in a sophisticated (and generally plausible) procedure. Based on a selection of questions such as about the image of God (personal God; some sort of spirit or live force; etc.), New Age affinity, disagreement with traditional Christian beliefs, but simultaneous disagreement with secular rationalism, this analysis reveals a clear trend in most of these countries, especially France, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden, but also in the United States. Houtman and Aupers present, for the United States, evidence of a modest longitudinal trend of an increase of post-Christian spirituality over two decades from 1980 to 2000 which, as the authors claim, can be ascribed to cohort replacement.

To further profile our third perspective with an assessment of *religious/spiritual self-identification*, we can refer to a variety of recent survey results. Marler and Hadaway (2002) report and summarize previous research and their own study on the question of being "spiritual, but not religious" in the United States (data were collected in the years between 1991 and 2001). The authors report an average of between 14% and 20% of respondents who self-identify as "spiritual, but not religious" (for a more detailed summary and figure, see Streib: 2008). Fortunately, we have (be-

sides our own) two most recent data sets which can be used for an assessment of "more spiritual" self-identification: the *General Social Survey* 1972-2006 integrated data set and the *Religionsmonitor* (Bertelsmann Foundation) data.[9] Both data sets include a self-rating scale for religiosity and a self-rating scale for spirituality which allow for an assessment of "more religious than spiritual", "more spiritual than religious", "equally religious and spiritual," and "neither religious nor spiritual" preferences.

Table 4 presents results from our calculation of data which have been collected in 2006 and are included in the GSS 1972-2006 integrated data set for the United States. We present data only for selected religious groups. Compared to the report by Marler and Hadaway (2002) for the 1990s, we see signs of confirmation or stability – with only a slight increase: Members of Christian churches identify to about 20% as being "more spiritual than religious." The surprise is with the people who report no religious affiliation: Almost 50% can be identified as being "more spiritual than religious." Also the "equally religious and spiritual" group with 22% is rather high.

Table 4. Spiritual/Religious Preferences in the United States 2007 for selected Religious Groups and People with no Religious Affiliation (GSS 2006 Results)

	More religious than spiritual	Equally religious and spiritual	More spiritual than religious	Neither religious nor spiritual	Total
Protestant	193 12.7%	969 63.7%	338 22.2%	22 1.4%	1522 100%
Catholic	120 16.3%	439 59.6%	158 21.5%	19 2.6%	736 100%
Jewish	7 14.0%	22 44.0%	15 30.0%	6 12.0%	50 100%
No religious affiliation	27 5.6%	106 22.0%	236 49.0%	113 23.4%	482 100%
Total 2006 GSS sample	358 12.2%	1594 54.3%	815 27.8%	166 5.7%	2933 100%

(Own calculation on the basis of the *GSS* 1972–2006 data set)

The *Religionsmonitor* data which were collected just one year later yield similar results (see Table 5): The portion of "more spiritual than religious" people *within* religious communities amounts to 25% or more, according to the *Religionsmonitor* data. The surprisingly high number of almost

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[9] The *Religionsmonitor* (Bertelsmann Foundation) includes data about religiosity from an n=1,000 from each of 21 countries of the world. Data in Germany and the United States have been collected in 2007. See www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de for more details.

50% "more spiritual than religious" people with no religious affiliation is confirmed. Further, while we calculate 22% of people who could identify equally with both religion and spirituality according to the GSS data, we see a stronger refutation of any identification with religion and association with spirituality from respondents with no religious affiliation emerging from the *Religionsmonitor* data.

Table 5. Spiritual/Religious Preferences in the United States 2007 for selected Religious Groups and People with no Religious Affiliation (*Religionsmonitor* Results)

	More religious than spiritual	Equally religious and spiritual	More spiritual than religious	Neither religious nor spiritual	Total
Christianity	101 14.2%	406 57.2%	184 25.9%	19 2.7%	710 100.0%
Judaism	5 16.7%	12 40.0%	10 33.3%	3 10.0%	30 100.0%
No religious affiliation	4 2.2%	7 3.8%	88 47.8%	85 46.2%	184 100.0%
Total US sample	111 11.4%	443 45.5%	305 31.3%	114 11.7%	973 100.0%

(Own calculation on the basis of the *Religionsmonitor* 2007 data set)

Taken together, it may nevertheless be safe to assume that there is at least an equal number of those who can be identified as being "more spiritual than religious" as there are those who deny both spirituality and religion within the group of people without any religious affiliation. This sheds some light on the deconverts: at least half of them may have turned to a "more spiritual" self-understanding. There is no reason to any longer exclude the possibility that they deconverted and terminated membership, but moved into the *un-organized* segment of the religious field.

2.2   Deconversion in Germany: Survey Results

For an assessment of disaffiliation rates in Germany, we can refer to the data from the *Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften* (ALLBUS 1980-2000; ALLBUS 2002) on current and former religious affiliation. This may be the most reliable database we have for our question

– even though it is several years old[10] and the data, again, do not allow for an assessment of multiple deconversions. But it documents the almost continuously growing drift from religious organizations in two decades (see Table 6).

Table 6. Drift from the Churches in Germany East and West

	1982-W	1992-W	1992-E	2000-W	2000-E	2002-W	2002-E
Previously Member: Yes	6.6%	9.3%	33.1%	9.3%	24.1%	10.6%	21.4%
Previously Member: No	1.1%	3.1%	33.3%	3.5%	46.9%	4.5%	41.5%
Presently Member	92.3%	87.6%	33.6%	87.2%	29.0%	84.9%	37.1%

(Source: ALLBUS 1982–2002)

We see an almost steadily growing percentage of disaffiliates in the German population: In West Germany we see an increase from 6.6% in 1982 to 10.6% in 2002 who report previous termination of membership with a religious organization; in East Germany we have a percentage of 21.4% disaffiliates, but also a rather high number of people who have never been members of a religious organization (41.5%) – which reflects that East Germany is probably one of the least religious regions in the world.

We see about the same picture on the basis of ISSP 1991 and ISSP 1998 data. As already presented in Table 2 on page 36, we can document a life-span disaffiliation rate of 10.5% for West Germany in 1998 (increasing from 7.8% in 1991). For East Germany, the extraordinary situation of living in an atheistic state is reflected in a life-span disaffiliation rate of 24.6% in 1991 which has dropped to 18.3% in 1998. In East Germany we also see extensive permanent secular milieus of 39.7% in 1991 which increased to even 50.4% in 1998.[11]

Another detail which indicates the urgency of exit rates from the Protestant churches in Germany, especially in West Germany, is presented in *The EKD-Survey on Church-Membership* (Huber/Friedrich/Steinacker: 2006)[12]: In the West German sample of people who are presently without

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[10] Unfortunately, the questions we use for this calculation were not included in every survey round, and neither in the most recent surveys in 2004 and 2006 (ALLBUS 1980-2006); thus we have data only for the years 1982–2002.

[11] Fluctuations within a decade may reflect a complex interplay especially of East-West migration and cohort replacement.

[12] The survey was conducted in 2002 including a sample of members of the Protestant churches in West (n=1,532) and East (n=609) Germany, and also former members in the Protestant

church membership, 24.3% had never had any church affiliation and 75.7% report to have terminated membership with the Protestant church in the past. And from this latter group, 44.2% report their termination of membership in the decade 1990-1999, while 26.1% left the church in the 1980s, 11.1% in the 1970s, and 2.1% in the 1960s.

We have no comprehensive empirical evidence about the destination of these church-leavers, but some speculations: Some social scientists point to the fact that, in the survey data, we see no equivalent growth of other churches or religious organizations in Germany which could account for the disaffiliation rates (see for example Pollack: 1996; Pollack/Hartmann: 1998; Pollack/Pickel: 1999; 2003). New religious groups are by far too small in number and not growing fast enough in order to account for this disaffiliation processes from the main-line churches in Germany. The religious field in Germany apparently does not offer enough alternatives for church-leavers to affiliate anew with a religious organization. In terms of our typology: religious switching, integrating exit, but also oppositional exit do not seem likely for large groups; and, there is not enough evidence for that in the data. Thus, many in the social sciences are convinced and conclude that the majority of deconverts simply disappeared from the religious field altogether and have taken a secularizing exit.

We may ask whether this is a potential misinterpretation which can be blamed on a rather strong focus on formal membership; furthermore, whether data analysis has stopped too early and did not go far enough due to the difficulties and complexity of an assessment of un-churched religiosity and belief. That there *is* enough in survey data at least for some initial evidence and that different results are possible, is demonstrated by the analysis by Houtman and Aupers (2007).

The focus on *believe in God* makes the picture even more complex. As presented in Table 3 on page 37 on the basis of ISSP 1998 data, 24.6% of West Germans and 16.7% of East Germans say they "don't believe in God, but used to." This obviously exceeds by far the number of people who terminated their church membership. Likewise, the number of people who say they never believed in God is significantly higher than the number of people who never belonged to a church in the first place. Taken together, this indicates that Germany has large segments of non-believers who *are* church members. We have ample empirical evidence for that. This makes attempts to quantitatively assess the number of secular exiters for Germany on the basis of these data very difficult, if not impossible.

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churches and people who had never been church members in West (n=336) and East (n=544) Germany.

We think that we have, nevertheless, reason to raise some doubt in regard to the sweeping assumption of a unidirectional move toward secularization upon termination of membership. We suggest considering the possibility that at least part of these church-leavers may have taken privatizing and heretical exits and migrated into the *un-organized periphery* of the religious field. The problem is that we have only initial empirical evidence from large-scale survey data for such migration and no precise quantitative assessments.

Houtman and Aupers present evidence for a recognizable longitudinal trend of an increase of post-Christian spirituality over two decades also for Germany, as has been presented already by us (see page 37). To further characterize the kind of *un-organized* religiosity or spirituality in Germany, we can refer to our calculation of the *Religionsmonitor* data.

Table 7. Spiritual/Religious Preferences in Germany 2007 for selected Religious Groups and People with no Religious Affiliation (*Religionsmonitor* Results)

	More religious than spiritual	Equally religious and spiritual	More spiritual than religious	Neither religious nor spiritual	Total
Christianity	254 38.7%	139 21.2%	61 9.3%	202 30.8%	656 100.0%
Muslims	6 33.3%	8 44.4%	0 0.0%	4 22.2%	18 100.0%
Other religion	4 17.4%	12 52.2%	2 8.7%	5 21.7%	23 100.0%
No religious affiliation	13 5.2%	8 3.2%	25 10.0%	204 81.6%	250 100.0%
Total German sample	277 29.0%	167 17.5%	93 9.7%	418 43.8%	955 100.0%

(Own calculation on the basis of the *Religionsmonitor* 2007 data set)

In the group of Germans without religious affiliation,[13] 5.2% can be identified as "more religious than spiritual", 3.2% as "equally religious and spiritual", and 10.0% can be identified as being "more spiritual than religious" – which is only a slightly higher percentage of "more spiritual" people than

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[13] The *Religionsmonitor* data unfortunately do not allow to separate out the deconverts from the group of people without religious affiliation (n=250).

we calculate for members in the Christian churches in Germany (9.3%) (for some more details see Streib: 2008).

Thus, we see in the survey data evidence for a move of deconverts into the *un-organized* segment of the religious field, i.e. taking privatizing and heretical exits, aside from all other avenues of deconversion, including secularizing exits. To be sure, all religious migration in Germany happens on a significantly lower level when compared to the United States: "more spiritual" preferences are lower, secularity is much higher. This may support an expectation that we have more secular exiters in Germany than in the United States.

2.3   Deconversion in Cross-Cultural Perspective

In face of the great differences between Europe and the United States, it is surprising that research on religion in cross-cultural comparison is not stronger. Even though some authors, e.g. Greeley (1989; 2003), Zulehner and Denz (1993) or Höllinger (1996), analyze data from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and compare Europe and United States, we are far from being able to draw a map of religious institutions, organizations and milieus and keeping track of religious migrations on a global scale. The puzzle of the so-called Eurosecularity has not been sufficiently resolved; and it appears even more difficult to find answers, the more we learn about the great differences on the European continent alone (Draulans/Halman: 2005; Halman: 2001). Finally, we agree with Houtman and Aupers, "there are embarrassingly few studies that systematically map the worldviews of the unchurched."

To recall some details from the survey results which include at least a rough portrait of the complexity of cross-cultural commonalities and differences between United States and Germany:

With life-span disaffiliation rates of ca. 10%, there appear to exist, in both countries, comparable percentages of people who leave organized religion and remain in a state of non-affiliation. But we have indications of higher rates of religious mobility in the United States where 37.5% say that they had another religious preference before. This overflow of religious migration in the United States can be ascribed to switching membership, and these migrants very likely remain within the segment of organized religion, while, in contrast, the ca. 10% German disaffiliates very likely have wandered into non-affiliation, because there are only little alternatives

for new affiliations. We can thus assume that the religious migration streams in the United States may be stronger compared to Germany, but that the religious field in the United States reacts with greater flexibility: new forms of religion or spirituality more easily lead to the formation of new organizations, and welcoming "religious migrants" has a rather strong tradition in the United States; this makes it easier to find a new home for a new religious taste. Thus the 10% un-affiliated U.S. Americans may be without religious affiliation for different reasons and on a different background, than the 10% un-affiliated Germans.

Belief in God is reported by a percentage of 92% in the United States, but only by 62% in Germany-West and 26% in Germany-East. While about 20% Germans say that they have lost their belief in God, only 5% US Americans report loss of belief in God. Finally there is only a marginal percentage of 3% US Americans who never have believed in God, but 13.2% in West-Germany and even 57.5% in East-Germany.

Also the results on "more spiritual than religious" self-identifications reflect the difference between Germany and the United States. While we have about 10% of "more spiritual than religious" members of religious organizations such as the Protestant churches in Germany, there is at least double that percentage in the United States. Even larger is the difference which is indicated for the "more spiritual than religious" people in the group without present religious affiliation: about 10% in Germany and almost 50% in the United States.

In sum, the U.S. religious field – in which almost the entire population are players – appears to be populated with at least one third (or in the meantime half?) religious migrants who tour or have toured the field segment of organized religion with rather high mobility; thereby almost all migrants preserve and only 5% loose their belief in God; 10% disaffiliate for ever, but very likely many of them by heretical or privatizing exits into the un-organized segment of the religious field where we see almost 50% "more spiritual than religious" self-identifications.

In the German religious field, in contrast – in which at most two thirds, but very likely less than half of the population are players – we can estimate some 25% who lose belief in God, but only 10% or 15% of them appear as religious migrants, the majority of whom disaffiliate for ever. We can assume rather low mobility in the field segment of organized religion; but not all take a secularizing exit: at least part of the deconverts may take heretical or private exits and move into the un-organized segment of the religious field, as can be inferred from indications of a rising post-Christian spirituality and a considerable number of "more spiritual than religious" self-identifications.

Looking ahead, it would be too ambitious to claim or assume that we could resolve the Eurosecularity puzzle on the basis of our own research. Our own contribution to the question about the drift from the churches in Germany and where church-leavers go is more moderate and more ambitious at the same time: It is more moderate, since our data, because of an over-representation of oppositional and accommodating groups, does not allow for a quantitative assessment of religious migration, including migrations from integrated religious organizations into the un-organized segment. Thus, we cannot compete with the surveys in presenting results which are representative for the German population. But first, the great cross-cultural differences have to be taken into account when we prepare for an interpretation of our results on deconversion in the United States and in Germany. Second, our research can be situated in the context of the survey results which we presented; and it expands these results, because we are able to profile in many ways the in-tradition members and deconverts, including the "more spiritual than religious" subjects. Thus, our research is more ambitious, because our massive qualitative and quantitative data allow for in-depth analyses of deconverts who indeed go in many directions, including not only secular exits, oppositional and integrating exits, but also privatizing and heretical exits into the *un-organized segment* of the religious fields. For more details on this we have to refer to later chapters of this book.

Our own research is qualitatively focused and it is based on narrative and faith development interviews in the first place. Questionnaire data are included – and amount to an N of almost 1,200 –, but they will serve primarily for a detailed profiling of the deconversion case studies. Thus, it is necessary to attend to previous research on deconversion which is primarily based on interviews.

2.4   Previous Interview Research on Deconversion

The empirical study of deconversion has emerged, at least it has received strong impulses, from the scientific study of new religious movements. The 1980s were a relatively productive decade, as the studies of Skonovd (1981), Levine (1984), Jacobs (1987; 1989), and Wright (1987) demonstrate (see Table 8). These studies have the merit of bringing to light some of the dynamics of deconversion from new religions which were viewed with special concern in public discussion, in the courts, and in politics of the time. The results of these research projects are not perfect. Without

going into detail, we point to some short-comings: Deconversion is studied primarily as a turning point phenomenon involving crisis and conflict. Efforts to conceptualize deconversion or linking deconversion to the discussion on conversion are rather scarce. We do not see an integrative effort to situate deconversion in theories of faith development. Deconversion is predominantly linked to adolescence and young adulthood, while data on the second half of life are restricted to rare cases.

Table 8. Selection of Deconversion Research in the United States 1980–1990

	Sample characteristics	Length	Sampling	Data analysis	Theoretical orientation
Skonovd 1981	Unification church; 30 apostates: 30 other NRM apostates; mean age: 30.5	Not specified	Snowball, starting with publicly outspoken apostates	Illustrative quotes, but selection of interviews unclear	Sociology of knowledge
Levine 1984	800 interviews with devotees and defectors (adolescents and young adults)	15 yrs	Contacting group leaders; contact to devotees and their families	Nine fictional "typical" stories based on case analyses	Theories of identity in adolescence; Psychodynamic concepts
Jacobs 1989	40 former religious devotees (Hindu, charismatic, Unification church), age range from 19 to 63, average age of entering: 23	1 year of data collection	Newspaper advertisements and referrals	Stage model emerging from interview interpretation	Sociological and psychodynamic concepts: ego psychology, object relations
Wright 1987	Children of God, Hare Krishna, Unification Church; 15 members, 15 defectors	1½ yrs of data collection	Snowball, starting with printed posters and newspaper ads	Interviews, some verified by journals / diaries	Sociological approaches

Some deficits are overcome in more recent research, a selection of which will be discussed below and is summarized in Table 9.

Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1997) studied religious socialization of more than 4,000 college students and in this large sample identified 24 "amazing believers," subjects who come from non-religious or anti-religious backgrounds and find faith, and 46 "amazing apostates" who come from religious backgrounds and turn to atheism or agnosticism. According to Hunsberger (2000), the process of becoming an amazing apostate is "strongly intellectual and rational, and seems to result from a slow, careful search for

meaning and purpose", resulting in "a dramatic transformation of self in 'becoming one's own person'" (245f). The picture that Hunsberger draws is one of hard-won freedom, independence and personal identity and self-confidence – and of tolerance, since amazing apostates, in sharp contrast to the amazing believers, refrain from proselytizing. The "amazing apostates" deconverted in a rather gradual process (Altemeyer/Hunsberger: 1997, 232). The process of deconversion can be characterized here as individuative-reflective gain over a period of socialization in and before the college years.

Table 9. Selection of Deconversion Research in United States and Europe 1993–2000

	Sample characteristics	Length	Sampling	Data analysis	Theoretical orientation
Hunsberger & Altemeyer 1997; Hunsberger 2000	46 "amazing apostates" + 24 "amazing believers" (students)	1994-1995	'extreme groups' selected from 4 questionnaire surveys	Quantitative analysis of several scales; Comparison of answers to interview questions	Religious socialization; religion & fundamentalism, orthodoxy
Richter & Francis 1998	27 interviews with church-leavers; 400 questionnaires	1995-1997	contacting clergy; telephone screening	Interview interpretation, Grounded Theory approach; Quantitative Analysis	Sociological & socialization perspectives; Faith development
Jamieson 1998; 2002	Interv. with 98 church leavers (+ 54 with leaders) in Pentecostal / Charismatic churches in New Zealand	1993-1996	Snowball	Interview interpretation (coding of small paragraphs); Grounded Theory approach; Statistics	Faith development theory
Streib 1998	12 out of 22 biographical interviews (converts and deconverts)	1997: six months of interviewing	multiple ways of finding deconverts, then members	Sequence analysis; narrative analysis	Life themata; Faith development theory

Richter and Francis (1998) explored the reasons for leaving mainline churches in Great Britain. They started by interviewing 27 church-leavers who had been mainly recruited by clergy, and followed with a questionnaire survey with more than 400 church-leavers located through an extensive telephone screening. Richter and Francis found that many church-leavers

claim to believe in and experience God without belonging to a church, "their spiritual quest persists" (p. 38). Richter's and Francis' discussion of influences leading to the decision to leave church is structured partially along familiar lines: social change, change of values, critical life events, childhood socialization. But they also attempt to account for changes in faith development. The authors address the question of fit between the faith stage of church goers and the 'modal level' of faith development of their churches and, consequently, of their possible common growth and mutual advancement.

Jamieson (1998; 2002) studied 98 church-leavers (and 54 church leaders) of evangelical Pentecostal and charismatic churches in New Zealand. Jamieson outlined a typology of leavers from evangelical, pentecostal, and charismatic churches which he aligns along Fowler's model of faith development. These people, while leaving the same type of religious group which Jamieson identifies as being on Fowler's Stage Three of Synthetic-Conventional Faith, move in different directions, which also differ in terms of stages of faith. This illustrates the need to look at the interactions of social context and individual motives and biographical trajectories involved in leaving religious groups. These questions also concern mainline traditions.

The Enquete Commission of the 13th German Parliament on "So-called sects and psycho-groups" invited biographical research on members and ex-members of Christian-fundamentalist groups.[14] Of the 22 interviews conducted, 12 were selected for analysis according to the rule of maximal contrast. In their analysis, the research group did not find – what some in the Enquete Commission had expected the researchers to find – a typical 'sect biography,' neither of converts nor of deconverts. Instead, the research revealed a variety of biographical avenues. Important in regard to our theme of deconversion is the observation that the attraction toward fundamentalist affiliation is due to *themata* which derive from earlier experiences and belong to a biographically older layer of the person. Not only the affinity towards the group, and thus the stability of membership, appears to be the effect of a 'fit' or resonance between the themata of the convert and the mental, ritual and moral setting of the fundamentalist group, but also *de-conversion* finds an explanation: If such a 'fit' does not emerge or declines for whatever reason, disaffiliation is the most likely consequence. Contrastive comparison of the cases allowed locating them in a typology. Three types of fundamentalist biographies or 'careers' could be identified: (a) a

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[14] Results were published in the Final Report of the Enquete Commission (Streib: 1998b; 1999b) and as a separate research report (Streib: 1998a; 2000a); a brief summary is included in an article (Streib: 1999a), and a summary report is published online (Streib: 2002).

type governed by tradition who, innocent of alternatives, was born into or had grown into a fundamentalist orientation; (b) the *mono-convert* who converts as it were once in life-time into a religious orientation which he or she did not have before, and (c) the *accumulative heretic* whose biography is a tour through different religious orientations and who represents a new type of religious socialization. Finally, a developmental perspective was applied which revealed developmental transformation and progress during membership and precipitating disaffiliation especially in the accumulative heretics, while tradition-guided deconverts and mono-convert type deconverts engaged in developmental transformation only after their disaffiliation. This research for the Enquete Commission inspired us and can be seen as pilot research for the Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study on Deconversion which is reported in this book.

We can conclude that empirical research on deconversion has made some progress, since it has opened the field of research to include a broader spectrum of religious orientations and organizations and has made attempts to include a developmental perspective in the analysis. However, deficits remain to be resolved, one of them being that the concepts used and the methodological designs across the studies are not consistent and make a comparison of the results difficult.

We cannot expect from the survey data any answers to questions of biographical transformation, faith development and faith styles, attitudes, personality factors or psychological well-being of religious migrants. But we could expect from interview research on deconversion to address these questions. This indicates another deficit in extant interview research on deconversion. Also, we find no cross-cultural comparison in these interview studies, but rather a narrow focus on particular spots in the religious fields of particular countries.

These are desiderata which our project focused on and aimed at producing results. From the start, our research design took a double focus on Germany and the United States. This justifies the expectation that our data will speak to and open up new perspectives on the question of cross-cultural commonalities and differences in religiosity and religious change in U.S.A and Germany. But the expectations and aspirations of this study have been more ambitious, at least in one respect: We follow biographical accounts of individual religious transformations and avenues. This decisive focus on the individual biography, of course, is a restraint in regard to quantitative and representative claims; but the gains are considerable: From the cross-cultural comparison of deconversion narratives, we expect insight in the difference of disaffiliation processes on both continents which include such details as the personality, psychological well-being, and faith styles – and

which nevertheless should shed some light on the difference of the religious fields.

Thus, it is our expectation that our results are valuable contributions to the so far underdeveloped cross-cultural comparison of religiosity and religious change. It is our hope and aspiration that this research project on deconversion of which we present results in this book can convince the scientific community in regard to the research design and the results, and that it may encourage further research on deconversion.

3 Our Study: Design, Methods and Sample Characteristics

3.1 The Qualitative Core of our Design

The methods, instruments and procedures in the Bielefeld-based Cross-Cultural Study of Deconversion were selected and combined into a coherent research design in order to accomplish one task, namely: to study a specific group of focus persons, the *deconverts*. This focus involves, in the first place, attention to commonalities which in turn rests on a definition precise enough to allow a clear enough categorical demarcation. In terms of the research method, such clear focus on a group of focus persons suggests to use any kind of approach, quantitative or qualitative, which promises insights in the characteristics of the object under investigation. In order to analyze personal and biographical characteristics and thereby attend to latent structures and depth dimensions – which involves a diachronic perspective –, the biographical-reconstructive method had to placed at the center of the research design (Fuchs-Heinritz: 1998; Jüttemann/Thomae: 1998; Lucius-Hoene/Deppermannn: 2003; Völter et al.: 2005). This was one of our basic methodological decisions.

Aside from such a search for commonalities, the design was supposed to allow the attention to a variety of *differences* ranging from macro-, meso- and micro-sociological differences to inter-individual differences in personality traits. A research design which is supposed to account for differences in this way gains in methodological profile and argumentative support from incorporating aspects and priciples from the Grounded Theory (Dey: 1999; Glaser/Strauss: 1967). Methodological suggestions such as "theoretical sampling" according to the principle of maximal contrast and the analytic process moving from the initial stage of discovery to the subsequent steps of theorizing and typology formation has been informative. The Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study of Deconversion right from the start on adopted a procedure of search for the contrasts and differences in many directions. In the following paragraph we compile the basic – contrastive – structures of the field:

1. Contrasts in terms of cultural background: Comparison between Germany and the United States was a prominent goal in the project. Thus we were aiming at two samples of equal size and structure in each country.

2. Contrasts in terms of religious tradition / type of religious organization: The study began with a focus on deconverts from fundamentalist new religious (oppositional) groups; in a second phase it moved on to include accommodating and integrated religious organizations.

3. The research design had a firm focus on deconverts. But the contrast to the milieu which the deconverts left was supposed to be informative. In order to allow for a methodologically effective investigation of the difference between the focus persons and the persons who remain inside these religious organizations (in-tradition members), these in-tradition members had to be included in the research. They were investigated using an extensive questionnaire, but also by administering a faith development interview to a limited number of persons. Results from these data also allow for quantitative analyses.

So far, we have introduced the contrast dimensions which were built into the structure of the research design. Theoretic sampling, however, also has an effect on decision-making in field work. The directions and dimensions in which we looked for contrasts in field work are as follows:

a. Duration of membership (years of membership after conversion, or: born into the tradition).

b. Gender

c. Age

The list of contrasting directions could be longer (further options which are possible on the basis of our questionnaire are, for example: education, ethnic background, religiosity of partners), but limitations of the sample size require a focus of attention.

The contrastive sampling strategy is the optimum which we were able to apply in our investigation of deconverts. We cannot claim representativeness in regard to the population of the United States or of Germany. Our design follows a logic of discovery and of understanding the dynamics of the case. Nevertheless, we claim that our sample reflects basic structures in the field of deconversion since it was selected with attention to a maximum variety of contrasts.

Against the background of our attention to *difference*, it is consistent to design a basic unit of research – which works mainly with one of the differ-

ences, namely with the difference between deconverts and in-tradition members.

3.2 The Basic Unit of Research

The basic unit of research (see Figure 3) starts with the deconverts as our focus persons. Focus persons were investigated with the entire set of our instruments: narrative interview, faith development interview and our questionnaire. Evaluation of qualitative data, the narrative interview in particular, leads to case studies. Questionnaire data and (with a smaller number of cases) the faith development interviews allow comparison of deconverts with in-tradition members in detail.

For a more detailed portrayal of deconverts against the background of the group from which they disaffiliated, the plan was to administer our questionnaire to a group of ten members of each of these groups, and to conduct, in addition, a faith development interview with three of these ten members. Thus the ideal of a basic unit of research contains the data of one deconvert, of ten in-tradition members' questionnaire data, plus three faith development interviews with in-tradition members.[15]

The structure of the basic unit of research also indicates that our research design pays attention to the contexts and conditions which may be influential in the process of deconversion: the group or organization which the focus person deconverted from. We compare individual levels of deconverts' faith development with the modal level of faith development[16] of the groups or churches they disaffiliated from. Because we also collect data on personality, psychological well-being, and on fundamentalist and authoritarian attitudes, we may be able to locate in which way the deconverts actually are different from their former groups.

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[15] As one may expect, this ideal of the basic unit of research was not possible to obtain in each and every case. When, for example, we approached high-tension religious communities after we had completed an interview with a deconvert, the members adamantly refused to be interviewed. But for a majority of our sample the design of the basic unit of research did emerge and proves to be useful. This is visible also from descriptive statistics which shows a ratio of deconvert narrative interviews to questionnaire data of 1:10, and a ratio of almost 1:2 for the faith development interviews – even if we had originally aimed at a ration of 1:3.

[16] 'Modal level of faith development' is the term in faith development research for the predominant level of faith development in a group.

Figure 3. Basic Unit of Research in the Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study of Deconversion
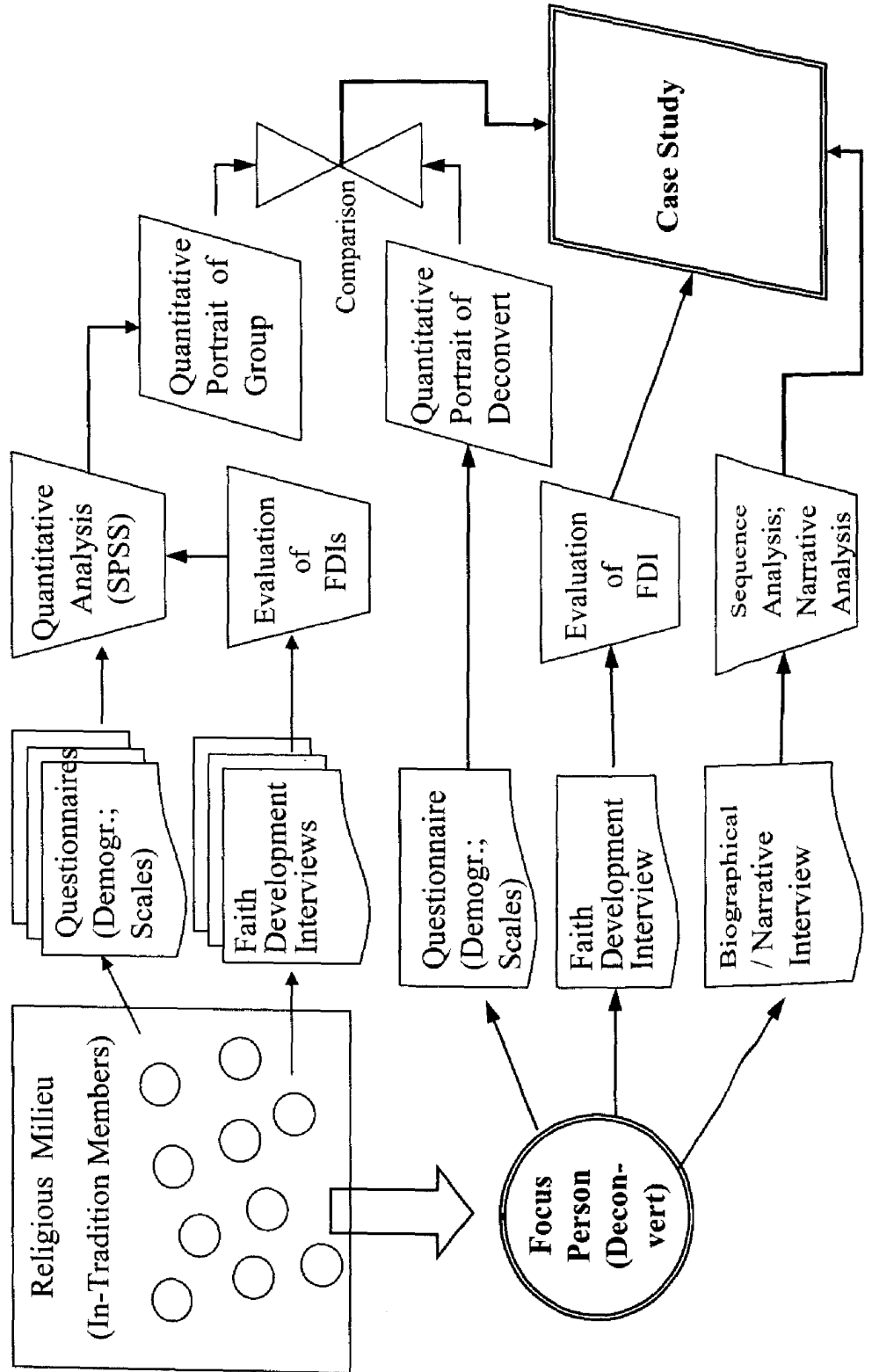
3.3   Methods and Instruments

The research design of the Bielefeld-based cross-cultural study of decon-version combines three sorts of data: open-ended narrative interviews, semi-structured faith development interviews, and questionnaire answers.

3.3.1   The Narrative Interview

The narrative interview is the core instrument in our study. A consistent stimulus opens the interview. Narrative interviews are open-ended; only responsive, catalytic questions are allowed. The interview is completed when the interviewee feels that his or her story has come to an end. The narrative interviews are transcribed in full length to allow thorough evalua-tion – also through the use of computer-assisted coding procedures.

Sequence analysis has proven very helpful for a start in the evaluation process of the narrative interviews. Our use of sequence analysis is inspired by the procedure Oevermann and co-authors (1979; 1993; 1984) proposed and used in what is called Objective Hermeneutics. Our analysis has a pri-mary focus on the first passage(s) of the interview. It aspires to reconstruct the logic in the spontaneous narration with special attention to latent struc-tures of action options in the context of the social field. Sequence analysis results in a case structure hypothesis. Especially effective is sequence analysis in small groups.

A next step of analyzing the biographical interviews is using the narrative analysis – for which we found Schütze's (1981; 1983; 1984) ap-proach helpful. He suggests isolating the narrative passages in the interview from the reflective and focusing on the narrative segments. These can be further divided into three categories according to their time range (sub-segments, segments, supra-segments). The result is a detailed re-construction of the respondent's plot by the interpreter. This way, deconversion trajectories can be identified and coded.[17]

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[17] It was helpful to use the software NVivo (see Bazeley/Richards: 2000) to code the interpre-tations. Passages of texts were coded and could be retrieved under different perspectives. Assay tables were used for a first inspections of the frequencies of the codings; matrices are important tools as they allow the inspection of binary relations and discover typical combinations of codings. The inspection of the co-occurrence of codings serves as a qualitative equivalent for the explora-tion of correlational patterns, thus supporting the construction of the typology. Moreover, the program allows tapping into the single fields and retrieving directly the coded text passages direclty, which can then be used for illustrations.

For further and more thorough interpretation of the narratives of deconverts, focusing on narrative identity in terms of psychology, the approach of McAdams and colleagues has proven inspiring (cf. McAdams: 1990; 1993; 2001; McAdams et al.: 2001; McAdams: 2003; McAdams/Bowman: 2001; McAdams/Josselson/Lieblich: 2001), especially his proposal to distinguish a contamination plot from a redemption plot. The narrative analysis also serves for re-examining the case structure hypothesis.

In sum, the biographical-reconstructive method is the core procedure of the research design. On the basis of a sufficient number of narrative interviews which are contrastively sampled and carefully evaluated, this method allows for the construction of a typology (or typologies) of biographical narratives of deconverts from the maximum variety of religious groups.

3.3.2   The Faith Development Interview

Secondly, the faith development interview was included in order to determine faith structures of focus persons and in-tradition members. The faith development interview is a semi-structured interview which consists of 25 questions – presented in the *Manual for Faith Development Research* (Fowler/Streib/Keller, 2004) – which address four areas: Life Tapestry/Life Review, Relationships, Present Values and Commitments, and Religion. The faith development interview opens up with the Life Tapestry exercise, a sheet on which respondents are invited to divide their life into chapters and write down in several columns what biographical, political events and changes, what images of God were important in the different phases of their lives. The faith development interview questions then elicit responses and narratives which are tape-recorded and transcribed. The result is an interview text with plenty of data on a wide variety of aspects in the respondent's life and faith.

Evaluation, in the classical procedure as it is suggested in the *Manual*, is an interpretation of the structures of faith in each response; the interpretation of a response results in the stage score, i.e. the assignment of one of the six stages. Thereby each of the answers to the faith development questions in the interview is supposed to speak primarily to one of the seven Aspects of Faith. The third edition of the *Manual* introduces a new computer-assisted procedure for faith development evaluation – thereby paying special attention to Aspect-specific coding.

Since Fowler's model of faith development assumes a hierarchical order of sequential and irreversible faith stages – and the model of structural and lateral (de-) conversion is also embedded in this model –, the classical evaluation procedure does not invite attention to more complex develop-

mental trajectories. Deconversion, however, may reveal a more complex and ambivalent process which may involve gains and losses. Thus, deconverts may have to cope with the loss of stability and embeddedness in a community. Therefore, destabilization and regression should not be excluded from the range of possibilities. The religious styles perspective, as a modification of Fowler's faith development perspective, invites attention to a more open preference of faith orientations including the possibility that more than one structural patterns of faith are operative in one person at the same time. This suggests attention to the possibility that there is a presence or revival of "lower" styles such as the mythic-literal style, e.g. in people with fundamentalist orientation.

3.3.3 The Questionnaire and Scales

The third instrument is a questionnaire which includes four well-tested and reliable scales and a demographics section:

The Demographics Section
Our demographics section does not only ask for age, gender, education, but also includes questions concerning the religious group(s) the interviewee has affiliated with and/or disaffiliated from, duration of membership and time of deconversion. It also asks for self-assessment of the respondent's religiosity compared to his/her parents.

Four items were included in the demographics part of the questionnaire which assess the spiritual/religious self-identification; respondents were asked what identifies them best: "I am more religious than spiritual," "I am more spiritual than religious," "I am equally religious and spiritual," or "I am neither religious nor spiritual" (Hood: 2003).

The Big Five Personality Factor Instrument
One of the key areas of psychology for the past century has been personality theory which has made significant advances based upon the identification of basic personality traits that can be largely assumed to be inherited. Thus, these characteristic traits appear to stay relatively consistent over time and are unlikely to be effected or changed by either conversion (Paloutzian/Rambo/Richardson: 1999) or deconversion. However, their relevance may be important in our own study as we are able to make a comparison between those who remain within religious traditions and those who deconvert from them in both Germany and the United States.

Dominating the empirical study of personality is what is commonly called the "Five Factor Model of Personality" also known as "The Big

Five" (Costa/McCrae: 1985; McCrae/Costa: 1987). This theory is based on five major characteristics which can reliably be measured and appear consistent over the span of one's life. We will briefly discuss each of these five factors, each a measurement of a psychological trait or aspect of personality.

The first trait is *extraversion*. Extroverts are more likely to enjoy social situations, to have a large amount of emotional expressiveness and are able to connect well with others. The second is *agreeableness* with which the individual is more likely to trust others while also relating to and expressing altruism, kindness, affection, and other preferred social behaviors. The third is *conscientiousness*. Persons high on conscientiousness tend to be extremely organized and thorough in detail. The fourth trait is *neuroticism*. Persons scoring high on neuroticism tend to be prone to emotional instability, moodiness, irritability, and sometimes sadness. For our own research, we chose to reverse score this factor and call it *emotional stability*. This decision is mainly theoretical due to the perceived stigma which could be associated with scoring high on neuroticism. Since our research participants are partners in our research, we saw this as only fitting to treat them with respect. The fifth and final characteristic is *openness*. Persons scoring high on openness tend to be imaginative and insightful and are willing to explore a wide range of interests, ideas, and behaviors. They often thrive on and seek new experiences.

The five factors of the *Big Five* readily imply their opposites. For example, those who score low on *extraversion* are likely to have a higher propensity for introversion. Those who score low on *agreeableness* are more likely to be antagonistic. Those who score low on *conscientiousness* are more likely to be unfocused or lack structure. Those scoring low on *neuroticism* are more likely to be emotionally stable. Finally, those who score low on *openness* are unlikely to seek out novel experiences. While these characteristics appear dichotic, they are relationally based on a normative score for each subscale. In the simplest of terms, each factor is a simple trait thought to be heavily inheritable. There are several slightly different measures of the *Big Five*. The *NEO-FFI* which we used for our data collection (as detailed below) was chosen because of its empirical reliability, its validity, and the fact that there is massive research literature that employed this version of the *Big Five*. It is widely thought to be the "gold standard" among measures of personality.

Recent research with the *Big Five* has suggested a higher-order two factor solution (DeYoung/Peterson/Higgins: 2002; DeYoung: 2006; Digman: 1997), called the *Big Two*. Following the arguments of DeYoung et. al. (2002) the *Big Five* factors *extraversion* and *openness* were combined as a measure of *transformation* while *emotional stability, agreeableness*, and

conscientiousness were combined as a measure or *traditionalism*. Our terms are deliberately chosen to favor religious connotations, but capture the same meanings that DeYoung et. al. (2002) intend by *plasticity* and *stability*, respectively. These two higher-order traits hopefully empirically capture the dynamic tension between a tendency to stay within traditional boundaries from which meaning and purpose are derived versus the tendency to seek novel experiences and to risk a creative break with tradition. Obviously we suggest that these two tendencies should empirically identify those who stay within and those who deconvert from new religious movements.

Neither the *Big Five* nor the higher-order two factor solution *(Big Two)* have been extensively used in the study of religion. However, in their comparative study of liberal and fundamentalist church members, Streyffeler and McNally (1998) found that *Openness to Experience* was the most significant trait distinguishing between members. We are able to test this hypothesis directly in our study.

Thus, our questionnaire includes the "Big Five" personality instrument for an assessment of personality characteristics. We used this Five-Factor Model not in the longer version (NEO PI-R), but, to keep the number of items somewhat shorter, in its current (revised) NEO-FFI version (Costa/McCrae: 1985) for which an official German translation was available (Borkenau/Ostendorf: 1993). Responses in the questionnaire are marked on a 5-point scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). This well-tested and widely used scale offers the possibility of comparison with the findings of numerous empirical studies (DeRaad: 2000; Fjell/Walhovd: 2004; Kubarych/Deary/Austin: 2004).

The Psychological Well-Being and Growth Scale

We also included C. Ryff's scale on Psychological Well-Being and Growth (Ryff/Singer: 1996).[18] Unlike the *Big Five*, the dimensions of the Ryff-Scale are not hypothesized to be highly inheritable. Thus, we can expect differences in the dimensions of the *Ryff-Scale* between deconverts and in-tradition members to likely reflect changes in self reported well-being as a function of deconversion, although we cannot directly test this hypothesis.

The *Well-Being and Growth Scale* was first developed by C. Ryff and B.H. Singer. The scale (hereafter referred to as the *Ryff-Scale*) directly assesses six characteristics related to personal growth and well-being (Ryff: 1989; Ryff/Singer: 1998a; 1998b).

The first is *autonomy* which measures the extent to which an individual is able to govern him- or herself and function independently of others. The second is *environmental mastery* or how well individuals adapt to and func-

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[18] The German version was validated and used in the Berling Aging Study (BASE).

tion in the world around them. Those who are high on environmental mastery are also able to cope with change. The third is *personal growth* or the process of healthy psychological development over time. The forth characteristic is *positive relationships with others*. This is an indicator of how well people are able to form meaningful relationships. The fifth characteristic is *purpose in life*. This is an assessment of meaning often found through purposeful striving. The final characteristic of the *Ryff-Scale* is *self-acceptance* or how comfortable one is with one's self. Self-acceptance includes the feeling that one is worthwhile and it is associated with a positive self concept.

We believe that the six characteristics measured by the *Ryff-Scale* are particularly appropriate for individuals that may be struggling with religious or spiritual identity. More specifically, we anticipated that individuals who stay within a religious tradition may find a different set of positive psychological benefits as measured by the *Ryff-Scale*. Thus, this scale is useful for exploring the outcomes of transformation and deconversion and therefore may be helpful in determining the possible need for psychological help and intervention in those struggling with the psychological problems associated with deconversion (Ryff/Singer: 1996; 1998a). Including this scale in our questionnaire also opens the possibility of a comparison with a considerable body of research results (Brim/Ryff/Kessler: 2004; Grossbaum/Bates: 2002; Ryff/Singer: 1998b; Ryff/Singer/Seltzer: 2002).

Religious Fundamentalism Scale and Right-Wing-Authoritarianism Scale

The *Religious Fundamentalism Scale* (RF) (Altemeyer/Hunsberger: 1992) is a scale which Hunsberger and colleagues developed and applied, in a series of studies, as a fundamentalism measure (Altemeyer/Hunsberger: 1992; Hunsberger et al.: 1996; Hunsberger/Pratt/Pancer: 1994); Genia (1996) also has included the Religious Fundamentalism Scale in her research. In combination with the Religious Fundamentalism Scale, the Right-Wing-Authoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer: 1996) was used in research (Altemeyer/Hunsberger: 1992; Danso/Hunsberger/Pratt: 1997; Duck/Hunsberger: 1999; Hunsberger: 1995; 1996; Hunsberger/Owusu/Duck: 1999). These questionnaires have proven suitable for the comparison of large samples of fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists.

We produced a German translation (checked by blind re-translation) for both scales and included both scales in our questionnaire. However, for several reasons we caution the reader to not uncritically equate authoritarianism and fundamentalism.[19]

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[19] The *Religious Fundamentalism Scale* can be regarded as generally appropriate for the assessment of fundamentalist orientation, but it has to be kept in mind that the questions in the *RF*

Right Wing Authoritarianism. Altemeyer (1981) sought to simplify the once heavily influential theory of an authoritarian personality (Adorno: 1950). He did so by providing a more psychometrically adequate measure of authoritarianism based upon the three major factors that were able to demonstrate the strongest empirical validity. These three factors define what Altemeyer refers to as right-wing authoritarianism. The three factors are: (1) *authoritarian submission* – defined as a high degree of submission to authorities perceived as the legitimate leaders in society; (2) *authoritarian aggression* – defined as a general aggressiveness directed against others especially when positively sanctioned by established authorities; and (3) *conventionalism* defined as a high degree of adherence to social conventions and cultural traditions (Altemeyer: 1996, 6).

While Altemeyer (1999) accepts authoritarianism as a personality construct, he also (Altemeyer: 1981; 1988) notes that authoritarian values and attitudes spawn from social conditioning. Altemeyer (1988) suggests that society as a whole must protect itself from right-wing authoritarianism, including its religious expression in fundamentalism. To caution against potential discrimination of our research partners, we included a measure of both right-wing authoritarianism and of religious fundamentalism to explore in a less biased manner how additional personality and psychological factors relate to these constructs and to tease out their role in both deconversion and satisfaction with a particular faith tradition.

Religious Fundamentalism Scale. Since our research in its first phase focused on deconversion from new fundamentalist religious movements, we saw the need to include a measure of religious fundamentalism. We selected the most widely used standardized measure, the *Religious Fundamentalism Scale* (Altemeyer/Hunsberger: 1992). While the items in this scale are summed to provide a single score, the various items are designed to measure a particular style of adhering to religious beliefs that, paraphrasing the authors of the scale, includes that (1) there is one set of teachings that is inerrant and reveals the essential unchangeable truth about humanity and God; that (2) this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by forces of evil that the righteous must oppose; and that (3) those who believe and

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have a one-sided focus on consent to aspects of religious-orthodox exclusivism or absolutism and for disagreement to religious relativism. Some fundamentalist respondents in our field work had difficulties or even have refused to answer some of the statements. This was even more the case with the *Right-Wing-Authoritarianism* scale: It is our conclusion from our field work experience that this scale is especially inappropriate for Germans as it elicits associations with Nazism. The wording of some items in this scale has led to artificially suppressed scores, because a considerable part of our research partners, especially from oppositional groups, refused to answer the questions. In light of our experiences and results, we suggest looking for a better instrument in future research.

follow this truth have a special relationship to God (Altemeyer/Hunsberger: 1992, 118).

One problem with this religious fundamentalism measure is that it has consistently been shown to correlate highly with RWA. Krauss, Streib, Keller, and Silver (2006) noted high correlations between these two scales in samples from three countries, Germany, Romania, and the United States. Furthermore, it must be noted that, given the high correlations between fundamentalism and RWA (>.70 in all countries), the two scales have virtually identical patterns of correlation with the *Big Five*. Thus, the reader is cautioned that the *Fundamentalism* scale and the *RWA* scale can be viewed as redundant measures. Krauss et al. caution that Altemeyer's and Hunsberger's fundamentalism measure is a measure of religious authoritarianism; a claim that is not inconsistent with Altemeyer's view that fundamentalism is simply the religious expression of right wing authoritarianism. While Altemeyer is adamant on this point, we do not insist that all religious fundamentalism is an expression of *RWA*. Other studies of fundamentalism suggest that to link religious fundamentalism with RWA is neither as conceptually warranted as Altemeyer claims nor can it be empirically defended simply on the basis of the correlation between Altemeyer's measures (Herriot: 2007; Hood/Hill/Williamson: 2005).

The Religious Schema Scale

Measuring faith development with the faith development interview is the classical procedure as described in the third edition of the *Manual for Faith Development Research* (see 3.3.2); it however takes large resources to collect faith development interviews in a sample size[20] which can be further evaluated in quantitative analysis. There is the need for a shorter scale type measurement – a need which has been noted occasionally (e.g. by Burris: 1999) and has led to a series of instrument construction efforts (Barnes/Doyle/Johnson: 1989; Clore: 1997; Green/Hoffman: 1989; Hammond: 1993; Hiebert: 1993; Leak/Louks/Bowlin: 1999; Rose: 1991; Swensen/Fuller/Clements: 1993) with more or less success (see Streib: 2003a; 2005a). Thus, it seemed appropriate to develop and initially validate a quantitative measure of faith development.

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[20] To our knowledge, our sample of 277 faith development interviews is one of the largest samples in a single project in faith development research (and can compete with the sample on which Fowler's Stages of Faith is based and which has combined data from various researchers and research locations).

We constructed our own new quantitative measure to assess some characteristics of faith development on the basis of the religious styles perspective during the first phase of the project. The final product was the *Religious Schema Scale* (RSS) which was reduced from 78 items by means of factor analysis to three subscales of five items each. The subscales assess three schemas by means of belief statements. The first faith schema is *Truth of Texts and Teaching (ttt)* – a schema which focuses on accepting the absolute truth of one's religious tradition and thus the absolute truth of the texts which constitute this tradition. The second is *Fairness, Tolerance and Rational Choice (ftr)* which identifies a schema in which one is open to acknowledge and discuss differences in opinion and looks for a fair resolution of differences on the basis of rational exchange of arguments. Third, *Xenosophia and Inter-religious Dialogue (xenos)* is a schema in which contradictions and paradoxes can be acknowledged – appreciating, rather than downplaying the otherness of the other as creative stimulus; thus, persons of varying faith traditions can engage in dialogue.

The 15-item *RSS* was used for our data analysis. The total *RSS* score is obtained by summing the three subscales, with *ttt* reverse scored. When treated as a separate subscale, *ttt* is not reverse scored. As indirect measures of religious schemata, *ttt* operates in opposition to both *ftr* and *xenos*. The religious styles perspective, as already mentioned, opens the perspective on gains and losses in terms of faith development. When we assume that the sub-scales from the *RSS* relate to schemata, it is an open question whether the data indicate gain or loss. Data from the other scales in our questionnaire package may be helpful in determining and confirming what is measured by the Religious Schema Scale.[21]

3.4   Sample Description and Levels of Analysis

3.4.1   Sample Description

The total quantitative data sample has a total N of 1,196 questionnaire data. It includes 129 deconverts and 1,067 in-tradition members from the religious groups which the deconverts left. Deconverts are our focus persons about whom we collected rather comprehensive information. With 42.9 % male and 57.1% female subjects, the distribution of gender is acceptable.

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[21] The personality characteristic of *openness to experience* is an important indicator for transformation. Also, *personal growth* and *purpose in life*, two aspects of psychological development, should be significantly related to transformation in terms of the religious styles perspective.

The slight majority of female respondents may reflect the greater readine of women to agree to an interview and talk about religion and religio transformation in their lives, which in turn may be a sign that women a somewhat more explicitly involved in questions of religiosity. In regard the distribution of age, we have a relatively large group of responder under the age of 25 in the U.S.-part of the sample; the uneven distributi of age is, however, not on the part of the deconverts, but on the part of tl members.

We applied the typology of religious organizations (see page 26) in o research which differentiates between oppositional, accommodating, al integrated religious organizations. Oppositional religious organizatio include, for example, Unification Church, The Family, Scientology, al groups inspired by Eastern Religiosity, who participated, but insisted on n being named. Accommodating religious groups include groups such Pentecostal churches, Seventh Day Adventists or Church of Christ; Inl grated religious organizations in our sample include Roman Catho. Church, Lutheran Church, (reformed) Synagogues and the like.

Our research began with a focus on deconverts and in-tradition membt from oppositional groups and organizations with new religio fundamentalist orientation. The second phase of our research included ε commodating as well as integrated religious organizations. The structure our quantitative data reflects our typology: We have 58 deconverts in t German sample, almost equally distributed among the three types of re gious organizations; also in-tradition members are almost equally distri uted, with a slightly smaller number of in-tradition members in oppositior organizations.[22] The ratio between deconverts and in-tradition membt allows for solid comparison. Also the U.S.-part of the sample has a so ratio between in-tradition members and deconverts.

The number of interview partners from oppositional groups, however, relatively low, and instead, we have a higher number of deconverts and tradition members from accommodating religious organizations. This ι even distribution reflects the structure of the religious field in the Unil States where, in contrast to Germany, the number of groups that could classified as oppositional organizations is less due to the more open, co petitive market place structure of the religious field in the United States. considerable number of groups decide against opposition and opt growth and accommodation. Thus, a number of religious organizatic

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[22] This is due to the difficulties in locating interview partners in this partially rather herm section of the religious field.

which are in the oppositional group in Europe qualify as accommodating organizations in the United States.[23]

Our quantitative database was enriched greatly by the import of results from qualitative analysis and faith development evaluation. The use of computer-assisted procedures in qualitative evaluation – with NVivo for the biographical interviews and with the Scoring Sheet for the faith development interview evaluation[24] – allowed data import into SPSS. Thus we have a number of variables for

1. *Faith development interview* (FDI) scores resulting from classical FDI evaluation for 99 deconverts and 177 in-tradition members (total n = 276). Our faith development data, however, do not only consist of a single summarized stage score, but include scores for all of the seven Aspects of faith. This import of results from the faith development interviews in the data set allows for comparison with results of the newly developed Religious Schema Scale (RSS).

2. Classification of *deconversion trajectories* such as 'secularizing exit,' 'religious switching,' 'oppositional exit,' 'integrating exit,' 'private exit,' and 'heretical exit' for almost all deconverts with whom we had an interview. This rating is based on the interpretation of the biographical interviews.

3. Assessment of *deconversion criteria* – such as 'intellectual doubt,' 'moral criticism,' 'emotional suffering,' 'loss of religious experience,' and 'termination of membership,' according to Streib & Keller (2004) – for all interviewed deconverts. Also these assessments are the result of the interpretation of the biographical interviews.

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[23] This is no handicap for comparison between deconverts and in-tradition members, but it could be a source of error when specific types of religious organizations are compared across the cultures. In our analyses we will take this into account.

[24] While the faith development Scoring Sheet which was recommended in previous editions of the *Manual for Faith Development Research* (Moseley/Jarvis/Fowler: 1986; 1993) had to be copied and filled out by hand, we constructed for our evaluation a computer version of this Scoring Sheet. It was published and is distributed together with the third edition of the *Manual for Faith Development Research* (Fowler/Streib/Keller: 2004) which we wrote and published in the Research Center for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion in Bielefeld during the second phase of the deconversion project. The new electronic Scoring Sheet offers not only the advantage of higher readability opposed to the handwritten version, it also opens the possibility of entering the results into SPSS easily.

3.4.2   Levels of Analysis

Our database consists of three types of rather different data: 1. transcripts of open-end, narrative interviews; 2. transcripts of semi-structured faith development interviews; 3. questionnaire data.

Roughly, these three sorts of data correspond to the three levels of personality research that Hooker (2002) identified on the basis of McAdams (1995; McAdams et al.: 2004) work: 1. traits (broad, universal, general dispositions); 2. personal concerns and characteristic adaptations (goals, developmental tasks, motivations); 3. the integrative life story (the person's narrative creation of meaning).

When linking our types of data to these three levels, we have to note, however, that data types are not confined to a specific level of analysis: A great portion of our questionnaire data also speaks to level two; the questions of being religious vs. being spiritual, the Religious Fundamentalism Scale or the scale for Psychological Well-Being and Growth (Ryff) measure "characteristic adaptations" and "personal concerns." Moreover, the quantitative data also speak to level three: a combination of certain subscales from the Ryff instrument, namely Personal Growth and Environmental Mastery, produces results about life integration and the creation of meaning – and thus parallels the analysis of the variations of life narratives.

The differentiation in three levels of analysis however helps to better understand the task we encounter in evaluation of our data. The three levels have to be considered separately, they cannot be reduced to one another, but supplement each other. Then they result in a comprehensive portrait of deconversion narratives.

These levels of analysis require a strategy of triangulation (Denzin: 1978; Flick: 1991; Flick: 2000; Köttig: 2005; Lerner et al.: 2001; Marotzki: 1999). Triangulation of methods and triangulation of data and results is supposed to improve validity, because it is based on a broader set of results. It also yields a better understanding, because it invites more than one perspective. Triangulation in biographical-reconstructive analysis thus leads to a deeper understanding, including the diachronic dimension of religious change and including the interpretation of religious change in the context of the milieus. The three sorts of data (narrative interview, faith development interview and questionnaire data) can be viewed as interrelated building blocks of the triangulation strategies which we use in our research (Streib: 2005a; Streib/Hood/Keller: 2002).

Our research design has its focus on the analysis of deconversion narratives; thus narrative interviews, and this means that qualitative analyses

play a privileged role. In this we agree with the hierarchy which is suggested in McAdams' and Hooker's three levels of analysis. Case studies of deconverts are at the core of our study. The study of biographies is an interpretative task and the central projected result is a typology of deconversion narratives.

It is nevertheless reasonable to engage in quantitative evaluation of our data as separate and self-reliant analytic step. For a quantitatively generated portrayal of deconverts against the background of members, quantitative evaluation is an excellent option with the promise of producing good results. This is what will be unfolded in Chapter Four.

3.5 Summary of Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research questions can be summarized briefly as follows: What kind of versions and what kind of variety of deconversion trajectories can be identified for the United States and for Germany? What are the characteristics in terms of personality traits, psychological well-being, fundamentalism, and authoritarianism scores of deconversion from integrated (no tension) religious organizations compared to deconversion from oppositional and accommodating (tension) groups? How do deconverts differ in these characteristics from in-tradition members? Are there signs of religious transformation in terms of faith development and/or religious styles in relation to deconversion? Under what conditions can we expect a revival of "lower" religious styles? How are individual and community level of faith development/religious style related to each other? What are the gains and losses in deconversion? What are the implications for prevention and intervention? We conclude with a summary of our basic assumptions and hypotheses: We expected that

1. we find a variety of deconversion narratives, rather than a stereotype model;
2. there is advancement in terms of faith development / religious style in deconverts;
3. for deconverts we get lower scores on *religious fundamentalism*;
4. *openness for experience* is higher in deconverts;
5. regarding the well-being of deconverts there is no unusual need for intervention.

In the following chapters we present the results from our research in all detail. The types of deconversion which is based on qualitative analysis will

stand in the center and cover most space. The case studies, however, include also data from the quantitative part of our research; thus, quantitative results will be reported and discussed there in a triangulation of our threefold data. In order, however, to understand the quantitative data which will be referred to in the case studies, a brief summary of quantitative results is necessary. This will be the task of the next chapter.

4 Characteristics and Predictors of Deconversion in Germany and the United States: Quantitative Results

In this chapter we present calculations that all use the entire quantitative data set which is based on the questionnaires. The results are produced on the basis of the pre-defined and well-tested measures of personality, psychological well-being and growth, and religiosity, which were described in the previous chapter on the research design. Descriptive data (means and standard deviations by country, deconvert/member classification, and spiritual/religious self-identification) yield insights in the characteristics of religious deconverts against the background of their former fellows in faith. A limited step-wise regression analysis allows the identification of possible predictors of deconversion.

4.1 Reliabilities and Intercorrelations among the Scales

Internal reliabilities were computed independently for all scales for in-tradition members and deconverts for both Germany and the United States (see Table 10).

Generally, reliabilities are acceptable. Despite large differences in sample size between in-tradition members and deconverts, reliabilities for most scales and subscales exceed the minimally acceptable level of .70 for both in-tradition members and deconverts in both countries. Only few scales are in the .60 range, and especially in the United States, are as likely to be associated with the *Big Five* and one of the subscales of the *Religious Schema Scale (xenos)*. All in all, on a total of 21 scales and subscales, only two of the in-tradition and three of the deconverts in the United States sample were below .70. For the German sample the numbers are one and two, respectively. Thus we conclude that our scales have adequate reliabilities, both to compare in-tradition members with deconverts within the respective countries and to suggest patterns of differences that vary between countries.

Table 10. Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) for In-Tradition Members and Deconverts in Germany and the U.S.A.

| | Germany | | | | U.S.A. | | | |
| | In-Tradition | | Deconverts | | In-Tradition | | Deconverts | |
	N	Alpha	N	Alpha	N	Alpha	N	Alpha
Big Five Total Score	368	.70	53	.66	658	.73	66	.60
Emotional Stability (ES)	368	.92	53	.83	658	.82	66	.74
Extraversion (E)	368	.76	53	.84	658	.79	66	.83
Openness (O)	368	.70	53	.75	659	.74	66	.77
Agreeableness (A)	368	.70	53	.72	659	.76	66	.63
Conscientiousness (C)	368	.82	53	.83	658	.82	66	.80
Transformation (TF)	368	.94	53	.94	658	.72	66	.70
Traditionalism (TD)	368	.88	53	.85	658	.86	66	.76
Ryff-Scale Total Score	367	.91	53	.94	658	.94	65	.91
Autonomy (AU)	367	.71	53	.79	660	.76	66	.71
Environmental Mastery (EM)	368	.78	53	.89	660	.78	66	.73
Personal Growth (PG)	369	.72	53	.70	660	.77	66	.80
Positive Relations with Others (PR)	368	.72	53	.82	660	.82	66	.77
Purpose in Life (PL)	367	.70	53	.72	660	.80	66	.74
Self-Acceptance (SA)	368	.79	53	.91	658	.81	65	.81
Religious Fundamentalism Scale (RF)	363	.93	53	.94	657	.92	66	.92
Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA)	363	.94	51	.94	655	.93	65	.96
Religious Schema Scale (RSS) Total Score	223	.81	27	.89	525	.75	26	.65
Truth of Text & Teachings (ttt)	226	.86	27	.91	532	.87	26	.82
Fairness, Tolerance & Rational Choice (ftr)	226	.66	28	.61	535	.69	28	.73
Xenosophia & Inter-Religious Dialog (xenos)	225	.81	28	.87	536	.66	28	.60

We also computed intercorrelations among all scales and subscales for both Germany and the United Sates. These are presented in Table 11. Due to the small sample size for deconverts in both countries, the correlation matrices are for total sample size. Occasional number variations reflect incomplete questionnaires. Given the large size of the sample, many of the correlations are significant. The correlation matrices are useful to give a descriptive sense of the interrelations between our various measures.

Of most relevant interest is the fact that in both countries, as we had anticipated, we find a strong negative correlation between *openness to experience* and *Religious Fundamentalism* (*RF*). Also, the correlations between *RF* and *Right-Wing Authoritarianism* (*RWA*) are so high in both countries that they exceed reliabilities for most of the other scales. Hence, our concern is both with the redundancy of these two measures and the conceptual issue noted previously (see Note 19 on page 20) with the problem with many of our participants, especially in Germany, in terms of wording of the item on the *RWA* scale.

Finally, in both countries the *Religious Fundamentalism Scale (RF)* correlates negatively with the total *Religious Schema Scale (RSS)* – in which we have a measure for three religious schemata in combination: appreciation for the other/strange and readiness to engage in inter-religious dialog *(xenos)*, inclination to fairness, tolerance and rational choice *(ftr)*, and rejection of the absoluteness of truth claims of a specific religious tradition *(ttt)*. For the calculation of the total *RSS*, it has to be kept in mind that the *Truth of Text and Teachings* (*ttt*) subscale is reversed; thus the negative correlation with total *RSS* masks the fact that there is a positive correlation between *ttt* and *RF*. The negative total correlation is accounted for by the fact that *RF* also shows a strong and negative correlation with the *xenos* subscale. Also, an inspection of the correlation matrix indicates that *ttt* functions the way *RF* does; this means that one can consider *ttt* as an indirect measure of a religious schema that operates in fundamentalists. Thus, from the correlation matrix there is more than ample support for seeing fundamentalism as a relatively closed system – however, as we shall see, not necessarily a system that lacks meaning or fails to provide emotional support for those who believe and stay in-tradition.

Table 11. Correlation Matrix of all Scales

		Total Big Five	Emotional Stability	Extraversion	Openness	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	RYFF Total Score	Autonomy
Total Big Five	Pearson Correlation		-0.103	0.444	0.584	0.540	0.443	0.347	0.065
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.034	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.183
	N	U.S.A.	421	421	421	421	421	420	420
Emotional Stability	Pearson Correlation	-0.088	Germany	0.481	-0.072	0.322	0.385	0.699	0.414
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.018		0.000	0.140	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	724	U.S.A.	421	421	421	421	420	420
Extraversion	Pearson Correlation	0.568	0.315	Germany	0.062	0.292	0.224	0.527	0.165
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.204	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001
	N	724	724	U.S.A.	421	421	421	420	420
Openness	Pearson Correlation	0.470	0.064	0.024	Germany	0.152	-0.067	0.201	0.133
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.087	0.511		0.002	0.170	0.000	0.006
	N	724	724	724	U.S.A.	421	421	420	420
Agreeable-ness	Pearson Correlation	0.561	0.331	0.314	0.093	Germany	0.252	0.446	0.075
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.012		0.000	0.000	0.125
	N	724	724	724	725	U.S.A.	421	420	420
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	0.475	0.340	0.300	-0.090	0.281	Germany	0.499	0.295
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.016	0.000		0.000	0.000
	N	724	724	724	724	724	U.S.A.	420	420
Ryff Total Score	Pearson Correlation	0.377	0.638	0.481	0.169	0.422	0.552	Germany	0.600
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	719	719	719	720	720	719	U.S.A.	420
Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	0.148	0.437	0.146	0.297	0.092	0.307	0.659	Germany
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.013	0.000	0.000	
	N	722	722	722	723	723	722	723	U.S.A.
Environmen-tal Mastery	Pearson Correlation	0.196	0.634	0.349	-0.038	0.314	0.608	0.823	0.466
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.313	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	722	722	722	723	723	722	723	726
Personal Growth	Pearson Correlation	0.501	0.347	0.352	0.461	0.371	0.323	0.723	0.469
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	722	722	722	723	723	722	723	726
Positive Relations w. others	Pearson Correlation	0.377	0.501	0.555	0.024	0.503	0.385	0.781	0.307
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.513	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	722	722	722	723	723	722	723	726
Purpose in Life	Pearson Correlation	0.333	0.453	0.383	0.085	0.303	0.529	0.830	0.407
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.023	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	722	722	722	723	723	722	723	726
Self-Acceptance	Pearson Correlation	0.212	0.591	0.431	-0.007	0.361	0.428	0.839	0.463
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.861	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	719	719	719	720	720	719	723	723
Religious Fundamen-talism	Pearson Correlation	-0.111	0.049	0.151	-0.474	0.077	0.107	0.045	-0.162
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003	0.189	0.000	0.000	0.039	0.004	0.232	0.000
	N	719	719	719	720	720	719	718	721
Right-Wing Authori-tarianism	Pearson Correlation	-0.162	0.042	0.129	-0.565	0.057	0.128	-0.014	-0.193
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.262	0.001	0.000	0.125	0.001	0.710	0.000
	N	716	716	716	717	717	716	715	718
Traditionalism	Pearson Correlation	0.379	0.801	0.418	0.033	0.693	0.713	0.737	0.396
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.377	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	724	724	724	724	724	724	719	722
Transfor-mation	Pearson Correlation	0.723	0.259	0.693	0.738	0.279	0.138	0.447	0.313
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	724	724	724	724	724	724	719	722
RSS Total	Pearson Correlation	0.229	-0.112	-0.090	0.502	-0.076	-0.017	0.040	0.182
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.009	0.036	0.000	0.075	0.688	0.347	0.000
	N	549	549	549	550	550	549	549	551
RSS tn	Pearson Correlation	0.038	0.165	0.273	-0.337	0.174	0.214	0.228	-0.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.375	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.357
	N	556	556	556	557	557	556	556	558
RSS ftr	Pearson Correlation	0.385	0.051	0.168	0.323	0.135	0.262	0.383	0.278
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.225	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	561	561	561	562	562	561	561	563
RSS xenos	Pearson Correlation	0.245	-0.066	0.056	0.349	-0.034	0.054	0.114	0.126
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.117	0.188	0.000	0.420	0.199	0.007	0.003
	N	562	562	562	563	563	562	562	564

(left margin, vertical text: United States)

		Germany										
Environmental Mastery	Personal Growth	Positive Relat. w others	Purpose in life	Self-Accep tance	Rel. Fun-damen-talism	Authori-tarianism	Traditio-nalism	Transform ation	RSS Total	RSS m	RSS fr	RSS xenos
0.192	0.423	0.374	0.307	0.201	-0.186	-0.224	0.327	0.705	0.304	-0.134	0.332	0.282
0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.033	0.000	0.000
421	421	421	420	421	415	413	421	421	249	252	253	252
0.686	0.233	0.485	0.546	0.669	0.218	0.168	0.828	0.282	-0.146	0.125	-0.055	-0.134
0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.021	0.048	0.386	0.034
421	421	421	420	421	415	413	421	421	249	252	253	252
0.409	0.310	0.477	0.479	0.474	0.140	0.094	0.464	0.730	-0.155	0.172	0.002	-0.126
0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.057	0.000	0.000	0.014	0.006	0.973	0.046
421	421	421	420	421	415	413	421	421	249	252	253	252
-0.045	0.479	0.137	0.108	0.129	-0.434	-0.504	-0.016	0.727	0.462	-0.327	0.282	0.404
0.354	0.000	0.005	0.027	0.008	0.000	0.000	0.738	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
421	421	421	420	421	415	413	421	421	249	252	253	252
0.343	0.280	0.562	0.344	0.357	0.012	-0.041	0.635	0.305	0.094	-0.001	0.293	0.034
0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.813	0.407	0.000	0.000	0.138	0.983	0.000	0.589
421	421	421	420	421	415	413	421	421	249	252	253	252
0.606	0.151	0.309	0.447	0.365	0.168	0.182	0.740	0.108	0.076	0.027	0.104	0.122
0.000	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.026	0.230	0.667	0.098	0.052
421	421	421	420	421	415	413	421	421	249	252	253	252
0.812	0.568	0.746	0.794	0.863	0.088	-0.052	0.758	0.500	0.043	0.054	0.176	0.047
0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.074	0.292	0.000	0.000	0.497	0.392	0.005	0.458
420	420	420	420	420	415	413	420	420	249	252	253	252
0.388	0.256	0.246	0.319	0.432	0.010	-0.037	0.383	0.204	0.034	-0.008	0.080	0.020
0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.840	0.450	0.000	0.000	0.592	0.905	0.204	0.750
420	420	420	420	420	415	413	420	420	249	252	253	252
Germany	0.218	0.563	0.606	0.723	0.201	0.125	0.761	0.250	-0.030	0.098	0.038	0.023
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.011	0.000	0.000	0.641	0.119	0.547	0.713
U.S.A.	421	421	420	421	415	413	421	421	249	252	253	252
0.418	Germany	0.325	0.402	0.381	-0.229	-0.378	0.291	0.541	0.239	-0.134	0.210	0.210
0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.033	0.001	0.001
726	U.S.A.	421	420	421	416	414	421	421	250	253	254	253
0.591	0.452	Germany	0.552	0.576	0.104	-0.010	0.597	0.422	-0.010	0.070	0.176	-0.040
0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.034	0.834	0.000	0.000	0.871	0.270	0.005	0.529
726	726	U.S.A.	420	421	415	413	421	421	249	252	253	252
0.649	0.619	0.587	Germany	0.627	0.212	0.075	0.616	0.403	-0.068	0.131	0.129	-0.063
0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.127	0.000	0.000	0.288	0.038	0.040	0.316
726	726	726	U.S.A.	420	415	413	420	420	249	252	253	252
0.710	0.454	0.643	0.618	Germany	0.061	-0.047	0.650	0.414	0.031	0.062	0.134	0.052
0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.219	0.337	0.000	0.000	0.627	0.331	0.033	0.411
723	723	723	723	U.S.A.	415	413	421	421	249	252	253	252
0.121	-0.155	0.167	0.103	0.102	Germany	0.825	0.197	-0.198	-0.849	0.798	-0.222	-0.684
0.001	0.000	0.000	0.006	0.006		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
721	721	721	721	718	U.S.A.	412	415	415	249	252	253	252
0.105	-0.231	0.117	0.049	0.066	0.835	Germany	0.158	-0.278	-0.769	0.684	-0.278	-0.621
0.005	0.000	0.002	0.193	0.079	0.000		0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
718	718	718	718	715	718	U.S.A.	413	413	248	251	251	250
0.716	0.467	0.628	0.582	0.636	0.102	0.099	Germany	0.308	-0.012	0.081	0.125	-0.006
0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.006	0.008		0.000	0.853	0.200	0.046	0.921
722	722	722	722	719	719	716	U.S.A.	421	249	252	253	252
0.209	0.570	0.393	0.320	0.286	-0.241	-0.322	0.306	Germany	0.209	-0.107	0.195	0.189
0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.001	0.089	0.002	0.003
722	722	722	722	719	719	716	724	U.S.A.	249	252	253	252
-0.061	0.271	-0.093	-0.006	-0.067	-0.779	-0.743	-0.099	0.305	Germany	-0.780	0.488	0.864
0.154	0.000	0.028	0.889	0.117	0.000	0.000	0.020	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000
551	551	551	551	549	551	551	549	549	U.S.A.	250	250	250
0.211	0.055	0.286	0.252	0.256	0.811	0.722	0.255	-0.060	-0.721	Germany	-0.005	-0.436
0.000	0.198	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.158	0.000		0.934	0.000
558	558	558	558	556	558	558	556	556	551	U.S.A.	252	251
0.207	0.516	0.234	0.349	0.213	-0.156	-0.210	0.199	0.349	0.504	0.082	Germany	0.437
0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.053		0.000
563	563	563	563	561	563	562	561	561	551	554	U.S.A.	252
0.002	0.260	0.020	0.055	0.065	-0.421	-0.424	-0.026	0.292	0.747	-0.218	0.397	Germany
0.957	0.000	0.642	0.192	0.123	0.000	0.000	0.545	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
564	564	564	564	562	564	563	562	562	551	555	560	

Table 12. Significant Differences between In-Tradition Members and Deconverts for Germany and the United States of America

| | Germany | | | | U.S.A. | | | |
| | In-tradition | | Deconvert | | In-tradition | | Deconvert | |
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Big Five	N=368		N=53		N=658		N=66	
Total score	203.72	12.42	206.25	12.74	200.83	13.50	206.76	11.75
ES	41.66	7.07	35.43	10.15	39.28	7.61	41.26	6.65
E	40.57	5.75	38.23	7.52	42.73	6.12	42.08	7.30
O	41.22	5.82	46.00	5.75	38.63	6.24	46.91	6.00
A	46.34	4.82	44.15	5.57	43.20	5.81	44.29	5.07
C	45.26	6.03	41.30	7.23	43.55	6.07	42.74	6.06
Big Two	N=368		N=53		N=658		N=66	
TF	81.79	8.66	84.23	9.44	81.36	9.03	88.99	8.48
TD	133.26	13.12	120.89	17.15	126.02	14.62	128.29	11.48
Ryff Scale	N=367		N=53		N=660		N=66	
Total score	204.63	19.02	194.09	27.15	200.58	23.31	210.49	19.57
AU	31.66	4.47	32.60	4.97	32.20	4.76	35.56	4.32
EM	33.61	4.59	29.66	6.74	32.16	4.87	32.55	4.58
PG	35.05	4.18	36.47	4.14	34.38	4.56	38.08	4.46
PR	34.98	4.26	31.98	6.19	34.05	5.53	34.03	5.63
PL	35.09	4.09	32.28	5.06	34.30	4.90	35.12	4.35
SA	34.27	4.52	31.09	7.34	33.46	5.10	35.02	4.67
RF	N=363		N=53		N=657		N=66	
	61.15	17.17	42.55	16.31	61.89	15.01	40.79	14.49
RWA	N=363		N=53		N=655		N=65	
	79.28	19.93	60.86	17.52	89.36	18.07	61.17	19.86
RSS	N=223		N=27		N=525		N=26	
RSS total	48.87	7.93	52.56	9.95	48.69	6.35	57.54	6.34
ttt	17.17	4.38	14.41	5.31	17.35	4.14	11.42	4.38
ftr	20.36	2.21	20.43	1.81	19.56	2.49	21.00	2.80
xenos	15.73	4.10	16.54	4.60	16.51	2.95	18.32	3.32

Notes: *Big Five*=NEO-FFI; ES=emotional stability (neuroticism, reverse scored); E=extraversion; O=openness; A=agreeableness; C=conscientiousness; *Big Two*=higher order calculation with Big Five); TF=transformation, TD=traditionalism; *Ryff*-Scale=Psychological Well-Being and Growth scale: AU=Autonomy; EM=Environmental mastery; PG=Personal growth; PR=Personal relations with others; PL=Purpose in life; SA=Self-acceptance; *RF*=Religious Fundamentalism Scale; *RWA*=Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale; *RSS*: Religious Schema Scale: In RSS total, ttt has been reversed scored; ttt=Truth of texts and teachings; ftr=Fairness, tolerance & rational choice; xenos=Xenosophia; **Bold**: Significant difference between deconvert and in-tradition for specified country (p<.01); *Italic*: Significant difference between countries (p<.01).

4.2 How Deconverts Differ from In-Tradition Members

Table 12 provides means and standard deviations for all scales and sub-scales for in-tradition and deconverts in both Germany and the United States. Based on the calculation of means and standard deviations of all scales by country and deconvert/member classification, the differences between deconverts and members emerge.

Differences between In-Tradition Members and Deconverts in Germany.
In the *German sample*, the deconverts significantly differ on all subscales of the *Big Five*. They also differ on both scales of the *Big Two*, though only significantly on *traditionalism*. As might be expected from our discussion of the correlation matrices above, *openness to experience* is higher for deconverts while all other subscales of the *Big Five* are lower. We will address this issue more fully below.

The considerable effect of *openness to experience* also accounts for why *transformation* of the *Big Two* is higher for deconverts, even though it is a composite of *openness* and *extraversion* (which is lower for the German deconverts). *Openness to experience* obviously is the most significant measure for our German sample. It is the overriding subscale that differentiates deconverts from in-tradition members in Germany, and as we shall shortly see, in the United States as well. But, in contrast to the U.S., German deconverts score significantly lower on *agreeableness* and *conscientiousness;* thus, *traditionalism* is also significantly lower. Together with *openness*, this characterizes German deconverts most powerfully.

On the *Ryff-Scale*, the deconverts for our German sample score lower on the total scale and lower on four subscales (*environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance*). However, they do not differ significantly from in-tradition members in *autonomy* or *personal growth*. Again, we will discuss the implications of these differences more detailed below when we consider how German deconverts differ from those in the United States.

Finally, as anticipated, German deconverts score considerably lower on *Religious Fundamentalism* and on *Right-Wing Authoritarianism*.[25] Given our concern with the *RWA* scale, especially for Germans, we will focus our discussion on the *Religious Fundamentalism Scale*. However, as noted above, at the purely empirical level the *RWA scale* functions similarly to the

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[25] As noted before, the scale *Emotional Stability* is identical with *Neuroticism*, but reverse scored. Thus it is truly a scale of the *Big Five* and based on the NEO-FFI instrument, but labels the phenomenon positively — with the term "stability".

RF scale given the high correlation (>.80) in both the German and U.S. samples.

Differences between In-Tradition Members and Deconverts in the U.S.

If we now turn to the *United States* sample, we see a significantly different overall picture. Like the German deconverts, deconverts in the U.S. sample score lower on *Religious Fundamentalism* and *Right-Wing Authoritarianism*. However, this difference is tempered by the fact that on the *Big Five* total scores for the U.S. deconverts are significantly higher than those for in-tradition members; and, most of this is obviously accounted for by the much higher score on *openness to experience* for deconverts. This is also the reason why *transformation* of the Big Two is significantly higher for U.S. deconverts. While this finding parallels that for Germany with respect to the *openness to experience* measure, it is radically different in that, unlike German deconverts, American deconverts do not significantly differ from American members on *any* of the other four subscales of the *Big Five*. As noted above, German deconverts are, compared to German members, significantly lower on other *Big Five* subscales which constitute the Big Two *traditionalism*. These differences between Germany and the United States have cultural implications.

The results with the *Ryff-Scale* also reveal differences between deconverts and in-tradition members for Germany and the United States. Compared to members, U.S. deconverts score higher on the total *Ryff-Scale* in contrast to German deconverts. Furthermore, in the U.S. sample this is accounted for largely by two of the subscales, *autonomy* and *personal growth*. Thus, deconverts in Germany and the United Sates show significantly different patterns from their in-tradition counterparts.

Because some doubt is justified in regard to the *Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale* as noted previously,[26] we focus on fundamentalism and conclude that, in confirmation of our expectation, *deconverts tend to more strongly disagree with fundamentalist statements than in-tradition members*. This appears not very surprising for deconverts from new religious fundamentalist groups; but it is surprising for deconverts from accommo-

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[26] See Note 19 where we have expressed our concern that the *RWA* scale is inappropriate for Germans as it is associated with Nazism, and that the wording of some items in this scale has led to artificially suppressed scores, because a considerable part of our research partners, especially from oppositional groups, refused to answer the questions. Furthermore, the *Right-Wing-Authoritarianism* scale highly correlates with the *Religious Fundamentalism* scale in both Germany (r=.83) and the United States (r = .84) – which is even higher than in the test run for our questionnaire which was replicated in Romania (US: r = .74; Germany: r = .76; Romania: r = .73); see Krauss et.al. (2006) for details.

dating and integrated religious organizations and must be addressed more fully below.

Table 13 presents differences between in-tradition tension and no-tension members for both Germany and the United States. As noted previously, groups are identified as those in tension with the host culture (oppositional and accommodating types) and those without tension with the host culture (integrating type). Some additional insight is also gained from this table by noting the slightly different pattern of differences of the *Religious Schema Scale (RSS)* for Germany and the United States. The German no-tension group (integrating) has higher total *RSS* means than the tension groups (accommodating and oppositional). Again, given the reverse scoring of *ttt,* we note once again that the difference is due to a lower *ttt* subscale (not reversed when treated as a subscale) and higher *xenos.* Hence, it appears that fundamentalist groups in tension with the host culture are most at odds with religious dialogue with other groups for Germany.

In America a different pattern emerges. First and most obvious is that the tension groups are higher in *openness to experience* than the integrative groups. This corresponds to the higher *ttt* for the integrating groups and also on the lower total *RSS.* Thus, unlike Germany, in-tradition members in America with no tension to the host culture are more open and score higher on the *Total RSS* and lower on the *ttt* subscale. Thus, it would appear that in the United States in-tradition fundamentalists with tension between themselves and the host culture remain open to explore their faith tradition in ways that do not challenge the authority of its sacred text. They are supported by a culture in which religious freedom is paramount.

Again, emphasis has to be put on the difference in fundamentalism scores for Germany and the United States: German in-tradition tension groups are higher on *Religious Fundamentalism,* while these groups in the United States are lower on *RF.* The differences between in-tradition means for tension and no tension groups in Germany and the United States call for a more detailed analysis provided below and also in our qualitative assessment of case studies.

Table 13. Significant Differences between No Tension and Tension Groups for In-Tradition Members in Germany and U.S.A.

| | Germany | | | | U.S.A. | | | |
| | Tension | | No Tension | | Tension | | No Tension | |
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Big Five	N=215		N=149		N=357		N=298	
Total score	203.22	11.90	204.42	13.24	*201.26*	13.91	*200.19*	13.00
ES	*42.25*	6.77	*40.90*	7.21	39.30	8.16	39.29	6.87
E	*40.87*	5.71	*40.36*	5.62	42.62	6.36	42.91	5.79
O	*40.65*	6.04	*41.89*	5.42	**39.22**	**6.21**	**37.80**	**6.11**
A	*46.79*	4.48	*45.70*	5.18	43.32	6.01	43.08	5.59
C	*45.17*	6.15	*45.38*	5.80	43.40	6.22	43.68	5.87
Big Two	N=215		N=149		N=357		N=298	
TF	81.51	8.68	82.25	8.69	*81.84*	9.33	*80.72*	8.63
TD	*134.21*	13.03	*131.97*	12.81	126.02	15.64	126.04	13.30
Ryff-Scale	N=215		N=148		N=358		N=298	
Total score	*204.99*	18.74	*204.24*	19.49	*200.45*	24.58	*200.81*	21.79
AU	31.51	4.52	31.85	4.47	*32.28*	4.86	*32.08*	4.66
EM	*33.62*	4.65	*33.63*	4.41	32.09	5.18	32.27	4.48
PG	34.93	3.91	35.17	4.56	*34.36*	4.60	*34.36*	4.51
PR	*35.40*	4.04	*34.46*	4.44	34.08	5.61	34.03	5.42
PL	*35.34*	3.92	*34.78*	4.34	34.20	5.08	34.45	4.68
SA	*34.18*	4.48	*34.40*	4.60	33.34	5.36	33.63	4.79
RF	N=211		N=148		N=354		N=300	
	68.00	**14.67**	**52.03**	**15.83**	**59.73**	**15.85**	**64.75**	**13.18**
RWA	N=211		N= 148		N=352		N=300	
	84.37	**18.76**	**72.82**	**19.25**	**87.29**	**18.96**	**92.16**	**16.23**
RSS	N=76		N=143		N= 259		N=264	
RSS total	**42.82**	**6.65**	**51.78**	**6.58**	**49.61**	**6.87**	**47.66**	**5.49**
ttt	**19.30**	**3.53**	**16.13**	**4.42**	**16.69**	**4.54**	**18.07**	**3.66**
ftr	19.88	2.01	20.55	2.27	*19.69*	2.66	*19.42*	2.28
xenos	**12.24**	**3.74**	**17.40**	**2.92**	*16.62*	3.02	*16.36*	2.85

Notes: Tension=Accommodating + oppositional groups; No Tension= integrating groups; *Big Five*=NEO-FFI; ES=emotional stability (neuroticism, reverse scored); E=extraversion; O=openness; A=agreeableness; C=conscientiousness; *Big Two*=higher order calculation with Big Five): TF=transformation, TD=traditionalism; *Ryff-Scale*=Psychological Well-Being and Growth scales: AU=Autonomy; EM =Environmental mastery; PG=Personal growth; PR=Personal relations with others; PL=Purpose in life; SA=Self-acceptance; *RF*=Religious Fundamentalism Scale; *RWA*=Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale; *RSS*: Religious Schema Scale: In RSS total, ttt has been reversed scored; ttt = Truth in text and teachings; ftr=Fairness, tolerance & rational choice; xenos = Xenosophia; Bold: Significant Difference between No-Tension and Tension Group for specified country (p<.01); *Italics*: Significant Difference between Deconvert and In-tradition for specified country (p<.01); thereby means for German deconverts are all lower, except for O=Opennes, while for US deconverts means are higher, except for RF, RWA and ttt.

Summary Conclusion

Generally, because of the high negative significant correlation between *Religious Fundamentalism* and *openness to experience* in both Germany and the United Sates — one of the highest negative correlations in the correlation matrixes in Table 11 — it appears to be justified to interpret fundamentalism as religious commitment to an absolutist tradition and as a counterpart to *openness to experience*. This receives further plausibility from a closer look at the items of the *Religious Fundamentalism Scale* noted previously. Its items can be characterized as probing for consent to some aspects of religious-orthodox exclusivism or absolutism as well as for disagreement to religious relativism. Thus, the *Religious Fundamentalism Scale* can be interpreted as centering around the theme of (lack of) religious openness. This can be interpreted in two ways.

First, assuming *openness* to be a partly inherited trait, persons high on this trait are likely to fully explore the fundamentalist tradition they were socialized into, and to find its limits. They then are likely to be unsatisfied with a tradition that demands the truth of its text and traditions be accepted in absolute terms while simultaneously denying the value of inter-religious dialogue. This is consistent with the correlation matrices for both Germany and the United States (see Table 11) where the relationship between *openness*, and *RSS* (especially *ttt* and *xenos*) suggests the kind of dynamic relationship we believe to produce the motivation for persons to deconvert from fundamentalist religious movements. Here we suggest that openness precedes deconversion and is not a consequence of it. Our case studies and qualitative data will illuminate this hypothesis.

Secondly, the effort of denying those subjects who score high on *openness* genuine inter-religious dialogue and exploration assures that fundamentalists high on this trait will seek its fulfillment when they deconvert from the very tradition that prohibits it. Thus, after a deconversion from fundamentalist religious movements, we may expect further change in religious and spiritual explorations as the trait of openness explores more fully religious and spiritual landscapes denied by fundamentalist traditions. This may be easier to do in the United States where more religious groups have low tension due to a culture of religious freedom. In Germany, a different religious culture exists and religious fundamentalist are in stronger tension with their culture and perhaps, as a consequence, less open to explore the limits of even their own faith tradition and certainly do not seek the dialogue with other traditions.

While the question of which interpretation is more adequate could be answered best by a longitudinal study, we conclude on the basis of our results (and leaving out the term 'fundamentalism') the following: *In both cultures, United States and Germany, and across religious milieus, deconversion from religious organizations is most strongly associated with openness to experience and with the readiness to explore other religious, spiritual and secular options.*

4.3   Cross-Cultural Differences:
Indications of a Loss for Deconverts in Germany?

Aside from the commonalities in respect to *openness* and related characteristics, Table 12 provides evidence from our data for cultural differences between Germany and the United States in how far deconverts differ from their former in-tradition fellows in faith. As already noted above in four subscales of the *Big Five* and four subscales of the *Ryff-Scale*, German deconverts stand out from in-tradition members through *negative* differences, while for United States deconverts there are few differences, and when there are, they are *positive.*

What can we conclude from this? Our answer concentrates on four aspects:

1. Lower scores of German deconverts on *conscientiousness* may be understood as corresponding with the disaffiliation from a religious environment which is felt as demanding and constricting. Similarly, lower scores on *agreeableness* can be interpreted as corresponding to the quest of living according to one's own truth and life style. *Deconversion for German deconverts is associated with significantly lower scores in traditionalism and, thus, appears as a step into the realm of greater freedom to agree or disagree and the realm of greater freedom to define one's own rules.* This interpretation is supported by the lower scores on *emotional stability* and *extraversion* suggesting emotional strain involved in deconverting, which is largely a solitary process lacking perhaps significant social support. If we find this plausible for the German deconverts, it raises the question why deconversion in the United States does not relate to a difference in *agreeableness* and *conscientiousness* and appears not to involve such a quest for religious liberty.

2. All remaining six domains in which German deconverts, in contrast to U.S. deconverts, differ from their former in-tradition fellows in faith point in the same direction: German deconverts, in contrast to U.S. deconverts, are less equipped with *emotional stability* – or, to phrase it in terms of the original *Big Five*, German deconverts have higher scores in *neuroticism* than their in-tradition fellows in faith. They also have lower scores on *extraversion* suggesting lack of social support as noted above. Correspondingly, German deconverts have lower scores on *positive relations with others* and *environmental mastery*. If we take into account also their lower scores on *self acceptance* and *purpose in life*, a portrait of German deconverts emerges which indicates a loss and perhaps a crisis. Because six measures significantly present such indicators for German deconverts – and reveal a significant difference to the U.S. deconverts –, we have rather strong evidence for the assumption that *German deconverts, in contrast to deconverts in the United States, more strongly than their former in-tradition fellows in faith, show signs of a loss or a crisis in regard to self (emotional stability, self-acceptance), relationships and social contexts (positive relations with others, extraversion, environmental mastery) and meaning-making (purpose in life).*

3. The possibility of a loss for deconverts in Germany must be balanced by its mirror image for in-tradition members. Here, the analysis of the *Big Five* subscales and the *Ryff subscales* suggests that for those who remain in-tradition, their faith actually provides them with a satisfactory system of meaning in which *emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness,* and *extraversion* work in opposition to openness in order to provide a stable meaning system. These members must be judged as psychological stable in terms of the *Big Five* traits. Likewise, in terms of psychological well-being, the relevant differences of the *Ryff subscales* indicate that in-tradition members have *purpose in life, positive relations with others*, and a sense of *environmental mastery*.

4. It appears that in Germany deconversion might be associated with a crisis – perhaps the cost of moving to the abandonment of religious beliefs that are felt to be too absolutist as well as the moving to an openness to inter-faith dialogue that is associated with a maturing in one's faith in terms of the religious styles model. All this is maintained by what Hood et al. (2005) termed an adherence to the principle of *intratextuality* whereby a sacred text is deemed authoritative for both behavior and thought. This is supported by our data indicating that in-tradition German members score higher on *ttt* than de-

converts. Thus, as suggested above, *truth of texts and teachings* can be seen as an indirect measure (using belief statements) to assess the schema operating in religious fundamentalism defined as an intratextual tradition.

All four aspects correspond to some extent, and, taken together, provide a portrait of deconversion in Germany which is characterized by gains and losses: gains in autonomy and freedom of mind and speech, but losses in stability of meaning, emotion, self-acceptance, relations and environmental mastery.

In the United States by contrast, deconversion is simply associated with openness fuelled by a quest for personal growth and autonomy as measured by the appropriate *Ryff subscales*. In this sense many of the U.S. deconverts seem to be involved in what might be referred to as humanistic explorations of self-realization within a very generalized "spiritual" context. As others have commented, this is perhaps a spirituality without transcendence (Bellah et al.: 1985; Streyffeler/McNally: 1998) which has given rise to a perhaps uniquely American sense of being "more spiritual than religious" and for some, a distinctive sense of being "spiritual but not religious" (Hood: 2003). Other than this they differ little from their former fellow in-tradition believers. We may conclude from this that there is a difference of the religious fields in the United States and Germany and that much of this centers upon religious and spiritual self identification.

4.4   "More Spiritual than Religious" Self-Identification and Deconversion

As noted previously, our questionnaire contains four questions which associate our study to this relatively new area of research on spiritual and religious self-identification (Hood: 2003; Zinnbauer/Pargament: 2005). We asked for agreement or disagreement concerning 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." The results are presented in Table 14.

The inspection of Table 14 reveals that in both samples a comparable low percentage of 6.9% (United States) and 7.9% (Germany) of the total sample (n=712+404) identifies as being neither religious nor spiritual. But we find great cross-cultural differences in the other answers: 40.6% in the German sample identify as "more religious than spiritual," while, in the U.S. sample, we find this in only 9.8%. A large percentage of the U.S. sample (44.0%), but somewhat less (31.2%) in the German sample identify as being "equally religious and spiritual." Taken together, we find that only somewhat more than half of the U.S. respondents (53.8%) prefer a self-description of "being religious," while in the German sample we count 71.8% who find a self-identification as "being religious" suitable.

Table 14. Spiritual/Religious Self-Identification in U.S.A. and Germany based upon Religious Group Tension with Host Culture

Country				Tension of Group to Host Culture		
				No Tension	Tension	Total
Ger-many	More spiri-tual or reli-gious?	more religious than spiritual	Count	64	100	164
			% of Total	15.8%	24.8%	40.6%
		more spiritual than religious	Count	24	58	82
			% of Total	5.9%	14.4%	20.3%
		equally religious and spiritual	Count	62	64	126
			% of Total	15.3%	15.8%	31.2%
		neither religious nor spiritual	Count	8	24	32
			% of Total	2.0%	5.9%	7.9%
	Total		Count	158	246	404
			% of Total	39.1%	60.9%	100.0%
United States	More spiri-tual or religi-ous?	more religious than spiritual	Count	29	41	70
			% of Total	4.1%	5.8%	9.8%
		more spiritual than religious	Count	123	157	280
			% of Total	17.3%	22.1%	39.3%
		equally religious and spiritual	Count	150	163	313
			% of Total	21.1%	22.9%	44.0%
		neither religious nor spiritual	Count	16	33	49
			% of Total	2.2%	4.6%	6.9%
	Total		Count	318	394	712
			% of Total	44.7%	55.3%	100.0%

Finally, the responses of spiritual self-identification show a major difference between the U.S. sample and the German sample: *While 20.3% in our German sample identify as "being more spiritual than religious", we find 39.3% "more spiritual than religious" respondents in the U.S. sample.*

4.4.1 Comparing our Results on "Spirituality" to the Surveys

We find in our U.S. sample the rather large number of almost 40% self-identified "more spiritual than religious" respondents. While this rather large portion of "more spiritual than religious" subjects in our present study receives confirmation from the test run of our questionnaire in the year 2001/2002, in which of 278 young adults in the United States 31.3% self-identified as "more spiritual than religious" (Streib: 2005b, 142), our results generally exceed what is reported in previous studies.

1. Based on data from the years 1991 through 2001 from studies which included the spiritual/religious self-identification and their own results, Marler and Hadaway (2002) report between 14% and 20% "spiritual but not religious" self-identifications for the United States (see page 37);

2. from our own calculation of survey data from 2006 (n=2933), which are part of the GSS 1972-2006 integrated data set, we find 27.8% who are "more spiritual than religious" (see page 38 and Table 4);

3. the *Religionsmonitor* data collected in 2007 (n=973) reveal, according to our own calculation, 31.3% "more spiritual than religious" respondents (see page 39 and Table 5).

This indicates that our results are somewhat 25% higher than the most recent studies, but at least double Marler and Hadaway's account. Thus, some explanation is necessary.

In regard to the difference to Marler and Hadaway's results, one explanation could point to the different wording of the questions: Our study asked for self-identification of being "more ... *than* ...", while the studies compiled by Marler and Hadaway (1998) asked "... *but not* ...".

Of course, conclusions from our data have to be viewed with caution, because, despite the considerable number, our sampling is based on theoretical considerations (maximal contrast between deconverts in the qualitative core of our research design). Further, we investigated only members and former members of religious organizations and thereby oppositional and accommodating organizations are overrepresented. This may partly explain the difference – which is further moderated by the indication from the GSS and *Religionsmonitor* results – that either the religious field or the

popularity to identify as "spiritual" in the United States has changed rapidly.

In our German sample about 20% self-identify as being "more spiritual than religious." Again, results from our questionnaire pre-test can confirm these results: Aside from 32.8% self-declared "neither religious nor spiritual" young adults, we found 20.7% "more spiritual than religious" self-identifications (Streib: 2005b, 142).

For the German part of the sample, we note a large difference to major religiosity surveys (see Chapter Two) which evidence that self-identified non-religious segments in Germany amount to one third or even half the population. It may be safe to assume that most of this difference can be explained with reference to our research design: Participants in our study are *members* in religious organizations – and most of them members of oppositional or accommodating groups indicating mostly *active* membership. Sampling in this segment of the religious field very likely produces relatively low numbers of self-declared secular people and relatively high numbers of self-declared religious people.

Thus, if we attend to the in-tradition members in no-tension religious organizations in Germany, the "more spiritual" self-identifications drop to about 15%; and when we further take into account the large number of Germans who are non-believers or convinced atheists, we can speculate that the number of "more spiritual" people in Germany probably does not exceed 10%.

The only survey data we found for a comparison of our results for Germany, the *Religionsmonitor* 2007, confirm just this. Here we calculate 9.7% "more spiritual than religious" respondents (see Table 7 on page 42). Interestingly enough, in these data the people with no religious affiliation self-identify in slightly higher numbers as "more spiritual than religious" (10.0%) than for example Protestants (9.3%). But, again as we saw for the U.S. sample of our own study, our results for "more spiritual" self-identification slightly exceed the results from the surveys.

4.4.2   Spiritual/Religious Self-Identification and Deconversion Characteristics

Our study reveals even more surprising results as we continue to focus on deconversion. A closer inspection of Table 15 reveals that the calculation of the spiritual/religious self-identification of deconverts and in-tradition members yields spectacular results.

Less spectacular, to begin with, are the changes seen for the results for the in-tradition members in both cultures after the deconverts were separated out. "Religious" self-identifications are marginally higher: 10.2% in the U.S. sample and 43.3% in the German sample self-identify as "more religious than spiritual"; 46.8% in the U.S. sample and 32.6% in the German sample identify as "equally religious and spiritual." The "more spiritual than religious" self-identification of in-tradition respondents is slightly lower in both the U.S. sample (37.0%) and in the German sample (18.3%), and the "neither religious nor spiritual" self-identification as well (U.S. sample: 6.0%, German sample: 5.9%).

The big difference is on the side of *deconverts* in both cultures – and there in the first place the self-identification of being "more spiritual than religious:" *More than a third (36.5%) of our German deconverts and almost two thirds (63.6%) of the deconverts in the U.S. sample identify as "more spiritual than religious."*

Table 15. Spiritual/Religious Self-Identification of Deconverts and In-Tradition Members in the U.S. and Germany

Country				More spiritual or religious?				Total
				more religious than spiritual	more spiritual than religious	equally religious and spiritual	neither religious nor spiritual	
Germany	De-con-ver-sion?	No (In-Tra-dition)	Count	154	65	116	21	356
			% of row	43.3%	18.3%	32.6%	5.9%	100.0%
		Yes (Decon-vert)	Count	10	19	12	11	52
			% of row	19.2%	36.5%	23.1%	21.2%	100.0%
	Total		Count	164	84	128	32	408
			% of row	40.2%	20.6%	31.4%	7.8%	100.0%
United States	De-con-ver-sion?	No (In-Tra-dition)	Count	66	240	304	39	649
			% of row	10.2%	37.0%	46.8%	6.0%	100.0%
		Yes (Decon-vert)	Count	4	42	9	11	66
			% of row	6.1%	63.6%	13.6%	16.7%	100.0%
	Total		Count	70	282	313	50	715
			% of row	9.8%	39.4%	43.8%	7.0%	100.0%

The ratio in the self-identification of deconverts as being "neither religious nor spiritual" is different, though: 21.2% in the German sample, 16.7% in the U.S. sample. While in the U.S. sample the self-identified secularists in the deconversion group more than double, they more than treble in the German sample. Viewed from the other side: in the U.S. sample a great majority (80.3%) of deconverts is hesitant to identify with "being religious;" among the German deconverts we find this reservation against a religious self-identification in more than half of deconverts (57.7%).

The number of self-identified "more spiritual than religious" deconverts almost doubles the amount of self-identified "more spiritual than religious" in-tradition members. This indicates a very strong interrelation between deconversion and spiritual self-identification. Correspondingly, we note also the increase of the segment in the deconvert group who identify as "neither religious nor spiritual."

The reverse side of this is that identification with religion resides in minority positions among deconverts in both the United States and Germany: In the U.S. sample only 19.7% are content with a self-description as being religious one way or the other (opposed to 56.8% religious in-tradition members); yet, among the German deconverts still 42.3% prefer a religious self-identification (opposed to 75.9% "religious" in-tradition members). In other words, a great majority (80.3%) of the U.S. deconverts are reluctant to identify with being "religious" one way or the other; among the German deconverts we find this reservation against a religious self-identification in more than half of deconverts (57.7%).

Taken together, we conclude that *in both cultures, the United States and Germany, deconversion is associated with a reluctance to identify with "being religious" and a strong preference to self-identify as being "more spiritual than religious" or, to a lesser degree, as being "neither religious nor spiritual."*

Put in sociological terms, we see indications here that deconverts do not tend to associate with religious organizations which require the person to self-identify as being "religious", but rather look for affiliations which allow self-identifications as being "spiritual" or being "neither", if such organizations are available in the first place and the interest in a new affiliation is strong enough. We will see this confirmed from the (qualitative) assessment of deconversion trajectories: the majority of deconverts wander into private religious praxis or into secularizing exit.

4.4.3   Spirituality, Deconversion and Fundamentalism

In both the U.S. and the German total samples, only a minority (less than 8.0%) self-identify as "neither religious nor spiritual." In the U.S. sample this "neither/nor" group accounts for the lowest scores in *Religious Fundamentalism*. In the German sample we find the lowest scores on *Religious Fundamentalism* in the "more spiritual than religious" group. On the reverse, "more spiritual than religious" self-identification is associated with lowest scores on *Religious Fundamentalism*, lower than in the secular group. *In Germany spiritual self-understanding appears most strongly opposed to fundamentalism, more even than secular self-understanding.*

In the U.S. sample we have a similar, somewhat weaker, but significant effect as in the German sample: also here "more spiritual than religious" self-identification is associated with lower scores on *Fundamentalism*. But the greatest interaction in the U.S. sample is between two other groups: "Neither religious nor spiritual" self-identifying subjects score lowest on *Religious Fundamentalism*. This allows for the conclusion that in the United States, it is not so much spiritual, but rather secular self-understanding which warrants low fundamentalism scores. *In the United States secular self-understanding appears to be most strongly opposed to fundamentalism, more than spiritual self-understanding.*

Taken together, this difference of results for the German and U.S. sample may indicate a cultural difference in the semantics of 'spirituality.' *While in the United States, secular self-understanding, more than spiritual self-understanding, indicates the opposite of fundamentalism, it is reverse in Germany; here, spiritual self-identification indicates the strongest opposition to fundamentalism, stronger than secular self-identification.*

4.5   Summary of Scale Analyses and Group Differences

The quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data from our study sheds light on the characteristics of deconverts. From the scales of our questionnaire instrument alone, we derive perspectives on commonalities and cross-cultural differences in the characteristics and dynamics of deconversion. The questionnaire data also yield a perspective on predictors for deconversion.

1. As general and cross-cultural characteristics of deconversion we can summarize that *openness to experience* is associated with deconversion; this is fuelled by a quest for personal growth and autonomy. Deconverts also more strongly disagree with fundamentalist statements than in-tradition members. Deconversion, this is especially visible for German deconverts, appears as a stepping out into the realm of freedom to agree or disagree and to define one's own rules. That deconversion is associated with a highly valued personality trait of the *Big Five* (*openness to experience*) and with desirable dimensions of the *Ryff-Scale* (*personal growth; autonomy*), and further, for both cultures, with lower scores on *religious fundamentalism*, constitutes one side of the characterization of deconversion on the basis of our questionnaire data. It confirms, but details and qualifies our hypotheses. In this light, deconversion does not appear as loss, but as a gain.

2. For German deconverts our data indicate also a "downside" of deconversion — which is not visible for deconverts in the United States and, thus, may point to a cross-cultural difference: In contrast to the United States, deconversion in Germany appears to be associated with a loss or a crisis in regard to self (*emotional stability, self-acceptance*), relationships and social contexts (*positive relations with others, extraversion, environmental mastery*), and meaning-making (*purpose in life*). This may lead to a conclusion about the difference of the religious fields in the United States and Germany: In contrast to the United States, deconversion in Germany is accompanied by crisis symptoms, because deconverts in Germany cannot expect to find new affiliation easily on the rather limited religious market.

3. Spiritual self-identification — this is our rather spectacular result — goes hand in hand with deconversion. Our data present new results on spiritual/religious self-identification which appear to slightly exceed previous studies. In our U.S. sample we find more than a third and, in our German sample, a fifth self-identified "more spiritual than religious" subjects. Deconverts have an extraordinary increase in spiritual self-identification: The number of self-identified "more spiritual than religious" deconverts almost doubles the amount of self-identified "more spiritual than religious" in-tradition members. In both cultures, the United States and Germany, deconversion is associated with a reluctance to identify with religion, but, conversely, to identify with "spirituality."

4. This resonates with the result that "more spiritual than religious" self-identification goes hand in hand with significantly lower agreement to fundamentalist statements – with a slight difference of results for the German and U.S. sample that may indicate a cultural difference in the semantics of 'spirituality:' While in the United States, secular self-understanding, more than spiritual self-understanding, indicates the opposite of fundamentalism, in Germany spirituality is the label indicating strongest opposition to fundamentalism.

While there is much more to explore in these quantitative data, the differences between deconverts and in-tradition members in both Germany and the United States suggests commonalities within and differences between cultures. While additional sophisticated statistical analyses can be mined for more refined insights, we think that it is most worthwhile and illuminating to explore our results from these quantitative data with specific comparisons of deconverts, studied in qualitative depth. This is the focus of the chapters to follow. Here we conclude with simply one exploration of the extent to which our measures are useful for predicting deconversion.

4.6   Regression Analysis to Predict Deconversion

We anticipated limits to the study of deconversion based solely upon quantitative analyses. Due to our sampling procedure which started with identifying deconverts who agree to a narrative interview, our sample size for deconverts is relatively small for a quantitative study (though quite high for qualitative research). Still, largely as an exploratory effort, we utilized all scales in a limited step-wise regression with deconversion as the dependent variable.[27] Analyses were run separately for Germany and the United States. Results of these analyses are presented in Table 16.

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[27] Because the regression procedure removes moderating variables, we excluded *Right-Wing Authoritarianism* allowing for the effects of the measure of *Religious Fundamentalism (RF)* to be identified; for the same reason we also excluded the sum scores of the scales such as the *Ryff scale total* or the *Big Five total* and also the higher-order factors of the *Big Five, traditionalism* and *transformation*.

Table 16. Limited Step-Wise Regression with Deconversion as Dependent Variable

Model Summary

Country	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
						R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
Germany	1	.274[a]	.075	.071	.301	.075	20,018	1	246	.000
	2	.330[b]	.109	.101	.296	.033	9,170	1	245	.003
	3	.367[c]	.135	.124	.292	.026	7,318	1	244	.007
	4	.408[d]	.166	.153	.287	.032	9,276	1	243	.003
U.S.A.	1	.305[e]	.093	.092	.203	.093	56,005	1	545	.000
	2	.354[f]	.125	.122	.200	.032	19,992	1	544	.000
	3	.364[g]	.133	.128	.199	.007	4,594	1	543	.033
	4	.360[h]	.130	.127	.199	-,003	1,725	1	543	.190
	5	.378[i]	.143	.138	.198	.013	8,175	1	543	.004

a. Predictors: (Constant), Openness to experience (Neo FFI) total
b. Predictors: (Constant), Openness to experience (Neo FFI) total, Conscientiousness (Neo FFI) total
c. Predictors: (Constant), Openness to experience (Neo FFI) total, Conscientiousness (Neo FFI) total, Autonomy (RYFF) total
d. Predictors: (Constant), Openness to experience (Neo FFI) total, Conscientiousness (Neo FFI) total, Autonomy (RYFF) total, Self-acceptance (RYFF) total
e. Predictors: (Constant), Religious Fundamentalism total
f. Predictors: (Constant), Religious Fundamentalism total, Openness to experience (Neo FFI) total
g. Predictors: (Constant), Religious Fundamentalism total, Openness to experience (Neo FFI) total, Truth of texts and teachings (RSS) total
h. Predictors: (Constant), Openness to experience (Neo FFI) total, Truth of texts and teachings (RSS) total
i. Predictors: (Constant), Openness to experience (Neo FFI) total, Truth of texts and teachings (RSS) total, Personal Growth (RYFF) total

While little overall variance for either German or United States deconverts is accounted for by our predictors, they follow a pattern consistent with our discussion. Given the exploratory nature and limited variance accounted for, we ought not over-emphasize the value of these data. However, its predictors of deconversion for both Germany and the United States include most significantly *openness to experience*. This is consistent with our discussion above. Likewise, the overall predictive pattern for Germany and the United States varies in ways consistent with what we have noted.

In the United States sample, openness to experience combines with measures of fundamentalism (*Religious Fundamentalism, truth of texts and teachings*) – thereby, interestingly, *ttt* overrides *RF* – and *personal growth* in order to predict deconversion. The pattern is consistent with our discussion of United States deconverts seeking to explore a spiritual landscape largely in terms of values and a focus upon self-realization. This is a process that is primarily identified by an abandonment of the authoritative base that defines fundamentalism.

However, in the *German sample* deconverts reveal a pattern that suggests a rejection of the authoritarian base that defines fundamentalism but not a pattern suggestive of *personal growth* as with the United States deconverts. Here, the regression analysis only hints at what is more clearly addressed in other analyses discussed. Still, it is *openness to experience* and *conscientiousness* from the *Big Five* and *autonomy* and *self-acceptance* from the *Ryff* subscales that are factors predicting deconversion in Germany. However, as we shall see, it is the qualitative data placed against the backdrop of our quantitative data that illuminates much more fully the various deconversion trajectories in both the German and United States samples.

5 The Variety of Deconversion Narratives: An Overview from Qualitative Results

5.1 Qualitative Sample Characteristics and the Evaluation Procedures

"You have recently left the <religious group>. I would like to know what happened in your life before and after this change. You choose what you talk about and what you are willing to disclose. It is up to you where you let your story begin. I will mainly be listening and will only interrupt when I need an explanation."

With this interview stimulus we invited our respondents to share their deconversion experiences. The narrative interviews are the core data. They are the most extensive and intensive database about deconverts we have and they are data which consumed the most time and resources. Above and beyond that, not only is their evaluation the most open interpretative process, they are also based on co-constructions of interviewer and interviewee – which qualifies the narrative interview as the most fragile instrument in field work. In response to our open invitation to tell about their process of leaving a religious community, it was possible for most of the interviewees to create a narrative focusing on their experience – with differences, of course, because some are ingenious spontaneous storytellers, while others are not very communicative, overly reflective – or even chaotic.[28]

In our sample of narrative interviews with deconverts, we included 99 interviews usable for interpretation, all of which have been transcribed.[29] The distribution of gender is almost completely balanced in our sample (53.5% female, 46.5% male) with only a small difference between the U.S. and the

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[28] Because, in some rare cases, no narrative was able to unfold – either participants finished very soon, giving a short summary rather than a narrative, or lost themselves in talking about their lives in a very chaotic way –, assignments of codes were not always possible in every single case. Thus, the descriptions according to categories in the statistics below sometimes do not add up to the complete number of narratives.

[29] All names and other indications to the identity of the interviewee have been removed or exchanged for pseudonyms.

German sample. The distribution of age shows a stronger presence of adolescents and young adults and rather few older people: 28.7% under 25 years of age; 29.5% between 25 and 34 years; 20.2% between 35 and 44 years, 10.9% between 45 and 54 years, 8.5% between 55 and 64 years, and only 2.3% are 65 years and older; here the U.S. sample has a greater share in the youngest group since almost half of the deconverts in the U.S. sample are under 25 years of age.[30] Moreover, the distribution according to the type of religious group – deconversion from integrated, accommodating, and oppositional religious organization – is the way we had anticipated it: One third of the deconverts coming from no-tension (integrated) religious organizations and two thirds coming from tension (oppositional and accommodating) religious organizations.

In order to evaluate the narrative interviews as well as the faith development interviews, we first worked with a theory-based "top-down" approach. For evaluation of the narrative interviews, the top-down approach involved coding according to basic criteria of the deconversion trajectory:

1. coding the characteristics which we already used in the sampling process aiming at a maximum of contrast, such as ahving been born into the group vs. having converted into the group, or the gradual vs. the sudden process of deconversion;

2. coding the deconversion criteria and the deconversion trajectories as detailed in chapter 1 (see p. 22): loss of specific religious experiences, intellectual doubt, denial or disagreement with specific beliefs, moral criticism, emotional suffering, and disaffiliation from the community;

3. coding the deconversion trajectories as detailed in the typology (p. 26): religious switching, secularizing, oppositional, integrating, privatizing and heretical exit.

Our descriptions of the general characteristics of the deconversion narrative (5.2) and our reports of the exits taken by the deconverts (5.3) are based on these codings.

Regarding the *faith development interview*, the top-down approach means coding according to standards of the revised *Manual for Faith Development Research* (see Chapter 3.3.2). In this chapter we are able to show that by using this strategy of evaluation, we are enabled to present the comparison of the faith development interviews with the deconverts with those of members (5.4).

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[30] In light of the GSS results (which are presented in Table 1 on p. 34) which report that 76.3% of changes in religious preference, and still 61.3% second switches (!), have occurred when the person was under the age of 30 years, our results do not appear extraordinary for the U.S.

Including the inductive-interpretative "bottom-up" evaluation, we finally present a summary overview (5.5) of how we integrate our rich data and use it for the interpretation of deconversion processes in the framework of a typology. In doing so, we triangulate our data on the level of narrative analyses, faith development analyses, and scores on a variety of scales which were included in the questionnaire.

Thus, beginning with this chapter, we invite the reader to move from the general characteristics of deconversion to the particular characteristics of deconversion of single cases on the basis of biographical narrative, and faith development interviews, which will be presented in detail in Chapters Six through Nine – whereby we always include a triangulation perspective that juxtaposes to the background of our statistical data.

5.2   General Characteristics of the Deconversion Narratives

In the following, we summarize the basic characteristics as they emerge from the qualitative analysis. The prevalent pattern in the deconversion narratives is that of a *one-time gradual* disaffiliation from a religious community. We find this pattern in narratives of deconverts who were born into their former faith traditions as well as in narratives of deconverts who converted in adolescence or adulthood. We also find multiple deconversions by one person; these appear more frequently for the former converts than for those who were raised in their faith tradition. But about three quarters of the deconversion narratives in our sample report so-called mono-deconversions or single examples of deconversion in one's life trajectory. Thus, while multiple deconversions were narrated less frequently, it is a factor that we should not ignore and that possibly reflects results from the surveys.[31]

Almost all deconversion narratives in our sample refer to gradual processes (n=90). To give some example quotes:

"It was a gradual leave. And just, kind of realizing that some of the things, that I thought all along, were really true, such as, the don'ts, aren't that important (audible

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[31] As already presented on p. 34 already, the General Social Survey (GSS 1972-2002: 04) reports for the US population in the year 1988 that 23.8% who say that they had one other religious preference before their current one, and 11.9% speak of more than one previous religious preference. Numbers and ratio for the German population are probably lower.

grin). And what they put their focus on wasn't that important." (Narrative Interview with Dan, Interact 157)[32]

"I-I think it was a slow build-up and then, I, ahm, once I started to-once I started to finally admit-admit-admit the problems I had with the- [...] religious thing to myself, it, went really fast [...]. And I started-started to hate going to church and I just-, stopped going and so." (Narrative Interview with Andrew, Interact 178)

In some ten deconversion narratives, a *critical life event* plays a crucial role in the process of exit. This applies especially to those born into the group. Oliver, a German ex-Roman-Catholic, states:

"Well, and in the end, the ... main reason to leave the church ... basically was some-how the ... my parents' divorce. Nope, that's b-s. (very long pause) Yup, at least it started uh ... somehow by way of ... uhm, that my mother got sick. (pondering) Who had always ... been very impor-, very important to me. And still is very ... important to me. This all took place kind of ... at the same time ..." (Interview with Oliver, Interact 3)

In some deconversion narratives, *important others* were mentioned as triggering the process of disaffiliation. This group of deconverts consists mainly of U.S.-Americans and is almost evenly distributed between those born into and those who had converted into the respective groups. Gina, a U.S.-American Ex-Mormon tells how shocking and decisive it had been when she found out that her friend suddenly had distanced himself from the Mormon faith (see quotes in the case study about Gina, p. 113).

Only in six cases a *sudden deconversion* was reported We have reports of sudden deconversion, of course, in cases when the deconvert was dismissed to his or her own surprise, but also when the decision to deconvert came as a kind of break-through event, as in the case of Ralph, a German. Ralph joined the Unification Church in the United States as a student. He had already been confronted with some doubts and critical questions, when he turned to God for guidance:

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[32] We have used the "interact" that is, the interviewees's complete statement after turn taking in the communication with the interviewer, as point of reference. For the interpretation of the narratives we have used the transcripts along with the tapes, as spoken language gives rich or more information such as voice hesitations. When editing the quotations for better readability, we have preserved some of it: We have, for instance, marked breaks with "..." which however may also indicate skipped text. Other communicative signals, such as lowering one's voice, were mentioned when we thought it important for the understanding of the interact presented. We also, for the sake of readability, eliminated some repetitions, and adjusted spoken language. We sometimes added the interviewer's short questions or comments in squared brackets. Because we have to protect the personal data of our respondents, you will find "City A" and "friend B," anonyms of names and places in the single interviews in squared brackets. We have also skipped or slightly changed personal details when necessary for the protection of the respondents' privacy.

"And there I, okay God, lead me, and ... I did this, I think I will come to the right decision. Show me the truth and if that is not, and if that really is the way it is, then I wanna know this now and ... for real, the next day I started studying these things, you know, packing up flowers and sellin' them and in between paging through the Bible and [...] like this and like that, dressing up and so on. And suddenly it was real, like a reality check, yup. It was like, wham, like as if, like as if you wake up from a trance, like ... what are you doin' here? Yup, crazy. Suddenly it was like this, it was like, wham, exactly, that's what it was, like someone had thrown a nail in this vase. And bam the vase fel- broke apart. That was like a real snapping, yup. And I was like 'wow' that was so real like there was some real energy flowing through my whole body. And I then felt like this immense joy and this 'freedom.' I suddenly noticed that I am free ..." (Interview with Ralf, Interact 951–969).

The experience of deconversion appears in most cases as a gradual process. This may point to the high amount of responsibility which deconverts have for their own decisions: It may take time to find out if one wants to stay or not. But also it may point to the complexity of cognitive and emotional pros and cons with which the deconverts have to come to terms. Finally, from a narrative perspective, it may also signify the emergence of a *deconversion story*, characterized by these markers of individual responsibility.

5.3 Where Did the Deconverts Go? – Deconversion Trajectories Quantified

Our characterization of deconversion trajectories is based on narrative interviews with our 99 deconverts. While this is a relatively high number of cases for qualitative research, it is rather low for a quantitative calculation. Nevertheless, it is interesting to chart in which directions the 99 deconverts in our sample went. Based on a theoretical framework, we constructed a typology of deconversion trajectories (Figure 1 on p. 27) attending to the direction and destiny of deconversion. We also visualized the integration of these deconversion trajectories as migration paths in – and eventually out of – the religious field (Figure 2 on p. 32). Now, we present results on the basis of which we are able to quantify the arrows in these figures for a more detailed portrait of our research.

As these figures show, deconversion is, in part, a religious change within the segment of organized religion. At the same time deconversion here means conversion to a new faith community; it is a change of membership or affiliation. Our coding of interviews reveals that, within this field seg-

ment, we count a total of 13 deconverts who have engaged in religious switching, i.e. exchanging membership with a religious organization of equal integration and legitimacy: 16 moved to more integrated, and eight to more oppositional religious organizations. This could be interpreted as an indication of a trend, since we have more migrations to religious organizations with lower tension; however, we should take into account that we have an overrepresentation of oppositional and accommodating groups in our sample.

A cross-cultural difference is visible when we compare deconversion trajectories in the United States and in Germany. As shown in Table 17, secular exits (Germany: 17 cases; United States: 12 cases) and integrating exits (Germany: 10 cases; United States: 6 cases) are considerably higher in the German sample than in the U.S. sample. In contrast, privatizing exits (Germany: 11 cases; United States: 13 cases) and, even more, heretical exits (Germany: 1 case; United States: 8 cases) are higher in the U.S. sample. Furthermore, in both the German and the U.S. sample, we see deconverts from tension (oppositional and accommodating) religious organizations taking secular exits (Germany: 12 cases; United States: 10 cases), but also changes to more integrated religious organizations (Germany: 10 cases; United States: 6 cases). Taken together, we see a stronger tendency toward private and heretical forms of religiosity in the United States (21 cases; Germany: 12 cases) while most of the German deconverts strive for more integrated religious organizations (10 cases; United States: 6 cases) or secularity. This may reflect a sociological difference in the religious landscape of the United States and Germany.

Secularity and private religiosity appear to be the primary destinies of deconversion. More than half of the deconverts we interviewed leave the field of organized religion and refrain from a new affiliation. Exiting the field of organized religion, however, does not for all of these deconverts mean that they relinquish concern with religion and religious praxis. Certainly, 29 deconverts finished with religion altogether (secularizing exit) – even if this may involve inclination of mourning process about the loss of faith; but 24 chose a way to practice their religion without a community (privatizing exit) and we may add here also the heretical exiters who engage in religious or spiritual quests in one way or another and also refrain from affiliating with traditional religious organizations, but are content with religious scenes or networks. Altogether we counted 62.6% or almost two thirds of the deconverts that have left the boundaries of organized religion.

Table 17. Deconversion Trajectories Crosstabulation for U.S. and German Tension and No-Tension Groups

Country	Tension of Group to Host Culture			Deconversion Trajectories						
				Secularizing Exit	Oppositional Exit	Religious Switching	Integrating Exit	Privatizing Exit	Heretical Exit	Total
Germany	No Tension	Count		5	4	3	0	4	1	17
		% within Tension Gr.		29,4%	23,5%	17,6%	,0%	23,5%	5,9%	100,0%
		% within Dec. Traj.		29,4%	100,0%	50,0%	,0%	36,4%	100,0%	34,7%
		% of Total		10,2%	8,2%	6,1%	,0%	8,2%	2,0%	34,7%
	Tension	Count		12	0	3	10	7	0	32
		% within Tension Gr.		37,5%	,0%	9,4%	31,3%	21,9%	,0%	100,0%
		% within Dec. Traj.		70,6%	,0%	50,0%	100,0%	63,6%	,0%	65,3%
		% of Total		24,5%	,0%	6,1%	20,4%	14,3%	,0%	65,3%
	Total	Count		17	4	6	10	11	1	49
		% within Tension Gr.		34,7%	8,2%	12,2%	20,4%	22,4%	2,0%	100,0%
		% within Dec. Traj.		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total		34,7%	8,2%	12,2%	20,4%	22,4%	2,0%	100,0%
U.S.A.	No Tension	Count		2	4	3	0	3	4	16
		% within Tension Gr.		12,5%	25,0%	18,8%	,0%	18,8%	25,0%	100,0%
		% within Dec. Traj.		16,7%	100,0%	42,9%	,0%	23,1%	50,0%	32,0%
		% of Total		4,0%	8,0%	6,0%	,0%	6,0%	8,0%	32,0%
	Tension	Count		10	0	4	6	10	4	34
		% within Tension Gr.		29,4%	,0%	11,8%	17,6%	29,4%	11,8%	100,0%
		% within Dec. Traj.		83,3%	,0%	57,1%	100,0%	76,9%	50,0%	68,0%
		% of Total		20,0%	,0%	8,0%	12,0%	20,0%	8,0%	68,0%
	Total	Count		12	4	7	6	13	8	50
		% within Tension Gr.		24,0%	8,0%	14,0%	12,0%	26,0%	16,0%	100,0%
		% within Dec. Traj.		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total		24,0%	8,0%	14,0%	12,0%	26,0%	16,0%	100,0%

5.4   Deconversion: Transformation in Faith Development and Religious Styles

Deconversion refers to an important change which is associated with a variety of preconditions and outcomes. The investigation of deconversion thus requires a multi-perspective approach. One perspective we pursued energetically and in which we invested a considerable part of our resources is research with the faith development model and the religious styles perspective. The leading research question is whether deconversion involves transformation in terms of the faith development model and the religious styles perspective. In order to explore this question, we used the faith development interview[33] and we included in our questionnaire in the second phase of our research a considerable number of items on the basis of which the Religious Schema Scale (RSS) could be developed.[34]

5.4.1   Deconversion in Light of the Faith Development Interview

The faith development interview was administered to all deconverts. To profile the deconverts' faith development scores against the background of the former milieu, we interviewed up to three members of the religious organization the deconverts had deconverted from. Therefore, in our data, we have a total number of 277 faith development interviews.

Our faith development interview sample has an almost equal distribution of gender and somewhat unequal age distribution (29.8% are under age 25, and 7% over age 65). The deconvert/in-tradition member ratio of almost 1:2 is sufficient for comparison. Distribution of types of religious groups is acceptable: 37.2% are or were members in no-tension (integrated) religious organizations, 62.8% in tension groups (accommodating + oppositional) religious organizations. Thus the faith development interview sample and

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[33] Evaluation of faith development interviews has proceeded in accordance with the Manual for Faith Development Research (Fowler et al.: 2004). For a more detailed discussion of the faith development instrument, see Chapter 3.3.2 on p. 56. Evaluation of the faith development interviews in our sample has good inter-rater reliabilities. The Manual for Faith Development Research (Fowler et al.: 2004, 29) suggests to double-rate "20 or 20%, whichever is greater" of the FDIs and considers an inter-rater reliability of 70% "good." We have double ratings of 48 of the total of 277 faith development interviews and an inter-rater reliability of more than 80%. Thus inter-rater reliability is sufficient.

[34] Development and characteristics of this new measure were discussed in Chapter 3.3.3.

its distribution is a solid basis for faith development evaluation and may allow for a better understanding of deconverts and in-tradition members.

The result of faith development interview evaluation is the assignment of stage scores to the faith development interviews. For our sample, faith development interview scores have the following distribution: Two thirds of our faith development interviewees in the total sample (63.2%) are assigned to Stage Three of synthetic-conventional faith and 30.3% to Stage Four of individuative-reflective faith. Stage Two of mythic-literal faith was assigned to 5.1% of faith development interviews; Stage Five of conjunctive faith to only 1.4%. Stages One and Stage Six were not assigned at all. This distribution of stage assignments with almost two thirds of Stage Three assignments reflects the characteristics of our sample of faith development interviewees which includes a majority of rather active and convinced members and former members of religious communities. What we see here, however, is an effect of the relatively high number of faith development interviewees under the age of 25.[35] This may explain part of the strong presence of synthetic-conventional orientation in our faith development interview sample.

Thereby – interestingly – it is *not* the oppositional and accommodating religious groups with tension to the host culture, but the no-tension (integrated) religious organizations which have a stronger presence of Stage Three (Germany: 80.0%; United States: 90.0%). This is depicted in Figure 4 in which we present faith stage assignment distribution detailed enough to allow for a comparison between tension and no-tension groups in Germany and the United States. This could reflect a difference between tension and no-tension groups: members in integrated religious organization tend to be more conventional and need less individuative reflection than members of religious groups which are in tension to their host culture, since oppositional and accommodating attitudes require more explicit reasoning and argumentative justification.

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[35] While we have a total of 29.8% faith development interviewees under the age of 25 in our sample, this age group accounts for 34.7% of the Stage Three assignments. The stronger frequency of synthetic-conventional orientation under the age of 20 is reported from Fowler's (1981, e.g. in the Table on p. 318) research and results from other faith development researchers. This "normal" age distribution of Faith Stages is amplified in our sample by an overrepresentation of interviewees under the age of 25.

Figure 4. Faith Stage Scores of In-Tradition Members and Deconverts for Tension and No-Tension Groups in Germany and the U.S.A.
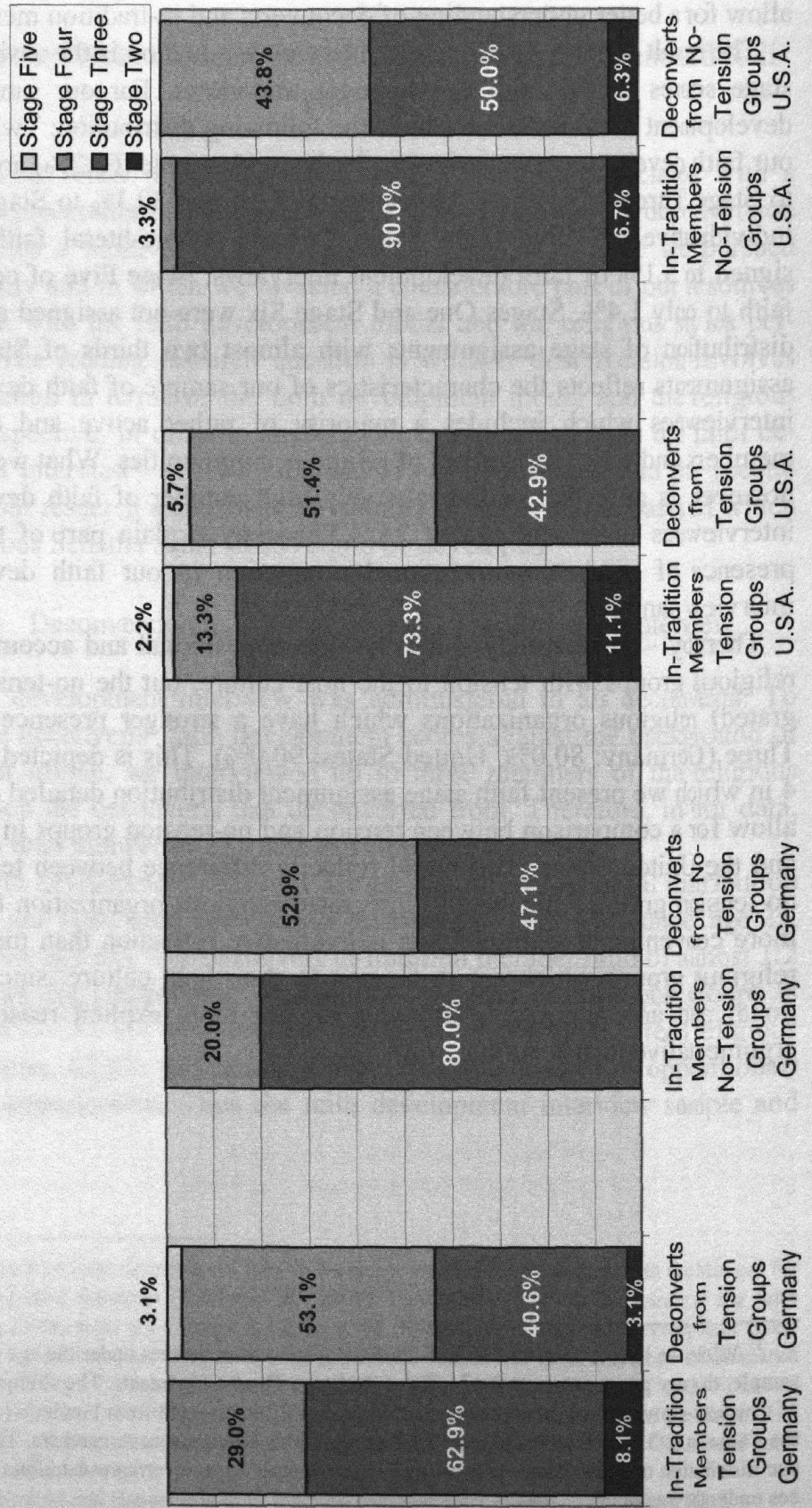
Still, open questions remain. The other side of the strong presence of Stage Three assignments can be seen in the marginality of Stage Five, but also in regard to the low number of Stage Two assignments. Obviously, one's deconversion is not the occasion for a high number of people to move on to conjunctive faith orientation. But then one could expect a larger number of Stage Two assignments. Because of the strong focus of our project on new religious fundamentalist respondents, one could also expect a stronger presence of Mythic-Literal Faith.

A plausible conclusion could be this: There is a segment of respondents whose faith development interview was assigned to Stage Three, but who show a strong fundamentalist orientation − which indicates the mythic-literal style of Stage Two. And indeed we have indication for this: Of all interviewees whose faith development interview was assigned Stage Three, 26.5% agree and 4.2% strongly agree to the fundamentalist statements on the *Religious Fundamentalism Scale (RF)*. The result is even stronger for the agreement with the subscale *Truth of Text and Teachings* of the *Religious Schema Scale* − which, as explained on p. 71 and 82, qualifies as a measure of a schema that operates in fundamentalism: 40.3% of Stage Three subjects agree and 14.5% strongly agree to the statements of the *Truth of Text and Teaching* scale. We will go in more detail about the relation of the faith development interview and the *Religious Schema Scale* below after the characterization of the faith development interviews. And we will draw our first conclusion: From the faith development interview evaluation we also know the phenomenon which we called "stage four fundamentalism" or "stage three fundamentalism:" In some cases, indicators of individuative-reflective and synthetic-conventional structures are present, while indicators of mythic-literal orientations are also visible in the interview text. Taken together, this indicates that fundamentalist attitudes and orientations very likely occur in a way which is not fully captured by the current faith development interview and may require additional research tools to be accounted for.[36] Thus, we conclude with the assumption that, among the cases assigned to Stage Three of synthetic-conventional faith on the basis of their faith development interview evaluation, there are cases with fundamentalist orientation − which did not stand in the foreground in faith development interview rating, but can be assessed through measures of fundamentalism such as the *Religious Fundamentalism Scale* or the *Truth of Texts and Teaching* subscale.

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[36] As Streib has repeatedly argued, the relationship between cognitive development and the appropriation of fundamentalist attitudes is less straightforward than Fowler's structural model might suggest (Streib: 2001; 2007). Keller (2008) argues for a multidimensional perspective.

Comparing faith development interview scores of deconverts to those of in-tradition members may help in approaching one of our central research questions, namely how deconversion relates to faith development. As visualized in Figure 4, the majority of in-tradition members in both cultures and in both tension groups display Stage Three orientations; this is the characteristic of all in-tradition groups, while Stage Four assignments are the minority. In contrast, Stage Four orientations apparently are more frequent among deconverts and amount to about 50%. The deconverts in both cultures in general have higher faith development scores than the in-tradition members. These results generally confirm our hypothesis that faith development interview scores of deconverts are higher compared to in-tradition members. These results also suggest the inclusion of higher faith development scores in the core characteristics of deconversion as it is represented in our sample. Of course, one can imagine – and we *have* cases in our sample indicating this – that the faith development score of a deconvert can be lower than that of the in-tradition members of the group which the deconvert left, e.g. in oppositional exits; but these cases are the clear minority in our sample.

All of this points to the necessity of attending to individual cases – for which there will be plenty of time and room in the chapters to follow. Aside from its potential for correlating with and producing quantitative results, research with faith development interviews shows its unique strength and richness in the context of qualitative research, since there is the oppportunity to quote from the interview text and based on this to gain deep insights into the dynamics of religious transformation associated with deconversion.

5.4.2 Deconversion in Light of the Religious Styles Perspective

As mentioned already and detailed in Chapter 3.3.3 on p. 62, we developed and initially validated the *Religious Schema Scale (RSS)* during the second phase of our research. The *RSS* is supposed to measure schemata that we assume to be operative in religious styles which in turn correspond to Fowler's stages of faith. Thus the *RSS* is not a direct and one-to-one measure for the assessment of faith stages in Fowler's model, but an independent, more focused and more precise measure of schemata which are indicative also of faith stages. Since we have in our data scores on the *RSS* and ratings of faith development interviews from a considerable number of subjects (n=104), we are able to compare both. Table 18 shows correlations of the *RSS* and its subscales. The strongest and highly significant (negative) correlation of the faith stage scores are with the RSS subscale *Truth of Texts*

and Teachings in both the U.S. and German sample; for the German sample also *Xenosophia* and the total *RSS* score display strong and significant correlations with the FDI scores. Thus the *ttt scale* may qualify as cross-culturally valid measure to indicate, corroborate and correct the faith development evaluation.

Table 18. Correlations of Faith Development Scores with Subscales of the Religious Schema Scale

Faith Development Interview Scores		Truth of Texts & Teachings	Fairness, Tolerance & Rational Choice	Xenosophia / Inter-Religious Dialog	Religious Schema Scale (total score)
in German Sample	Pearson Correl.	-.55**	.04	.47**	.54**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.784	.000	.000
	N	59	60	60	59
in U.S. Sample	Pearson Correl.	-.49**	-.07	.14	.39
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.671	.353	.013
	N	40	44	44	40
in Combined Sample	Pearson Correl.	-.52**	-.04	.28*	.45**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.227	.004	.000
	N	99	104	104	99

Figure 5 presents a scatter plot of the cases which have both *RSS* and *FDI* scores. Because the qualitative-interpretative approach has a strong focus on the single case, a scatter plot may be the best way to visualize the relation between faith stage assignment and the *RSS*. We selected the *Truth of Texts and Teachings* subscale, because it is the strongest indicator. While the scattering indicates some independence of both measures, a majority of cases – and almost all deconverts – fall in the correct segments of either disagreement (-1) and strong disagreement (-2) with *ttt* items which is associated with Stage Four (faith development score ≥ 3.5), or in the segment with agreement (+1) and strong agreement (+2) with *ttt* items which is associated with Stage Three (faith development scores < 3.5). Strong agreement with *ttt* could even indicate, as already mentioned, the presence of fundamentalist or mythic-literal orientations which the research with the faith development interview did not reveal.

Figure 5. Scatter Plot of Faith Stages and *ttt* Scores of Deconverts and In-Tradition Members
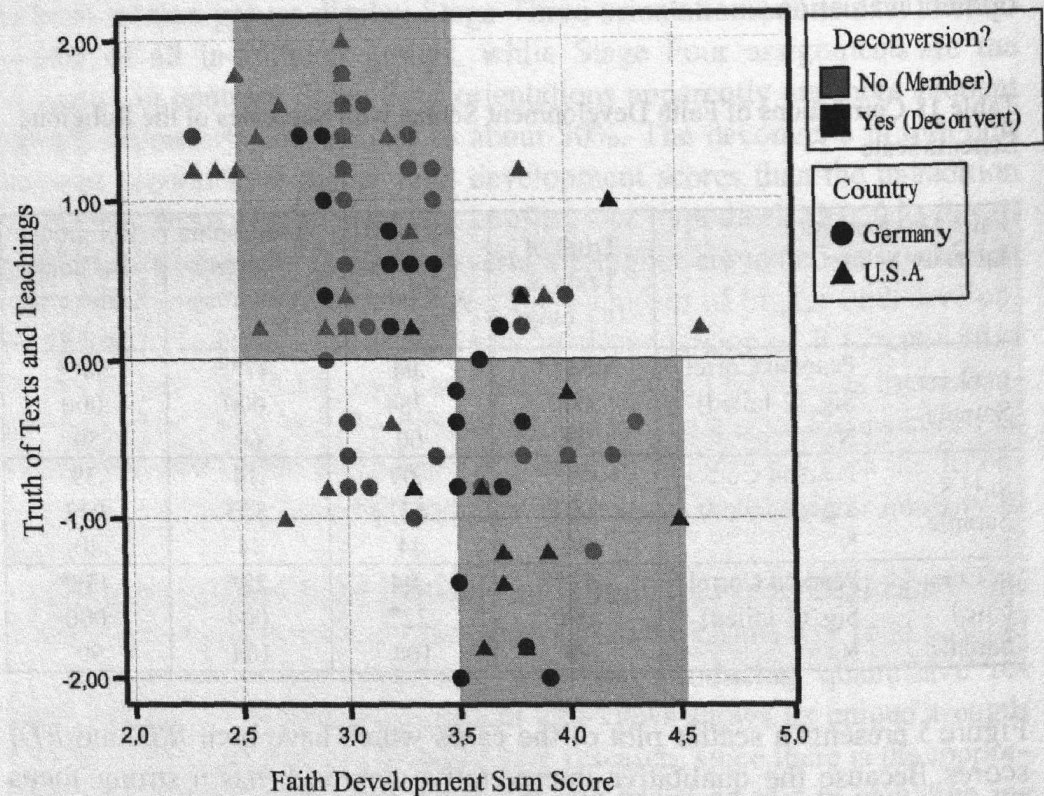
Also from the *Religious Schema Scale,* we see significant differences between deconverts and in-tradition members which roughly correspond to the faith development interview results. [37] It reconfirms the assumption that there is a transformation involved in deconversion whether we explicate this in terms of faith development or in terms of religious styles.

As already presented in Table 12 (page 74), both German and U.S. in-tradition members and deconverts differ significantly on the *ttt scale.* This provides a solid background portrait for our single case deconverts. Such background profiles will be presented in the case studies in the following chapters in form of tables listing the results for deconverts and in-tradition

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[37] Despite the correspondence, we of course see the differences in results. But this difference can be productive: Since the *RSS* opens another independent perspective on religious orientations, it may help us also to identify problems of the faith development instrument and the FDI evaluation procedure. These are questions for the future; the differences do not disqualify the results in this study in which we treat both measures independently and opening different perspectives.

members on a selection of scales in which deconverts differ from in-tradition members. For this purpose we divide our sample in four groups serving as background comparison for the single case deconverts: tension groups/Germany, no-tension groups/Germany, tension groups/United States and no-tension groups/United States. We already applied this sample split in Figure 4, and in Table 19, we also divided our data in the same way.

It comes to no surprise that – again – the *Truth of Texts and Teaching* subscale, along with the *RSS* total score, displays significant differences between deconverts and in-tradition members across all of our four groups – with only the German no-tension group not on the same high level of significance.

5.4.3 Conclusion

In sum, deconverts have a considerably larger share in individuative-reflective faith than in synthetic-conventional faith. Also,deconverts have higher scores on the *religious schema scale* and its subscales with especially *truth of text and teachings* making a significant difference. This confirms our hypothesis and suggests the inclusion of a higher faith development in the core characteristics of deconversion. We also derive confirmation for this from a correlation analysis documenting for both cultures a clear association of faith development with the key characteristics for deconversion: higher scores in Openness for Experience and lower scores in Religious Fundamentalism.

5.5 Preparing for Case Study Analyses and our Typology Construction

The "top-down" strategy of inserting pre-defined and theory-based codes in the interviews helped to identify the most decisive general characteristics such as deconversion criteria, deconversion trajectories, or basic information about religious socialization. Computer-assisted procedures of retrieving and calculating these codes helped us manage our very large number of almost one hundred narrative interviews. This way it has been possible to identify inter-individual commonalities and differences and to capture the contours of an emerging typological field.

Table 19. Religious Schema Scale Mean Differences for Deconverts and In-Tradition Members in No-Tension and Tension Groups in Germany and the United States

Country	Tension of Group		Decon-version?	N	Mean	Std. Devia-tion	Std. Error Mean
Germany	No Tension	RSS Xenosophia Inter-religious dialog	No	145	17.40	2.92	.24
			Yes	15	17.00	4.93	1.27
		RSS Fairness, Tolerance, Rational Choice	No	146	20.56	2.27	.19
			Yes	15	20.67	2.13	.55
		RSS Truth of Text and Teachings	No	146	*16.13*	4.42	.37
			Yes	14	*13.79*	5.35	1.43
		Religious Schema Scale Total	No	143	51.78	6.58	.55
			Yes	14	53.93	10.11	2.70
	Tension	RSS Xenosophia Inter-religious dialog	No	76	*12.24*	3.74	.43
			Yes	13	*16.00*	4.32	1.20
		RSS Fairness, Tolerance, Rational Choice	No	76	19.88	2.01	.23
			Yes	13	20.15	1.41	.39
		RSS Truth of Text and Teachings	No	76	*19.30*	3.53	.41
			Yes	13	*15.08*	5.39	1.50
		Religious Schema Scale Total	No	76	*42.82*	6.65	.76
			Yes	13	*51.08*	9.95	2.76
United States	No Tension	RSS Xenosophia Inter-religious dialog	No	269	*16.36*	2.85	.17
			Yes	13	*18.62*	3.33	.92
		RSS Fairness, Tolerance, Rational Choice	No	268	*19.42*	2.28	.14
			Yes	13	*21.00*	2.92	.81
		RSS Truth of Text and Teachings	No	267	*18.07*	3.66	.22
			Yes	12	*11.58*	4.42	1.28
		Religious Schema Scale Total	No	264	*47.66*	5.49	.34
			Yes	12	*57.67*	6.88	1.99
	Tension	RSS Xenosophia Inter-religious dialog	No	265	*16.62*	3.02	.19
			Yes	15	*18.07*	3.41	.88
		RSS Fairness, Tolerance, Rational Choice	No	265	*19.69*	2.66	.16
			Yes	15	*21.00*	2.80	.72
		RSS Truth of Text and Teachings	No	263	*16.69*	4.43	.27
			Yes	14	*11.29*	4.51	1.21
		Religious Schema Scale Total	No	259	*49.61*	6.87	.43
			Yes	14	*57.43*	6.10	1.63

Italics = significant on a niveau of p < .1; **Bold** = significant on a niveau of p < .01

This way we were able to apply different typological models and typological differentiations which displayed their explanatory power: sudden vs. gradual; born into a tradition vs. conversion later in life; the typology of six deconversion trajectories; and finally the five deconversion criteria which also allow for the identification of commonalities and differences – we were able to see all of these contributing to a portrait of deconversion in cross-cultural comparison.

Because codes or markers were inserted in our quantitative database, we were able to calculate and present some details of the dynamics of deconversion. From this relatively simple quantitative analysis, we can already see spectacular results: for example, that more than half of our deconverts leave the field of organized religion. This approach of deconversion trajectories is of great value, but also shows limitations. Cases appear as numbers in the statistics, while the biographical dynamic and many other details can not be accounted for. The narrative interviews offer much more detail and depth into this dynamic phenomena.

5.5.1   Details on the Evaluation Method

For the analysis of each single narrative-interpretative, bottom-up strategies were used. Our most important bottom-up evaluative procedures were sequence analyses and narrative analyses. As a start we used sequence analysis in the evaluation process of narrative interviews.[38] Sequence analysis enabled us to reconstruct the dynamics of the spontaneous narration and to develop case structure hypotheses. In narrative analyses,[39] we proceeded by distinguishing narrative passages and reflective parts. Narrative segments can be further divided into sub-segments, segments and supra-segments. Narrative analyses, just as some other qualitative evaluation steps, were assisted by the use of qualitative analysis computer software.

The narrative reconstruction by the interviewees when telling their deconversion story covers a very long time-span – depending on the intuition of the narrator of where his or her story begins. Further, the narrative includes an abundant wealth of details about the deconversion process, its background and its deep structures: motives, intentions, feelings, in some cases traumata, relationships to other people, including significant others, important beliefs and whether these are regarded as life-grounding or de-

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[38] See 3.3.1 for more details and for references. Working with sequence analysis, as we have included it as one step of analysis, does of course not imply that we had limited our focus in analyzing biographical interviews to the logic of decision-making and justification (*Entscheidungszwang und Begründungsverpflichtung*), nor that we limit our concept of religion to the conceptualization on the basis of this logic.

[39] See 3.3.1 for details and references.

structive, coping efforts, desires and hopes. Thus, in the narrative interview we see the relatively short plot of the deconversion process portrayed against the background of and interwoven with the plot of an entire life with all its complexity and depth. For the construction of a typology of our biographical interviews, therefore, it was important to turn to new, more complex, more comprehensive, but, most importantly, more dynamic models. Thus, we found inspiring models which allow the differentiation of narrative plots such as the difference between a redemption plot and a contamination plot (McAdams et al.: 2001), or between agentic vs. communal traits in personal myths (McAdams: 1993).

5.5.2   Construction of a Typology

The interpretative process of the typology construction for our specific sample of deconversion narratives, however, did not allow taking one of the prefabricated lenses and simply applying it to our sample – though the reader will recognize some concepts which were also used by others. In the process of analyzing our deconversion narratives, we came to identify clusters around four ideal types which we gave the following labels: A. Pursuit of Autonomy, B. Barred from Paradise, C. Finding a New Frame of Reference, and D. Later Revision and Life-Long Quests.

A summary and synoptic portrait of the types will be presented in Chapter Ten – but only after the detailed presentation of single cases in Chapters Six through Nine. As will become obvious from reading the case portraits of the deconverts presented to profile the four types, the 'ideal types' themselves include some difference and variety. Each of the deconverts is a unique case and typological commonalities are our construction – the typology therefore has some tentativeness. It is therefore best to be displaying the typology when we present a selection of cases which may serve as markers to delimit the types.

The case studies we present below are reconstructions of the interviewees' own reconstructions of their deconversion processes which refer to and include a diversity of motives, of events, of relationships, of self-evaluations in terms of personal development, and of subjective accounts of gains and losses in regard to the biographical outcomes. Our analyses and reconstructions of the deconversion stories are summarized in the first part of each case study. In the second part, the evaluations of the narrative interviews are linked to the analyses of the faith development interviews.

Another facet of the case portrait is the faith orientation in terms of faith development. Faith development assignments were included in the general quantitative database and used for identifying inter-individual commonal-

ities and characteristics. When we attend to the *content* of single answers in the faith development interviews, as suggested elsewhere (Streib: 2005a) and as we will do below, the reader may realize that this type of faith development interview evaluation is of great value for the complementation of the case portrait. Here, we also include, wherever those data are available, reference to faith development interviews with the in-tradition members, drawing on interviews with matched respondents. Then a further perspective opens up: the portrayal of the deconverts against the background of the religious milieus which they left. This allows for additional assumptions of whether the process can be described as a structural or a lateral deconversion (Fowler: 1981). In cases for which we have results of the *Religious Schema Scale,* we can make an even more comprehensive assessment of their structure of religious orientation against the background of the milieu which they deconverted from. Thus, on the level of the basic unit of research (see 3.2 on p. 53), a detailed profile of the deconverts emerges.

5.5.3   Triangulation with Questionnaire Data

Finally, another facet – another triangulation – which we already mentioned needs to be explained in more detail: the use of questionnaire answers of the single cases for a comparison with differences of deconverts and in-tradition members. In order to enrich the interpretation of the deconversion narrative, we pay attention to their self-identification as "more spiritual than religious", "more religious than spiritual," "equally religious and spiritual," or "neither religious nor spiritual," and eventually to other details from the demographics section of the questionnaire.

Further, in special tables for each case, we present side by side the case-specific answers for those scales of the questionnaire in which, for the cultural context (tension and no-tension group; Germany and the United States) of the deconvert under scrutiny, we can assume differences between deconverts and members.[40] The scales showing significant differences be-

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[40] This split of the database is the result of our attempt to balance statistical significance, on the one hand, with the case-specific profiling, on the other hand. Our aim of course was to present a comparison of deconverts and in-tradition members on the lowest and most specific level which is the basic unit of research (specific religious groups such as the Unification Church, Jehovah's Witness or the Roman-Catholic Church). And we present comparisons on this level, e.g. with faith development interview scores and some other measures. But we cannot expect statistical significance on an acceptable level when using such small numbers of cases as are available for the basic units (which is the case in many oppositional groups where there are less than ten cases). However, to use the powerful quantitative data for profiling the single case deconvert in a statistically acceptable procedure, we had to move up and use larger religious milieus to which the deconverts' specific religious groups belong. Our solution was to use the four-fold split in tension/Germany,

tween deconverts and members in Germany and the United States are presented and marked bold faced in Table 12 on p. 74.

For the German deconverts this includes all scales of the *Big Five* personality scale along with the higher-order factor *traditionalism* ("Big Two"); further, the total score from Ryff's scale on *Psychological Well-Being and Growth* – which can be viewed as general measure of positive adult development – and its subscales *environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life* and *self-acceptance* – here German deconverts generally score lower, which may indicate a crisis or loss. Also included are the scales measuring fundamentalism and religious styles: the *Religious Fundamentalism* scale, the *Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale,* and, from the *Religious Schema Scale* (if available), the subscale *truth of texts and teachings,* as already mentioned.

For the sake of comparison concerning the U.S. deconverts, we display: *openness to experience* from the *Big Five,* along with the higher-order factor *transformation;* further, the total score and the subscales *autonomy* and *personal growth* from the scale on *Psychological Well-Being and Growth*; finally, since in the U.S. sample all of the religiosity measures show significant differences, we can compare the scores on the *Religious Fundamentalism Scale,* the *Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale,* and the total score and all three subscales of the *Religious Styles Scale,* namely *truth of texts and teachings, fairness, tolerance, and rational choice,* and *xenosophia / inter-religious dialog* (again, only for those respondents for whom the *RSS* was included in the questionnaire).

This opens new perspectives on profiling deconverts against the in-tradition members' milieus in a variety of ways, including dimensions of personality and well-being, fundamentalism and religious styles. Thus, deconversion in its different typological variations is explored on three levels of analysis using all three different sorts of data: on the level of the person's narrative creation of meaning (open-ended narrative interview), on the level of faith development (semi-structured interview), and on the level of general dispositions and outcomes (questionnaire data). In the chapters to follow, results are compared and contrasted in a process of triangulation in order to yield the best case-specific understanding of deconversion we can afford from our data. Taken together, the deconverts stand in the center and all the variety of data are evaluated in order to give the most comprehensive description of the deconversion process and indicate the location in the framework of our typology.

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no-tension/Germany, tension/United States and no-tension/United States; this is what was used for producing the comparison tables.

6 Pursuit of Autonomy

6.1 "Church for Me right now is Non-existent:" Gina

Gina is a 21-year-old Caucasian female living in the West of the United States. She deconverted from the Mormons (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, LDS) approximately two years before the interview. Gina had been born into the tradition and took a secularizing exit. She reports that her family did not adhere strictly to the doctrines or to the food and Sabbath mandates of their church. Also, Gina's parents were not strict (enough) in their enforcement of moral mandates such as prohibiting watching R-rated movies or playing sports on the Sabbath.

Gina's narrative begins with the close tie between her former religious membership and her family life. In fact, the central tension throughout her narrative is that between her deconversion from the LDS and the disapproval of her family to which she used to be so close. Her deconversion also appears to be strongly connected to her relationship with her future husband. She describes herself as a convinced Mormon, until the doubts and disaffiliation of her future husband became obvious to her, when she found out that he did not wear his Garments.[41] Gina then was forced to choose between her own religious affiliation and her relationship with him. The dramatic situation comes to expression in the following segment from the narrative interview, starting with the core episode of Gina's deconversion story:

"Uh, but, one day I was at his house, and I realized that when he took off his clothes-just his top, uhm he didn't-he wasn't wearing his garments. Which is a huge deal, [...] So I asked him, I said hey ... you know, why aren't your garments on? And he says, you know, I just don't believe in it anymore. And I said believe what? And he says I don't believe in any of it. [I: Wow!] Of course to me this was, this was the most insane, unimaginable thing that could ever happen - I was in love with him. So at that point, I had to make a decision, him or the Church. As seems pretty easy for all of my friends at the time and for anyone in my situation, of course, picked the Church. If you picked [husband's name], you're not gonna be happy, you're gonna live a life of evil, Satan will have a hold of you, and you'll basically burn in Hell in

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[41] The Mormon's Garment is a special underclothing as an everyday reminder of commitment to the Mormon faith.

the after-life. You could never reach the High Eternity, and you won't be with your family. So, me being very close with my family, this was not an option. So my whole deal was to bring him back. So for the next few months I tried *so* hard to bring him back into the Church, every day, quoting him the Scripture, y'know telling him my beliefs and my mind and saying I love you, and please come back." (Narrative Interview with Gina, Interact 16–18).

This lively episode, characterized by verbatim dialogue, conveys Gina's perspective of surprise and emotional turmoil – and the interviewer responds sympathetically as she elaborates on her dilemma of conflicting loyalties, hopes, and fears. Gina works hard to convince her future husband, but he leaves the church. That leads to their (temporary) separation, but also triggers Gina's efforts to find out about his decision, to understand – and, finally, join him and leave the church. Gina gives a chronology and explains what happened:

"We broke up. He didn't come back. In fact instead of breaking up, instead of coming back he wrote his letter of resignation and had his name removed from the Church's records. And that was a huge deal. Uh, 'cause after that happens you. don't come back. So I knew that he was not coming back, so I went up to [college B], to maybe meet another man, get married ... The problem was that I was in love with him. We kind of kept up a friend relationship. He came up to visit me a few times with my brothers, and this whole time I was still very much believing, I was in an apartment with three girls that were Mormon, I was up at [college B], back in [city C] back in the bubble, and I still had this in the back of my mind, you know all my friends were saying forget him, he's not worth it, you deserve so much better. And here I have [husband's name] who has also become my best friend, because during the time we broke up we bonded, we had a friendship that was amazing, so not only would I lose my future husband and the man I'm in love with, but also my best friend. And I wasn't willing to do that." (Narrative Interview with Gina, Interact 18).

Gina reports that her first response was an attempt to bring her future husband back into the church, but when this failed and she actually followed him, the disapproval of Gina's family brought them together even more strongly. Gina claims that she chose to disaffiliate because of a personal investigation of the veracity of the doctrines, and the criteria of intellectual doubt as well as of moral criticism apply to her deconversion. However, there are also indications that it was her relationship with her future husband that really fuelled this research and motivated her to explore the foundations and sources of the doctrine for the first time in her life. Gina summarizes:

"Uhm, so that's the end, uh we're still striving towards, you know, understanding. I don't even believe in God anymore, but if you can imagine your whole life believing something ... strongly, and even about what's gonna happen when you die, and all of a sudden ... at uh over the period of a year ... it's completely shattered. Completely

shattered. And, your family and friends will never forgive the man, that supposedly... [sounding strained] made you do it. So [husband's name] is ... having that stereotype ... for the rest of his life probably, even though I left on my own accord after studying and researching heavily. Uhm ... and I guess that's the way it's gonna stay until something's changed. That's it." (Narrative Interview with Gina, Interact 25–27)

It seems that the Mormon tradition of which Gina was part has failed to foster any deeper sense of religious experience or spiritual renewal. Gina never speaks of religious experiences and appears to be preoccupied with the social aspects of the tradition, beginning to critically reflect the traditional role of women and the issue of polygamy. For her, the LDS have been functional for providing avenues of connection with her early social network, namely her family. When Gina went to college, it was the LDS that provided the social context; when Gina began to develop another social relationship, the relationship with her future husband, which became very valuable to her, the LDS was the facilitator. Therefore, when her future husband's deconversion began to take place, she was forced to choose. Since the LDS has mainly had a social function for Gina, it is understandable that, in the case of conflict, she was inclined to reject the LDS in order to maintain the new intimate and social ties which have become more important to her.

The Mormon worldview and belief system were important for Gina only for promoting family values. The rest of the LDS theology and moral prescriptions were less important. Gina was rather superficially tied to the LDS tradition which might eventually have turned out to be an obstacle to her ambitions in the longrun. Thus, Gina had not so much a problem with leaving a belief system, or, for that matter, a certain image of God. The real issue for her was the damage her deconversion would cause for her relationship with her family – which finally ended in conflict and break-up. Gina has come to reject almost all of what the LDS believe and observe. While she and her husband are happy in their marriage and with the friends they associate with now, Gina feels deeply hurt and disappointed by the reaction of her family:

"... so, the Church as of now, especially since I'm learning more about y'know the Bible, and other, uhm religions, right now, the Church for me right now is non-existent. I don't think about it, I don't want to think about it. It ruined the relationship with my family ... ruined it, it's, I don't talk to my parents any more I haven't spoken to them in three months because my mom told me that she wanted me to divorce [husband's name] and come back to the Church. I didn't accept that so I told her I'd never speak to her again. So, this is my mom ... who, until I was eighteen, nineteen years old had the closest relation to. And my father as well. My father was always very positive always, I was the number one student in his mind, I was, you know very bright intelligent young girl and he ... when I left the Church he basically ... didn't

speak to me. So, I'm completely disassociated with my parents." (Narrative Interview with Gina, Interact 25)

In her faith development interview, Gina shows strong indications of *individuative-reflective faith*. With an average score of 3.8 in her faith development interview, Gina appears as one faith stage ahead of her former fellows in faith. The members of the LDS we interviewed show an average faith stage score of 2.8. However, this difference in the faith development interview results alone can not be interpreted as clear and firm evidence that Gina has experienced transformation in terms of faith development in the process of her deconversion and thus has experienced a structural deconversion. The clear assignment of Stage Four and the interpretation as structural deconversion can be seen as contradicted by Gina's rather strong relatedness to and desire for embeddedness in different social contexts. Has Gina left the values of her family to adopt those of her husband? Is this a transition between Stages Three and Four, or, rather, the replacement of a conventional religious by a more liberal belief set? We have some indication from the narrative interview which points in the opposite direction: Gina has chosen her own individual way which has damaged her embeddedness in family and faith community; and she is able to reflectively give reasons for her own decision.

A certain ambivalence appears also from a closer inspection of Gina's scores in the single faith aspects. The aspect-specific scores display a relatively wide spectrum, from 3.1 in Aspect B, *perspective taking*, to 4.3 in Aspect F, *form of world coherence*, and even 4.7 in Aspect C, *moral judgment*. The following passages from the faith development interview give some more details about these findings. In her logical structure, Gina is very reflected and explicit. She is using formal operational logic which is clearly associated with Stage Four. The following quote is speaking primarily to *form of logic* (Aspect A), and has been assigned Stage Four:

"[I: Uhm, when you have an important decision to make, how do you go about making it?] Usually intuition [laughs], I've always had gut instincts and I've usually always followed them, now granted when you're Mormon you pray for guidance and you're supposed to make the decision and ask if it's correct. Usually you go with what you've decided anyway, because, it's what you wanted. [I. laughs] ... I believe in myself, I believe in whatever decision I'll make probably be the right one. If it's a choice between right and wrong, or, I don't know, I just ... I make it for myself I go with what I think, I mean I'll usually deduce it intellectually, uh or I'll research, you know things like that, I won't just make a stupid decision but, usually it's just me. You know obviously if it has to do with marriage or [husband's name] then I'll discuss it with him, but if it's just my decision ... I'll just make it." (Faith Development Interview with Gina, Interact 52)

Gina presents herself as relying on her own good and independent judgment. On the other hand, she appears to be preoccupied with questions of embeddedness in her social relationships, while lacking a systematic approach to the interior of others. This is obvious when Gina speaks about her closer family in the following quote in which she is supposed to talk about the aspect of *perspective taking*, focusing on the interviewees' understanding of others', e.g. parents', subjectivity. This passage has been assigned Stage Three:

"They watch General Conference which never happened. They just, uhm, they went a complete one-eighty ... and my whole life I was brought up by these parents to be how I was, and then when I just, you know, decided not to believe in their religion anymore, they just, totally, become zealots – it was amazing, if you would've seen them, it was a one-eighty. If you would have known them before and after it's insane, all my relatives, all my friends think the exact same thing like what is wrong with your parents? 'cause they grew up with me, they knew that they were always the ones you know supporting me playing soccer, and, you know doing all these things that weren't Mormon, but now, they won't even, like ... go out on Sunday, [spoken in a whisper] which we did all the time, just things like that." (Faith Development Interview with Gina, Interact 30)

But finally, in terms of *form of world coherence*, we assigned several Stage Five scorings. In one of those statements, Gina explains her view on the difference between 'being a religious and being a believing person', referring to a multi-leveled and complex reality:

"[I: Okay. Do you consider yourself a religious person?] No. [laughs] [I: What does it mean to be a religious person?] In my opinion it's to belong to a religion. An-uh ... no religions that I've ever seen or ever heard of are... acceptable to me. I think religious ... even if you're really in it or not, if you really believe in a religion, I think you're religious. If you believe in God you don't have to necessarily be religious, in my opinion, I just think you have to be, a believer in God. Religious has to be more a religion, and I'm definitely not [laughs]." (Faith Development Interview with Gina, Interact 61–64, *world coherence*, [Aspect F], assigned: Stage 5).

While, for Gina, a "religious person" is someone who is committed to a religious tradition and a church, someone who "believes" is a "believer in God," which – taking the interpretation one step further – is not necessarily connected to a specific religious tradition.

We may compare Gina's response to the statement of a 21 year-old Mormon member, Gloria, who was also born into the tradition. Gloria expresses what can be viewed as a conventional and common way of 'being religious' in this faith tradition:

"[I: do you consider yourself a religious person?] Uhm, yeah I mean I think, it's more than just going to church every Sunday, but you know uhm my believes are very

important to me and I will never change because, uhm, I know what I want and this is what I want, and so uhm the things that the church promises and, uhm, like being sealed together, you know that's what I want and so, I am a religious person because all the things that my church provides for me, and would allow me to do as long as I'm worthy, you know , so I wanna be a religious person and I wanna do the best that I can to, get those things ... just always, doing things for other people and uhm, praying and reading our scriptures you know and uhm... just always thinking of someone else you know, that's what Jesus Christ did, and so, for me to be a religious person ... that I'm always strong in my believes and never, you know ... deter... from that and ... to never give up." (Faith Development Interview with Gloria, Interact 185–190, Form of World Coherence [Aspect F], assigned to Stage Three)

To conclude: According to Gina's faith development rating, there is a clear domination of the individuative-reflective style of faith, even though we also see a rather broad spectrum from a conjunctive faith orientation to a synthetic-conventional perspective-taking. It is rather likely that Gina has experienced a structural deconversion, even though we should not ignore that Gina's deconversion and also her faith transformation were triggered by the strong impact of the close relationship to her husband.

Table 20. Differences between Gina and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Gina has Deconverted

	Single Case Question- naire Data of Gina	In-Tradition Members in No- Tension (Integrated) Religious Organizations in United States	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Openness	36.00	37.80	6.11
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Transformation	79.00	80.72	8.63
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	217.00	200.81	21.79
Autonomy	37.00	32.08	4.66
Personal Growth	35.00	34.36	4.51
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	38.00	64.75	13.18
RWA	65.00	92.16	16.23

Gina self-identified as being "neither religious nor spiritual" in the questionnaire. The conflicting elements in Gina's faith development rating are reflected in her scores on the scales which differentiate significantly between deconverts and in-tradition members of integrated groups in the United States, as Table 20 shows[42]: Gina's score on *openness to experience* is close to the central tendency of the scores of in-tradition members. This is also the case for *personal growth* from the scales on *psychological well-being and growth*. On *autonomy*, however, her score is higher than her former in-tradition fellows and on the high end of the deconverts from no-tension religious organizations in the United States (36.17). Similarly, Gina's score on *well-being* is higher than the in-tradition mean, and even higher than that of the average deconvert (213.57) – which is caused by her high scores on *environmental mastery* (37.00) which is rather high, compared to U.S. deconverts (33.33). Gina's scores on *religious fundamentalism* and *right wing authoritarianism* are low – which corresponds to the average deconvert of no-tension groups in the United States – reflecting her criticism of the church's value system which was involved in her decision to leave.

6.2   "Now I'm Kind of just Exploring …:" Samantha

Samantha, a young Caucasian adult of 22 years, reports that she was born and grew up in the Southeast of the United States, surrounded by a loving extended family which all lived in her home town. Samantha reports that she was given a quality education at an early age and that she had always been an overachiever who sought the approval of her teachers and her family. When she entered school, she was immediately assigned to second grade to match her educational level. This was not problematic until high school; then Samantha noticed that she may have missed something and be behind in some other ways, especially in her emotional development. Samantha was also involved in sports until college. Sports reinforced her work ethic.

During Samantha's childhood and adolescence, her parents encouraged her to go to church. First, at a very young age, she attended Nazarene Church in her Southern town. Her mother later quit going to that church

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[42] Subscales in this and the other Tables were selected, if the difference between deconverts and in-tradition members of the specified group is beyond our criterion for a significant difference ($p < .01$).

when Samantha was not allowed to participate in a Bible competition, because Samantha had not been baptized in the church. The family then joined a Southern Baptist church, the church where the family of Samantha's father went to. Samantha attended this Southern Baptist church with her parents and actively participated in programs like vacation bible school and Sunday school. In her retrospective she introduces an observer's perspective when she contrasts her personal motives with the impressions she may have rendered:

"I might have appeared to be very involved in my church', but ... in high school and middle school I was involved in a lot of things just kind of ... out of, I guess looking for something to do." (Narrative Interview with Samantha, Interact 142)

During her high school years, Samantha began to question her beliefs and her membership in the Southern Baptist Church. Her disaffiliation was assisted by a friend from an Eastern European country who was a self-proclaimed atheist and who showed Samantha that it was okay to live as an atheist even in the South of the United States. Samantha began to realize the lack of any personal ties in the church; she began to question the sermons and teachings and gradually left the Southern Baptist church. She compares church customs with her own attitudes:

"In Southern Baptist church you don't ask questions ... it's just best to believe ... I don't like being reminded every other minute that you're going to hell ... that's like, no matter what you do', they're always telling you you're going to hell so it's like you know if you're always telling me that, what's the point." (Narrative Interview with Samantha, Interact 326–332)

Samantha also remembers and notes her moral criticism, evaluating peoples' behavior across contexts:

"You'd start seeing people who were very holy in church but were doing whatever during the week ... were hateful towards their children, or were hateful towards people of other races or people of other religions ... I guess I got to the point where I said, if this it what it means to be Southern Baptist or Christian, then, I don't think this is something that I wanna be." (Narrative Interview with Samantha, Interact 312–316)

These objections, together with her parents' divorce a critical life event, appear as triggers for her disaffiliation from the Southern Baptist Church at the age of 17. Once she started college, Samantha stopped attending church. She explains:

"When I started college, I didn't do the whole church thing anymore, and more or less did it in high school out of a sense of, obligation ... when I got to college, I had a better excuse I guess in college, didn't have time', couldn't go. And then of course

when my parents divorced, that effectively put an end to church as well." (Narrative Interview with Samantha, Interact 150–154)

After her disaffiliation, Samantha considers other religious possibilities such as Judaism and Buddhism. Her engagement in exploring religious options can be understood as a heretical exit. She states:

"Now I'm kind of just exploring, I gave serious thought to converting to Judaism, because I've read a lot about Judaism, talked to several rabbis and things like that and I really liked their emphasis on education and knowledge, that they encourage questions." (Narrative Interview with Samantha, Interact 322–324)

Samantha's faith development interview was rated 3.8 as the total FDI score, spanning from 3.5 (*moral reasoning*) to 4.0 for *bounds of social awareness, locus of authority*, and *symbolic function*. While displaying the same average score as Gina, Samantha's story sounds more independent – which, perhaps, is reflected in the more balanced scorings across the aspects of her faith development interview. Her deconversion, while also characterized by intellectual doubt and moral criticism, was less conflicted than Gina's. Against the background of the "modal level" of faith development in her Southern Baptist Church – eleven faith development interviews with Southern Baptist in-tradition members have resulted in an average faith development score of 2.9 – Samantha appears almost a full faith stage more advanced. This suggests a structural deconversion.

Asked about past relationships that were important to her, Samantha mentions the encounter and friendship with the boy from Eastern Europe in her high school times who had opened for her a new world of religious and ideological diversity. She continues that also her relationship to her husband has been important, as the following segment shows in which she also talks about her appreciation of education and tolerance, including religious openness:

"Erm so the fact that my husband had, had been, you know, erm', brought from an educated family, you know very kind of worldly, family, erm, you know he's very, open to that and very, you know, understanding of that and, you know we've had talks about, you know what are we gonna do with our kids', that's like the, you know, the big issue, [I: yeah] and erm, you know he's very open to, to erm... exposing kids to, a variety of stuff, you know ... Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism', and you know whatever, you know, he doesn't nec-he's not necessarily, you know, the kids have to be Christian [I: mhm] ... erm, which is a very, beneficial thing, 'cause I don't think I could be married to someone who was very, adamant about ... that', but a lot of that I guess is because he has a lot of doubts of his own, [I: mhm] ... so he doesn't necessarily feel right about, you know, about why has he got to raise his kids as Christians' if he's not sure, you know if that's [I: right'] what he wants to be himself, so [I: right]

that's probably it." (Faith Development Interview with Samantha, Interact 78–84, Perspective Taking [Aspect B], rated Stage Four)

For Samantha, religious experience appears not really important as such. When asked about spiritual disciplines, she mentions, in a demythologizing way, yoga and meditation as practices she uses just functionally:

"Erm, and just liked ... liked feeling calm, I liked feeling ... centered I guess, for lack of a better word, erm ... that was erm, a very, refreshing, very, calming and soothing, kind of thing for me to do ... erm ... and erm, I pray erm, I don't know, kind of have like a, a hazard, you know, method of prayer, erm, so I might probably think I'm just talking to myself." (Faith Development Interview with Samantha, Interact 510, Symbolic Function [Aspect G], scored Stage Four)

For Samantha, religion is "a man-made construction" and should be "something that gives you structure, but also leaves a lot of room for individuality" (Faith Development Interview with Samantha, Interact 490). This is what makes Buddhism an attractive option for her.

It may be interesting here to contrast Samantha's stance toward religions and her faith development with one of the in-tradition members of the Southern Baptist church: Matthew, an 18-year-old Afro-American who grew up within the Church, states when asked about harmony and communion with God or the cosmos:

"[I: When or where do you find yourself most in communion or harmony with God?] In Church. I just go into Church just for ages, it seems like I must. It is a thing you're going through, it just seems like you let it all out in Church, you letting all loose, you let it all off in Church, it's like you pick up a heavy load through the week and you go to Church on Sunday and then you drop it off. That's how I feel this, so ... [I: 'Kay. Are there any times when you find yourself in harmony with God?] When I'm by myself in my room or I'm laying down or ... so says before I go to sleep when I pray I just feel ... you know ... he's there, like he's a friend, he's there with me." (Faith Development Interview with Matthew, Interacts 322–325, [Aspect G], rated Stage Three)

Matthew's answers display emotional needs and a deep personal relationship to God. In contrast to Matthew, we see how far Samantha has distanced herself from the Southern Baptist way of being religious and how her orientation in terms of faith development is different. Samantha considers herself not a religious person, but a spiritual person. In the questionnaire she self-identified as being "more spiritual than religious."

When we look at her questionnaire responses in Table 21, we see that Samantha shows high scores on *openness to experience* (53.00), thus a strong contrast to the means of her former in-tradition milieu (37.80), but even higher than the average deconvert from an integrated religious organization in the United States (45.67). With a high score on *autonomy* (39.00)

and on two other subscales of the *psychological well-being* scale,[43] namely *positive relations with others* (Samantha: 39.00; deconverts: 34.09; in-tradition members: 34.36) and *purpose in life* (Samantha: 39.00; deconverts: 35.92; in-tradition members: 34.36), Samantha has a relatively high total score for *well-being* – which reflects the interpretation of her narrative and her faith development scores.

Table 21. Differences between Samantha and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Samantha has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Samantha	In-Tradition Members in No-Tension (Integrated) Religious Organizations in United States	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Openness	**53.00**	37.80	6.11
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Transformation	**97.00**	80.72	8.63
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**230.00**	200.81	21.79
Autonomy	**39.00**	32.08	4.66
Personal Growth	**36.00**	34.36	4.51
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**26.00**	64.75	13.18
RWA	**47.00**	92.16	16.23
Religious Schema Scale			
RSS total score[44]	**57.00**	47.66	5.49
Truth of Texts...	**6.00**	18.07	3.66
Fairness, Toler.	**18.00**	19.42	2.28
Xenosophia	**15.00**	16.36	2.85

Samantha also shows very low scores on *truth of texts and teachings*[45] – which demonstrates that she is highly critical of beliefs and claims of absoluteness. This corresponds to her low scores on *religious fundamentalism*

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[43] These subscales are not included in the Tables for the U.S. deconverts, because the difference between deconverts and in-tradition members is below our criterion for a significant difference (p < .01) on these subscales.

[44] Note that, for the calculation of *RSS* total score, the *truth of texts and teachings* subscale has been reverse scored.

[45] The interview with Samantha took place after we had started to include the new *religious schema scale* in our questionnaire, thus we can present scores in the Table.

and *right-wing authoritarianism* which, as *truths of texts and teachings*, is much lower even than for the average deconvert in her group. Samantha's total *RSS* score – which is considerably higher than that of the average in-tradition member – reflects the results of the faith development evaluation.

Taken together, Samantha appears as a late adolescent deconvert for whom deconversion has the characteristic of gradually stepping away from her family's faith tradition and of exploring the world, including the religious world, with openness to new experiences and a highly critical and heretic (sensu Berger: 1979) attitude. Her faith development interview evaluation indicates that she has moved to an individuative-reflective faith. This means that her deconversion can be interpreted as a structural deconversion.

6.3   "It Took Me a Long Time after I Left the Religion to Stop Believing in God:" Timothy

Timothy, another Caucasian American, is 32 years old at the time of the interview and a deconvert from the Church of God, an accommodating religious organization. Timothy gradually moved away from his affiliation and has since adopted an atheist world view. In his narrative interview he gives us details about his childhood and the important, structuring role of the church. He talks about his parents' divorce, his difficulties in school and a first step of alienation from church. He got along better after moving away from his father's place to live with his mother, but, in the years after college, he was rather drifting aimlessly along. At the time of the interview, he is working in a coffee shop and planning to get married.

Timothy's deconversion story is one of a non-dramatic alienation and gradual disaffiliation, probably influenced by his mother, who had also stopped going to church. Another line of explanation could refer to Timothy's experience as a teenager, when he found himself in a rather distant observer role in church services, while the adults were starting to speak in tongues. In the following segment he portrays a typical episode:

"... I would sit up in the dock with all the, with the rest of my friends', you know', we'd sit down there and watch it was like, we had great seats', you know we could see everybody' [I. laughs] and it was so, it was just like', like erm', you'd see on TV', you know the preacher comes up and gets talking', to the people with the, we could

do it on cue', you know they'd start the music and get the music over at dock' [I: mhm'] and someone starts you know screaming the Hallelujah', and then', and this guy is gonna start dancing, okay this guy starts dancing and this guy over here he starts and they all said the same thing every time', [I: mhm'] and then talk, just just, nonsense', [I: mhm'] like baby talk, but they just go off', and it was just, it was like chaos', little bit sort of like handling snakes'." (Narrative Interview with Timothy, Interacts 111–119)

Still, at the time of the interview Timothy is searching for explanations why the members of his former church behaved the way they did; and Timothy associates – using the rhetoric he probably has listened to in hundreds of sermons – that these people "were in love with Jesus', you know', and they will get', so carried away, you know."

The theology of the Church of God had influenced Timothy deeply. Some passages in the interview give some insight. He looks back on struggling with doubt and anxiety. And, he describes how he discovered his fear of getting punished for his growing disbelief, if, after all, there *was* a God.

"I was at a really unhappy point in time, in my life, and I just couldn't figure it out, I talked to some people, and I talked to some Christian people I knew and I read a lot ... you know and it took me a year, a year and I had to come to a conclusion, that I did not believe in God, and I, I was like why do I, why do I still do this, I haven't been to the church, such a long time, why do I still, have the God faith and pray, and everything like that, and I just, came to the conclusion that I was scared ... you know why would, what if there is, I don't think there's a God, I didn't think there was a God person, and I hadn't for years, but what if there is, I'm gonna die and go to hell, I mean no one wants to do that, and I was like well that's, because I was, in my mind I rationally could not think of why, you know, God didn't make any sense." (Narrative Interview with Timothy, Interact 159)

Timothy appears to have arrived at an agnostic, but rather tolerant "functional" theory of religion:

"I've, I've, I've never had, you know, even, since I have, you know, and it took me a long time after I left the religion to stop believing in God, and even after that', you know after I made that decision, I'm always like, you know', I think it's extremely healthy for everyone to believe in what they want to believe in, and how they want to believe." (Narrative Interview with Timothy, Interact 141)

In the questionnaire Timothy self-identifies as being "neither religious nor spiritual", while the majority of Church of God in-tradition members self-identify as being "equally religious and spiritual." Thus, in terms of belief systems, Timothy appears to have been involved in a major transformation process.

In terms of faith development, however, we see Timothy being between Stage Three and Stage Four. Indications for this are Timothy's emphasis on

critical thinking, on the one hand, and his relatively long partial perpetuation of the belief system of his former church, on the other hand. Timothy's faith development interview was rated 3.6 as its average assignment, spanning between Stage Three (*bound of social awareness*) and Stage Four (*moral reasoning* and *symbolic function*). When we compare Timothy's faith development interview scores with those of in-tradition members and other deconverts we see almost no difference. This appears to support the assumption that Timothy was involved in a kind of lateral deconversion which, for him, means the replacement of the belief system of the Church of God with an atheistic world view. Given the range of faith development interview scores in the in-tradition member group, we of course cannot claim that our data provide secure evidence for our assumption of a lateral conversion; Timothy also could have moved within this spectrum of faith development.

Timothy's secular and agnostic world view becomes obvious in the following quote in which he critically reflects the belief and thought system of "religious people", concerning the end of their life on earth. Timothy gives an explanation of why "religious people" hold on to their belief in an afterlife:

"... the end of existence, that's it' game's over [I: plain and simple] ... people have a hard time with that, they're you know', they are surely', surely there's got to be something after this', I think people are just afraid of dying', to', as far as people turning to Christianity' [I: so what happens'] ... or not just Christianity but any religion' [I: yeah] ... cause like you know there's, there's got to be something, there's got to be a God, there's got to be something after this', cause I don't want to, believe that when you die', that's it', and I think that when you die that's it' [laughs]." (Faith Development Interview with Timothy, Interact 398–404, World Coherence, [Aspect F], rated Stage Four)

In terms of present values and commitments, Timothy now feels strongly committed to his "community" – with a focus on his family and his girlfriend:

"I don't think, my life right now, the scope of, the great big picture has, you know it's very minuscule my existence, you know, it's non-existent, but in the scope of my community it's, it can be, it can be, enormous, you know, I want to, and I want to see my, community, thrive and I wanna, you know do well for, you know for my family, you know my girlfriend such and the babies we may have, and thrive for them and, I want to er, cause you know who knows you know, maybe our kid may be the next president, you know." (Faith Development Interview with Timothy, from Interact 238, *locus of authority* [Aspect E], rated Stage Three)

As we see from this quote, Timothy's loyalty and *locus of authority* relate to traditional, cultural values and "inherited relationships" (Bellah et al.:

1985) such as "my community", "my family" in an unquestioned way and focuses on interpersonal values and concerns. This would suggest and reconfirm that Timothy's faith development orientation has a clear focus on the synthetic-conventional style (Stage Three). On the other hand, we also see signs of a critical and self-reflective orientation which Timothy has developed hand in hand with his gradual disaffiliation from the belief system of the church in which he had been raised.

Table 22. Differences between Timothy and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Timothy has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Timothy	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in U. S.	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Openness	**39.00**	39.22	6.21
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Transformation	**87.00**	81.84	9.33
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**208.00**	200.45	24.58
Autonomy	**33.00**	32.28	4.86
Personal Growth	**31.00**	34.36	4.61
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**26.00**	59.73	15.85
RWA	**58.00**	87.29	18.96
Religious Schema Scale			
RSS total score[46]	**53.00**	49.61	6.87
Truth of Texts...	**6.00**	16.69	4.54
Fairness, Toler.	**19.00**	19.69	2.66
Xenosophia	**10.00**	16.62	3.02

The somewhat conflicting impression of Timothy's deconversion narrative fits his profile on the scales displayed in Table 22: On *openness to experience*, Timothy is like any average member of an oppositional or accommodating religious organization in the United States – and only Timothy's high score on *extraversion* (48,00) adds to a high score on *transformation*.

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[46] Note that, for the calculation of *RSS* total score, the *truth of texts and teachings* subscale has been reverse scored.

Also on *autonomy* Timothy does not differ much from in-tradition members and scores far below the mean for deconverts (35.21); his score for *personal growth* is even below the mean for current members. However, Timothy's scores on *religious fundamentalism* and *truth of texts and teachings* are very low compared to in-tradition members of his former milieu (and also far below the mean for deconverts), showing his clear rejection of fundamentalist religiosity and of religious beliefs in general. This is reflected in the very low scores on the *truth of texts and teachings* subscale of the *RSS*. Timothy's total RSS score, however, is only somewhat higher than that of the average in-tradition members in tension groups – due to his rather low scores on *xenosophia;* this – again – reflects the ambiguity in Timothy's religious styles transformation.

Timothy's deconversion and secular exit into an atheistic world view may be best understood as a struggle for independence from a dogma which he had kept as long as he feared the threats involved. However, with his commitment to atheism, he achieved freedom from these threats when he no longer accepted the beliefs of his previous faith. Timothy's deconversion does not appear to be associated with openness to new experiences, appreciation of the other, or gains in personal growth. There is no change in his attachments. The moderate gain in his sense of autonomy is associated with a rather strong focus on intellectual doubt, denial, and disagreement with his former system of belief.

6.4 Coming-Out and Stepping Out – Issues of (Sexual) Identity: Christoph

Christoph is 37 years old at the time of the interview and a deconvert in our German sample. Christoph deconverted from the *Evangelische Freikirche,* a type of evangelical, small non-denominational church. After his deconversion, Christoph affiliated with the mainline Protestant Church. This means that the deconversion trajectory is an *integrating exit.* Christoph's deconversion is characterized by moral criticism, intellectual doubt as well as emotional suffering. He reports that he had become a member of his former church when his parents, disappointed by the Protestant Church, had joined this small independent church. Thus Christoph indicates right at the beginning of the interview that it was not his autonomous decision to affiliate with this small church.

Christoph grew up in this Church, however, enjoying the youth work there in which he actively participated and volunteered. The critical life event that finally brought about his deconversion was his realization that he was homosexual. When he told his girlfriend that he was homosexual and, therefore, he could not imagine a future relationship with her, she made this public in the community. In the following segment he reports how this led to a polarization in his parish:

„Well ... yes. Then there was this coming out. I was outed in ... this congregation. Or, by my ex-girlfriend back then. [unsure] This led ... to tremendous turbulence and a lot of concern in, in these circles, in, in this church. [I: Mhm.] Well ... up to then, so the church kind of divided up into two camps. Suddenly I was something like a stumbling block, eh, I mean this guy who divided this, this church up into those who ... who said, uh, this is okay and we can understand that. [I: Mhm.] The way you feel. Well, and we support you. And the other camp with those, [slower] who ... said ... this is not compatible with the Biblical principles. Well, homosexuality is not something that is in the Bible. God has ... He created man and woman. In order to procreate and have children. And, well ... this cannot have been intended by God. This was the other camp." (Narrative Interview with Christoph, Interacts 33–39)

Christoph was forced to resign from all his functions – which he accepted with the expectation that such a withdrawal and attention to his personal issues would help. However, he had to realize that there was no chance of getting along with the community. He looked for opportunities to meet people with similar concerns and, finally, accepted his sexual identity and sent a statement explaining his disaffiliation from the church. In retrospect, he feels that it might have been more of a justification than necessity, but acknowledges his statement as something along the lines of a coping effort and as an important step toward individuation:

"But this could have been done in, in [hesitating] in another form. Back then it was somehow important to me. Ba-... There was something like sorta an excuse. Today I wouldn't do it this way anymore. [I: Mhm.] But back then this was it. Because, this ... I have to say, was a really difficult step for me. As I just said, this was family to me. [I: Mhm.] Also a surrogate family. And this was ... really hard, to leave the Church. Because [hesitating] this ended not only ... a part of my life. But also because from one day to the next social contacts and relationships were discontinued. They had been very important to me. [I: Ah yes, mhm.] And well ... that's why this had been so hard for me. This was also partly a, a ... kind of working things out I think. [I: Mhm.]" (Narrative Interview with Christoph, Interacts 85–95)

Later, as the interview unfolds, it turns out that his way toward autonomy was less straightforward than the first part suggests. While he was still struggling with the conflicting aspects of both his sexual and his Christian

identity, he accepted the advice to look for "sexual healing" – implying that being homosexual was a disease that could be cured:

"Yes, exactly. And, well, it was suggested to me, to take a, well, a seminar, a ... uh ... a course, to take a course, uh ... that deals with homosexuality like from a Christian point of view. There was this concept coming from the United States. Back then it was called *Living Waters*. And it was a, a model ... which was supposed to reach, "sexual healing" ... in several phases, in several steps. [...] And this, uh, was supposed to, uh, lead to spiritual growth ... Well, and it was suggested to me that I do this stepwise uh model.In a uh-, in a uh ... in a university group." (Narrative Interview with Christoph, Interacts 173; 175)

At the time of the interview Christoph seems amazed that he took part in the program. He claims that he enjoyed meeting with other people and sharing concerns in the group. At that time, however, he may still have been insecure regarding his sexual identity and perhaps had not yet given up his hope to continue his life in the church.

"And I stuck it out all the way to the end. Yes. Well ... that's what I did. I still don't understand why I actually did this in the first place. On the one hand, I thought this was... fascinating, what they were doing there. You know, the dynamics there. What, uh, how, how, uh ... ba-. There was also this sticking together, you know, like in the group. It was sorta like a self-help group. [I: Mhm.] I also, kind of ... felt like I was in good hands there. [agitated] Because it was the first time ever that I had contact with people who felt exactly the way I was feeling. [I: Mhm.] Who had experienced the same things I had. Well,... the direction, the goal that was very obvious. Uh ... but to deal with it, the contact with these people, that was very important for me back then. And that's why I did it. Uhm, but as a result I like saw [hesitating] this ... that this was a goal that I couldn't uhm ... see for myself." (Narrative Interview with Christoph, Interacts 207–211)

When he realized that he could not change his sexual orientation, Christoph made contact with the gay community and, finally, decided to leave the church. He was seeking therapeutic support to cope with these experiences. Looking for possibilities to live his Christian as well as his homosexual identity, he got in touch with a nationwide ecumenical gay organization.

With an average faith development interview score of 3.6 (ranging from 3.3 for *form of world coherence* (Aspect F), to 4.0 for *bounds of social awareness* (Aspect D), and *locus of authority* (Aspect E), Christoph can be seen as between synthetic-conventional and individuative-reflective faith. This might reflect Christoph's forced individuation, but also the appreciation of relationships, of attachment to others. Search for autonomy can also be seen in his effort of finding groups for support.

When we take a look at some details of his faith development interview, we realize that Christoph's statements on Aspect A, *form of logic*, display a

striving for independence from external authorities. Christoph summarizes his personal struggle for identity, reflecting an individuative approach to authority. Asked for his understanding of mature faith, Christoph states that he works toward integrating his "own, individual lifestyle and his moral concepts" with those of a Christian faith and his belief in God. As he latr adds, he strives for personal religious experience. This includes for him also to be critically reviewing his "personal image of God" that he as a child had learned and adopted. Concluding, Christoph reflects on his faith:

"Well ... okay. Mhm, now you could like critically say that I'm sorta creating my own beliefs ... [choppy] This may well be the case. But ... I think it's more honest and authentic mhm... to live, to live Christian beliefs in such a way that suits me, that it's okay with my personality, the way ... the way I believe God has created me. [I: Mhm.] Instead of adopting something that other people ... have chosen for ... their lives." (Faith Development Interview with Christoph, Interacts 335–337)

He cannot believe in God in the naïve and trusting way he used to earlier. However, he still sees God – according to his new and more accepting image of God – as someone he can turn to when he feels the need.

Taken together, Christoph's deconversion was triggered and influenced heavily by the former church which did not tolerate homosexual members. Therefore, the process was associated with heavy emotional suffering, but also with intellectual doubt and moral criticism. It involved transformation processes: Christoph had to deal with and resolve issues of identity including both sexual identity and religious identity. In working on and resolving both identity challenges, he moved toward individuative-reflective faith. Therefore, we have some reason to assume that Christoph was involved in a structural deconversion.

Christoph self-identified as "equally religious and spiritual" in the questionnaire. His struggle with questions of identity is reflected also in his answers in the questionnaire (see Table 23): His pursuit of autonomy is reflected by rather low scores on *traditionalism*. His struggle and the cost of freedom are visible in his relatively low scores on *emotional stability*. Costs may also be reflected in his low score on *purpose in life* and the rather low *well-being total*. His, compared to in-tradition members of his kind, moderately lower scores on *religious fundamentalism*, *right-wing authoritarianism* and *truth of texts and teachings* reflect the fact that his movement away from authoritarian forms of religion was only partially his own initiative.

Table 23. Differences between Christoph and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Christoph has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Christoph	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in Germany	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Emotional Stabil.	**30.00**	42.25	6.77
Extraversion	**32.00**	40.87	5.71
Openness	**48.00**	40.65	6.04
Agreeableness	**39.00**	46.79	4.48
Conscientiousness	**42.00**	45.17	6.15
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Traditionalism	**111.00**	134.21	13.03
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**177.00**	204.99	18.74
Envir. Mastery	**29.00**	33.62	4.66
Positive Relations	**26.00**	35.41	4.04
Purpose in Life	**23.00**	35.34	3.92
Self-Acceptance	**30.00**	34.18	4.48
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**51.00**	68.00	14.67
RWA	**59.00**	84.37	18.76
Religious Schema Scale			
Truth of Texts...	**15.00**	19.30	3.53

6.5 "Eventually I Became like More and More Critical of My Religion:" Mehmet

Mehmet is 25 years old at the time of the interview. He is a deconvert from the Sunnite Muslim tradition in which he had been raised. Of course, as the termination of membership does not apply to Islam, we see a rather silent moving away in the case of Mehmet. But we can identify *intellectual doubt* and *loss of religious experience* as characteristics of Mehmet's deconversion.

For Mehmet, being different is part of his experience as a child with a Turkish migrant background in Germany. Looking back, he finds that, at school, difference was enhanced:

"Well, at the beginning of every new year ... the first thing that was talked about by the teacher was what gifts everyone had gotten for Christmas. And after the second or third time that I had said that I hadn't gotten anything for Christmas, and the other children were like totally ... puzzled like why this was the case and they couldn't understand that I belonged to a different kind of religion." (Narrative Interview with Mehmet, Interact 4)

Going to high school implied a change of context and encounter with many new situations in which many things that he had until then taken for granted were challenged. He reports some examples:

"There was – of course many things weren't of importance anymore, things that had had some kind of logic and then not anymore. For example not eating pork. For example thinking very critically about God. For example ... going to a mosque, fasting. And a lot of other things that I can't come up with now. Well ... I guess that's also why I had this kind of crisis about the meaning of being and all. Because values that I sorta had, had for a very – yes a very long time in my life and had taken special care of during a very important period of time were suddenly gone." (Narrative Interview with Mehmet, Interact 4)

After a time of crisis, due to his confrontation with conflicting values, Mehmet's educational career paved the ground for critically re-evaluating his world view and religion:

"Well, this went on really until like I started my vocational training. That was until I was like twenty-three years old. Or maybe twenty-two. After which I decided not to, hm dive into a working life but hm ... to go on with school. And then [year] I applied at the [high school] and was accepted. "(Narrative Interview with Mehmet, Interact 4)

Mehmet develops an interest in social and political issues and encounters many challenges put to his world view and his religion. This finally brings about his disaffiliation. Mehmet continues to report and reflect:

"Hmm, with this process with a ... with this, or starting to understand the world this way I realized like, hmm, what the structures of my own belief, of my own belief are like. Or at least I thought I had understood it. And this gave me ... hmm not so much an underst- or more understanding for my religion, but made me like get more distanced, I mean. And eventually I became like more and more critical of my religion. More critical of Allah. More critical of the, the religious community." (Narrative Interview with Mehmet, Interact 4)

Mehmet attests his deconversion process a gradual loss of reverence and awe towards God in favor of gaining a rational distance towards his religion. When defining his current world view, Mehmet mentions an atheistic phase in the past which he is about to overcome. There is a certain tension between critical and autonomous thinking and re-visiting his roots and finding identity. In this process, a "very special, unique form of faith or religion" emerges, in which faith and religiosity are considered again, not as an obligation to follow, but rather as a chosen – and in Berger's sense: heretical – religious life style:

"Well ... I think-... I think that I wouldn't call myself a heathen, I wouldn't even call myself an atheist anymore. I would call myself something hm, something in between maybe. Kind of like I still follow certain religious patterns and still consider them important and serious. But on the other hand, I don't feel like I have any obligations towards my religion. And I, because of that I think that it is a special form of, of belief, of religiousness ... but also of, of, of a life style, I'd say." (Narrative Interview with Mehmet, Interact 4)

Mehmet reflects on his current position between cultures and religions and outlines a developmental perspective: He sees himself as a probable mediator whose eventual return to his faith, Islam, might not be seen as a step backward but as a step forward, supported by his experience of tension between cultures and traditions as something helpful and inspiring. His efforts at mediation might inspire further integration – perhaps a movement toward *conjunctive faith* or a dialogical style.

"... but to be exactly in between and simply being a mediator between right and left, between the top and the bottom, that's like difficult and also uh something that you have to accept like inside yourself. But I think ... this can be very productive. Yeah, I think so ... uh it could well be, for example, that I like re-Islamicize myself. And nothing speaks against this. And I think that if I, uh change my opinion on this again and sorta undo this or even develop it, then it could well be that someday I'll become a believing Muslim again. Nothing speaks against this, and I don't wanna close myself to this, to be honest. Because, well, we all like define our own religion, right?

Inside yourself. And you can like create bad terror, but you can also build up a lot of freedom for yourself." (Narrative Interview with Mehmet, Interact 4)

Turning to faith development evaluation, the attitude expressed last is also present in Mehmet's faith development interview, justifying high scores, especially in form of *moral judgment* (Aspect C). Mehmet's faith development interview was rated Stage Four of individuative-reflective faith – which is consistent almost across all aspects; *form of logic* (Aspect A) was rated 3.8; *moral reasoning*: 4.5.

The example below demonstrates Mehmet's current views about God which are characterized by a demythologizing and reductionist approach – resembling explanations from the 19th century critique of Christian religion.

"Well, today I would identify God, that's my approach, like it's a construct. That is, a manmade construct. Two thousand years ago, in this kind of sense, or about one thousand five hundred years ago. There were people, very smart people actually, uh - who in some way were able to see into the future, well hm, foresee certain things, from the present, to draw con- conclusions from the fut- about the future. Well, but mainly it was all about power. Social power. And in order to maintain this power or to establish it in the first place, they made a god. Created a god. And, and I think that it's part of human nature to look up to something bigger, more powerful. And this is the way I can sorta classify God." (Faith Development Interview with Mehmet, Interact 16, Aspect G, rated Stage Four)

The faith development interviews with three Sunnite Moslem-in-tradition members were scored between 3.0 and 3.3, thus describing Stage Three of synthetic-conventional faith. Against the tendency indicated by this background, Mehmet's disaffiliation can be interpreted as structural deconversion.

To illustrate the contrast to the in-tradition milieu, we now introduce a Sunnite Muslim in-tradition member from our sample. Chihan, 28 years old and, like Mehmet, a student of social sciences, displays in his faith development interview a total faith development score of 3.1. Chihan refers to the after-life in Muslim thought by depicting the end of human life and transition to the other-world:

"A death is for me a ... uh like a ticket, like a passenger ticket ... well, uh, first you have to have this passenger ticket, uh to get to this other world, without death we can't do this. What happens then, yeah, life was like a test and afterwards you see what kind of grade you get for it [I: okay] ... if you get a good grade, then you know where you can go." (Faith Development Interview with Chihan, Interact 337–347, scored Stage Three)

To conclude: Mehmet's narrative may yield some insight in the religious transformation processes that take place in the milieu of Islamic immigrants who, with their parents, came from Turkey to Germany where they enter

the educational system. In the case of Mehmet, the encounter with Western cultural tradition, including philosophical and sociological critique of religion in high school, has resulted in religious doubt and questioning the religious convictions of his family and milieu. In an almost classical faith development trajectory, we see an adolescent involved in structural transformation and deconversion and immersing into the world of individuative and critical reflection. We may understand Mehmet as having taken a secular exit; but he did not abandon concern with religion altogether and he is, as he notes, open also to the possibility of returning to Islam and becoming again a faithful Moslem – not in the traditional way, however, but, as we hear him saying, in his own construction, his own synthesis.[47]

6.6   Conclusion

The cases presented above used to profile the type of deconvert which we label "pursuit of autonomy" are unique individuals, yet they display commonalities: Deconversion for them is the search for individuation and critical development of new perspectives in a long-term gradual process of stepping out and distancing from the taken-for-granted religious environment into which they have been born or brought by the parents as a child. It comes as no surprise that many deconverts of this type take a deconversion trajectory of a secular exit – even though the heretical exit (Samantha) or the integrating exit (Christoph) are options.

A consistent feature of this type of deconversion are higher scores in faith development – which, from the summary statistics, appear as core characteristics of deconversionin the first place, as we have seen in Chapter 5. Deconversion here may be associated with a move from synthetic-conventional toward individuative-reflective faith – which we see most clearly in Mehmet and Samantha, who definitely in terms of the faith development model have arrived at Stage Four; and we may include also Timothy, since his faith development profile suggests that he uses critical reflection while striving towards liberation from the dogma he grew up with.

In four of five of our cases we hence see a movement of structural deconversion toward the individuative-reflective style. For young adults this may be a "natural accompaniment of leaving home and of the construction of a first, provisional adult life structure" (Fowler: 1981, 182). It may,

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[47] Unfortunately, Mehmet did not complete our questionnaire, which means that we cannot draw on these data for further comparison and discussion.

however, be also associated with, or precipitated by, critical life events challenging identity as well as intimacy in Eriksonian terms (cf. Fowler: 1981, 181) – most critically for Gina, when her future husband leaves the church, and for Christoph, who had been outed as gay by his girlfriend, triggering and reinforcing his conflict with sexual identity issues.

A cultural difference emerges for those who deconvert for their pursuit of autonomy. For the American respondents, for whom religion is more part of their daily family life, we see a spectrum which includes deconversion and transformation as a "natural accompaniment" of leaving home and growing up (Samantha), but also a "precipitating crisis" (Gina). This is different in Germany where being a member of a church does not necessarily imply participation in church activities and where family life is much less tied to church activities. Therefore, German adolescents and young adults may emphasize, in their deconversion story, that they grew up in a demanding religious environment as seen in Christoph's case, or that religion was tied to issues of culture and identity, as in Mehmet's case. Above and beyond that, deconversion seems to have involved more of a crisis for German deconverts – which is clearly visible in Christoph's scores on some subscales of the *Big* Five and the *Well-Being Scale* which are even below the average for German deconverts. Thus, the narratives convey different experiences made in different religious fields – perhaps they also reflect different cultural concepts of biographies (Habermas: 2006).

In sum, the narratives of all of the respondents of this type of deconversion show features of "coming-of age-stories:" The young people report how they found their ways from innocence and ignorance to experience and knowledge (Jeffers: 2005).

7   Debarred from Paradise

7.1   Love and Hate for the Guru – and a Recovery: Pia

Pia is a 44-year-old German woman who, at the age of 41, deconverted from a new religious Hindu guru group she had been affiliated with for twenty years. Her deconversion involved emotional suffering and moral criticism.

Pia reports that, as an adolescent, she reacted with depression to her difficult family situation as an adolescent. Her mother had developed a psychosis when Pia was two or three years old; her mother was several times hospitalized in psychiatric care, and finally committed suicide, when Pia was thirteen years old. Pia refers to her own depression in a rationalizing way, leaving out these dramatic circumstances when she, just at the beginning of the interview, explains how all of this came about:

"[I: Yes, how did all this happen?] How it all started? [I: Yes.] Well, I became part of this group like when I was 20. [I: Mh.] And back then, really beginning when I was 16, 17 or 18 or so, I had this severe, well severe or medium severe depression. Well, you know the usual kind of crisis about the meaning of being and all that teenagers have, I think ..." (Narrative interview with Pia, Interacts 5–10)

The Guru and the group provided, at least in part and for some time, what she had missed in her traumatized childhood and adolescence: a reliable and caring social environment and an answer to all of her quests:

"And then, I still remember that, the first time I had this feeling, wow this is it. He knows, he knows what it is. He knows what I'm looking for, uh, he's doing ... what I want to do [...]."(Narrative Interview with Pia, Interact 88)

Pia spent a considerable part of her adult life in the group gaining access to the inner circles. That sexuality was banned was, in the beginning, a relief to her and had a protective function. This changed, however, as Pia gained more stability. Then, the repression of sexuality and intimate relationships, the hidden relationships Pia had as well as the indiscretion about them fuelled Pia's conflict with the guru. First, she was removed from the inner circles of the guru group and finally she was excluded. On the peak of the conflict, Pia reacted heavily with depression, alcohol abuse, suicidal tendencies, and somatic symptoms. As a result she had to be hospitalized and

receive professional therapeutic support. Also, the support of other ex-members helped her to rely on her own critical reflection, to overcome her ambivalent attraction to the guru, and to finally disaffiliate from the group.

For a while, she then agitated against the guru and the group on the Internet. She now recounts her temporary role of a 'troublemaker' for her former affiliation in an amused, self-ironic tone. She describes the abandonment of her idealizations and high expectations as the turning point, taking the perspective of an "omniscient" narrator:

"And uhm, and then it was over. [...] And that was like a really important point, that was like the most important thing of all, uhm, what uh, what made it possible for me to use my brain again. That I like noticed that none of what he had promised ... or everything that I had been looking for, unconditional love, this sympathy, this all encompassing love or whatever, there was nothing there." (Narrative Interview with Pia, Interacts 803; 805)

In Pia's narrative we see the severe disappointment, anger, and hatred at the time of deconversion but, however, told from a mature perspective (Habermas: 2006, 115). She shows an integrated use of different ways of relating to herself and others, then as well as now (see Keller: 2008), when she looks back and reflects on her feelings:

"... and this anger and the hatred toward this guru [laughing]. Well, when, I could've killed him like that, yeah and all the people with him [laughing], uh, that is like a really typical kind of development that suddenly when you see what has happened or what you've like done, you get like so mad at yourself and of course at the guru. Like we're like gonna kill him now." (Narrative Interview with Pia, Interact 925)

Pia's story is one of lost years in a group which she is relieved to have left. But her story could also be understood as a quest narrative (Frank: 1995, 115ff.), telling that something is to be gained – even from adverse experiences. In this respect, it is a hero's story. In terms of McAdams' (McAdams et al.: 2001) typological framework of redemption vs. contamination plots, Pia's story leads to redemption.

Pia's deconversion is a secularizing exit as she did not affiliate with any other religious group or network and explicitly states that she does not "believe" anymore. At the same time, however, Pia presents herself as a spiritual seeker. In her questionnaire she self-identifies as being "more spiritual than religious".

In Pia's faith development interview, which has been assigned an average score of 4.3, we see traits of an individuative-reflective and a conjunctive orientation (4.0 for *form of moral judgment*; 4.6 for *locus of authority*). In terms of religious styles, it can be understood as the simultaneous presence of characteristics of the individuative-systemic and the dialogical style. While Pia is critical of specific prescribed God representations, she is

interested in "spiritual" experience, trusting that there is something divine which is perhaps not completely accessible to human understanding.

The faith development interview with Pia yields some deeper insight in her self-understanding in terms of spirituality and religion when we look closer at its content. Pia considers herself being more 'something of a spiritual person'. She is not concerned with definitions and system boundaries, but displays an openness to mystery and the uncanny (Fowler et al.: 2004, 54). Questioned whether she considers herself a religious person, believing or spiritual, Pia answers:

"... [laughing] Yeah, maybe like spiritually or so. [laughing] [I: And uh, what does that mean to you?] Uh, I don't know [laughing]. Well, okay, spiritual in the sense uhm,... that's so hard to answer [laughing] what it [really?] means [...] Uhm [throat clearing], yeah, somehow in combination with belief, believing in, in uh, how can I put this, in, in finer ethereal levels or in uhm, in, in these other kinds of levels of perceptual consciousness and spiritual in this kind of way uhm, that I somehow try to make contact with this ... [I: Mh.] with these levels [within myself?]. But it is, it doesn't play this important role anymore that it like used to [have] in my life." (Faith Development Interview with Pia, Interacts 460–468, rated Stage Five)

Asked what "mature faith" means to her, Pia says:

"... but, but I've never met anyone about whom I could say that this is a mature belief or, no, I couldn't say that. [I: Mh.] On the contrary, what I've rather seen that the more people believe, the nuttier they get. Somehow the more they uhm, uhm, yeah, because I, there's always this thing, you know, belief, I don't want to believe anymore, I want to know it. [I: uhm, uhm] Yeah, that's not enough anym-, that's not enough anymore and nor do I believe, no, I don't believe it [laughing] [I: Mh.] Uh ... that a [...] that this is right, I don't think anymore that belief is an answer to that. I don't believe that anymore." (Faith Development Interview with Pia, Interacts 348–354, Form of World Coherence [Aspect F], scored Stage Four)

Taking into account the questionnaire responses presented in Table 24, Pia's quest narrative is reflected in her high scores on *openness to experience* and *extraversion* and her low score on *traditionalism* (due to low *conscientiousness*, while on average on *emotional stability* and *agreeableness*). This underlines that Pia, while she is open and communicative, she can handle rules and regulations generously; and she is, as other deconverts, less inclined to adapt to others. She is less stable than current members of oppositional and accommodating religious groups in Germany. Nevertheless, her total *well-being* scores and her profile on *purpose in life*, *positive relations with others* and *self-acceptance* are not so low as the averages scores for the German deconverts. This is illustrated by the achieved security of her attachments. Her extremely low scores on *religious*

fundamentalism and *right-wing authoritarianism* demonstrate her fierce rejection of authoritarian belief systems.

Table 24. Differences between Pia and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Pia has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Pia	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in Germany	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Emotional Stabil.	**34.00**	42.25	6.77
Extraversion	**42.00**	40.87	5.71
Openness	**48.00**	40.65	6.04
Agreeableness	**45.00**	46.79	4.48
Conscientiousness	**30.00**	45.17	6.15
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Traditionalism	**109.00**	134.21	13.03
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**199.00**	204.99	18.74
Envir. Mastery	**27.00**	33.62	4.66
Positive Relations	**35.00**	35.41	4.04
Purpose in Life	**34.00**	35.34	3.92
Self-Acceptance	**32.00**	34.18	4.48
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**26.00**	68.00	14.67
RWA	**36.00**	84.37	18.76

In Pia's view, adhering to any religion is an obstacle on the road to independence and autonomy of personal development. It might be important to add that, at the time of the interview, Pia's primary concern was her everyday life, her relationship with her husband, and her ongoing process developing a mature life style while avoiding the traps of "dependencies" and "addictions". Thus, the pattern of *debarred from paradise* applies to Pia's deconversion narrative, but, after her secularizing exit, Pia is not so much looking back but forward in order to make her secular everyday life pleasant and meaningful.

7.2   "... suddenly the Frame of Reference is Missing:" Peter

Peter, also from our German sample, is 41 years old at the time of the interview. He grew up in the New Apostolic Church and disaffiliated only a few months before the interview. In his narrative intellectual doubt, moral criticism, loss of religious experience and emotional suffering were identifiable. Peter reports that he felt embedded in his tradition while he enjoyed, at the same time, more liberal ideas and behavior than usually tolerated in the New Apostolic Church in regard to conduct or personal appearance, for example, being allowed to wear his hair long. He managed to avoid direct confrontations and conflicts until he was offered an official position in the church. This official position would have involved his public representation of the church's teachings. But Peter found it increasingly difficult to justify the beliefs and rituals of his church vis-à-vis the younger generation. This in turn led to an internal conflict. After a long time of quarrel with his personal God, including times of depression, he left the church. At the time of the interview Peter has no religious affiliation. He is on a secular path using means like therapy and other 'secular' approaches to find out what he may expect from life and to explore his own potentials.

During adolescence, his personal relationship with a fatherly God had been important and supportive. However, Peter reports that he had been questioning parts of the New Apostolic belief system secretly even during this time, and he explains how he dealt with his growing dissent:

"And, there was something like criticism, and-and big discussions in the New Apostolic Church that couldn't have been there simply from the way the system is there. You think that everything that is done there, is preached there, is God's will. Uh, factually it's like, if you mention this in the first place or make a deal out of it, it's like criticism of God ..., right? But I never bothered too much about that. Maybe I also didn't say certain things at all for starters to avoid conflicts in the first place or I like said I do my own stuff anyways and, uh, this isn't of any interest to me anyways." (Narrative Interview with Peter, from Interact 47)

Peter's deconversion proceeds gradually, starting in his adolescence, increasing during the last five years before the final step of his deconversion. He describes how his bodily sensations and feelings made him realize that he did not feel at home in his church anymore:

"This happened to me two or three times within maybe a period of four to six weeks that I left right before the services started. I had this pressure inside me or felt something, well nothing-nothing [looking for words], uh, well, I thought I have to get out of here. Then I left. And, uh, I came back two or three times and then there was a service and I then thought, then it became like really obvious to me: the topics don't

interest you and don't get you anywhere ..." (Narrative Interview with Peter, Interact 87)

Peter's deconversion process shows all five deconversion characteristics we have defined: to the fore, however, comes 'emotional suffering' explained by Peter himself by the loss of stability and safety once provided by the community in which he was embedded:

"I fought for that, for a, well for a period of, I wouldn't put it that way, three years, that may have started three or even five years back. Like one by one, that I started having quarrels, or that I was getting mad, or-or that I was yelling at God in my prayers. Yup, well that was like a, right? Or that I also cried, or stuff like that, or that I was desperate, because of, uh, well yeah, that you, that suddenly this frame of reference is missing, right? Then something like breaks down, right?" (Narrative Interview with Peter, Interact 121)

Peter reports that, in a later period of his deconversion process, he went through a "deep desperation" due to his conflicts between his strivings toward individuation and his dependency on his faith and his community. Still a member of his church, he developed a "bad conscience," which he characterizes as a logical consequence of his criticisms in a system in which doubts are not allowed. In those times, his quarrel with God has led him to the conviction that his separation from his church would necessarily imply that his soul will get lost. Peter finally felt so weak that he had to see a physician who recommended psychotherapy.

Peter overcame his fear that his soul would get lost. He survived, having conquered his fear and setting out on his own journey. At the time of the interview he feels an increasing liberation:

"And my relation to God? Today I, well, I don't pray ... anymore. Uh, I don't miss anything either, I don't have real big tragedies or things like that either, something you may have expected. Like always in this system. That is like a liberation." (Narrative Interview with Peter, Interact 151)

Peter was amazed that he did not feel guilt and emptiness after having left the New Apostolic Church. Peter is currently a seeker – not in spiritual terms, but in terms of searching for self-awareness. He states that he is curious again, but takes care to avoid any kinds of "dependencies."

Peter's stage of faith development reflects his deconversion. His faith development interview total score is 4.1 with higher scores than Stage Four mainly on aspect E, locus of authority. When we compare Peter's faith development interview scores with the modal level of faith development of current members of the New Apostolic Church, which is 3.2, we might assume that his disaffiliation from the New Apostolic tradition has involved a structural deconversion:

Peter's individuative reflection is especially visible in his de-mythologizing interpretation and his interest in individual and autonomous development.

In the faith development interview Peter highlights the importance of "finding oneself" while, at the same time, he is distancing himself from "that fashionable way" of esoteric, egotistic "self-finding-trips." He rather would understand it in the sense of finding out "what is important for myself, what do I actually expect" (Faith development Interview with Peter, Interact 44). The topic of self-actualization and learning self-responsibility appears repeatedly in his faith development interview. This is reflected when he tries to explain the problems he experienced during his affiliation with the New Apostolic tradition:

"Uh, yup, I'd say that I, uh, just concerning myself maybe I was totally controlled from the out-out-outside. Maybe that's what got me there. That I was only, that I never asked what my own will was and what I wanted and what would get me ahead personally, but, uh, only from my point of view a faraway goal, you know, well, unreachable, this means a really graspable goal, eternity and so on. Striving for that, or maybe eventually wanting to fulfill the expectations. But I hadn't been aware of that. But then I like didn't know that the next step would be [knocks on the table in order to emphasize the words] this and this and this is important for you and th-that's where you're headed." (Faith Development Interview with Peter, Interact 42, [Aspect A], scored Stage Four)

In accord with his secularizing exit, Peter says about his current image of God:

"And if, then I'd really, if He exists, see Him as a really, as a very benevolent and very different, uh-uh very tolerant God who maybe in some way steers and leads everything and-and creates but doesn't interfere with the lives of individual people ... Or, punishes them in any kind of way or so. That's something I'd really exclude now." (Faith Development Interview with Peter, Interact 18, Symbolic Function [Aspect G], scored Stage Four)

Peter's image of God becomes more profiled when compared to his former fellows in faith. We may look at a statement about the image of God of a current New Apostolic Church in-tradition member which we consider typical for this religious group. Jörg (41), who has also been raised in the New Apostolic Church, summarizes his image of God which is immune to critical analysis. While marking certain functional qualities of his God image, he emphasizes at the same time its evocative power as directing his every day life:

"Well, I'd never, uh, want to leave Him, you know. He's really important in my life, I honestly have to say. Even if I sometimes sorta think that, well [sighing], why are you running to church again? It's super weather, you could walk through nature with your

family or do sports. But I noticed more and more that it accompanies me throughout my every day life. I mean, I'm better in my job, I mean, I have a better marriage. Because of this power, through God I'm able to say the-more-the whatever." (Faith Development Interview with Jörg, from Interact 49, Symbolic Function (Aspect G), scored Stage Three).

Table 25. Differences between Peter and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Peter has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Peter	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in Germany	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Emotional Stabil.	**34.00**	42.25	6.77
Extraversion	**43.00**	40.87	5.71
Openness	**54.00**	40.65	6.04
Agreeableness	**47.00**	46.79	4.48
Conscientiousness	**37.00**	45.17	6.15
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Traditionalism	**118.00**	133.21	13.03
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**197.00**	204.99	18.74
Envir. Mastery	**34.00**	33.62	4.66
Positive Relations	**26.00**	35.41	4.04
Purpose in Life	**35.00**	35.34	3.92
Self-Acceptance	**30.00**	34.18	4.48
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**27.00**	68.00	14.67
RWA	**50.00**	84.37	18.76

In the questionnaire responses Peter considers himself being "neither religious nor spiritual." That he has left a once protective, and later constricting, environment, is reflected in his questionnaire data (see Table 25).

He has high scores on *openness to experience* and *extraversion*, reflecting his willingness to explore and share new perspectives. His score on *traditionalism* is lower than the mean for in-tradition members – which corresponds to the average German deconvert in this group.

Peter's rather low scores on *positive relations with others* and *self-acceptance* point to his current efforts for self-actualization, for finding out and expressing what he wants from life. Low scores on *religious fundamentalism* and *right wing authoritarianism* illustrate his rejection of any systems claiming authority over people's lives.

7.3 From Feeling Sheltered to Feeling Cheated: Elisabeth

Elisabeth, 41 years old at the time of the interview, had converted to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) in Germany when she was 17 years old. After 25 years she deconverted taking a secularizing exit.

Elisabeth was traumatized as a child; abused by a family member. As an adolescent, she was introduced to the LDS by a schoolmate; she found the atmosphere in the church enchanting and, without telling her parents, joined the LDS and was baptized. She explains what attracted her:

"And then she took me along to a, it's called a family evening, which always takes place on Mondays with the Mormons. [I: Mh.] Normally it's just the family but because she was like a friend of mine, right, uhm, well, the only one who went to a Mormon church. [I: Mh.] [...] Yeah, and it was quite nice, quite nice, the missionaries had also been invited. And uhm, then I asked my question, too. [I: Mh.] They had like these extremely meaningful answers for 'everything.' For me this was awesome and, and super cool, it ruled, well, uhm yeah, well Mormons like play a lot with emotions and you can easily be in an upbeat kind of mood, feel a kind of so-called burning in your heart and so on, and that was like that back then. Yeah, and then I got like more and more interested in that. I was baptized [I: Mh.] that summer against the, the will of my parents." (Narrative Interview with Elisabeth, Interacts 25–35)

Later, Elisabeth met her husband, who showed no intention in sharing her faith. Their children, however, went to church with her. The youngest was still an LDS member at the time of the interview, and her mother's deconversion caused some distress.

Elisabeth had enjoyed the social life she found after her affiliation with the LDS. The Mormons had been to her "like a family." The process of her deconversion began when she started to doubt the supposedly divine inspirations of leaders of her local church. In order to resolve her doubts, Elisa-

beth planned to join the Temple which implicated that she would have to wear the Mormon's Garment, a special underclothing, as an everyday reminder of her commitment. She was challenged by her husband who found this ridiculous, but nevertheless, she started to investigate on her own the Mormon documents that were available to her on the Internet – with the result that she found different versions of the Mormon's myth. She gives a vivid impression of the thoughts crossing her mind when this happened in the following segment, and she started to develop intellectual doubt:

"And uh, at first I didn't want to believe what I was reading. [I. Mh.] And uh, there was among other things uh this most important incident of all for the Mormons, this, the first vision that Joseph Smith, [...] Supposedly [laughing], supposedly uh had had. [I. Mh.] Very many visions were presented there. [I. Mh.] Uh, and I then thought this can't be real. Well, you can't tell this uh really world moving incident, if it was like that, uh, you can't tell it in so many different variants. [I. Mh.] Um, one time he only heard voices, once he had this person appear in front of him, once, well ... [I. Mh.]... in every story it's somewhat different and then in one story it's two and then there also was this version which is the one officially told by the church. [...] [I. Mh.] Um, and in this version God Father and God Son appeared in front of him and uh, and on, on the basis of a question he had which church to join, they told him he shouldn't be part of a church at all. [I. Mh] And this triggered it for me and made me fall into a deep hole, because this first mission was a crucial experience for me. And that this is suddenly being reported in x different versions. Told or written down by Joseph Smith as well. To me that came as a shock. I would say, I've got to know do I see one version, do I see two versions or am I just listening to voices? And also the emotional world, what I experience. If God would appear to me, then I would know all my life how this happened and not, and not tell different stories here and there." (Narrative Interview with Elisabeth, Interacts 183–221)

To her, this has led to a devastating loss of religious experience. All trust in the tradition that had become the most important framework for her identity and her psychic structure in the preceding years, was shaken.

Elisabeth fell into a major depression with suicidal thoughts from which she has recovered with therapeutic support. Thus, Elisabeth's deconversion experience can be characterized by intellectual doubt, loss of religious experience and emotional suffering, leading to the termination of membership. We may assume that, ironically, it is the emotional support that Elisabeth received from the Mormon environment that has helped her to gain the stability to set out on her own and ask critical questions. This stability is then threatened by her discoveries. She reacts with severe depression and needs professional help. Her affiliation with the church which she describes as "covering up" her trauma and related conflicts may have provided a safe environment and a helpful moratorium.

In the midst of all this turmoil, Elisabeth's marriage broke apart. At the time of the interview, she is dividing her time between living with her family and her new partner. She is also engaged in exit counseling. From a clinical perspective, we assume that the crisis was not only precipitated by the conflict around deconversion, but also by vulnerability of her personality structure, probably due to early trauma and probably controlled by the protection she found during her years with the Mormons. Testifying that she came out of trauma and crisis alive, and is finally getting well, Elisabeth's story is a survivor story.

With a total faith development interview score of 3.8, Elisabeth shows an individuative-reflective style (Stage Four) almost across all aspects. In regard to *locus of authority*, Elisabeth stresses certain principles, like the realization of autonomy and self-responsibility, as important and valuable in her life. Elisabeth's internal locus of authority is obvious, when we listen to her answer to the faith development interview question "Do you feel that your life has meaning?":

"Yes, now I do. [laughing]. [I: What what gives your life meaning?] Well, simply the new perspective that I have built for myself. [I: Mh.] Um, at the beginning of my break-up I had a talk with a family therapist who also offered to ... [I. Mh.] to talk ... [I: Mh.] with both of us, with my husband and me. Uh, and he told me, [interviewee's name], no matter what happens, you decide. [I: Mh.] Well, um, he kind of drummed into my head that I have to, uh, get away from decisions that others could possibly make for me, that I myself have to... [I: Mh.] fina- well finally have to learn ... [I: Mh.] make my own decisions and try to realize the goals somehow. [I. Mh.] And, uh, yeah, I have the feeling that was a good tip [laughing]." (Faith Development Interview with Elisabeth, Interacts 333–350, scored Stage Four)

For Elisabeth, we have indications for a structural deconversion, involving a transition from Stage Three of synthetic-conventional faith to Stage Four of individuative-reflective faith. This is supported by a comparison of faith development interview scores with current German LDS members, showing a mean score of 2.9. We can contrast specifically the *locus of authority* (Aspect E), as we see it in Elisabeth's faith development interview with quote from a Mormon in-tradition member's faith development interview. Rita (38 years old, married, one child) was born into the Protestant church and converted to the Mormon faith in her early twenties. With an average FDI score of 2.7, we can take her as an example of the faith structure of her religious tradition, where FDI scores vary between 2.3 and 3.4. In Rita's response on whether her life had meaning, a legalistic argumentation and literal understanding come to expression:

"In any case. Well, I know where I'm coming from, I know why I'm here, I know where I'm going. And I think that's a lot already. [laughing] [I: Yes. What gives your life meaning? That are these] Yes, simply my faith. There are answers which we, which we get from our Lord. He tells us why we are here on earth." (Faith Development Interview with Rita, Interact 94–96, Locus of Authority (Aspect E) scored Stage Two).

Table 26. Differences between Elisabeth and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Elisabeth has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Elisabeth	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in Germany	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Emotional Stabil.	**36.00**	42.25	6.77
Extraversion	**40.00**	40.87	5.71
Openness	**50.00**	40.65	6.04
Agreeableness	**49.00**	46.79	4.48
Conscientiousness	**52.00**	45.17	6.15
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Traditionalism	**137.00**	134.21	13.03
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**211.00**	204.99	18.74
Envir. Mastery	**34.00**	33.62	4.66
Positive Relations	**35.00**	35.41	4.04
Purpose in Life	**35.00**	35.34	3.92
Self-Acceptance	**36.00**	34.18	4.48
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**31.00**	68.00	14.67
RWA	**51.00**	84.37	18.76

When we take into account the individual questionnaire responses presented in Table 26, we see that Elisabeth's score on *traditionalism* is even higher than the means for members of oppositional and accommodating religious groups in Germany. This is caused by her high scores on *agreeableness* and especially on *conscientiousness* – which portray Elisabeth as a reliable and trustworthy person who takes care to be getting along well with others. On *openness to experience*, Elisabeth is also above the respective in-tradition

mean, reflecting her willingness to explore new ideas and possibilities. With a *well-being* total score above the means for German in-tradition members (and much higher than the means for deconverts), she seems to have gained rather than lost in terms of personal development during her deconversion process. The low scores on *religious fundamentalism* and *right-wing authoritarianism* demonstrate her distrust toward authoritative doctrine. In sum, from the quationnaire data, we derive an overall reflection and confirmation of our narrative and faith development evaluation. It comes therefore with no surpirise that Elisabeth considers herself "more spiritual than religious".

7.4   "... It's like Watching when Your Relatives Die:" Adam

Adam is a 41-year-old Caucasian American male from the South West of the United States, who has deconverted from the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) at the age of 38 with a secularizing exit. The criteria describing his deconversion are intellectual doubt, emotional suffering, and loss of religious experience. He had been born into his tradition, and both of his parents were very active in the faith. In fact, he had attended only Adventist schools until sometime in high school. Adam was recruited through a posting on a website for ex-fundamentalists and volunteered to drive a couple of hours to participate in the interview, willing to share his story. In the beginning sequence Adam is responding to a direct question about the time frame of his deconversion.

["You said that you left Seventh Day Adventists how many years ago?"] "In 2000." [I:"Oh, in 2000. So it has been fairly-"] "It was.. the thing is my, my, its actually- I can't remember the exact day ... when I decided to chuck it all but it was mid February sometime. And uhm, you know ... where over a decade, you know, my faith had been just kind of ... just kind of floatin' away from me and in spite of all my efforts trying to keep it in the box." (Narrative Interview with Adam, Interacts 1–4).

Thus, summarizing his deconversion story, he is able to name almost an exact date before he briefly outlines what appears to be a gradual process of doubt and dissatisfaction. However, it is such a salient feature of his life that he has chosen a date so that he could commemorate that occurrence. He makes no references to the group as bad, but rather seems to mourn the loss of this belief set and comments about the loss of those beliefs despite his efforts to maintain them. That he responds to the question asking for the date of his deconversion by giving a summary of his experience and an overview of the narrative to unfold, suggests that he might be a natural

story-teller who has told this story in the past. He goes on to elaborate what made him turn away from his faith:

"I just had this growing realization that everything that I had taught and everything that I believed was simply you know, there wasn't any real substance to it. It was- it just seemed- and, and I had the inkling for years and been pushing it down ... And, and I just finally decided I was going to ... that uhm, you know, everybody's going around ... It seemed like it was all talk. It, it's like it never touched the pavement you know. It's kind of like a car that's jacked up on the ... back side and the wheels are spinning around and you know, every thing there to give you the indication if you're inside the car that you're going 100 miles per hour ... But you get out and look and you say 'oh, the wheels were just spinning around' you know. And it was like ... you could sit there and you could stack up one claim after another and...you know, where's the beef? ... And uhm, you know, when I finally decided that I had enough of it was ... I can still remember what I was doing. I was sitting there in front of my computer reading some article ... on the Internet web site about credibility of the Bible. I realized that ... you know, the, the historians, the archeologists, and the people that study in the language of the Bible, you know, the scholars for over a century they've been slowly chipping away at the credibility of the Bible and I just kind of viewed it kind of like a, a graph, you know, it, it ... with timing going out on a horizontal dimension and Bible credibility in this way and I just visualized it as a line that was going like this and I realized that ... well you know, there may be some stuff, substance to it there, eventually its going to hit zero in the future." (Narrative Interview with Adam, Interact 10-66)

Adam's narrative suggests a gradual disillusionment with the claims of the SDA. The analogy he employs is one of benign deception characterized by the appearance of progress and coherence while on the inside, but obvious meaninglessness when viewed from an objective distance. The picture thus compares two perspectives: The narrow view of the insider is put against the objective and encompassing view of the outside observer. He reiterates the tension of a growing realization that things are not true, and the desire to contain those doubts for the sake of holding onto the belief system. Thus, his intellectual doubts lead to his gradual loss of religious experience: In the next paragraphs, we find Adam continuing to apply his analytical mind to the task of weighing the costs and benefits of belonging to SDA. Despite his starting point of intellectualism, he asks the more existential question of "does anything real ever happen?" (Interact 18), displaying besides his concrete, analytical reasoning concern for the more ethereal aspects of faith and religious beliefs. As Adam's narrative continues, his story of frustration with the perceived meaninglessness of his former religious beliefs is revealed as constantly intertwined with family tension:

"You know, but uhm, as far as the way it all started out, you know, I was born as a Seventh Day Adventist. You know, my whole immediate family was Adventist as

well as all my relatives and my grandparents. I was, I was completely surrounded by the whole environment." (Narrative Interview with Adam, Interact 24)

Adam was brought up in an exclusively SDA environment from schools to friends and family friends. As a result, growing up he never thought of questioning the requirements of SDA. Sadness and grief emerge from his nostalgic description of his childhood world:

"... you had these little school rooms scattered every three of four miles all around the country side..at least in that part of the country. And they had essentially abandoned all of these little schools, and concentrated all students in the, in the town, in the bigger towns. And they just had everybody bussed in. See, you know, you remember back in the olden days, when kids used to walk to school across the fields, well they went to all these little school rooms ... And the Adventists actually bought up a bunch of those and ran some of those for their, their grade schools and stuff. And uhm, you know ... uhm ... some of this is kind of hard for me because it's, you know, it's my only childhood and it's still a little bit painful for me ... You know, I ... it's weird because I didn't want this forced on me. It was the last thing I wanted was for my faith to just kind of, you know, blast into nothing." (Narrative Interview with Adam, Interact 30–34)

Difficulty increases for him during adolescence, and finally his parents' divorce disrupts family life:

"And it was a bitter, nasty divorce. I can remember them screaming ... You know, Christian home, good Christian Seventh Day Adventist home. I learned to cuss from their arguments, ok?" (Narrative Interview with Adam, Interact 74)

His narrative suggests a connection of turning away from faith with intellectual development and education, coinciding, however, with the constant discord he experienced then in his family:

"But uhm, about a year or two before I started graduating, I just ... it was like I could not interest myself in even going to church. And it got to the point where I uhm, didn't attend church at all. I probably kept feeling like I otta do it, but to just think about doing it was like 'Ah ...I'd rather watch the grass grow!' And uhm, I think largely, as a reaction to the terrible divorce my dad went through, and of course my dad moved away and he was living in the [large Midwestern city] area and he met this other gal that he liked ..., he got married to her and I was sitting on the front row of their wedding and actually broke down and cried right there in the middle of the wedding. Cause it was so hard on me." (Narrative Interview with Adam, Interact 100–102).

It is likely that his perception of the contrast between his family's devotion to SDA and the separation of his parents was the impetus of his growing dissent. Family and religion were intertwined; in addition, his parents' divorce introduced two conflicting religious authorities: His father became involved with a much more conservative and radically fundamentalist line

of SDA, while his mother maintained her position in the church. Retrospectively, this twofold conflict seems to have led to his first step in the deconversion process. He starts to study books criticizing spiritualism and cults, describes this as "difficult" because his belief was challenged, in spite of what he did to hold on to it:

"And that's really where, like I said, it seemed like my faith in spite of every effort of my own, despite all my prayers and pleas, that's where it really started to dry up and blow away. It was like I was sitting there watching this process. I don't know, it's like watching when your relatives die or something like that." (Narrative Interview with Adam, Interact 176)

He gives vivid descriptions of his efforts to preserve his faith, which sadly failed:

"And I'd take my bible up there and I would ... I'd try to pray and I'd try to open up the bible and make it mean something like I had six or seven years before. And it just literally had no effect on me. It was like reading ... [sighs] I don't know. What do you think of something that's boring, you know? An ingredient list on the side of a cereal box or something." (Narrative Interview with Adam, Interact 190)

He reports the steps of his disaffiliation, leading to his search for more reliable knowledge:

"And that I was essentially no longer an Adventist. I wasn't going to church. I wasn't paying any tithe or offering. I now I had bowed out of the men's chorus. And so I had just kind of drifted along for the next couple of months and ... and then that's when I started reading all this stuff about, you know, I just decided that I was going to church at all because it wasn't working for me. And of course, that ... as soon as I decided to chuck it all, it ... there was just his huge hunger that erupted within me. For the next two months, I just read and read and read." (Narrative Interview with Adam, Interact 196–198)

During the process of deconversion he develops symptoms severe enough to make him seek medical treatment. He recovers with the support of other deconverts:

"It was just about, just after I went into the emergency room thinking I had a heart attack that I joined the Internet support site. I just started pouring out my anguish, my pain, my frustration, in my post on, on the website. And you know, it was just a bunch of fantastic people. We would swap stories and talk about it and that's when I realized, it's not just me. I'm not the only one. I'm not all alone in this. I'm not the only person who has difficulty in believing all this stuff. There's a lot of other people out there that have the same problems." (Narrative Interview with Adam, Interact 206)

He even dares to challenge God and Satan, thus "testing" their power and discovers that nothing bad happens, thus proving that his doubts were valid

and his religion is not. To draw on his own imagery, he is looking for truth based on the rigors of science and proof, for an objective perspective from above, not from within.

This is underlined by the evaluation of his faith development interview which is individuative-reflective across all aspects – and suggests a transformation. When, for example, asked about when or where he really felt in harmony with the universe, or if this even was a concept still relevant for him, Adam responds that it helped him to remember his former self-identification as a 'nature lover:'

"You know, you can enjoy the mocking bird out there singing, still fun to watch and listen to no matter whether you're an Atheist or a Creationist. So yeah, uhm... it's just when I'm out and alone. And also sometime, I don't know if feel one with the universe but, but I think it's neat when I you know, understand something, the "ah-ha" of understanding." (Faith Development Interview with Adam, Interact 149, Symbolic Function [Aspect G], Scored Stage Four)

The individuative part, however, may deserve a second look: At the time of the interview Adam no longer participates in any religious activities. While his focus is on seeking answers, he rarely develops answers or ideas of his own. Most of his concerns and doubts seem to be "discovered" in books and conversations he has with others. Therefore the separation from SDA was not really final, until he had a strong foothold in a new community that could guide his thinking – in this case, it is the Internet-community of ex-fundamentalists –, but one that provides that guidance in a slightly looser fashion. His overall story seems to be one of contamination until his deconversion brings about a change. Adam has a fairly low opinion of his former affiliation, which is, in his current perspective, responsible for the narrow and false views he had to work so hard to overcome. Adam portrays himself as someone, who, confronted with truths he had not sought or wished for, finally collects his courage, faces the facts – and survives.

Adam identifies as "neither spiritual nor religious" on the questionnaire. His explorative and questioning attitude is reflected (see Table 27) in his high *openness to experience* score. That his deconversion involved a loss is indicated by the low scores on the scales *autonomy* and *personal growth* as well as on the low total *well-being* score. Low scores on *religious fundamentalism* and *right-wing authoritarianism* show his rejection of what he has found out to be without convincing foundation.

Table 27. Differences between Adam and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Adam has Deconverted

	Single Case Question-naire Data of Adam	In-Tradition Members in Oppo-sitional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in United States	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Openness	**54.00**	39.22	6.21
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Transformation	**89.00**	81.84	9.33
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**155.00**	200.45	24.58
Autonomy	**32.00**	32.28	4.86
Personal Growth	**33.00**	34.36	4.61
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**26.00**	59.73	15.85
RWA	**40.00**	87.29	18.96

7.5   Regretting Lost Years: Franz

Franz, a 58-year-old German, deconverted from the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW). Franz left after 30 years of membership and after having achieved the status of someone whom the JW authorities entrusted with pastoral care. Leaving Jehovah's Witnesses was precipitated by a conflict with an elder who visited for an inspection of the parish's activities and criticized him, Franz. Franz' efforts in turn to clarify his position and to defend himself culminated in his (and also his wife's) exit.

As reason for joining the Jehovah's Witnesses, Franz explains that he was in search for reliable answers and predictable authorities. Born in 1944 by a mother who had lost her other children and whose husband did not return from Second Word War, he grew up in post-war West Germany.

A recurrent theme in his narrative is that he did not receive satisfying answers to his questions about the war and his father's involvement and about other moral and religious issues. He joined Jehovah's Witnesses because there he found answers which were trustworthy to him and served as moral guidelines. He left when he found out that, again, his questions were not permitted and authorities did not live up to moral expectations. At the time of the interview, Franz is very disappointed about the adamant behavior of the elders, but also about the failure of the JW hierarchy to respond to his requests for resolving the conflict. He somehow feels cheated by Jehovah's Witnesses and is disappointed when he recalls his efforts:

"This was my aim, to help people. To solve problems, to take the path in accordance with God." (Narrative Interview with Franz, Interact 36).

After leaving Jehovah's Witnesses, Franz continues, now on his own, to take the guidelines for a Christian life literally from the Bible, and he is suspicious whether the community he has left truly teaches what the Bible says. Franz' rigorous opposition against any discussion about or change of the Bible's commandments reflects a mythic-literal religious style. With reference to Hood et al (2005), this can be interpreted as fundamentalist in the sense of an intra-textual understanding of a sacred text.

This is confirmed by a closer inspection of the faith development interview with Franz. We assigned a faith development interview total score of 2.4 – which means a prevalence of the mythic-literal style. But scores differ across aspects and vary from 2.0 on *moral judgment* (Aspect C) to 2.9 on *locus of authority* (Aspect E).

Franz' deconversion appears to be associated with the rejection of specific prescriptions and their interpretation by the church authorities, rather than with the application of a new structure of reasoning. Franz states in his faith development interview that for making important decisions he primarily relies on the commandments of the Bible and only secondarily asks whether the decision is reasonable and feasible:

"Uh, well, I'll think about this. A ... firstly, well, in accordance with, uh ... the Biblical commands or principles, not commands, we don't have those anymore, okay with the Biblical principles, uh, then reason, this decision, is it reasonable, is it advisable to do something like that. This is the way I would. And then the do-ability of it." (Faith Development Interview with Franz, Interact 103, Form of Logic [Aspect A] scored Stage 2).

Asked how evil comes into the world, Franz suggests that we would be in paradise if everybody lived according to the divine rules:

"And I tell myself if-if all the-the principles that God gave us, exactly as consequently, were done by everybody then we'd be in paradise." (Faith Development Interview with Franz, from Interact 182, Form of Moral Judgment [Aspect C], scored Stage 2)

Asked how religious conflicts might be resolved, Franz refers to the unambiguousness of the God's word and states:

"Well, now I can't say that I, I, uh, read this text in the Bible, uh but in fourteen-hundred so and so pope whatshisname said something about this and then a Roman author once, they are all simply commentators, that's not the-the main principle that is here in the Bible. And then people have to uh do only what is said in the Bible." (Faith Development Interview with Franz, from Interact 184, scored Stage 2).

In sum, Franz' disaffiliation from Jehovah's Witnesses does not show any signs of transformation in terms of faith development. Comparing Franz' average faith development score (2.4) with the JW in-tradition members (mean score 3.0, spanning from 2.1 to 3.7), we see him at the lower end of the spectrum. This suggests that Franz' deconversion was a *lateral* deconversion.

Considering the questionnaire responses (see Table 28), Franz' scores on the B*ig Five* show him as an emotionally unstable person, rather introverted, but as agreeable and conscientious as the average German deconvert from an oppositional or accommodating religious organization. These scores result in low scores on *traditionalism*. His score on *openness to experience* corresponds to that of members of an oppositional religious group in Germany.

This may reflect the fact that deconversion was not his deliberate decision and not associated with the spirit of adventure and exploration. For Franz, deconversion results in losses rather than in gains; this is highlighted by his scores on the *well-being* scales, which are all low, even for a German deconvert. In contrast, his scores on the *religious fundamentalism* scale are lower than the mean for in-tradition members, but higher when compared to others deconverts; and his scores on *right-wing authoritarianism* are even higher than for current in-tradition members when referring to his desperation for a reliable authority to guide his life. Franz surprisingly self-identifies as "more spiritual than religious" in the questionnaire – which perhaps indicates his rejection of being "religious" in the Jevoah's Witness style and his specific understanding of "being spiritual" as living a life according to the Biblical priciples.

Table 28. Differences between Franz and the In-Tradition Members of the
Type of Religious Organization from which Franz has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Franz	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in Germany	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Emotional Stabil.	**23.00**	42.25	6.77
Extraversion	**25.00**	40.87	5.71
Openness	**40.00**	40.65	6.04
Agreeableness	**44.00**	46.79	4.48
Conscientiousness	**42.00**	45.17	6.15
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Traditionalism	**109.00**	134.21	13.03
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**137.00**	204.99	18.74
Envir. Mastery	**22.00**	33.62	4.66
Positive Relations	**22.00**	35.41	4.04
Purpose in Life	**21.00**	35.34	3.92
Self-Acceptance	**16.00**	34.18	4.48
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**53.00**	68.00	14.67
RWA	**95.00**	84.37	18.76

7.6   "Scientology is Very Godless ...:" Fiona

Fiona is a 56-year-old woman in the United States who left Scientology three years before the interview. Fiona had been a member for over 30 years, finally in a central position of the organization. She converted to Scientology in her early twenties and was both a member and a leader of several sub-chapters. She was very cautious about the interview and remained skeptical about the interviewer's connection with Scientology. Fiona tells a gradual deconversion story.

Fiona begins her narrative portraying her life as an upper-middle class suburban girl living in the Midwest of the United States. However, her early

experiences with religion are described as marred by the 'ineffectiveness' of prayer:

"So I ... every day, I would walk around the block and pray to what I thought was God, and I would just keep walking until I felt like God got it. What I wanted, and I wanted a horse right? And, and so then, I would come down to my, I'd come home to my yard which was like a big-big yard and it wasn't in the front area and I felt okay well maybe I ... side yard. And I went the side yard, there was no horse, okay so and that the right side of the back yard cause it was like a two lot case I was living, I was in there then I ... the left side, then grapping a guard and then up at the basketball, you know it was like nowhere, and I was like what is the problem and it ended up actually being the first huge upset I had in my life. I was like probably, maybe, ten at the time, you know, eight or ten, but that was, it was really my first, big upset with God, it was like uhm, something's really wrong here." (Narrative Interview with Fiona, Interact 4–12)

According to her report, she experienced a sexual assault in early adolescence ("that molestation thing") which she could not reconcile with the pictures and values promoted by her church. When the family moved, the loss of friends lead to further destabilization, finally bringing about a downward slide into drug and alcohol abuse and irresponsible sexual practices:

"And I was thirteen, and I just had this molestation thing, and now we're up with all these rich snotty kids who were just horrible, you know I got a better car than you do, andragragrag, and, I just turned into an absolutely, I remember walking into a church there in [Suburb B] and they had all these, women, their pictures on the walls or maybe they were stained glassed windows but there were, women, up in clouds, playing harps and I mean I never forget it, I mean I felt I hate women anywhere, the idea of spending an eternity with a bunch of women playing harps was just a nightmare to me, I mean, it, it was just so boring, and I felt most of my friends are gonna go to hell anyway, so party on ... that was like all my moral courses went down the toilet, it's all-everything my parents had taught me, everything just [makes a hissing noise], that was it, and one [clicks her fingers] just a thought like that ... But it was really the molestation, the move, and then walking into that church and then that was it and then I started sneaking out, drinking, stealing, and just turning into the-the disaster daughter, of the universe, you know, from like the greatest kid to just, an absolute maniac, and I was that, until I got in Scientology." (Narrative Interview with Fiona, Interact 24–30)

She later contracted hepatitis, presumably from drug use, and was admitted to the hospital for treatment. In addition, she was also diagnosed with an illness requiring lifelong control by medication. She reports that it was the extreme caring and personal attention given by the recruiters for Scientology that really drew her into the group "'cause they just hit me on the right time saying the right thing" (Narrative Interview with Fiona, Interact 174).

She later worked in several of the more prestigious offices and was given large responsibilities.

There were two factors that seem most influential in her final decision to leave after 30 years of membership: the issue of medication and free speech. Scientology was unable to give her clear instruction about whether or not it was acceptable for her to take her medication. Hubbard had said that it was fine for her to use that medication, but when he died the group reversed that decision. This lack of agreement was unsettling for her. The second issue, the one of free speech, happened through the Internet newsgroups. She witnessed first hand Scientology's efforts to coerce free speech and silence the critics. When she befriended someone from outside who was a gentle critic of the group, she was unable to defend the actions of Scientology – which consequently was the beginning of the deconversion process.

Fiona's story sounds chaotic when she starts to give a report on her disaffiliation, using present tense and direct speech, drawing the listener/reader into her turmoil:

"So ... now I get off in [City A] ... hours later ... and I'm thinking okay you gotta trade change plans okay so I get off ... there comes my husband ... [interviewee name] what are you thinking of? I'm like, 'What are you doing here? How do you know I'm in the airport? ...' He said, 'Honey, we really need to go on a vacation, we gonna go on ...vacation.' Well, Scientology does a thing if somebody goes what they called Type Three which is well they they think you flipped out. They lock you in a room, that's what happened to [name blocked]. They locked her in a room and they won't talk to you. And I've always told my husband and everywhere ... around me if you ever did that to me I will go insane and I probably be dead 'cause I, I, I would not make it ... I mean it's a really horrible thing I think , they think it's ... and they've their own reasons for wi... they think it's okay. But to me it's not, and so he's saying we... gonna go on a vacation with ..." (Narrative Interview with Fiona, Interact 1138ff).

Fiona seems to be struggling to make sense of her experience, to turn a "chaos narrative" (Frank: 1995, 95ff.) into a testimony. Perhaps her childhood traumata shaped the early trajectory of her narrative. Much of what came after that can be understood as coping strategies. Her long term relationship with this group might well be the answer to her earliest question, the one she asked as a young girl who failed to have her prayer for a horse answered. She felt that "something is really wrong here" and her experiences of abuse and distant relationships may have lead her to feel that she, in essence, was "wrong." Therefore, when Scientology's worldview stated that she was the problem and that they were willing to fix her, it fit her most early experiences and opinions of herself.

Fiona indicated a total involvement story. Her overall story seems to be one of contamination. While she was never really happy within the group, it did provide hope for improvement. Conditions got worse for her, until she finally left in a rather dramatic way. Even so, this is a gradual deconversion story. Fiona seemed to adopt a victim's outlook through much of the story. There was a particular time when she described her experiences as being "spiritually raped." Fiona has an almost entirely negative view of her former affiliation. However, at the time of the interview she does still respect L. Ron Hubbard and sees the modern leadership as suspicious. Thus, she can save something good from a long period of her life.

Fiona's faith development ratings vary between Stage Three for *locus of authority* and *symbolic function* (Aspects E and G) and 3.8 for *moral* judgment and *form of world coherence* (Aspects C and F) resulting in a mean score of 3.4, suggesting a mixture of synthetic-conventional and individuative-reflective styles. Fiona's *locus of authority* does not appear to be internal. It appears to be based upon a desire to please significant others, thus, is basically interpersonal-oriented. Her faith development scores are within the range of those of the two members of the Church of Scientology in our sample. Even though this is not a large sample to make a strong argument, nevertheless it may support the impression from Fiona's faith development interview that her deconversion is not associated with significant transformation.

The questionnaire responses (see Table 29) appear to reconfirm this interpretation: While Fiona's *openness to experience* is rather close to the mean for in-tradition members in an oppositional or accommodating group in the United States, her score on *transformation* is higher – but only because her score on *extraversion* is high (51.00). A similar picture emerges on the *well-being* scales: relatively high total *well-being* score may suggests some developmental gain upon deconversion and this corresponds to a rather high sense of *personal growth* and relatively high sense of *positive relations with others* (40.00), this, however, must be noted in the context of a very low score on *autonomy*.

We conclude from this that, as we see from the faith development scores, Fiona's deconversion is not so much associated with internal processes of change and transformation. Her deconversion is not associated with openness or autonomy. Her disaffiliation is caused by a double shock from outside: the disillusion when she detected the repression of freedom of speech and opinion, and the conflict with authorities about the medication question. Her rather low scores on *religious fundamentalism* and *right-wing authoritarianism* may reflect just this: her dissatisfaction and rejection of the authoritarian system she has experienced.

Table 29. Differences between Fiona and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Fiona has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Fiona	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in United States	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Openness	**41.00**	39.22	6.21
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Transformation	**92.00**	81.84	9.33
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**214.00**	200.45	24.58
Autonomy	**31.00**	32.28	4.86
Personal Growth	**40.00**	34.36	4.61
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**30.00**	59.73	15.85
RWA	**60.00**	87.29	18.96

Thus, as a way of dealing with this, Fiona feels committed to give testimony and warn the young generation, as she says in the following quote from the faith development interview – which is rather remarkable also, because here we hear a deconvert from Scientology talk about "God's calling" and blaming her former "church" for being atheistic:

"Well, I have a you know belief that people should be educated about this cult that I have a lot of information about so, and I have kind of a commitment to help people I mostly don't want kids in my age that I got into like nineteen or twenty, and I got out thirty years later that's a long time. That's a lot of my life. But I ... do something else: I don't regret it 'cause I don't believe in regret I think it's a really negative thing and ... I did have some good times there. I did ... I mean uhm for the first twenty years it was probably, really good I mean not all good but it was a lot of ... but uhm ... but I, I just think if people don't have to get into real-real really good things so I'm kind of committed to let people know ... you know this is what it is. You can read their side you can read our side, but make sure to read both sides before you go you know give... your life away. So ... and I think God wants me to do that too, I really feel like I, I do 'cause it's, it's very God like what I'm doing compare it to Scientology which is very godless, there's no God." (Faith Development Interview with Fiona, Interact 661–675)

7.7   "I ... Noticed a Lot of ... Double Standard Moral and a Lot of Dishonesty:" Celia

Celia, a 31-year-old German, has deconverted from a "free" or non-denominational (non-state) evangelical church to which her parents had converted and in which she was raised. Her deconversion is characterized by emotional suffering and moral criticism, which lead to disaffiliation. She tells about the serious conflicts which lead to her deconversion:

"Uh, I then like uh ... you know, then during puberty, later ... yeah, when I was a teenager I tried to distance myself. I couldn't do ... it. I moved back and forth ... uh, between belief and disbelief. And I had serious doubts that I pushed away for a long time. Uh, somehow the tensions, uh, in the family and in the congregation became really unbearable. And I ... noticed a lot of ... uh, double standard moral and a lot of dishonesty. Uh, insofar, that parents and congregation didn't like realize the principles of faith in everyday life, uh, that I then ... at the age of nineteen years was able to distance myself and simply didn't go there anymore. My distancing meant that I like quietly moved away from the congregation." (Narrative Interview with Celia, Interact 38).

In a detached way she talks about her childhood which was structured by her participation in the church's children's program. She stresses that she was taken there by her parents. She presents herself as a child growing up in a milieu in which being a member of the family implied being a member of the non-denominational evangelical church. This included regularly attending Sunday school and efforts to convert class mates in school. These efforts were rejected by the other children and made her an outsider. Her parents denied Celia's participation in activities like school carnival – which further separated Celia from the other children. Holidays were spent in retreats of the church dedicated to church-related activities and Bible study.

Celia also complains that she was separated from her parents for most of the time during those holidays. In her portrait of her life in the community, she does not appear as an active agent. Rather, she is obedient to her parents and follows the guidelines of the church. A first attempt for disaffiliation at age 16 fails:

"I, when I was about sixteen years old, temporarily didn't go to the services anymore. Uh, but then there was uh, yeah, pressure from father. Well, it was really more ... a kind of psychological pressure. Uh ... father didn't uh want to know, well didn't want to know about my... motives. When someone ... stops going to the congregation, he's always at fault. And then I bent under the pressure and uh, and also asked myself uh, questioned my decision for not going to the congregation anymore. I was a little shaken and then I went there again until I was like eighteen or nineteen years old. Uh, at that point I started staying away completely. And then I stuck with this decision." (Narrative Interview with Celia, Interact 52).

Celia does not mention any positive experiences or events, neither in the church nor in other life contexts. Her youth is, in her retrospective, dominated by conforming to duties and lack of self-confidence. We see no signs of early protest or criticism. Celia's story is a story of suffering. In McAdams' (2001) terms, it may be understood as a contamination story: Things do not start out particularly well, but they definitely get worse. Celia reports that she was a shy child; she reports the experience of many accidents while playing and a tendency to hurt herself. As a teenager, her school problems become serious, and she does not meet the standards to get admitted to higher education. Then she fails when she is in training for a job and falls into a crisis, leading to her first contact with professional mental health care, organized by her parents:

"Well, then I like really ... bashed my life. And uh, my, my situation ... uh, yeah, it like worried me so much and ... So uh, to be thrown so off track uh, that I then also reacted with, with like defiance or with aggressions towards the parents. And the parents who like put a lot of ... emphasis on obedience, uh, used this as a reason to put me, yeah, into... treatment. Uh, but back then ... they didn't take the medical history, like it wasn't like at all ... I wasn't questioned at all but ... they prescribed some kind of herbal sedative. Uh, and sent me back home again. And uh, with this, this being the result uh, of this visit to the doctor or this psychiatrist so... was, was so unsatisfying, uh, my parents then decided, uh, together with me ... to go to another psychologist or psychiatrist. Or ... if possible this was supposed to be a Christian psychologist." (Narrative Interview with Celia, Interact 136–141)

Celia accuses her parents to have put her into treatment, because she had not been obedient. Again, the parents are described as un-empathic, trying to calm her with medication or to send her for treatment to a Christian therapist in order to assure that she continues to follow the rules of their religion. Celia herself reports to have been in need of treatment, but to have refused it because she felt that accepting treatment implied taking the blame on her:

"Yes. And then we looked for a hospital for psychosomatic disorders in [city F]. There was an admitting interview. Uh, but back then I wasn't yet willing, uh, to, uh, go into treatment because ... uh, my parents simply weren't uh willing to talk. And uh, they all like wanted to blame me uh, exclusively ... for my ... condition." (Narrative Interview with Celia, Interact 142).

Deconversion appears to have been the central event in Celia's life so far. When she finally has left both her family and church, she is disappointed by her parents' response:

"Uh, the father then ... only occasionally tried to uh, motivate me to, uh, go to a congregation in [big city R]. Uh, but like... what I noticed a lot was that he uh, like always ... uh, put quotes from the Bible and verses from the Bible on the letters he sent me to [big city R]. Uh, but I really only later when I was older became aware of how he was ... withdrawing behind these quotes from the Bible and wasn't really trying, you know, to build up a relationship with the kids. And the mother was really rather passive. Well... the relation to the mother was full of ... yes, tension. Maybe a little better than to the father. But the mother really was rather passive." (Narrative Interview with Celia, Interact 96)

Celia's descriptions of her parents as persons remain vague. She perceived her father as hiding himself and his personal feeling toward his daughter behind quotes from the Bible. She perceived her mother as passive. This implies that there was not much of a supportive environment, or one that backed her up. She complains that her parents, though pious persons, neglected her and were not interested to learn how she felt. Conversely, it seems that it was not easy for her to accept help from her parents. She and her parents seem to have been mired in mutual attributions of guilt. Also dishonest actions play a role: Celia reports that her parents had been active getting a job assignment for her. Celia felt manipulated and her work not appreciated. Also, she felt looked down upon, patronized, and depreciated as mentally ill.

"And uh, then because of that my parents uh, described me as being uh, psychologically sick ... to this reverend and the eldest of the congregation. They didn't like concede that I ... in the course of and the result uh, of this uh, project or this work like would get me angry, I would be extremely angry and ... uh, mad and angry and would also say that." (Narrative Interview with Celia, Interact 176)

At the time of the interview, Celia attributes her skeptical and apprehensive attitude toward life in general to her upbringing in this church, taking the perspective of a victim. With her narrative, she testifies her suffering and accuses her parents and the church, implying that she should be entitled to compensation.

In regard to faith development, we see a person who has grown and transformed – probably during the process of her deconversion. With a faith

development interview score of 3.8, Celia has been assigned to Stage Four of individuative-reflective faith – which we see almost throughout all faith Aspects.

Asked about her image of God and the changes in her relationship to God, Celia remembers a little Christian song from her childhood which she applies to illustrate her feelings toward God and "faith" in a demythologizing, reflective way:

"Uh, in the congregation we used to often uh, sing this song, '*Pass auf, kleine Hand, was du tust. Pass auf, kleines Auge, was du siehst. Denn der Vater im Himmel schaut herab auf dich.*' [Watch out little hand what you're doing, watch out little eye what you're seeing. Because our Father in heaven is looking down on you.] And that was like uh, an image of God uh, constant control. He controls, he punishes and uh, he also destroys. This means that as a child I was told, even as a toddler I was told, uhm, you can make your own decisions. You may decide for or against faith, or for or against Jesus. But if you decide against it, the uh, you may be far away from God forever. Then, when you're dead, uhm, you may go to hell. [I: Mhm.] And that uh, was the image of God that I had back then. Yes, punishing, uhm, all the way to complete destruction and control. And there uh, I couldn't, you know, this loving that they also tried to tell me about [...] verbally, only verbally, to pass on to me this image of a loving God. [I: Mhm.] And those two things I, uhm, couldn't bring together." (Faith Development Interview with Celia, Interact 19-25, Symbolic function [Aspect G], scored Stage Four)

Another sequence shows individuative reflection in the aspect of *social awareness* (Aspect D). When asked about groups or institutions she identifies with, Celia mentions her identification with NGOs and contrasts global ethical concern against the mental narrowness she has experienced in her church:

"Uhm, I have ... or I'm thinking about, uhm, if my financial situation allows me to, yup, maybe to become a, uh, member of Greenpeace. Well, to support Greenpeace financially. Uhm, I think Amnesty International uhm, is very interesting. [I: Okay.] Well, the type of activities are interesting. And uhm, I have also looked at Attac more closely, but can, cannot identify with them, uh, all that much. [I: Mhm.] Yup, those are the three uhm, organizations that I can come up with off the top of my head. [I: And what would you find important about this? Why those?] Uhm, because what is personally important to me in life is, uhm, is supported by these groups uh, or also uh defended. [I: Mhm.] You know, what is ... important to me today or what ... used to be important to me when I was a teenager, uh, yup, that you can maintain that, or that life becomes better. [I: Mhm.] And that the circumstances of life are improved. That you uh, well, fighting poverty, environmentalism, are topics, uh, that have no place in the religious community I come from. This is not even brought up but still keeps you busy when you start your teenager years. And uh, this occupation with these topics doesn't let me go anymore. And for me it is uh, part of my own identity opposing

what I experienced or learned in ... the religious community." (Faith Development Interview with Celia, Interact 65–75, Scored Stage Four)

Table 30. Differences between Celia and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Celia has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Celia	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in Germany	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Emotional Stabil.	**15.00**	42.25	6.77
Extraversion	**22.00**	40.87	5.71
Openness	**57.00**	40.65	6.04
Agreeableness	**40.00**	46.79	4.48
Conscientiousness	**33.00**	45.17	6.15
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Traditionalism	**88.00**	134.21	13.03
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**128.00**	204.99	18.74
Envir. Mastery	**13.00**	33.62	4.66
Positive Relations	**21.00**	35.41	4.04
Purpose in Life	**23.00**	35.34	3.92
Self-Acceptance	**14.00**	34.18	4.48
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**21.00**	68.00	14.67
RWA	**31.00**	84.37	18.76

From the questionnaire responses given by Celia (see Table 30), we see a rather strong confirmation of what has emerged from the evaluation of the narrative interview and the faith development interview. Celia has a high score on *openness to experience* which corresponds to her individuative-reflective style. At the same time, she has a rather low score on *extraversion*. Taken together, this shows her interest in exploring new possibilities, while being shy.

Further, Celia's low scores on *emotional stability*, *agreeableness*, and *conscientiousness*, resulting in low *traditionalism*, show a vulnerable person who resists being submissive to others or to rules. Celia's very low total score on *well-being* and also on the single *well-being* scales show her rather negative evaluation of her own development and of herself. *Self-acceptance*, *environmental mastery*, *positive relations to others* and *purpose in life* – all are much lower than the means for German in-tradition members and even of deconverts. This reflects and confirms her image of herself as a victim. Her low scores on *religious fundamentalism* and *right-wing authoritarianism* show that she definitely rejects authoritarian ideas and, indeed, distrusts authorities. Celia considers herself as being neither religious nor spiritual.

7.8   Conclusion

In contrast to the majority of Type One deconverts who are involved in the "pursuit of autonomy" and have stepped out from a taken-for-granted religious environment, this second type of deconverts which we, across the cases, characterize as "debarred from paradise" developed an emotionally deep attachment to the religious tradition which they leave, or are forced to leave, later in their life. For all of them emotional suffering is a criterion of deconversion, often requiring therapeutic help. For those who had converted as young adults (Pia; Franz), and especially for those who converted as adolescents (Elisabeth; Fiona), in particular when they joined an oppositional, high-tension religious group, this decision involved the search for reliable answers to existential questions, for shelter from a hurtful family history, or even for healing of a childhood trauma. Those who grew up in these traditions (Celia; Peter; Adam), did so with the feeling of belonging to a special group, perhaps of being burdened with more duties than the average person, but with the prospect of earning higher rewards in the afterlife.

The common characteristics of these deconversion narratives are high expectations and hopes which in the course of time were disappointed or abandoned, combined with the wish to give testimony of one's own experience. The narrators give testimony of their experiences; they are witnesses, sometimes organized in exit groups, sometimes publishing their accounts on websites of ex-members. The stories of abandoning high hopes are told from different perspectives and the testimonies convey different messages: The "heroes", like Pia, tell stories in which they emerge, after conflict and turmoil, with grief and anger, but as active agents with an increased aware-

ness of their own motives, wishes, and goals in life. Their message is learning to rely on their own intuitions and to trust that even a negative experience can be something one can gain something from.

The "survivors", like Elisabeth and Adam, also have a message to share, but this is one of having been cheated: thus, they wish to warn others. The uncovering of deceit is also stressed in the "victim's" tale – here, as in Celia's and, to a lesser degree, in Franz' case, the message is also about damage and entitlement to compensation.

Transformation is especially visible in the narratives of two of these types, "heroes" and "survivors", but, as Celia's faith development interview may indicate, transformation is not reserved for them. It is an open question, whether the different narratives present different coping styles, or whether they describe different phases of a process. This process may lead from hardly being able to articulate the disturbing experiences, to feeling victimized, perhaps looking for help, to appreciating survival, and, finally, taking responsibility for one's mistakes in the past and developing the courage to turn one's experiences into a heroic story which others might find helpful.

Most German interviewees in this type lived outside of mainstream society when they were members in the groups they later left. Thus, the affiliation with these groups had a strong impact on their everyday lives, setting them apart from the majority of "normal" Protestant or Catholic Christians or secular citizens. Therefore, for them, deconversion does not only mean to cope with leaving a group with some tension towards society, but also to manage one's own (re-)integration into the larger society and its values. In the United States, in contrast, the tension does not appear to be as strong since a pluralistic religious field in which changes of religious affiliation are more frequent, offers more alternatives. However, as Adam's story tells, loss of faith hurts, even when organized support is available. And even in a pluralistic religious field some groups may stand out as more different than others, as Fiona's narrative shows.

8 Finding a New Frame of Reference

8.1 "... at that Moment God Spoke to Me" – the End of the Search: Sabina

Sabina, 27 years old at the time of the interview, grew up in a Protestant environment. She is the daughter of a Protestant (Lutheran) minister in Germany. Sabina reports that, although she participated in church activities in adolescence, she did not feel a personal relationship with God and did not have personal religious experiences:

"... well then I went along to my father's congregation, just like that. But I uh wasn't really-really uh of the same conviction and then there I experienced so much, and I also asked God, looked for God and uh ... and was always astonished because I uh never truly ... well, not really, really experienced Him personally." (Narrative Interview with Sabina, Interact 2)

Sabina left home when she was 18 years old. After taking a year off to do voluntary social work, she went to university in a different city. The academic atmosphere and especially another student who impressed her with his intellect and knowledge influenced Sabina to abandon the Christian beliefs of her family. She decided against God, as she says, and called into question God's very existence. Instead she adopted the lifestyle of the other students who did not believe in God:

"And then I decided against God, in my heart and like thought, nope, God ... nope, that's not for me ... that's not for mature people, that's for kids. And I thought, nope, that's uh nothing for me. And ... uh or rather this guy doesn't exist, God doesn't exist. Then I rejected God. And uh then I just did what [name T] had done or everyone had done, something that more like that was in and that was hip and something everyone was doin' their best to get." (Narrative Interview with Sabina, Interact 6)

Sabina reconstructs her experiences and her development in the framework (e.g. 'decision' for or against God) of her evangelical group with which she presently is a member. She reports that she then started to explore several other spiritual options such as meditation, Tarot, Hinduism and Buddhism, and also started experimenting with drugs. Retrospectively, she interprets her development as a negative turn and an impasse: Her search did not lead anywhere, she lost contact with her formerly richer inner life. She also lost contact with other people:

"And for like five years I just lived like that and uh ... and had uh ... inside was ... but inside I got sadder and sadder and emptier and ... more, I kind of noticed that- that I was really pretty desperate. That I was really looking for something that I thought I'd find here but didn't find."(Narrative Interview with Sabina, Interact 6)

Sabina did not graduate. She left the university and started a vocational training for a health care job. There she met a colleague whose open and very responsive way of relating to other people she found very impressive. This colleague had a significant impact on Sabina's religious development, leading to her conversion: when she found out that this colleague was a deeply committed Christian believer, Sabina started to consider a "return to God":

"Inside ... uh there was a moment when I like said uh ... well, when I decided with my heart that I'd return to God, return to the Christian God and come back." (Narrative Interview with Sabina, Interact 6)

During a retreat while taking a walk on the beach with her colleague Sabina had an important religious experience which finally initiated her conversion.

"And-and, you know, like walking along the beach and uh ... although neither of us had spoken. Suddenly ... like somewhere uh real softly but directly in my heart, God spoke to me and ... well, I didn't really understand that, you know, that it really was God but back then it was- it really was that- um, uh at that moment God spoke to me ... You know, someone in my heart said I love you and I am your Father and I know you. I've known you all your life and I've seen everything you've done and where you've been and I was... have always, always, always been with you. And uh- yeah, and I love you and I will always, always stay with you." (Narrative Interview with Sabina, Interact 6)

Sabina tells her conversion story with all the emotional and transcendental aspects that belong to the 'affective conversion' (Lofland/Skonovd: 1981), culminating in the vivid description of her religious experience. She reconstructs her experience and her development as a "return", as re-conversion. This suggests that she herself recognizes and re-encounters, or re-activates, religious structures and God images of her childhood and early adolescence – which however, to refer to her own retrospective statements, did not include "to experience Him personally".

Although her partner with whom she lived together at that time did not share her new faith, Sabina felt that she was on the right way. When reading the Bible, she felt the texts talking to her. Sabina experienced acceptance and healing:

"... and then I like started going to church services again and uh ... yeah orienting myself in that direction. And I like really found uh, a lot. Well, suddenly, you know...

texts from the Bible really touched my heart and were talking to me and all these wounds that I'd suffered, uh, were he ... somehow healing. Well, suddenly through the word that I heard, uh, all my sorrows and my grief were taken, suddenly I was accepted." (Narrative Interview with Sabina, Interact 6)

Sabina also reports an experience of a personal encounter with Jesus. Being aware that her story is not comprehensible for everybody, she takes dissenting views into account and even admits some doubts of her own. However, she had met a woman who was able to be responsive to her experience; this woman was a member of a religious group where Sabina's experience obviously is appreciated:

"But then it was like Jesus was coming in my room, you know, some kind of glowing apparition, and uh was kneel- kneeling next to me. And it bent over me, really ... yes, just like so very uh kindly. And unobtrusive really. But that ... so, and then I thought ... and then I somehow immediately opened my eyes and thought, now you've gone like nuts, basically. And then a few days later I me-met someone who really was Christian and ... and who... and knew Jesus. And I like thought how, this can't be for real, there's someone who really knows Jesus and ... and so on. And who-who believes that and who can understand my experiences. And uh ... und uh... and that was just the way it was. And this person also was a member of the congregation in [city W]. And ... and uh the person helped me, really, and there I gave my life to Jesus, you know, in prayer." (Narrative Interview with Sabina, Interact 6)

Sabina claims that she needed some persuasion before she affiliated with the evangelical non-denominational church in which this woman was a member. When she finally gave in and joined her, she felt at home in the community, because there she found the authenticity she had been looking for.

"I made up my mind and told her, okay, I'll come along to a service but only look at it and uh ... yeah, and then I went along and this was, you know, a non-denominational church. Where I uh, then went. And it was like really totally different to what I had ever experienced, even the denominational church had never been ... not been authentic to me and where I just ... yeah, that... where tradition was in the focus and-and this li- you know like what you do there and so on. But it wasn't really- not really like ... was ... real. And-and then suddenly I was a member of the congregation in [city W] where the people like knew Jesus, and where they loved Him, and where they worshipped Him, and where they sang songs for Him, really coming from deep inside the heart. Where they worshipped Him, where it was all about Him, and where I felt like here Jesus is really important. Here it's about ... uh the Lord, uh-uh God, uh Jesus, uh-uh the Savior of the world and... yeah, somehow where I ... like authentic." (Narrative Interview with Sabina, Interact 6)

Sabina's narrative is told as a re-conversion narrative. Re-conversion narratives are about losing faith first and finding even stronger "authentic" faith after a period of doubt. God and Jesus made contact with her; she now has a

personal relation to them. The Bible is a means to establish this contact. Sabina's faith is deep and personal.

Looking at Sabina's faith development interview which we rated 2.7 (total score), we see a prevalence of the synthetic-conventional style with some tendency towards the mythic-literal style. Despite the fact that Sabina's interview indicates primarily a synthetic-conventional orientation throughout almost all aspects, we see components of mythic-literal faith for *moral judgment* and *locus of authority* (Aspects C and E) with a score of 2.3. In comparison with the faith development interview scores of in-tradition members of the Lutheran Church (n=15) with a mean of 3.5, Sabina's faith development scores are at the lower end of the spectrum. It is therefore unlikely that Sabina engaged in a structural deconversion/conversion process in terms of the faith development theory. Rather, we could speculate about regression, or assume a continuing (but perhaps hidden) presence – or a revival – of earlier faith styles, especially of the mythic-literal style.

Going more into detail, we see Sabina's *locus of authority* externally located to external authority figures (God; Jesus):

"[I: Do you feel that your life has a meaning?] (happily) Yes, I know that. [laughing] Hallelujah. [laughing] [I: What is it that gives your life a purpose?] Uhm-yeah, God, Jesus is giving me this purpose, the real purpose, that I simply know that I am wanted and that my life is not for nothing but that uh ... that-that God has a plan for my life, uh that-that it ... that God is the purpose, really, or Jesus is the purpose. For my life and uhm and He knows why I was born and He gave me lots of gifts and talents and-and gave me calling." (Faith Development Interview with Sabina, Interact 37–40, scored Stage Two)

On the same faith developmental level is Sabina's response to the question about her ideal of a 'mature faith':

"Yeah, I like totally orient myself along the lines of Jesus and uh ... the ideal uh... [sighing] well, my ideal is, I want with all my heart, you know, like uh in my heart to be more and more like a child and uh that ... well uh and-and like to really trust uh ... God. And to truly believe that He is my Daddy, who like loves me and that I'm His child like uh somehow unintentional. I want to be unintentional. And simply full of trust and that-that is really my ideal, and at the same time mature uh is like also important to me, uhm and uhm-uh like uh to be wise and smart and-and-and not naïve... Yup." (Faith Development Interview with Sabina, Interact 64, Form of World Coherence [Aspect F], scored Stage Two)

Sabina describes her ideal of a mature faith as childlike openness and naïveté and an absolute trust in God; thus, she uses the metaphor of the father and his unconditioned love for his child – but her childlike semantics ("my Daddy, who like loves me") abandon the metaphoric difference and

collapse it into concreteness. As a second part of her description of ideal faith, however, she points to a kind of wisdom, and intelligence – which contrasts Sabina's plea for naïveté.

Both quotes from the faith development interview indicate, below the synthetic-conventional pattern which mainly characterizes Sabina's faith at the time of the interview, a presence or revival of mythic-literal schemata. This allows for the identification and comprehension of the fundamentalist constituent in Sabina's newly found religiosity, which Sabina regards as a gain. And this interpretation in turn corresponds to the model of understanding fundamentalism as the presence or the revival of earlier faith styles, especially of the mythic-literal style (Streib: 2001; 2007).

In sum,[48] Sabina's story is, in the first place, a *conversion* story and, in her own terms, a return to God. Nevertheless, it is interesting to read her story with a focus on disaffiliation and deconversion. Had we interviewed Sabina when she was a university student, we very likely would have heard only half of the story as she tells it now after her conversion. Very likely it would have been a story of pursuit of autonomy and secularizing exit. But this is not her complete story as we hear it now, since a new (and in her terms an old) frame of reference has emerged – which, as far as we can see, has indeed features of a revival of, or return to, structures of her childhood religion. Thus the presence of the mythic-literal schemata as part of her new oppositional religiosity is understandable.

8.2   "Inside Myself I have this Certainty...:" Viviane

Viviane, 22 years old at the time of the interview, was 'born into' the Lutheran Church in Germany. Recently she has, without formally terminating the membership, distanced herself from the Lutheran Church. Her parents have for decades been members of a Christian evangelical or 'reborn' network (*Marburger Kreis* [Marburg Circle]) which is, to some extent, associated with the evangelical, charismatic movement in Germany. All this means that Viviane is following the religious orientation of her parents. Even though she still participates now and then in the Sunday service of the local Lutheran Church in her town, Viviane feels really at home in her new community. Hence, Viviane is that kind of deconvert who feels alienated from his or her 'mainline' religious community, but does not formally ter-

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[48] Unfortunately, Sabina did not complete the questionnaire. Therefore, we cannot provide a comparison between her narrative and significant findings concerning personality structure, psychological well-being, and fundamentalism, as it will be the case for the following case studies.

minate the membership, even though a new affiliation has become more important and participation in the new religious community has become more attractive. In these cases, the new conversion is more important than the disaffiliation, as we also saw in Sabina's case.

The new community Viviane found and affiliated with is a charismatic group, called *"Philadelphia Gemeinde* [Philadelphia Congregation]". Viviane had been invited by her parents to come and visit the community. She tells how she readily agreed to join her parents to visit this new religious group:

"Yeah, my parents told me to like that come along and look at, you know, what it's like in a ... in a non-denominational church, and I tried that, and then I said, yeah okay. I'll do it. And uh ... then I stayed in the non-denominational church." (Narrative Interview with Viviane, Interact 2)

She reports that she felt drawn into the new community because she liked the service better than in previous churches – it appeared "more modern" and "relaxed" to her. Also she appreciated the way her new community practiced baptism.

Especially attractive to Viviane in her new community was a new depth of religious experience, the relation to Jesus as a personal encounter, and the awareness that she was addressed personally had been immediately appealing to her:

"Well, my approach to God ... has changed. But not, I think, because of the ... of the congregation but ... because like-like I encountered Jesus and because-because Jesus did this and somehow and it didn't start elsew-... well ... um ... yeah. Well, in the non-denominational church I became more conscious of the fact that uh, I was being addressed personally." (Narrative Interview with Viviane, Interact 18)

Viviane experienced a "dramatic change", a conversion experience (without her labeling it as such) which was characterized by her decision to live her life "with Jesus". She points out that this intimate, personal relation to Jesus involves a specific understanding of personal prayer: it is "talking to Jesus":

"When I pray I ... I simply know that I ... that I'm talking to Jesus and then I am assured that he's like answering me and uh-uh ... about this I can ... in the Bible it says, I can believe it and I can believe that Jesus like died for-for the ... for the sins of mankind and I can... I can ... understand what is written in the Bible, like somehow Jesus reveals himself to me or God reveals Himself there. And I uh ... it's not like an understanding, you know, with my mind, and nei- but ... and neither with my feelings or so, but inside myself I have this certainty, an internal assuredness that-that what's written there is true." (Narrative Interview with Viviane, Interact 24)

What is interesting here is Viviane's use of the word 'certainty [Gewissheit]': It signifies a specific kind of evidence which comes to the individual

believer as a personal revelation when reading the holy text or while pray-
ing. With reference to the conception of fundamentalism suggested by
Hood et al. (2005), her appropriation of faith may be called "intra-textual":
Fundamentalist evidence is *selective* absoluteness; in Viviane's view, abso-
lute truth emerges through the internal and intimate perception of God's
voice while reading selected passages of the Bible:

"You know, I can't like always understand everything I read in the Bible. That's not
the way it is. But there are ... I think that uh, from time to time God ... well that God
whenever he thinks that it's right reveals Himself to me in the Bible in certain pas-
sages of the Bible. It can happen that I like read a passage a hundred times. And only
the hundred and first time I really understand what it's all about. And I have this kind
of revelation from God, so to speak. And uh ... yeah, exactly. Since then I'd say I
have this, that I ... like realize, so to speak. When I gave Jesus ... since I've given...
Jesus my life, yeah. [softly]. Exactly." (Narrative Interview with Viviane, Interact 26)

The reconstruction of Viviane's deconversion narrative revealed that the
deconversion criterion *loss of religious experience* stands out as one reason
for the alienation from the Lutheran Church. The search for religious ex-
perience characterized by intensity and relationship as well as a felt 'cer-
tainty' has consequently made the new evangelical-charismatic community
attractive. Viviane's deconversion trajectory can thus be identified as *op-
positional exit*.

This characterization of Viviane's faith orientation is reflected also in her
faith development interview, and here we see more details: Viviane's faith
development interview total score is 2.9. Her faith structure is synthetic-
conventional faith in most of the Aspects but within *form of world coher-
ence* and *symbolic function* (Aspects F and G), showing both a mean score
of 2.5, which means that several answers scored Stage Two of mythic-
literal faith. This may resonate with her desire for "certainty" and unam-
biguousness.

What stands out in Viviane's faith development interview is the impor-
tance of religious guidance by external authorities (God; Jesus) and her
adherence to charismatic Christian beliefs and practices that are uncritically
appropriated. Viviane wants the interviewer/audience to understand that she
is oriented towards a Christian lifestyle – which means for her that she
follows Jesus and gives him the power over her life. Viviane's scores on the
faith development interview are lower than the average of the group she
left. The comparison with the in-tradition members of the Lutheran Church,
who display a mean level of faith development of 3.4, would not support an
interpretation of Viviane's deconversion as involving faith stage transfor-

mation – unless we speculate about regression.[49] In any case, in Viviane's faith development interview we see a stronger presence of the mythic-literal schemata, especially, as detailed above, on *form of world coherence* and *symbolic function*. The strong presence of a mythic-literal schema is supported – or even simply made stronger than the faith development interview evaluation reveals – by Viviane's extremely high score on the subscale *truth of texts and teachings* of the *Religious Schema Scale* (22.00 – which is between "agreement" and "strong agreement", see Table 31). All this supports the assumption that deconversion from a mainline church such as the Lutheran Church and conversion to an accommodating evangelical-charismatic group or church, may involve the revival of mythic-literal faith schemata. It is even more likely if the conversion involves affiliation with a fundamentalist orientation (Streib: 2001; 2007).

Further aspects of Viviane's fundamentalist religiosity are reflected in her questionnaire responses (see Table 31): She has very high scores on all measures that imply fundamentalist orientation: *religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism, truth of texts and teachings*. Viviane also has a rather low score on *openness to experience* which indicates that the exploration of new ideas and new religious worlds is not part of her endeavor. Her high score on *extraversion* may reflect her wish to communicate and share her faith with others. Viviane's scores on *agreeableness* and *conscientiousness* portray her as a person who is hesitant to adapt to others or to rules. The overall *well-being* score and two well-being dimensions (*positive relations with others* and *purpose in life*) are rather low, even lower than the means for deconverts from integrated religious organizations in Germany; to interpret this as crisis symptoms may be overrating the case, but it may be safe to assume that, after the process of deconversion/re-conversion, Viviane has a low sense of being socially integrated and a low sense of purpose-orientation. From the *well-being* subscales, only *self-acceptance* is close to the mean for in-tradition members – which may indicate that Viviane feels at home with her faith and in being what she already is: a disaffiliate from mainstream Protestantism who is attracted to more oppositional groups with a rather fundamentalist religiosity.

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[49] But, as in the case of "Sabina," this interpretation would be based on the assumption that faith development unidirectionally moves from stage to stage and that the group level is an indicator for former members' former level of faith development. On the basis of our data, however, we are not in the position to verify these assumptions. Therefore, the comparison with faith development scores of in-tradition members has to be taken with some precaution.

Table 31. Differences between Viviane and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Viviane has Deconverted

	Single Case Question-naire Data of Viviane	In-Tradition Members in No-Tension (Integrated) Religious Organizations in Germany	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Emotional Stabil.	**42.00**	40.90	7.21
Extraversion	**47.00**	40.36	5.62
Openness	**32.00**	41.89	5.42
Agreeableness	**41.00**	45.70	5.18
Conscientiousness	**39.00**	45.38	5.80
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Traditionalism	**122.00**	131.97	12.80
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**183.00**	204.24	19.49
Envir. Mastery	**31.00**	33.63	4.41
Positive Relations	**30.00**	34.46	4.44
Purpose in Life	**30.00**	34.78	4.34
Self-Acceptance	**33.00**	34.40	4.61
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**73.00**	52.03	15.83
RWA	**82.00**	72.82	19.25
Religious Schema Scale			
Truth of Texts...	**22.00**	16.13	4.42

8.3   Discovering Intrinsic Religion: Melina

Melina is a 23-year-old student girl, who was born in Greece and raised in the Greek Orthodox Church. Her family came to Germany when Melina was four years old. At the age of 21, Melina left the Greek Orthodox Church and is now affiliated with a Protestant non-denominational church, after feelings of what she calls 'emptiness' in her tradition and searching for meaning in other religious traditions.

Melina reports that she used to go to the Greek Orthodox Church only because everyone went to church. It meant for her that she could meet other

Greek immigrants. However, she could not find any meaning in the Ortho-
dox Sunday service. She tells how she started to take questions of faith and
ways to experience and express her faith more seriously:

"Then I started thinking. You know, about my, about my image of God ... And then I
also started listening ... a little more attentively to the sermons in the Orthodox
Church. And I also followed the liturgy... more intensely. And then I found out, you
know for myself, that this really doesn't do anything for me. That I like considered
this like being a kind of cheap propaganda. That I, when I ... left the orthodox church
was in a sorta good mood ... But that I, uh, not really learned anything substantial
about the ... faith or God or the Bible." (Narrative Interview with Melina, from Inter-
act 2)

After high school, Melina tells us, she engaged in a search for meaning and
learned about other kinds of belief. She read religious books such as the
Quran or texts about Buddhism. Then she read the Bible for the first time
and at the same time found a friend, also of Greek origin, who was a mem-
ber of a non-denominational church ([Freikirche]):

"And, [slowly, hesitating] during that time I became friends with ... a girl, who went
to a Protestant non-denominational church. She, too, is Greek. And she and I would
meet more or less regularly. It was she who told me ... about-about the Bible. About,
about Jesus and ... what Jesus in the Bible. And how to understand that. And ... yeah,
how God ... how she understands God. (Narrative Interview with Melina, from Inter-
act 2)

Melina reports that she became very conscious about the self-sacrifice of
Jesus for the sins of humankind; and thus she found a direct and concrete
way of generating meaning. She attended a church service there and de-
cided to become a church member, because "there are people who believe
the same way":

"And then I turned uh, away from the Orthodox Church because... [very long pause]
there ... uh ... I simply didn't find any nurture ... for my ... spirit. And, yeah, since
then I've been I member of a Protestant non-denominational church. Because there ...
people who are, who believe the same way I do." (Narrative Interview with Melina,
from Interact 2)

While this is unusual within the Orthodox Church, she was convinced that
she should not continue leaving the spiritual practices to the priest, but
wanted to practice on her own. This personal religious practice was an
amazing new experience for Melina; she converted privately, surrendering
herself to Jesus.

Finally, reading the Bible, Melina found new meaning, content and a
more palpable, personal God. Melina affiliated with the Protestant non-
denominational community where she found what she was searching for:

authentic personal religiosity in a Christian community. Melina states that, in her Orthodox tradition, she had always rejected the mediating symbols like the use of icons, the ceremonies and the rituals as mediators of God. Instead of this "cheap propaganda", as she explains, she rather looks for a direct and personal relation to God as ultimate authority:

"Uhm. [pensive] Yup, that was uh, irritating for me because there are so many saints and ... uh, it lacked the final authority ... That was the point. I also thought that these were only people, too. Uh, and I can't like pray to just any people. That is something ... uh, there was something inside me that resisted this. To do this, basically." (Narrative Interview with Melina, Interact 78)

Melina's deconversion narrative is about searching and finding authentic faith:

"Well, I really notice that, that God uh was speaking to ... through ... the Bible. Well, there for the first time I ... realized some kind of authority ... above me ... Whereas, I didn't feel this when-when reading ... when uh, reading the Quran or in ... Buddhism uh, because ... Buddhism is more kind of like a ... philosophy, an attitude towards life. There is like no ... authority above you. And ... then I ... when reading in the Bible th.. really, it became like totally clear to me that there is someone higher than me. And ... who is an authority in my life." (Narrative Interview with Melina, from Interact 112)

Concerning her former attitude towards church services, Melina perceives that the extrinsic 'piety' is gone. Now she rather feels an internal desire to go to church and to "experience community with believers". Thus, she notices a positive development in her personality while getting more and more embedded in the non-denominational Church. There, Melina gains a new way of thinking and behaving, including a new form of being proactive. Melina is able to include others in her world view and respect them as long as they are striving for true and "deep" faith just as she is.

Melina's deconversion process is a gradual change for a higher-tension group. Thus, as we have seen in Sabina's and Viviane's case studies, the new affiliation and the process of conversion is more important, takes center stage, while deconversion and the old affiliation reside in the background.

Combining the account from the narrative interview with the faith development interview, it can be seen how Melina's stage of faith development is linked to her deconversion: Melina's faith development interview was rated with an average of 2.8. This means that in her faith development interview the synthetic-conventional style is the dominant one (including some mythic-literal share). This describes her way of finding meaning in the conventions of a faith community with a clear morality and strong world

views. The emphasis on community and personal relationship within her new group adds to her ideal of an authentic faith.

The change which Melina experienced in her process of deconversion and conversion did, as far as we see, not involve any transformation in terms of faith development. Rather, we interpret Melina's change as a lateral deconversion including her conversion in which she left a rather formal style of extrinsic religious participation and discovered a new world of personal religious experience.

Taking into account her questionnaire responses (see Table 32), Melina appears as a stable, well-integrated person with strong fundamentalist traits. Melina's high scores on *openness to experience* and *extraversion* correspond more to the average in-tradition member of an integrated religious organization than to a deconvert, while her *traditionalism* score is low, even for a deconvert. This seems to be due especially to low *conscientiousness*, and which may reflect her rejection of rules and ritual. Her high scores on all of the *well-being* scales show her as having gained in terms of personality development. Especially *positive relations with others* stands out – and fits the high regard she has for community and sharing faith in the group she joined.

Melina's very high scores on *fundamentalism* and *truth of texts and teachings* support the interpretation of her religiosity as being fundamentalist with a strong presence of a mythic-literal schema – consequently, her mythic-literal orientation may even be stronger than the faith development interview evaluation reveals. Interestingly enough though, she self-identifies as being "more spiritual than religious" – perhaps because the self-identification as "religious" is associated with the extrinsic religiosity of the Orthodox Church that she came to reject.

In sum, Melina is a religious seeker who deconverted and disaffiliated from a religious tradition which is closely connected to an immigrant group culture and which she had experienced as rather extrinsic, formal and empty until she encountered and moved to an oppositional exit toward a new religious environment that was appealing to her because of an authentic and experience-oriented style.

Table 32. Differences between Melina and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Melina has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Melina	In-Tradition Members in No-Tension (Integrated) Religious Organizations in Germany	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Emotional Stabil.	40.00	40.90	7.21
Extraversion	42.00	40.36	5.62
Openness	41.00	41.89	5.42
Agreeableness	46.00	45.70	5.18
Conscientiousness	32.00	45.38	5.80
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Traditionalism	118.00	131.97	12.80
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	207.00	204.24	19.49
Envir. Mastery	29.00	33.63	4.41
Positive Relations	39.00	34.46	4.44
Purpose in Life	34.00	34.78	4.34
Self-Acceptance	33.00	34.40	4.61
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	64.00	52.03	15.83
RWA	71.00	72.82	19.25
Religious Schema Scale			
Truth of Texts...	22.00	16.13	4.42

8.4 "I Became Orthodox ... Because of that Tradition, the Holy Tradition:" Dan

Dan, 30 years old at the time of the interview, is a Caucasian male. Dan disaffiliated from the Church of God, the faith tradition of his family of origin in which he was raised. After a two-year episode in a Charismatic church, Dan found new affiliation in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Different from other cases in this type, Dan turned away from individualistic

expression of religion and now appreciates established rituals and reliable tradition.

Dan starts his narrative with a detailed outline of his family background. He explains that the family tradition was tied to the Church of God, a religious organization with a strong presence and societal integration in the area where he lived. Family life and church life were intertwined. So Dan went to church as a child with his family as something taken-for-granted, but also, Dan remembers that he enjoyed meeting his friends in church.

After graduating from high school and in line with the aspirations of his parents, he attends a Christian college. He accepts this decision in retrospect, although he remembers that, at that time, he had wished to leave and go to a college in another town as some of his friends did. He regrets this and the feeling that something may be missing because he did not get the experience of going away for college. This is balanced by the new friendships he made in his college and also by the suspicion about himself that he would have spent all his time in bars drinking, had he gone to a public university. A semester in Europe promoted his ambitions and his individuative reflection: he reports how he began to reflect on rules so far taken for granted and that he returned to attend Graduate School.

Already as an adolescent, Dan had begun to perceive the rules of his faith as restrictive. According to the teachings of the church he should have developed a personal relationship with Jesus. Also, because the Church of God emphasized that speaking in tongues is evidence to have received the Spirit, he remembers considerable pressure on members to demonstrate this. While he enjoyed the community with peers and friends, he felt that he could not speak in tongues.

In his retrospect, he remembers two impulses for questioning his taken-for-granted religious world: Dan reports that, already in his High School years, he had met a youth pastor who had nurtured his awareness that being a Christian did mean more than being confined to a boring life in which many forms of enjoyment are banned:

"But I guess I just saw how it was kind of boring. I was like, man, the Christian life, you can't drink, you can't smoke, you can't, go to dances, you can't, you know, the Christianity I was exposed to. And-and I guess this youth pastor was, the first person that, that ... I was exposed to and it was like, this guy is, is like a real person. I mean, of course he didn't do any of that because he would have gotten fired [laughs]." (Interview with Dan, Interact 5)

Second, it was a private inter-denominational Bible study group, which opened his eyes for new worlds: Dan discovered that there may be many more varieties of living and expressing the Christian faith and Church of God is only one of them:

"One thing that, I forgot before, another influence in High School on me, was there was a lady, that wasn't a member of our church, but was a Christian, that every, people on my High School, they had bible studies at her house. And they were, interdenominational. And I remember, I went to some of those for probably about a year. And it was really really, enlightening, because, there was people from all different, I mean all Christian, but, you know, some Church of God, Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, and we're all like giving input and talking about things. And I, I remember thinking at that time, it was like, wow. It was the first time I ever really thought about it that, you don't necessarily have to be Church of God to be, a Christian. And that, there was other representations of Christianity that, are equally valid and probably have a lot better points in some areas. So, looking back, that, I think, that was a, a plus." (Narrative Interview with Dan, Interact 117)

But both of these impulses for alternative ideas, his hidden suspect for authorities, and also his problems with speaking in tongues, apparently did not lead to rebellion or a radical departure. Instead Dan went to the Christian college and survived with a hidden rebellion also there: he reports that they had to go to chapel frequently – and he hated it:

"Then in college, the college I went to was a Christian school, also. And you were required to go to chapel. Like several times a week. And, I hated it . [...] So, I'd go to chapel, like most of my f- close friends, and read books, and, you know. Do homework and things like that, and just kind of ignored what was going on around me. And it just seemed to me, too, that there's was just this, lack of holiness, that I just, I always kind of ... thought there should be a little bit more [laughs]." (Narrative Interview with Dan, Interacts 117; 125)

Dan's college years, however, were also the time for change and exploration: Dan met his wife, who, at that time, attended a charismatic church and invited him to join. There he was glad to encounter a new way of religiosity – with less stress on speaking in tongues; but Dan is anxious enough to note that this exploration did not require abandoning his religious roots:

"That was what, when I started going to the CEC, that part of it was what appealed to me, is that, they used the ... book of common prayer, and so it's a little bit more high church, like organized liturgy. But, without totally abandoning how I grew up, they have, a praise and worship time, where, you can, if you want to, you can raise your hands. There wasn't really a speaking in tongues, which I was glad about. But the, I didn't feel like I was totally abandoning what I grew up, there was a mix of the freedom of worship, plus the high church, you know, where there's just God is holy. And incense and just, that kind of thing appealed to me. So we went there, gosh, probably two or three years. And, then, a friend of my wife's had started going to the Orthodox Church." (Narrative Interview with Dan Interact 125)

Interestingly enough, the liturgical style in this charismatic church was more appealing to him, because of its high church components. This obviously was attractive to him – though it remains unclear whether this was

what he had been looking for all the time or whether it had been the relief of the pressure to speak in tongues, while, at the same time, preserving his religious roots.

However, this new liturgical style does not seem to have offered a satisfying and stable compromise between Dan's original religious tradition and his preference for a high church style. So, when his wife started to attend the Eastern Orthodox Church, he joined her – and was most impressed. Dan was impressed by the formality of the tradition, their formal prayer and readings.

Dan started reading Orthodox literature. He claims that he found ties to the apostles through the church. To be tied to a tradition that could be traced to the fundaments and the origin of Christianity made a profound impact on him and finally Dan converted to Orthodoxy:

"And so [laughs] it's like, if I wanna go by the Bible, maybe I should go by the tradition that actually canonized the Bible. Since [laughing] they knew what they were talking about. And, so, I guess, in a nutshell, the reason I became Orthodox was because of that tradition, the Holy Tradition. And, I think my religious views are a lot less chaotic. A lot more sane. Because I'm not scrambling around, trying to figure it out for myself. Part of a, you know, a 2000 year old tradition [short laugh] that believes, I mean, originally were taught by the apostles who were with Christ. And those apostles taught the next ones, the saints." (Narrative Interview with Dan, Interact 147)

It appears to be most important to Dan that he be embedded in a tradition. Links to the fundaments are essential for him. This may give his faith a reliable structure beyond personal interpretations and practices. Dan's gradual deconversion led to a new conversion with a long-lasting commitment which at the time of the interview had already endured ten years.

Dan's faith development interview was rated individuative-reflective, consistently almost throughout all aspects. Compared to the in-tradition members of his former affiliation (Church of God) for whom we have a faith development interview and which has a mean score of 3.4, Dan's faith development interview score is somewhat higher and may suggest that his deconversion/conversion process is associated with a structural transformation to the individuative-reflective style.

This faith development score reflects Dan's autonomous and reflective search and decision for a new religion which gives him what he desired: reverence, ritual, and connectedness to the origins of 'authentic' faith. The new frame of reference which came to structure his religious life is the Orthodox tradition, theology and liturgy. For Dan, this is not a formal system of rules and beliefs which prescribe specific expression of religiosity such as speaking in tongues and which repress individual reflection, but a

framework in which he can feel deeply rooted and embedded and, at the same time, have the freedom of individual reflection and religious expression.

Dan, who self-identifies as "equally religious and spiritual" in the questionnaire, is, according to the scores in Table 32, open for new experience and inclined to transformation. His scores on *openness to experience* are even on the high end of the means for deconverts from oppositional and accommodating religious organizations in the United States (47.62). At the same time, however, Dan has a rather high score on *agreeableness* (49.00). Taken together, this reconfirms the profile of a person in desire for, but on his way to, a frame to hold on to. Compared to the means of in-tradition members, Dan's *well-being* scores and also his sense of *autonomy* and *personal growth* are *lower* – while for the average deconvert in the United States means on these scales are *higher*. Finally, Dan's high score on the *religious fundamentalism* reflects his readiness to consent to a strong system of beliefs. Taken together, despite his autonomous and personal appropriation of religion, Dan appears as deconvert in favor of tradition and a new firm frame of reference.

Table 33. Differences between Dan and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Dan has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Dan	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommo- dating Religious Organiza- tions in United States	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Openness	**48.00**	39.22	6.21
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Transformation	**87.00**	81.84	9.33
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**193.00**	200.45	24.58
Autonomy	**29.00**	32.28	4.86
Personal Growth	**33.00**	34.36	4.61
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**66.00**	59.73	15.85
RWA	**76.00**	87.29	18.96

8.5   "The Saints Things ... is Really Big with Me": Jasmin

Jasmin is an American Caucasian female and 18 years old at the time of the interview. She left the Presbyterian Church, in which she was born in order to convert to the Catholic faith. In the region of the world in which she lives, this implies a change into a more oppositional group, since Catholics are a minority in the Southwest of the United States, and less integrated than Presbyterians. Jasmin converted with her family six years prior to the interview to join the Roman-Catholic Church, but, as she explains, converting was tied to mobility:

"We went to a Presbyterian church there. The whole time we lived there. We converted to Catholicism when we moved to [City C in State B in Northeast U.S.]. But that's ... we moved here when I was about ... about eleven. A little before I turned eleven." (Narrative Interview with Jasmin, Interact 19)

Jasmin describes what makes the new faith, after all, different from the former one, being aware of different attractions for her mother and her father:

"One thing about the Catholic Church that ... my mother liked, my dad wasn't too ... big on with how, you know, you would pray. To everything. There was like [...] just praying to God or to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit. You'd pray to Mary's, you know, St. Joseph, St. Patrick. You know, you just prayed to everyone. You go to church and you light candles under certain ... saints that you felt you needed their help from. And I, that doesn't ... that's something I really ... that's a huge thing I participated in." (Narrative Interview with Jasmin, Interact 19)

She makes clear that she is really interested and involved, while her sister "just followed the family trend". She is careful to define her former religious affiliation as similar to her current one, stressing shared concerns, thus avoiding open conflict and reconciling dissenting views and practices:

"My [Name of relative], [reluctant] she is actually ... a Presbyterian preacher. Which is kind of ironic. But she ... I still can have ... easy religious conversations with her. Cause ... the faith is so closely ... interlinked. I mean, we almost believe in all the same things but there's a couple of small things ... umm ... that are different." (Narrative Interview with Jasmin, Interact 19)

She uses this strategy of minimizing difference when she comments on her father's appreciation of the status and role of Catholic priests:

"My dad ... really liked the whole idea of you know, monks and priests and how they weren't married and ... so they could focus clearly on your job and everything. I don't know how I feel about that. [Laughing] But, that's my dad. Soo we decided we'd go ahead and convert ... to Catholicism." (Narrative Interview with Jasmin, Interact 19)

The potentially most controversial difference, namely that in the Catholic Church women are excluded from ministry, is not discussed at this point of the interview in more detail, but taken up later. Here, with the phrase "I don't know how I feel about that", resentment is put aside, for the sake of the harmony of the family. That the issue is important to her is unfolded when she reports that she has lived through a period of doubt recently. There was conflict in her family; her siblings started to leave home, the family did not attend church together anymore. Jasmin was particularly angry at her father who seemed to spend most of his time at his work.

In this difficult time she found the church of a friend attractive, whose family impressed her as living and sharing faith in harmony. That this impression did not last, is, however, foreshadowed by the qualifications in her introduction of his faith, the church of the Seventh Days Adventists:

"Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists. And all of those. It's just kind of ... like class to go. I was kind of like 'You know, those ... weird churches' [laughing] that do... the weird stuff." (Narrative Interview with Jasmin, Interact 21)

With him and his family she started to attend the Latter Day Saints services until she found out that the problems in his family were even more severe than those in hers. Her lively and dramatic narrative renders the impression that the contrast she perceived between a happy and harmonious public appearance and private misery touched her as hypocritical. She returned to her family and religious loyalties and would now rather convert him, using the language of the cult victim narrative in her proposal:

"Because that ... he ... I didn't say brainwashed, but that's really what it is. I mean ... he's so influential it's just... like that. I mean ... if I take him away and ... let him live with my family, we'd probably convert him to Catholicism as a stable ... root. You know?" (Narrative Interview with Jasmin, Interact 21)

Probed by the interviewer, Jasmin elaborates her deconversion/conversion story to report that her parents had announced their own conversion plans to the children and offered them to make their own decisions whether to join them or to stay with the Presbyterian Church. Feeling that her parents wished their children to join, but unsure what to do, she turned to a Catholic teacher, who introduced her to what has since then structured her appropriation of the Catholic faith: Praying to different saints.

The interviewer, however, still probing for more or deeper explanations asks: "So why exactly did your parents leave the Presbyterian church? Was it because they were moving? Or ... Do you know?" Jasmin answers:

"I would think it was probably one of the same ones as me. They wanted a more formal ... serious ... church atmosphere. Aaand ... to take in ... Cause I mean, my mother says the rosary probably four times a week when she has the time, you know. I think it was just ... the difference in the [...]. It wasn't ... a kind of hooky feeling with the Presbyterian Church." (Narrative Interview with Jasmin, Interacts 36-39)

While Jasmin does not say anything critical about the Presbyterian Church, she highlights what made the change of affiliation attractive: the ritual of the communion and the different saints who can be addressed with specific issues, thus stressing community as well as structure and tradition, and explains, what makes this choice preferable compared to other possibilities, for example joining the Methodist church:

"In Methodist ... [sighing] I actually had a lot of friends who were in the Methodist church and I went on a couple of Methodist church ... trips to the beach. You know. I don't see anything wrong you know, with the Methodist, you know, dom... like denomination and everything. I think it's great but ... like I said there's a couple of things.. in the Catholic faith like you know ... taking ... communion. And ... really thinking about the night you know, that Christ died. And his last supper. And ... you know. The different saints that we have ... The saints things, if you haven't noticed, is really big with me, you know. I mean, St. Patrick and just ..." (Narrative Interview with Jasmin, Interact 47)

Deconversion/conversion is in Jasmin's narrative entangled with family biography: It seems that the deconversion and conversion was motivated by the wish to give this patchwork family a common frame, as well as offering specific support to its different members: the foster children could keep their faith and thus some continuity in their disrupted lives, father can empathize with the priests who are entitled to focus on their work without being distracted by the demands of family ties, while mother and Jasmin can turn to many different saints for their emotional needs, only the sister merely moved along "following the family trend" according to Jasmin's narrative.

Jasmin attributes her deconversion and conversion to the religious experience she thus gains and could not find in the Presbyterian Church. It may, however, remain to be seen if this will keep her there. Her critical and thorough examination of her friend's Seventh Day Adventist faith includes specific reflections on the women's role there. While she compares her faith favorably to his, she also has cautiously hinted at her critical perception on the role of women in the Catholic Church. This is taken up again in her

faith development interview, where she even considers a further conversion for herself.

"With my mother, it's grown ... so much ... in the past year and a half. I would have to say. Umm, and with my father ... I love my father but we're not ... very ... close. I mean, we are close. But I ... not ... [Very long break] Religiously ... it's kind of like... I am Catholic and I believe in the Catholic faith. And I really like what we do. But ... I feel that there might be a chance were another religion might come along and I might convert to that. Maybe. I don't see it happening. But I consider that a possibility. I keep my mind open to that. But see, my father is very close-minded. He has decided ... just he like decided before he converted to ... Catholicism, that you know, Presbyterian was the right church. So they converted to Catholicism. And now it's the right church. Soo ... that's kind of the difference there." (Faith Development Interview with Jasmin, Interact 40)

Jasmin's Faith Development Interview was rated synthetic-conventional across all aspects (3.0). This score is quite consistent with the faith development mean score of 2.8 within the in-tradition members we have collected from her former group, the Presbyterians (N=4). Thus, we are assuming a lateral deconversion. While she lays out her own appropriation of Catholic faith, it is also important to her that faith is something the family shares. At the time of the interview it is an open question how she will negotiate the individuative-reflective faith foreshadowed in some of her critical comments with the Catholicism of her family.

The questionnaire data show Jasmin to understand herself as "more spiritual than religious". As listed in Table 34, her scores on *openness to experience* and on *transformation* are considerable higher than for in-tradition members in integrated religious organizations in the United States. Also her total *well-being* score, and the scores displayed on *autonomy* and *personal growth* are higher than the means for in-tradition members – which corresponds to the average U.S. deconvert profile. This indicates a gain in her development. But her measures on *religious fundamentalism* and *right-wing authoritarianism* are rather high for a deconvert from integrated religious organizations in the United States (*RF:* 41.96; *RWA:* 60.79), even though lower than means for in-tradition members. Thus, quantitative results show her as a kind of moderate deconvert – moderately, but not extensively differing from her background milieu. With moderately higher scores on *openness* and *well-being*, but high scores on *fundamentalism*, Jasmin appears from the quantitative portrait as a typical example for this version of deconversion which leads to a stronger frame of reference.

Table 34. Differences between Jasmin and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Jasmin has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Jasmin	In-Tradition Members in No-Tension (Integrated) Religious Organizations in United States	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Openness	**46.00**	37.80	6.11
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Transformation	**94.00**	80.72	8.63
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**217.00**	200.81	21.79
Autonomy	**34.00**	32.08	4.66
Personal Growth	**39.00**	34.36	4.51
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**52.00**	64.75	13.18
RWA	**81.00**	92.16	16.23

8.6 Conclusion

The cases which we regarded being typical examples for this third type of deconversion with the label "Finding a New Frame of Reference" have a number of characteristics in common: searching and finding more intensity, guidance and structure in religious life. Most of these deconverts disaffiliate from an integrated religious organization. They turn away from the mainline religion in which they grew up. Most deconversion trajectories therefore are changes to more oppositional groups and orientations; in Dan's and Jasmin's case, it is a firm and old, rather high church tradition which is attractive, while this opens a well-defined space for inwardly-oriented piety.

The German cases involve a conversion which in most cases reported a very intense personal experience – and may appear as re-conversion. Viviane, Melina, and Sabina report a kind of moratorium before their (re-) conversion – a moratorium which involved orientations such as atheism, interest in other world religions, depression, perhaps taking drugs. The new religiosity of these cases is an intense, personal relation to Jesus, who is portrayed as the agent of change. A new frame of reference, a new meta-story has taken over in which the personal life-story is almost completely entangled. In regard to faith development, we find in the German cases a synthetic-conventional faith orientation. But it is interesting that three cases at the same timeshow, as a kind of sub-current, signs of a presence or revival of mythic-literal faith.

The American deconverts, Dan and Jasmin, find importance in the origins of the Christian tradition, in scripture, and in rituals which are not subject to change, but provide a secure framework. Their newly acquired frame of reference is in fact an old one, a firm meta-story which they want to be part of. Dan rejects the expressive-ecstatic and individualistic religiosity of his family of origin, appreciating what he perceives as access to and embeddedness in the "Holy Tradition". Jasmin appreciates communion – which for her is not only Holy Communion, but the communication with a heaven full of helping saints.

9 Life-Long Quests – Late Revisions

9.1 Looking Back on a "Cult" of the Seventies: Erica

Erica is an American Caucasian female who is 47 years old at the time of the interview. She had deconverted from a Hindu devotional movement over a period of ten years, finalizing her disaffiliation at the age of 42. In the beginning sequence of her narrative Erica introduces a distinction between fundamentalism and cults. Asked, "where does your story begin?", Erica says:

"Uh, with the cult you mean? Oh, this is just about fundamentalism." (Narrative Interview with Erica, Interact 1–2)

Erica then begins her story by outlining the religiously ambivalent family in which she was raised, describing her parents' lack of religiosity in contrast to the strong religious ideals of her grandparents. She also claims to have had an early and intrinsic sense of spirituality:

"... but I was a really spiritual kid. I had, I had uhm, definite feelings just feelings that I had lived before or that there was more to it than this. Like I always felt, I was a really otherworldly kid. You know, I collected pictures of gurus and you know, got into the whole kind of hippie scene of the eastern religion stuff and uhm, I think my parents felt like that they were real failures cause I turned out to be religious and they didn't necessarily want that but somehow it skipped a generation." (Narrative Interview with Erica, Interact 8)

Despite this difference in opinion, her family appears to have been close. In fact, her reliable relationship with her father is a positive thread in her story and portrayed as an anchor for her when she began the deconversion process.

Erica's conversion to the community – she was 21 at that time – was motivated by a relationship formed with a man, who she later assumes was just getting her involved in the group and was probably not interested in a closer relationship with her.

During the time of her membership, Erica was involved in public relations efforts to present a good image. She criticizes the group's ideology and policy, there is, however, no remorse or shame regarding her own involvement. One reason she aligned with the group was because she was already engaged in the behaviors that most converts might find difficult:

She was already practicing celibacy and had stopped drinking and taking drugs.

"Plus I was kind of on a spiritual path, so I met these people at the [bookstore] in downtown [west coast city C] which isn't there anymore, and they ... the guy there told me, I was taking tarot card classes there and you know and they had a lot of classes and stuff. So the guy told me, you know, based on what you believe, you would really like the [name of Hindu devotional community] because they don't take drugs, they're all celibate, they're vegetarian, they believe in reincarnation, all the same stuff as you." (Narrative Interview with Erica, Interact 94)

Her narrative suggests that her a priori spirituality provides global causal coherence (Habermas/Bluck: 2000) for her biographical narrative; the practices of the community are concomitant phenomena. Erica seems to have taken the perspective of an observer, of a journalist looking in and reporting the facts, rather than a former participant working to cope with the loss of a valued belief set.

"So I'm, I think part of my uhm, part of what I've learned from begin in a group like that, is that, that is uhm, sort of a personal projection of paranoia based on cutting yourself off from the real world and thinking that you're the only one. You know, it's like a codependence. I'm like oh, I'm the only one that can do this work around here and everyone else in this household is lazy and I'm the only one that can fix things. And I'm the only one that ever does anything and you work yourself into a little hissy fit and then nobody wants to cooperate with you. So I think that is a lot of what those fundamentalists are manifesting for themselves." (Narrative Interview with Erica, Interact 44–46)

Erica highlights retrospectively the continuity of her spiritual interest and engagement. The discontinuity of her religious affiliation is motivated by her strong interest in religion and spirituality: At the time of the interview it seems Erica has continued to dabble in a variety of religious groups and systems. She seems to be very open to new experiences. She explicitly takes the willingness to disaffiliate as a characteristic of strong religious feeling:

"I just visited with my relatives from the mid west last week and like one of them that I spent a lot of time with was a uhm, is real active in her church and she even changed churches which I think shows when someone is like really into it, they'll look for a church that really suits them. And that, that shows I think that someone is very religious." (Narrative Interview with Erica, Interact 8)

Erica seems to be a "seeker" who was never fully enmeshed in the ideology of a community. Her story does not strongly fit into neither the redemptive nor the contamination category. Erica seems to begin as a victim in how she portrays her involvement with the man who drew her in and then left her.

The rest of the story and the overall tone, is one of self-management, of continuity of interests and relationships, therefore, the cult-victim-story schema does not quite fit, despite of the labels "fundamentalist" and "cult" which she uses. This is a gradual deconversion story comprised of many partial disaffiliations before a more finalized end point.

Erica's faith development has been rated 4.1, with scores above 4.0 on *locus of authority* (Aspect E), *form of world coherence* (Aspect F), and *symbolic function* (Aspect G); only *perspective taking* (Aspect B) with 3.5 is below Stage Four. Overall, her faith development interview indicates individuative-reflective faith. That she moved from a style centering on relationship toward a more independent orientation is suggested by Erica's reflection on her life:

"So, for a long time I was married. Then when I got divorced uhm, which was our choice because we both wanted to get away from the [Hindu devotional community] stuff, uhm, I just became an individual within the culture and I didn't want to have any big structure that I identified with." (Faith Development Interview with Erica, Bounds of Social Awareness [Aspect D], Interact 66, scored Stage Four).

But we found also answers in her interview, which have been scored Stage Five, conjunctive faith, as the passage from her answer on beliefs, values and commitments shows:

"Beliefs, I believe ... I have really strong beliefs and sometimes it gets in my way because I do tend to get kind of like, I'll argue ... I try ... my belief is to uhm ... be for things and not against things. [I: Mhm.] So I'm trying to, I believe that is really important to be for things, be for the solution. [I.: Mhm.] Instead of against the problem. So I'm trying to focus on that more and more instead of being against, you know, I've always been against something so [...] but my uhm, my main belief is to be uhm, a people person. You know, even if people irritate us, you know, there's uhm, I'm trying really hard to give people their dignity. Like if I meet you know a cashier or a gas station worker or an operator or an agent at that the phone company or anybody I meet, you know, even people I run into, like I walk past in the mall or whatever anywhere. Uhm, I'm trying really hard to just see, to treat them right, you know to treat them right. I think that's really important for a religion. To be, to call myself a religious person it so, see cause my old religion, the fundamentalist [Hindu devotional community] thing was that we're the only ones who know anything and everybody else is a dog." (Faith Development Interview with Erica, Interacts 128–133, Locus of Authority [Aspect E], scored Stage Five).

In these sequences, we find reflected pluralism, as well as a universalized concept of human subjectivity, which is interwoven with her concept of 'religion'.

Unfortunately, the community which Erica was previously a member did not accept the invitation to take part in our study. Thus we cannot draw on a

religious group background for Erica's case. We can, however, inspect her scores on the scales depicting difference to the in-tradition members in oppositional and accommodating religious organizations in the United States (see Table 35).

In the questionnaire, Erica self-identifies as "more spiritual than religious". Her questionnaire data show high scores on *openness to experience* and on *transformation*. Also her scores on *autonomy* and *personal growth* are higher than the means for in-tradition members. Her high score in *psychological well-being* shows her as someone who has made gains in terms of psychological growth. Her profile is further characterized by low scores on *right-wing authoritarianism* and *religious fundamentalism*.

Table 35. Between Erica and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Erica has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Erica	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in United States	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Openness	**53.00**	39.22	6.21
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Transformation	**103.00**	81.84	9.33
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**223.00**	200.45	24.58
Autonomy	**35.00**	32.28	4.86
Personal Growth	**38.00**	34.36	4.61
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**35.00**	59.73	15.85
RWA	**44.00**	87.29	18.96

Erica is, according to her narrative, her faith development interview, and her questionnaire data, basically committed to her own spiritual journey and to her relationships – a spiritual seeker.

9.2 Midlife Revisions of a Seeker: Tom

Tom is a veteran and former member of Jehovah's Witnesses from the west coast of the United States. Tom's narrative tells about a troubled childhood. Tom was born into a large family for which the mother had children by different fathers. Some of his siblings were given up for adoption. Both Tom's mother and his father were emotionally unavailable to him. By the time Tom was six years of age, he had lost his father, two stepfathers, and three siblings. The mother moved continuously to places such as Central America, Africa, and within the United States. According to Tom's narrative, she lacked an emotional connection with Tom and he describes her as "*totally numb*". Tom tells that his father was more into motorcycles than people. Due to one of the family's moves the relationship was disrupted. Additionally, one of the stepfathers was an alcoholic and, as the other adults in his young life, disinterested in Tom's development as a child. As he grew, Tom realized that he was going to be a loner. Tom's familial life lacked any kind of intimate relationship, which Tom states he would have needed.

Tom served in the Vietnam War before returning and working in computers. Tom found himself turned off by Christianity which he perceived as linked to the governmental decision to go to war. Additionally, he believed the corruption of Christianity was the reason for both World Wars and the Spanish Inquisition. He later recounted that his judgments of Christianity came from the behaviors of self-proclaimed Christians in sinful acts, not from the teachings of the Bible. This led him to seek a better understanding of the Bible. Tom's lack of relationship as a child, his appreciation for inquiry, and his critical opinions about Christianity culminated when the Jehovah's Witnesses knocked on his door. Tom participated in a Bible study and later converted to the Jehovah's Witnesses. One might wonder if the witnesses' rejection of military service also played into Tom's conversion, however, Tom himself states:

"Either, so I grew up in an emotional vacuum. And that's important I think ... to recognize why I became one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I was looking for structure." (Narrative Interview with Tom, Interact 42)

What brought structure into Tom's life was the community of the Jehovah's Witnesses. He married another devotee. Tom's marriage ended in divorce, due to what Tom cites as his own unwillingness to be emotional. But Tom continued his association with Jehovah's Witnesses. Eventually Tom's appreciation for textual analysis would cause him to have a strained rela-

tionship with the Witnesses: As Tom read the Bible and analyzed certain passages, he found discrepancies in the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses and his own understanding of the Bible. Tom shared his interpretations and questions with others in his congregation. This led to a conflict with the elders of his congregation, as Tom explains:

"I settled down and I read through the Bible three times in the course of four years. Looking for, where is the problem here? Is it me, is it the Elders? No. And uh, began seeing significant differences, important differences in what they were teaching and what the scriptures were saying." (Narrative Interview with Tom, Interacts 128-130)

For Tom, the elders' unwillingness to consider alternative perspectives of the Bible became unjust. Moreover, Tom believed that he found truth and it was unclear why the elders would not consider his points. From this experience Tom was 'disfellowshipped' from the Jehovah's Witnesses. Again Tom reflects:

"Uhm, and they eventually brought me in, gave me a warning, and I kept doing it because I was sharing truth. And they, brought me in again, and said 'did you say this and this and this and this?' and I said 'yes' and I brought out what I just told you about finally finding a relationship with our father and I had also finally gotten a sense of what the ransom ... was all about." (Narrative Interview with Tom, Interacts 162–164)

Tom is a seeker looking for truth. While the Jehovah's Witnesses community provided him with family and stability, his self-determined textual inquiry was not appreciated. This lack of consideration by the elders prompted Tom's moral criticism of the tradition. Tom's deconversion was gradual, while the elders decided his fate in regards to membership. Tom was already questioning the community's interpretation of the scripture and the authority that enforces it. Tom notes the relief he felt when he was disfellowshipped. Although his disfellowship was sudden, after 30 years of membership within the Jehovah's Witness community, Tom has moved on to a more liberal denomination which he believes filled the void left by the Jehovah's Witness community. Thus Tom's deconversion trajectory is an integrating exit.

Tom's faith development interview sum score is 3.8 – which indicates the individuative-reflective faith. Tom has lower scores on *form of world coherence* (Aspect F) and *symbolic function* (Aspect G: 3.5). More interesting is that, in Tom's faith development interview, similar as in Erica's case, scores range from Stage Three to Stage Five. The following passage, Tom's response to the question of how he would generally go about making a decision, has been scored Stage Five, *conjunctive faith*:

"Prayer, prayer and meditation and somewhere in the course it will come to me. [I.: How ... how or when did you sort of come to that model of decision making?] [long pause for thinking] [...] I grew up uhm ... extremely left brained. Personal decisions, personal work it out, figure out the logic of it, and come to the conclusions. And parallel with all of that was an intense fear of faith because my understanding of faith was blind faith. [I.: Mhm.] What I saw in Hebrews 11:1 is that we need foundation for our faith. We need evidence. [I.: Mhm.] and as I came to understand that I began to open up to something more than just what I could see, measure, analyze, etc. [I.: Mhm.] And ... growing accustomed to that, allowing myself to go in that direction has been a very long process. [I.: Mhm.] Uhm ... but I understood [...] that my heart was totally shut down, but heart is what I needed in order to be able to do all this stuff. [I.: Right.] And I didn't have a clue, how do I get the heart to open up the heart? [I.: Yeah.] But I just decided somehow I just got to have it. The scriptures say, 'ask and ye shall receive' that's what I am going to do. [...] And so it took years before that process speeded up enough and there had been enough healing and enough faith to allow myself to heal more rapidly. [...] So, to answer your question of how and where; [I.: Yeah.] it's just been a very gradual process." (Faith Development Interview with Tom, Interact 239–258, [Aspect A], scored Stage Five)

Tom's answer shows explicit and formal-operational thinking and a multidimensional, analytic approach along with an awareness of faith as something beyond explicit ideological systems, involving, in Tom's language, "the heart". Another interesting aspect in Tom's faith development interview is his reflective and explicit way of dealing not only with issues of truth and interpretation of the Bible, but with his own past. The following passage about current relationships shows Tom's self-reflective explanation of his difficulties to see God as a father:

"Well, with both my fathers, they're significant by virtue of having being just about null. And so not willful neglect but neglect, the emptiness none the less. [I.: Right.] That's significant because it leaves me with an emptiness, left me with a real difficulty as seeing God as my father... [I.: Mhm.] because my awareness of what a father is a presence that does nothing. [I.: Mhm.] And... shifting that relative to a father who is out of sight and works indirectly... [I.: Right.] has been a challenge." (Faith Development Interview with Tom, Interact 3–12, [Aspect B], scored Stage Four)

Here Tom is displaying a systematic approach to perspective taking, clearly reflecting his own interiority in terms of his developmental history and self-selected worldview.

Compared to the in-tradition members' faith development interview scores which have a mean of 3.1, Tom's faith development appears almost one faith stage advanced. Therefore, we may have some reason to assume that, in his gradual disaffiliation from the Jehovah's Witnesses, Tom was involved in structural deconversion.

We might compare Tom's individuative-reflective faith style to that of an active Jehovah's Witnesses in-tradition member. Eunice, 53, also of Caucasian ethnicity, whose total faith development interview score of 3.1 corresponds to the average score for members reported above. She had turned to the Jehovah's Witnesses as a teenager, ending an active search for a church which could give satisfying answers to her spiritual questions. Here is how Eunice describes the way she would go about making an important decision. Her reflections remain largely tacit, and she seems to rely on the guidance she finds in her personal relationship to Jehovah or Jesus Christ, rather than on rigorous questioning or systematic thinking:

"The first thing you do is you make it a matter of prayer. You keep your eyes open to receive that about a situation [...] But uhm, I always ... make any decision ... it doesn't even have to be the big ones, a matter of prayer. And then I look for indications that I think are leading me one direction or another. If it feels it is spiritually building up or spiritually [...] someone else, I go in that direction. Spiritually, as a single woman, right now, it's me and Jehovah. Jehovah, Jesus Christ. You know. And everything filters down from there. Right?" (Faith Development Interview with Eunice, Interact 254–262, Decision, scored Stage Three)

Tom identifies as "more spiritual than religious" in the questionnaire. His responses on the scales (see Table 36) display a very high score on *openness to experience* – which reflects his profile as a person who is committed to searching for truth. His high score in *well-being*, however, may reflect his growing attention for important, if not existential, aspects of his inner life. His scores on *autonomy* and *personal growth* point to his independent search for meaning. This search, however, is strictly based on his study of his sacred text, the Bible – whose authority may well be indicated by his high scores on *fundamentalism* and *right-wing authoritarianism*.

Taken together, Tom is on his autonomous path, gaining psychological growth, while strictly adhering to the fundaments of his Christian faith in a rather fundamentalist style.

Table 36. Differences between Tom and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Tom has Deconverted

	Single Case Question-naire Data of Tom	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in United States	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Openness	50.00	39.22	6.21
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Transformation	76.00	81.84	9.33
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	230.00	200.45	24.58
Autonomy	43.00	32.28	4.86
Personal Growth	41.00	34.36	4.61
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	53.00	59.73	15.85
RWA	91.00	87.29	18.96

9.3   Synthetic-Conventional Heresy: Gudrun

Gudrun, a 68-year-old German woman, had disaffiliated from the Jehovah's Witnesses some years previous to the interview. In the beginning of the interview, Gudrun tells how she and her family turned to Jehovah's Witnesses. It was after the World War II, when the family was living in the German Democratic Republic.

"Well, yes, the introduction to the Witnesses started uh, after the war. But this aunt who uh had lost her husband during the war, missed near Stalingrad, they said. And of course there was hope that he might come back some day. But uh, the destitution made her a slave to or open uh... to Jehovah's Witnesses going from door to door. Back then they were, right after the war they were there. Also in the little village [small town on former German territory]. Were, came from somewhere. And had ... My aunt was immediately enthusiastic. Soaked it, yes up like ... Then I had an uncle who lived a few villages away, you know, as a farmer. And he had ... he was a little bit like the intellectual type. And he tried to refute it with all his might. The Witnesses' teachings. And th... Anyway, then he put a lot of effort uh, in this and tried uh, to refute Jehovah's Witnesses teaching. But then he also studied the Witnesses'

writings and was somehow taken over by their logic and also became a Witness. And when the uncle became a Witness the rest of the family also, well, if he, then there must be something to this. And then we also started studying." (Narrative Interview with Gudrun, Interact 4–30)

Gudrun appears to be looking for explanations and trying to account for a membership which lasted a considerable part of her adult life. She apparently constructs continuity, while applying a dichotomous evaluation system: if it was right to leave, then there must have been something wrong with joining. Therefore, joining has to be explained: the aunt, who lost her husband, was prone to affiliate with or at least be open for the doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses. And when the intellectual of the family, the uncle, did not manage to defend his critical view, then there was no further need to account for the children who started to study the Bible and JW teachings as part of the family.

While later, in times of the German Democratic Republic, the Jehovah's Witnesses came under political oppression, aunt and uncle were sent to jail for years, and Gudrun's family managed to escape to West Germany. There Gudrun's mother converted to the Jehovah's Witnesses. Gudrun's mother insisted that she and the daughters go to the regular meetings, but Gudrun's father and Gudrun's brother could not be motivated or convinced to also join Jehovah's Witnesses.

Gudrun adapted to the new life circumstances, integrated in the community of Jehovah's Witnesses, where she met her future husband. Gudrun seems to have enjoyed especially the social network in the community, while not questioning the doctrine. She claims that she was less concerned about questions of principle, but always took these issues more lightly.

"Yes, and then there was this youth group, like I said, with ..., where we would then always meet and ... Yes. Then ... Yes, discussions, of course again and again about right and wrong. My husband, who got into that more intensively with his substitute service duty in order to finish it. I didn't see it as quite as badly as he did because in this respect I'm simply such a ... gullible person, you know. In the organization I often thought that they know what they're doing. They'll know why this is the way it is. I also excused a lot of things." (Narrative Interview with Gudrun, Interact 102–104)

Gudrun and her husband soon saw contradictions between the official teachings and their own perceptions of what is good and bad; Gudrun, however, kept her more tolerant and open thoughts in private, claiming that she trusted God more than the doctrine:

"My husband and I, for example, often talked about people we knew in the world whom we thought were likable, whom we liked a lot and ... we always said that they couldn't be doomed. Why, uh. Those were always the questions that we were con-

cerned with. And uh ... I then said, is there, uh I thought, I mean, you couldn't say it out in the open. Yes, God will have His way for you. If these are good people, they cannot be doomed." (Narrative Interview with Gudrun, Interact 118–120)

Most impressive is that Gudrun, while still a Witness, developed some inner distance to their beliefs: She trusted that God would find a solution for those people of the world of whom she could not imagine that they deserved to perish in Armageddon. In their contacts with non-Jehovah's Witnesses, the couple avoided discussions about religious questions and doubts – for example, when the year 1975 approached and most other Jehovah's Witnesses expected the end of the world, Gudrun did not really believe and expect that:

"You know, not at all. I didn't really ... believe it deep inside. I just noticed something, I mean that ... my ... again end time, yes. But uh, I didn't believe it all deep inside. Like some people from the gatherings who didn't wall-paper and simply said certain things like 'We are not going do this anymore. It's going to be over soon anyway.'" (Narrative Interview with Gudrun, Interact 144)

But there is also another side, there are other commitments: Gudrun enjoyed her job and she was married happily. Around the time when she got pregnant, they started their way: A pregnancy at that time, when other witnesses were not even considering renovating their homes, might be interpreted as another act of "silent rebellion" or independence on Gudrun's part, who understood herself, nevertheless, as a faithful member. Her husband had the stronger impulse to leave, but the couple discussed and decided it all together.

"Were, yes ... We done like whatever was going on. You like went to gatherings, we did our tasks. And we were, you could like say, since '75, we were all engaged in a hot discussion with each other. And we ... often talked all night long. And we ploughed through that topic, uh repeatedly. And ... uh ... and I think that that all contributed to like that we managed the exit so ... easily, really. Really ..., for me that was like, because at first I fought against it. Because, you know, I was the one convinced and ... I felt how my husband drifted off more and more." (Narrative Interview with Gudrun, Interact 168)

Gudrun reports that she was hesitant at first, but gave in, when she learned that her husband was able to back up his new perspective with literature and when she felt that he was definitely determined to leave. Finally, Gudrun left Jehovah's Witnesses together with her husband. The preparation for the birth of their child brought the couple in touch with more non-Witnesses and, through one of them, they found contact to the pastor of the local Protestant parish – and became members of the Protestant Church which they celebrated together with the baptism of their child:

"Yes, yes, and then, in this, after, where this [daughter's name] then was, there came uh, that our friends, through pregnancy gymnastics, then later neighbors, uh, who then also uh, introduced us to the pastor who lived in our neighborhood. There we had very good social contacts. And with them you could ... you know, like have a glass of wine and really discuss things and talk about everything. And this was when, that we ... decided to join the church again, also because we thought, yes, for [daughter's name] it's probably also good ... yes, the christening and joining the church took place at the same time. It was more than a year ... And yes, that ... we were living as good church Christians. I had always had a feeling that something was missing." (Narrative Interview with Gudrun, Interact 336–339)

Gudrun reports that she and her husband, even after a short time, felt some discontent with church-life in the Protestant Church. And when they then came in touch with charismatic believers, it was especially Gudrun who became impressed with their way of living their faith. This was the start of a charismatic episode in their religious biography. But her husband remained skeptical; and in turn, they withdrew from the charismatic scene. Gudrun explains that she is more patient with others' weaknesses:

"Well, yeah. He had more problems with it. He sees it ... is uh, yeah, sees it maybe also a lot more matter-of-factly. I uh, can then excuse some things. And I always think that the people ... behind it that they aren't somehow ... evil or to ... for the profit of it or ... that they like somehow ... want to make themselves be really important. Because that ... uh, uh ... Well, I don't really think that, now. Of course, I then excuse it. I then see the person behind it and think like he doesn't do it maliciously. I mean, I have, sometimes I, too, talk like [...] and make mistakes." (Narrative Interview with Gudrun, Interact 408)

At the time of the interview, Gudrun is a member of a women's prayer group in her Protestant parish.

Gudrun's deconversion trajectory clearly is an integrating exit. As motives and deconversion criteria intellectual doubt and loss of religious experience stand out for finally terminating the membership. But in the narrative, we see more. Something had kept her from exclusively focusing on and getting totally entangled in a religious community and its beliefs. She rather remained at the periphery. The reason may be described as follows: For Gudrun, faith had been of some, but not of prime importance throughout her adult life, and it was less the doctrine, but rather the social network which was most important to her. Of even higher priority was her marriage and family, but also friends in the "world". Such openness indicates a basic independent attitude and behavior that is characteristic of Gudrun's way of dealing with religion.

Corresponding to the fact that relationships had always been more important than doctrine, Gudrun and her husband were motivated to seek and keep friendships with people who did not share their faith – a quite unusual

behavior for Jehovah's Witnesses. She and her husband had always culti-vated relationships to such persons. This kept them more open and flexible – and made their deconversion less dramatic. Thus we see in Gudrun's religious biography, including her deconversion story and her charismatic episode, a kind of heretic structure: Being aware that the religious affilia-tion was her choice, she is skeptical and intellectually independent, while also perceptive as well as tolerant of others' weaknesses. She keeps the relationships which are important to her and follows her husband, when he starts to test whether their religious affiliation was the right choice.

But, interestingly, all heresy and all skeptical reservation weighed against too deep involvement which we see in Gudrun's story are not on an individuative-reflective, but clearly on a synthetic-conventional level (this indicates a clear difference to Type One "Pursuit of Autonomy"): Gudrun's faith development interview score is 2.8, consisting of assignments to *syn-thetic-conventional faith* across almost all aspects. The comparison with the measures of faith development of the members of German Jehovah's Wit-nesses, which results in an average score of 3.0, would suggest that Gudrun's deconversion did not involve any change in terms of faith devel-opment. Thus her deconversion(s) have to be understood as a *lateral* de-conversion.

Going into more detail of the faith development interview, we see Gudrun embedded in a conventional style. Her primary focus lies on inter-personal relationship. This is obvious also in the following excerpt – which nevertheless indicates also that this does not exclude openness for new questions and perspectives. Asked for the groups or projects with which she can identify at the moment, Gudrun responds:

"[Laughing] ... (very long pause) Yes, well I ... in those meetings where you talk ... I always feel ... and uh, [I: Mhm.] Right, there I feel comfortable. And ... generally it used to be called Bible Group and that's where I go to every now and then. Otherwise [...] here like our young [...] has such a discussion group which, well, you know, where you get more ... out of ... you know, common views on the Bible. [I. Mhm.] But rather also kind of someth... something with more depth and that questions the whole thing more psychologically." (Faith Development Interview with Gudrun, Interact 155–159, [Aspect D], scored Stage Three)

Ideological or dogmatic concerns do not appear to be of importance to Gudrun. On the contrary, moral decisions are made on the basis of inner feelings of "peace", as Gudrun's answer to the question, what makes deci-sion right or wrong, indicates:

"[Laughing] What makes it right? Uh, it can be wrong. But ... if inside you're calm about this, if you have inner peace about this, then it is always a sign for me. When I'm all calm then I know that the action ... is right. [I: Mhm.] Or it, even if it looks

crooked that moment or doesn't seem to be quite right, uh, and then get some peace about it. And this is the main point, you know, that you have peace inside and can say, yes, this is the way you can do it." (Faith Development Interview with Gudrun, Interacts 224–228, [Aspect C], Moral Judgment, scored Stage Three)

Gudrun is one of the rare deconverts claiming to be "more religious than spiritual". Her scores on the *Big Five* (see Table 37) reflect her silent way of being independent: She scores high on *emotional stability* – which results, together with *agreeableness* (which is higher than for the average member) and *conscientiousness* in high *traditionalism*. This truly conservative attitude is evident in her low scores on *openness to experience*.

Table 37. Differences between Gudrun and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Gudrun has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Gudrun	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommo-dating Religious Organiza-tions in Germany	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Emotional Stabil.	**45.00**	42.25	6.77
Extraversion	**39.00**	40.87	5.71
Openness	**35.00**	40.65	6.04
Agreeableness	**48.00**	46.79	4.48
Conscientiousness	**42.00**	45.17	6.15
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Traditionalism	**135.00**	134.21	13.03
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**196.00**	204.99	18.74
Envir. Mastery	**37.00**	33.62	4.66
Positive Relations	**37.00**	35.41	4.04
Purpose in Life	**31.00**	35.34	3.92
Self-Acceptance	**33.00**	34.18	4.48
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**77.00**	68.00	14.67
RWA	**85.00**	84.37	18.76

Gudrun's high scores on *environmental mastery* and *positive relations with others* are indicators of psychological well-being and refer to the importance of social integration and relationships in her life. Her score on the *right-wing authoritarianism* scale corresponds to, and her score on the *religious fundamentalism* scale is higher than the scores of average in-tradition members – showing her adherence to an authoritative religious value system.

Taken together, Gudrun appears as a religious person with a synthetic-conventional faith structure and no major ideological or dogmatic concerns, but including signs of a heretical trait throughout her religious biography. These kept her from an all too deep emotional involvement with Jehovah's Witnesses – which without doubt was the major and longest religious affiliation – and led to a gradual, lateral, integrating exit without much conflict and signs of crisis. Gudrun prefers a form of religion-enabling relationship – which meets her need for harmonious, peaceful and understanding personal relationships in her immediate environment.

9.4 Ongoing Quest and Multiple Deconversions: Konrad

Konrad is a 51-year-old German who deconverted from an Eastern guru group when he was young and who is, at the time of the interview, once again thinking about changing his religious affiliation.

Konrad grew up with an alcoholic father who was authoritarian, highly irritable and also had problems with impulse control. Konrad and his siblings were physically abused and traumatized. Retrospectively, he wonders how they managed to survive. His troubled childhood covers a considerable part of the interview and Konrad thinks that this is important to understand his story.

"Uhm ... the atmosphere at home was ... very pressing, extremely burdening. Uh, my, my father uh, always was uh, authoritarian, strict, brutal, violent, uh, he hit us, uh, when we mis... made mistakes in our homework. Uhm, at the table we, just to illustrate the atmosphere a little more. We weren't allowed to speak and no ... not move either. Uh, this means that we weren't allowed to clatter with the cutlery uh, or with the ... let the fork drop. If that happened, uh, the situation would freeze like ice. My father suddenly paused, stopped talking and moving and uh. looked at us scathingly. You know, that-that everyone's uh-uh ... everyone's impulses uh, froze." (Narrative Interview with Konrad, Interact 86)

Going to church regularly on Sundays was part of the schedule of the family, and Konrad was susceptible to the atmosphere, due in part to his openness for religious experiences, but perhaps also because he enjoyed the peaceful and safe place. But this provided the background for religious questions in adolescence:

"... my father didn't uh have anything whatsoever to do with faith or the church, you know, he he resisted that. But Sunday mornings he'd uh throw me out of bed because I was supposed to go to church. Hm, I did that, too, and sometimes I even liked going there because I felt something there. I don't know what but something was there. Not the sermon. The sermons were uh boring and I didn't understand them either, but something was there that appealed to me. And uh.. often that satisfied me inside. I don't know what it was. [throat clearing] That's why I liked going there and that's how I first came into contact with with the church and uh uh religion. Only later uh uh when I was sixteen seventeen eighteen there was this very strong question about God, who He is, where He is. Uh and I would today looking back definitely say, uh, that I developed a strong search for God." (Narrative Interview with Konrad, Interact 139–144)

Looking back, he describes himself as a seeker who "fell into the hands of a cult":

"Uh, nineteen hundred ... uh seventy ... uh while I was looking for God, you know, I really wanted to get this moving and advance it [throat clearing], I fell into the hands of an Indian sect." (Narrative Interview with Konrad, Interact 148–161)

Disenchanted by the authoritarian leadership style which he may have experienced as an echo of the anxiety of his childhood, he leaves the "guru sect", supported by Christian friends. He compares his dependency on the group to an addiction. In addition he had been afraid to leave the group. This process lasted half a year, then he made a statement that he was taking his leave.

After his disaffiliation, he felt exhausted and was suffering from depression. Then Konrad joined a Pentecostal Christian group in which he stayed for eight years. He completed his education, went to university and was able to successfully use his talents and interest in arts in his profession. When he met a theology student, he learned from her that he did not have to read the Bible as a collection of authoritarian prescriptions:

"... she gave me impulses, uh that I later followed up on. Uh ... because I suddenly realized that I was really sticking to this fundamentalist uh uh picture of God. [looking for words] What ... was uh also very hard for me, I uh suffered from that. Didn't know though how to deal with that. Nobody had shown me how to really re- read the Bible. How to understand it or how it can be understood. Instead this ... these authoritarian uhm uh ... or totalitarian understanding of faith." (Narrative Interview with Konrad, Interact 468–470)

Again, Konrad claims that he felt inferior and not good enough. Retrospectively, he says, he was suffering from depression but was not aware of it at the time. He felt that, if he could only believe in God firmly enough, he would finally feel better, an expectation that was suggested by a belief in 'miracles healing' which was considered proof of the existence of God. Konrad here refers to them as very common within Evangelical and Charismatic circles, labeling those as "fundamentalist":

"You know, this was preached in these ... uh in these fundamentalist circles. You know, if you're sick, you have to pray, then you'll get well again." (Narrative Interview with Konrad, Interact 560–562)

He visited theological lectures with his new friend, explored the Charismatic scene, but without membership or affiliation:

"You know ... also this whole charismatic scene that I got to know ve- very well in later years ... uh didn't get me anywhere. People are filled up with good feelings uh and the singing of Hallelujah and then mostly left to themselves." (Narrative Interview with Konrad, Interact 596)

Then, Konrad started to reject what he perceived as pressure for better performance, fuelled by Protestant ethics:

"Uh there also always was this- this hint at ... you have to practice regularly, get something moving, achieve something so that ... this can shape inside you and you reach a goal. The way you are now you're not good enough ... And I ... well, I couldn't go on living with this idea anymore." (Narrative Interview with Konrad, Interact 620–622)

A turning point came when Konrad met his wife, a theologian. They married and started a family. For twenty years then, he was a member of a Methodist parish. When he lived through a depressive episode again, he looked for therapeutic support. In the course of his therapy Konrad began to feel accepted as he is, and he felt his image of God change. God was no longer the authority Konrad had to obey. He felt relief from the pressure to live up to God's expectations. In therapy he had, as he says, his first positive experience with God. When he later suffered from the physical consequences of stress, he withdrew for several months, and, reaching back to his meditation experiences and skills, developed methods to stabilize himself. He describes what he has found for himself:

"Uh, this way of- of meditating and relaxing uh and- and also the- uh to let myself sink into God, I still do that. Every day. And for me uh this ... the whole way uh ... of believing, living faith, and taking my own path. Nope, I like dropped this authoritative ... uh this authoritative image of God and the authoritative and strict God and met One who uh uh is loving and present." (Narrative Interview with Konrad, Interact 878–882)

Now Konrad moved away from the Methodist Church and affiliated with the Catholic Church, in which he found the "mystical" atmosphere he had been looking for:

"Yes. [throat clearing] In the final phase, this means up to today, I describe it this way. After twenty years of the Methodist Church uh I also par... parted with the scene. And I turned to ... uh a Catholic-Mystic understanding of uh faith. On an irregular uh basis I go to the Catholic Mass ... Uh or every now and then I go to a cloister for-for a few days. And ... that is something uh that gives me a whole lot. You know, uh in the Catholic Church I have for the first time ... on this ... on my long search found a ... a safe and quiet place. This is what I can say unconditionally. I know that many people are against the Catholic Church and also have many reservations. I can say that for me I've discovered a safe and quiet place there which uh I can enter any time." (Narrative Interview with Konrad, Interact 946–962)

What attracted him to the Catholic Church is his perception of compassion and unconditional acceptance:

"There you know about the shortcomings of human existence. But that's like okay. You- you- that- that is really obvious that we uh make mistakes and are flawed and will always make mistakes. That we're not perfect. But that's okay. That's like part of- of this mystery." (Narrative Interview with Konrad, Interact 1042–1050)

Now Konrad felt accepted. It is important to him to tell in this long narrative that he was able to resolve the complex feelings toward his father. He prayed with him before he died, and, after going through an emotional turmoil, he could eventually feel pity for him. This conflicted relationship seems to have been mirrored by Konrad's religious quest. In his permanent and long-lasting search for something different and better, he appears, especially in his early years, to have repeated some of his conflicts with his authoritative father. Also, his psychotherapy appears to have promoted his faith development.

Konrad's faith development interview score is one of the highest we collected in our sample. With an average rating of 4.4, his faith structure is individuative-reflective – with clear traits of conjunctive faith. The lowest score is 3.8 for *form of logic* (Aspect A). High scores on the *locus of authority* (Aspect E) and *form of world coherence* (Aspect F) reflect his life-long struggle with his father and its resolution.

As we also saw in the narrative interview, Konrad had to deal with deep life crises. One of these themes was learning forgiveness – a challenge he had to face in order to liberate himself from his feelings of hatred, rage and anger in respect to his distressful youth and his "authoritarian, tyrannical" father. In the faith development interview answers, we see him deal with these complex feelings in a way which reflects "the ability to take the perspective of the other with less concern for the defense of one's own per-

spective" and with the ability to "grant autonomy to the other and to look at the other from the other's perspective" – as coding criteria for Stage Five are characterized in the *Manual* (Fowler et al.: 2004):

"I don't want to burden myself with my negative feelings towards my father anymore' [I: Mhm.] I put them aside. [I: Mhm.] And ... I'd also say that I forgave him. [I: Mhm.] ... A while ago uh I went to his grave and put a wreath down for him and a candle and so on, [I: Mhm.] And I also expressed it that way [I: Mhm.] that I uh that he ... that I don't bear a grudge anymore about what he's done. But that the fault uh remains with him and not me. [I: Mhm.] You know, he is responsible, uh but not I. [I: Mhm.] You know, somehow I ... I've always been ashamed ... for for something that I hadn't done, I've always felt bad, [I: Mhm. Mhm.] and this is gradually getting better." (Faith Development Interview with Konrad, Interact 338–354, Perspective Taking [Aspect B], scored Stage Five)

When explaining the change of his authoritative image of God, which was influenced by his relationship with his father, into an internally located and accepting God, Konrad himself gives his account of change and development in an individuative-reflective way:

"My picture of God has changed a lot. [I: Mhm.] Well uh ... about one hundred and eighty degrees I'd uh say it has changed ... uh (throat clearing) from an ... uh authoritarian uh image of God that was influenced heavily by my father and from which I wasn't able to find an escape. [I: Mhm.] to a ... to an image of God that uh uh is very liberal, I'd say. [I: Can you localize this more in time, when did what actually change? I mean, when uh would you say, looking back was your image of God like this uh authoritarian father image, for example?] Now I'm fifty-one uh years old ... Uh I've been dealing with uh faith and spirituality for about... uh thirty years. [I: Mhm.] Looking back I have to say that ... at least twenty-five twenty-six years were influenced by the authoritarian image of God. So strongly that I uh broke down under this impression that God is someone uh someone who ask things of me uh I can't fulfil." (Faith Development Interview with Konrad, Interacts 68–78, [Aspect G], Image of God, scored Stage Four)

Finally, with Konrad's self-identification as a spiritual person, we present a passage that we assigned to Stage Five, because, different from an individuative-reflective structure and from striving for systemic closure, Konrad perceives himself in a basically open, pluralistic framework. Being a spiritual person means for him to 'be on his way'.

"Yes, I'm a spiritual person. [I: Mhm. Could you explain a little more what this means?] Yes ... [exhales deeply] Well, I think that ... religiosity can be ... that ... I think rel... religion is the best form of avoiding God. This is, well, a ... God takes place where there is life. [I: Mhm] And religion is something artificial, manmade. Uh ... what people need in order ... it's like a corset. [I: Mhm.] Like someone who can't walk properly uh ... [I: Mhm.] or can't stand properly has to hold on to something. Right that moment when you leave religion behind the real uh the real path with uh

God starts." (Faith Development Interview with Konrad, Interacts 829–842, [Aspect F], Religious, scored Stage Five)

Konrad calls himself neither a religious person nor a believer, but a spiritual person; he shows strong opposition against a self-identification with "religion", using a juxtaposition which resembles that of life-as-religion vs. subjective-life-spirituality (Heelas et al.: 2005). Also in the questionnaire, Konrad identifies himself as "more spiritual than religious".

As we see in Table 38, Konrad's score on *openness to experience* is considerably higher than that of the average in-tradition member, while *extraversion* is much lower. This may refer to more subtle processes of inner change than to an outgoing way of sharing new experiences. Specific for his profile is Konrad's high score on *conscientiousness* which, combined with a very low score in *emotional stability*, reflects his vulnerability as well as his efforts to balance it by handling himself and others with deliberate care. As parts of the scale on *psychological well-being* the points on *positive relations with others* and *self-acceptance* are relatvely high, illustrating what he achieved during what he considers his spiritual path. Konrad's scores on *religious fundamentalism* and *right-wing-authoritarianism* are rather low and reflect his rejection of authoritarian aspects of religiosity.

In sum, Konrad appears as a seeker throughout his religious career; life-long quest and many deconversions characterize his trajectory. Through his journey of affiliations and disaffiliations, a repetition of lower tension deconversions, he appears – and he tells us – to have changed and grown. This can be interpreted as transformation or, to stretch Fowler's model of structural and lateral conversion a bit, as series of structural deconversions – or, perhaps better: as structural transformation through a series of affiliations and disaffiliations.

Konrad could also be called also an "accumulative heretic," if accumulation does not mean to save and keep everyone content, but to accumulate experiences that have contributed to finding one's own way of liberation, growth and (faith) development. Konrad appreciates forms of religiosity which include the extended use of religious symbols – which reflect the richness and the complexity of transcendence, the "mystery" of the world. He would reject forms of religiosity which are suppressing this richness. Konrad, in his encounter with life crises and rather challenging environmental structures, has managed to fruitfully cope with these challenges – and engage in transition.

Table 38. Differences between Konrad and the In-Tradition Members of the Type of Religious Organization from which Konrad has Deconverted

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Konrad	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in Germany	
		Mean	SD
Big Five Personality Factors			
Emotional Stabil.	**21.00**	42.25	6.77
Extraversion	**24.00**	40.87	5.71
Openness	**51.00**	40.65	6.04
Agreeableness	**45.00**	46.79	4.48
Conscientiousness	**54.00**	45.17	6.15
Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors			
Traditionalism	**120.00**	134.21	13.03
Psychological Well-Being & Growth			
Well-Being (total)	**212.00**	204.99	18.74
Envir. Mastery	**31.00**	33.62	4.66
Positive Relations	**37.00**	35.41	4.04
Purpose in Life	**35.00**	35.34	3.92
Self-Acceptance	**37.00**	34.18	4.48
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism			
RF	**40.00**	68.00	14.67
RWA	**54.00**	84.37	18.76

9.5 Conclusion

Against the background of Erica's, Tom's, Gudrun's, and Konrad's case studies, we can now summarize the characteristics of our fourth type "Life-long Quests – Late Revisions": In this type we assemble deconverts who, one time or multiple times, leave a religious environment because it did not sufficiently meet their need and expectation for a religious community which is responsive to their religious quest and open enough to tolerate their ongoing quest. It is the type of seeker or heretic whose religious quest typically emerges in adolescence and young adulthood and leads to conversion – typically into a religious tradition with higher tension to the mainstream and to society. Thus, we may typically observe lower-tension deconversion(s) here; and it is not unlikely that development and structural deconversion occur. What is the motivational structure for such life-long religious search? This type of deconvert may have experienced pressure, stress and trauma in childhood, be it in a troubled family or in troubled times, for example war. However, these deconverts seem to have developed the idea that there was something worth exploring. It seems that in times of discontent they can rely on their ability to eventually find new ideas and / or attachments.

10 Deconversion in Biographical and Cultural Perspective: Conclusions and Discussion

This book started with a detailed account of the conceptualization of deconversion. We gave an account of our *criteria* for conceptualizing 'deconversion'[50] and of our *typology* of potential deconversion trajectories.[51] The chapters of this book moved from the conceptual and methodological accounts through the presentation of quantitative results and faith development assessment and arrived at the case studies, which cover most of the book. This concluding chapter is the place to be looking back and discussing whether the conceptual framework established holds its promise when pulling perspectives and results together − thereby triangulating all three types of our data.

Thus, we will, in light of our results, reconsider and present an answer to the question: What is deconversion? While quantitative results suggest an answer which is based on predefined concepts and categories, case study analyses start with single cases and with individual narratives − which, in a synoptic view, yield a typological pattern. Secondly, there is the question: What motivates deconversion, how does it come about? Thirdly, we address the questions of the effects and consequences for the individual, the questions of gains and losses of deconversion; here is also the place to consider deconversion as a crisis and discuss whether there is a need for intervention. Finally, we present conclusions about the implications of our elaborate variety of deconversions for the conceptualization of the religious field and for future research perspectives on organized and un-organized religion.

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[50] See Chapter One (1.2), especially p. 22.

[51] The visualization of deconversion trajectories is presented in Figure 1 on p. 27; deconversion trajectories in the religious field, as informed by the sociological model of Weber, Troeltsch and especially Bourdieu, are presented in Figure 2 on p. 32.

10.1   What is Deconversion?

10.1.1 Deconversion in Light of Quantitative and Quantifiable Data

Questionnaire data from 129 deconverts[52] and from 1.067 in-tradition members and structural-quantitative evaluation of faith development interviews with 99 deconverts and 177 in-tradition members in our study shed light on the characteristics of deconversion. They give an answer to the question of what deconversion is.

On the basis of our quantitative and quantifiable data, the most important and cross-culturally valid characteristics of deconversion are:

- (higher scores on) *openness to experience,*[53]
- (lower scores on) *religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism* and *truth of texts and teachings*;
- a general reluctance to self-identify as "being religious" and a two or three times higher inclination for self-identification as being "more spiritual than religious" or as "neither religious nor spiritual;"[54]
- (higher scores on) *faith development*. For this characterization we can refer to the 277 faith development interviews in our sample which indicate that deconverts have a considerable larger share in Individuative-Reflective Faith than in Synthetic-Conventional Faith,[55] but also that deconverts score lower on *truth of texts and teachings*.

What is deconversion then? In light of these results, deconversion generally appears as a disengagement from a religious tradition which, in retrospect, is considered absolutist and authoritarian. It is an engagement in exploration of spiritual or secular alternatives, and is a change that is likely to be associated with transformation in terms of faith development. Though it is obvious from the case studies that this is a general answer and is not true for each and every single case deconvert, this is a general portrait of deconversion based on our quantitative and quantifiable data.

This portrait of cross-culturally valid characteristics of deconversion that center on lower fundamentalism scores, on explorative behavior and openness to experience corresponds to previous research on deconversion. Some researchers refer in their interpretation of deconversion and disaffilia-

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[52] The number of deconverts who have only filled out our questionnaire is higher that the number of deconverts whose narrative interviews we have evaluated (n=99).

[53] Here we draw together results as presented in Table 12 on p. 74, interpreted in 4.2 and summarized in 4.5; see also the confirmation from regression analysis described in 4.6.

[54] See results as presented in Table 15 on p. 86 and described in this context, and also the summary in 4.5.

[55] See results presented in 5.4, in particular in Figure 4 on p. 102 and Table 19 on p. 108.

tion from organized religion to modern developments such as religious individualism and heresy. Barbour (1994, 51) notes, for example, that historically the interest in deconversion is inspired by the "belief in the right and duty of each individual to chose his or her beliefs in a responsible manner." This can be associated with Berger's (1979) heretical imperative which, when people really want to put it into practice, requires openness for new experience and readiness for change. We could also refer to Beaudoin's (1998; 2003) notion that a spiritual quest, in his case of Generation X, involves heresy and irreverence towards religious tradition. Our results also correspond to Streyffeler and McNally's (1998) comparative study of 140 liberal and 109 fundamentalist church members who found that *openness to experience* has a unique negative relation to fundamentalism. Their data suggest, as they conclude, "a connection between conservative religious beliefs and a general avoidance of novel ideas and experiences."

Nevertheless, already in our quantitative assessment differences emerge which lead us to a more detailed answer to our question, namely what deconversion is. Obvious are cross-cultural differences between German and U.S. deconverts:

For the German deconverts in our sample, we see factors emerging which indicate a cross-cultural difference and also a "downside" of deconversion in Germany:[56] While in our U.S. sample deconversion is associated with higher scores on *autonomy* and *personal growth*, German deconverts show lower scores on *extraversion* and *emotional stability* and on *positive relations with others, purpose in life, environmental mastery* and *self-acceptance* (four out of six factors of the *Psychological Well-Being and Growth* scale). This may suggest a differentiated perspective – and a modified answer to our question. In contrast to the United States, deconversion in Germany appears to be associated with a loss or a crisis in regard to one's self (*emotional stability, self-acceptance*), relationships and social contexts (*positive relations with others, extraversion, environmental mastery*) as well as generating meaning (*purpose in life*).

Attending to the higher-order factor construction in the *Big Two*, we find deconversion associated with *transformation* in the U.S. sample, while, for German deconverts, deconversion is associated with (significantly lower scores on) *traditionalism*.

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[56] See Table 12, but also the interpretation in 4.3 and 4.5.

10.1.2 From Quantitative to Qualitative Perspectives on the Definition of Deconversion

While we certainly do not suggest to underrate or to ignore the results from quantitative and quantifiable data, the Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study on Deconversion has more to offer. The clear qualitative focus yields more insights about deconversion, but, as may be expected, with a clear focus on individual differences that starts with the attention to the single case. The core of the data consists of the – for a qualitative study – considerable number of almost one hundred narrative interviews and faith development interviews with deconverts from a very broad variety of religious groups and organizations in the United States and Germany; and from this data clusters of different types and subtypes of deconverts have emerged. This allows for an even more detailed answer to the question of what deconversion is.

One of the unique characteristics of our study also is the insight it allows into minority religions. This is because the core sample is the result of theoretical, contrastive sampling in which *intentionally* religious groups with tension and high tension to the culture, including new religious groups, are represented with more than 50%. Twenty-one cases were selected from this interview sample again according to the criterion of maximal contrast, serving as examples in order to profile the types of deconversion narratives which we presented in Chapters Six through Nine.

Case studies – as reconstructions of the interviewees' reconstructions – are elaborated using appropriate methods such as sequence analysis and narrative analysis, as detailed in the section on method,[57] but already the faith development interviews – evaluated in the "classical" way according to the *Manual*[58] – were able to open a new, a second perspective. A third perspective is opened by including the single deconverts' questionnaire answers on scales measuring personality, psychological well-being, religious schemata, fundamentalism and authoritarianism.[59] Thus, we tried our best to transcend and enrich classical qualitative analysis and put to work methodological triangulation and data triangulation,[60] and we hope that we were able to convince the reader that this procedure is productive.

A still new perspective – or more depth of the second and third perspective – is opened by the use of data from groups and organizations which the

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[57] For a general description of methods and instruments, see Chapter Three (especially 3.1 and 3.3); for a specific description of the qualitative sample and evaluation, see Chapter Five (esp. 5.1 and 5.2).

[58] See Chapter Three (3.3.2).

[59] This detailed in Chapter Three (3.3.3).

[60] The interrelation of the levels of analysis and sorts of data is discussed in 3.4.2.

deconverts have left. The ideal model was the *basic unit of research*[61] according to which faith development interviews and questionnaire data with in-tradition members could be collected in addition to the data from deconverts. This amounts to a database that allows the identification of statistically significant differences. Chapter Four presented the groundwork and preparation for the comparisons to be used in the single case studies. With the narrated experience of deconverts as a starting point, the quantitative results served to profile deconversion and deconversion types against the background of the religious environment which the deconverts left. Case study analysis accounts for individual trajectories in the first place, but yields the perspective of a typology. Thus, our prominent answer to the question of what deconversion is, is this: Deconversion occurs as a variety of deconversion narratives which cluster in four types whose characteristics can be profiled by using the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

10.1.3 Profiling the Variety: Four Types of Deconversion Narratives

Taking up the thread of the detailed discussion of case studies, we now present a summary of the typology – and our most prominent answer to the question of what deconversion is – which emerged from the analysis of narrative and faith development interviews and questionnaire data. Thereby we take into account the most important differences and polarities which we have used so far in our evaluation for a better understanding of the single case deconversion narratives. A synoptic characterization of our four types of deconverts may call attention to commonalities and dividing lines:

The essentials of the *pursuit of autonomy* type of deconversion trajectory for which we presented as examples the case studies of Gina, Samantha, Timothy, Christoph, and Mehmet in Chapter Six are the following: It is a long-term gradual process of stepping away from the previously taken-for-granted religious environment into which a person was born or brought by the parents as a child. It is a search for individuation and the critical development of new perspectives which, rather as a rule than as an exception (Christoph), lead to secularizing (Gina, Timothy, Mehmet) and heretical (Samantha) exits. It is associated generally with the prevalence of the individuative-reflective religious style, as indicated by low scores on the *truth of text and teachings* subscale of the *Religious Schema Scale* and an assignment of Stage Four in the faith development interview. This may

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[61] See 3.2 for a description and Figure 3. The Basic Unit of Research for a visualization. The field work, we have to admit, did not succeed in all instances to get a complete set of data, because some religious organizations, especially high-tension groups, refused to take part in our study.

suggest that the persons actually engaged in structural deconversion. In most cases this is associated with high scores on *openness to experience*. Scores on *psychological well-being* appear to be high for the U.S. deconverts of this type, but, in contrast, moderate or low for the German deconverts. Similar to the *pursuit of autonomy* type is the *tradition-guided type* which we identified in a previous study on Christian fundamentalist biographies (Enquete study).[62] These are religious persons who were either born into a faith tradition or were brought by their parents to a community at a very young age. Later, when leaving their traditions mostly during adolescence or early adulthood, they tend to step away from their family and religious group, orient towards an open and sometimes insecure future and insist on their independence and autonomy.

The second type of deconvert, we call it *debarred from paradise*, for which we presented the case studies of Pia, Peter, Elisabeth, Adam, Franz, Fiona, and Celia in Chapter Seven is characterized by an emotionally deep attachment to a religious tradition. This in turn is supposed to heal early traumata and protect from personal loss and normally does not develop before adolescence or early adulthood, and is eventually left by the deconverts later – sometimes considerably later – in their lives. Thus, for the conversion part of their story, these cases are likely to have been "mono-converts", as we called them in the Enquete study – with all the expectation and affection of a once-in-a-lifetime decision.[63] Characteristics of the disaffiliation process in this type of deconvert are, therefore, disappointment of high expectations, abandonment of hopes, and withdrawal of affection as well as the wish to give testimony of these experiences. It is an open question in which direction the disaffiliation for those *debarred from paradise* may go – into secularity, private religious practice, or heretical search –, but one thing can almost certainly be excluded: a new affiliation with a religious organization. This type can be regarded as the most intense and dramatic deconversion we were able to identify: *debarred from paradise* could therefore also be called "fingers burned." With only rare exceptions this type of deconvert is characterized by very low scores on the *religious fundamentalism* scale – indicating the very strong rejection of the former belief system. Also, generally, we observe in this type of deconvert high

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[62] The *pursuit of autonomy* type parallels and perhaps includes the *tradition-guided type* of Christian fundamentalist biographies which emerged in the previous study for the Enquete Commission of the 13th German Parliament on "so-called sects and psycho-groups". For more detail and references, see p. 48 and note 14.

[63] This type may thus reflect the "Mono-Convert" in the previous study for Enquete Commission (see Note 62) who in adolescence or adulthood actively converts to a tradition which is supposed to solve all problems of the world and bring heaven to earth.

scores in faith development including individuative-reflective and conjunctive styles – which indicates a high occurrence of structural deconversion.

These stories are told from different perspectives: there are *heroes*, *survivors*, and *victims*. *Heroes* tell stories in which they emerge, after all, as active agents with an increased awareness of their own motives, wishes, and goals in life, and, in terms of faith development, a crisis-induced faith transformation which may involve structural deconversion, partly exceeding or transcending Stage Four of individuative-reflective faith. This type may also display what in a clinical context would be called posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi/Calhoun: 2004). *Survivors* tell a story of having been cheated, connected with the wish to warn others. Upon potential disaffiliation, some of these converts orient backwards, mourning the loss of their desired embeddedness in a religious safe haven – but they survived. *Victims*, the third group, suffer emotionally the most, want to see their misery acknowledged, and feel that they are entitled to compensation.

These differences in narrative reconstruction and presentation are reflected in the questionnaire responses on the scales measuring the *Big Five personality factors* and *psychological well-being* – which show, in comparison to in-tradition members and other deconverts, exceptionally high scores for example in *openness to experience*, on the one hand, and very low scores on *self-acceptance* or *positive relations with others* for unstable or victimized cases, on the other hand.

The *finding a new frame of reference* type of deconvert, for which we presented the case studies of Sabina, Viviane, Melina, Dan and Jasmin in Chapter Eight, is characterized by searching and finding more intensity, guidance and structure in religious life – and, at the same time, preferring meta-stories with plots that are rather different from the meta-story of Enlightenment. This type very likely consists of disaffiliates from, or 'sleeping' members in, integrated religious organizations such as mainline churches as members of which they grew up. Deconversion trajectories are, therefore, mostly oppositional exits, changes to higher tension that resemble the "mono-converts" of the Enquete study.[64] Deconversion here involves conversion experience, which can be seen as (re-)conversion[65] and especially in the German cases it is a very intense personal experience leading to a new kind of personal religiosity such as an intense, personal relation to Jesus. Before the (re-)conversion, there may be, as in Viviane's, Melina's, and Sabina's case, a kind of moratorium which involves orientations to-

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[64] This third type of deconversion trajectories also reflects features of the type of "Mono-Convert" which the previous Enquete Commission study identified – with a focus on conversion rather than on deconversion.

[65] It was Barbour (1994), who made the point that each conversion story might be also looked at as a deconversion story.

wards, for example, atheism, interest in other world religions, depression, and perhaps taking drugs. Thus, the new religiosity is portrayed as changing life and morality completely.

In the faith development interviews we see an overall synthetic-conventional faith orientation, sub-currents of the mythic-literal style – which thus results in a significantly "lower" score than the expectation and calculations we have for the in-tradition members of integrated religious organizations. This is especially the case in the German sample. This presents a problem for an explanation in terms of Fowler's model of faith development – unless we assume regression. We interpret this as a revival of earlier styles which allows the identification of the fundamentalist religiosity. Our interpretation rests on the assumption that fundamentalism is the – partial – revival and presence of "lower" religious styles, especially the mythic-literal style, while and despite synthetic-conventional and individuative-reflective orientations have already developed in other domains (Streib: 2001; 2007). And we have, as the cases in Chapter Eight demonstrate, ample evidence from the scores on the *religious fundamentalism scale* and, as far as available, from the *truth of texts and teachings* subscale of the *Religious Schema Scale* that these deconverts have adopted rather strong fundamentalist orientations.

This appears to be different in the cases from the U.S. sample. Both characteristics, the intense desire for personal religious experience and the revival of the mythic-literal style, appear not to be the main concern; instead, as we see in Dan's and Jasmin's cases, deconversion for them is a migration to a firm and old and rather high church tradition. Their searching for and finding of a new frame of reference nevertheless is a reaction to religious environments which failed to provide them with structures solid and strong enough to ground their identity and provide a safe basis for their desire for an inward-oriented piety.

Taking our interpretation a step further, we were able to see in this type of deconversion, both in the United States and in Germany, a countercurrent to the modern project of individualization and autonomy which is assumed to lead, at least since Generation X (Beaudoin: 1998), to irreverence and bricolage also in the domain of religion and which most of the deconverts whom we interviewed are part of – whether explicitly in pursuit of autonomy, debarred from paradise, or in processes of life-long quests and revisions. Not everyone can stand the challenges of modernization of religion. Some search for and find identity through identification with a firm religious frame of reference – and eventually deconvert from the more "regular" or mainstream denominations in their culture.

The *life-long quests – late revisions* type deconvert which we have illustrated by presenting Erica's, Tom's, Gudrun's and Konrad's case studies, is

characterized by leaving, once or multiple times, a religious environment, because it does not sufficiently meet the needs and expectations for a religious community. It is the type of seeker or heretic whose religious quest typically emerges in adolescence and young adulthood and leads to conversion at a relative early age – and typically into a religious tradition with higher tension. So far, deconverts of this type show parallels with the *mono-converts* of the Enquete study and also with our second type who is later "debarred from the paradise." But this is not the end of the story, nor the end of the search: There are other – or even a series of – deconversions to follow. These usually are changes to lower-tension, private or heretical religious practice. They may parallel the "accumulative heretic" as identified in the Enquete study; this "accumulative heretic" is on a journey of a life-long quest, because of pursuing an individual project such as coming to terms with a traumatized childhood or finding the mystic or spiritual environment, or finding inner peace – a project of intelligent customers on the religious market in search for the product which best serves their needs.

We have reason to expect transformation in terms of faith development and structural deconversion – though there may be exceptions like people who tour from one religion to another but do not engage in transformation. But we also found higher scores in the faith development interview with a strong presence of individuative-reflective styles and considerable portions of conjunctive orientations in this type. This type is also characterized by high *openness to experience* in most cases and, consistent with the expectation that one can find what satisfies one's own needs, relatively high scores on *psychological well-being*.

As these four types of deconversion narratives display and as has become obvious in the case studies, only a sensitive reading and attending to the narrative interviews (and the narrative parts in the faith development interviews), assisted by methods such as sequence analysis and narrative analysis, was able to reveal the dynamics in depth. Our conceptual framework of five criteria and six types of deconversion trajectories has helped to identify structures in the case study analysis. Also faith development interview evaluation and the questionnaire data have revealed explanatory power in profiling the cases. The typology of four deconversion narratives, of course, is not without correspondence to deconversion trajectories (e.g. those *debarred from paradise* tend to take a secularizing exit), to faith development scores (e.g. *pursuit of autonomy* tend to develop individuative-reflective faith), to personality structure (e.g. *life-long quests* generally exhibit a high *openness to experience*), and to psychological well-being or fundamentalism scores (e.g. *finding a new frame of reference* is associated with high *fundamentalism*) – they cannot be simply reduced to these scales or models or a combination thereof. Narrative analysis allows

the reconstruction of the deconverts' own perspectives and of their own understanding of their experiences. Therefore, the four types of deconversion narratives are something new and have a profile of their own. We therefore conclude that this typology of four deconversion narratives may have relevance for further work on the concept of deconversion and future research.

10.2 How Does Deconversion Come About? – Motivations and Causes

What causes deconversion, what makes it happen? The question for the causes and motivations could, as statistical methodology suggests, be answered by entering the variables of interest into regression analyses. Results of such regression analyses were presented at the end of Chapter Four, in which we noted that regression analysis with our sample can explain only a small portion of the variance. Nevertheless, a report of regression analyses is useful because it confirms *openness to experience* to being the strongest and cross-culturally valid factor associated with deconversion. And also here we see cross-cultural differences appear: *personal growth* and *truth of texts and teachings* appear as predictors for deconversion in the United States, while *autonomy, self-acceptance* and *conscientiousness* are associated with deconversion in Germany. This may point to different motivations and developmental investments in the different cultural contexts and religious fields. This suggests that we turn to and consider a more comprehensive theoretical framework which may help us understand the dynamics of deconversion:

It is not only the individual and the dynamics within his or her psychological resources, but the interaction with the religious environment which account more fully for the dynamics of deconversion. Thus, the model of fit between the needs and demands of the individual person and the supply of the religious groups has already been suggested and used in research to some extent.[66]

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[66] In biographical research invited by the Enquete Commission on "So-called Sects and Psychogroups" of the 13th German Parliament, the model of a fit between the convert and the religious groups has been applied, and we concluded that membership is stable and not questioned as long as this fit is strong enough, otherwise disaffiliation is likely. This model was convincing to the Enquete Commission to be suggested in the Final Report (Deutscher Bundestag.Enquete-Kommission "Sogenannte Sekten und Psychogruppen": 1999. 111f, 314f., 372ff.).

With a stronger focus on the individual convert's biographical predisposition for converting into a new religious group (cf. Murken/Namini: 2007 for a review of research) , more precisely with focus on the loss of a father, the assumption has been taken into research that this trauma may constitute a specific fit to a specific new religious environment (Namini/Murken: 2008; Poling/Kenney: 1986). While biographical predispositions, and also traumata have, of course, to be taken into account, we understand this fit in a more inclusive perspective on the causes and motivations for conversion and deconversion, including a fit of interests. Thus we suggest taking into account the different cultural contexts, the different groups and their stance toward larger society as well as the individual trajectories. The deconversion narratives, situated in different cultures, reflecting the departures from different groups in differing degrees of tension to the surrounding culture, offer a unique window to the individual perspectives involved.

The case studies and the four types which we have identified give a more detailed answer to the question of causes and motivation of deconversion. Using a metaphor, we may characterize our four types in terms of capital and investment: The "Pursuit for Autonomy" type of deconvert, usually finding their way into life in early adulthood, withdraws investment since the investment did not hold its promise and result in satisfying rewards, and also the commitment hinders the pursuit of other projects. Deconverts who pursuit autonomy as a result leave in order to gain in self-determination and to realize other options in new fields. The "Debarred from Paradise" type of deconvert has invested all capital in one promising project, one organization and, after a time of gain and satisfaction, feels terribly disappointed. It is the type of religious investors who have burned their fingers and have to cope with the loss – usually in midlife or later. In turn, we may not expect that such deconverts will invest in a religious field again – but rather take a secularizing exit. The "A New Meta-Story Takes Over" type of deconvert has, after some not very satisfying little investments in mainstream religion, garnered information about the great opportunity. This means that the deconvert shifts investments and puts everything on one card. It is a change of low-reward to high-profitable and perhaps high-risk investment. And perhaps some of these stories evolve into stories of lifelong quests – or paradises lost! Finally the "Life-Long Quests – Later Revisions" type of deconvert has learned to be something like a smart and low-risk investor who is careful enough not to engage to such an extent that everything could potentially be lost; he does not put self-determination at risk, but keeps an eye on his own projects.

This indicates that we may derive from a careful and in-depth analysis of deconversion narratives a more detailed understanding of causes and motivations for deconversion. The study of single cases and the construction of

types adds to the deconverts' own perspectives on their experience. The variety of these perspectives in addition to factors such as *openness to experience,* search for *autonomy* or *personal growth,* or *conscientiousness,* or the concern for the *truth of texts and teachings* reflect the motivational dynamics of deconversion in the contexts of the religious organization which the deconvert is about to leave.

10.3 What Does One Get Out of Deconversion? – About Gains and Losses

10.3.1 Losses: Deconversion as Crisis

Deconversion is associated with gains. Our four types of deconversion narratives indicate the following: Deconversion can be the *pursuit of autonomy* and is, for most cases not only a search, but an accomplishment; deconversion can involve searching and *finding a new frame of reference* which, for these cases, is certainly a gain; and even the *life-long quests – late revisions*-type of deconverts appear to have gained considerably in their religious and spiritual life. It is more visible in the deconverts who find themselves *debarred from paradise* that the stories are not only about gains, but also about losses and crises, as, most obviously, the *victim's,* but also the *survivors'* narratives display. Taken together, we observe not only the occurrence of crises and losses, but also their uneven distribution in the four types of deconversion narratives.

From point of view of the quantitative analysis, we observe a cultural difference: Crisis symptoms in the deconversion process appear to occur more frequently in the German sample. Thus a difference is obvious not only from the evaluation of the narrative interviews, but corresponds to the findings from quantitative analysis (see 4.3): on four subscales of the *Big Five* and four subscales of the *Ryff-Scale,* German deconverts stand out from in-tradition members by *negative* differences. In the U.S., on the other hand, there are few differences, observable for the deconverts, which, if there are any at all, are *positive.* We have concluded that, in contrast to the U.S., deconversion in Germany appears to be associated with a loss or a crisis in regard to the self (*emotional stability, self-acceptance*), relationships and social contexts (*positive relations with others, extraversion, environmental mastery*) and the generation of meaning (*purpose in life*).

We may interpret this with reference to different characteristics of the religious fields in United States and Germany: While in Germany deconverts may feel like leaving a home, stepping out and feeling left alone – which may present a challenge to their sense of autonomy and self-acceptance –, U.S. deconverts can be confident that the church next door welcomes disaffiliates from other traditions – which may promise to advance their personal growth.

10.3.2 Need for Intervention?

In light of such crisis symptoms, research results should also help to determine whether, and in which cases, deconverts need intervention and professional help, or whether and based on what circumstances they are able to cope with their transition themselves – or even may have gained strength and stability. This question is important for professional counseling and pastoral care. Since this question continued from the Enquete study[67] in our research and has structured our design and sampling focus in the first phase of our cross-cultural research on deconversion, we can present at least a brief answer here.

We can now present new results on the basis of almost one hundred narrative interviews. From the inspection of those narratives where therapeutic help was reported, we found reports of therapeutic help in 16 of our 99 cases, among them the deconverts from oppositional (9 cases) and accommodating (5 cases) religious organization, i.e. tension groups, form a clear majority (we have only 2 deconverts from integrated religious organizations). The majority of deconverts who have used therapeutic help are deconverts from high-tension groups in Germany, among them particularly those who had previously converted into the community they later left. Certainly, 16 out of 99 deconverts who felt the need to receive therapeutic help is not a small number; but this has to be seen in light of the strong focus on oppositional and accommodating, i.e. on fundamentalist and new religious groups in our sample.

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[67] The invitation of the Enquete Commission "So-called sects and psycho-groups" to research on Christian-fundamentalist biographies (for more details and references, see p. 48 and note 14) has been motivated by the concern for the psychological and social well-being of members, but especially of deconverts. Our Enquete study has concluded that, for the Christian fundamentalist converts and deconverts, no extraordinary crisis can be identified beyond the crisis everyone experiences in a break-up of close relationships. Thus members and deconverts in the Christian-fundamentalist milieu have no extraordinary need for intervention and professional help. This, of course, was not meant to play down the need for expert counseling and professional therapeutic help for persons who encounter a more severe crisis.

Elisabeth, a German convert to the Mormon Church,[68] reacted with a major depression when she could no longer accept the teachings of her religious community. She spent long nights on the Internet, chatting with other ex-Mormons trying to understand her feelings when she was confronted with the severity of her situation. A chat partner confronted her with question whether she was suicidal and strongly recommended her to see a doctor; Elisabeth followed this advice, got treatment and a prescription for antidepressants she then also took. After several days, Elisabeth reported significant changes and an important decision:

"... this, this [medication] that made me, I think like ten days or so it took and then I started being able to hear birds sing, hear crickets chirp again. I hadn't taken in anything before. Because I was up there [some place on a mountain], I remember that [mountain area]. Um, and, and somehow I suddenly noticed, I'm taking things in again. And that was, that was a great feeling and then, back then I said to my husband, um, I'm going to go into therapy." (Interview with Elisabeth, Interact 383-417)

Elisabeth certainly is one of the deconverts in our sample who needed professional help and treatment. And also her depression coincided with her disaffiliation from the Mormon Church.

Dominik, another deconvert from a high tension group tells very dramatically that he needed therapeutic support:

"I am, we are now, uh, I have one year, well six months or one year after I left, for the first time um I started to doing a lot against the sect and then I-I broke down, nothing was possible anymore, physically and my body and even jobwise. And then I was at like the lowest point and I was able to say I need help, and then I went to see a psychologist and for more than a year, and my wife, too. And uh, then um, then it really started getting better. Then I started getting a grip again, also physically." (Interview with Dominik, Interact 220).

In Dominik's case, the breakdown occurred the considerable time of six months or a year *after* the formal disaffiliation. This may, as in Elisabeth's case, indicate that the adequate response to the crises is medium- or long-term therapy by psychological professionals, rather than only short-term crisis intervention.

There is another, perhaps even more important point to note: It would be short-sighted to assume that it is the religious environment which made the deconverts ill. In some cases a problematic life situation or a fragile personality structure may have other causes – and, for some, already motivated conversion into the group. And for some others of our deconverts, a religious high-tension environment with an authoritarian leadership style and strict rules may have provided the stability they had not found elsewhere, as

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[68] We presented the case study about Elisabeth in Chapter Seven (7.3, 147ff).

Tom's narrative suggests (see 9.2, 199ff) and as research has demonstrated for affiliates with groups in the new religious movement.[69] Thus, losses (and also gains) should not in each and every case be blamed on the previous religious environment or be causally related to the deconversion process. The dynamics are much more complex.

On the other hand, individual cases deserve individual responses. So we certainly have to point to the fact that, especially for those leaving a high-tension group and especially in Germany, adaptation or re-adaptation to a life style without the strong and strict structures of their former community affords a considerable coping effort – which, of course, is more difficult to manage compared to deconverts who leave an integrated religious organiza-tion. For these deconverts sufficient and competent professional help should be available, and therapists need to be sensitive to this particular area of concern.[70]

Most of the deconverts in our sample reporting crises were able to find and use therapeutic support and were able to recover – and, in some cases, appear to have not only recovered, but grown. In these cases, we were able to understand the crisis literally as being a 'turning point' leading to some-thing better than before. Certainly there are cases in which deconversion relates to critical life events, to life-long difficulties, repetitive conflict patterns, or even problematic personality structures. But in light of our sample of deconversion narratives, we cannot conclude that deconverts have an extraordinarily therapeutic exceeding the need for support on other instances of separation and loss which we may expect in in-tradition mem-bers and the wider population.

Looking back on the account from the quantitative analysis on gains and losses, we now see how the narrative analysis can open a new perspective and help to interpret the quantitative results: while we see from the statistics a general indication of a loss or crisis for German deconverts, narrative analysis identifies the most severe cases, those who are in need of therapeu-tic help. Here, the majority are deconverts from German oppositional groups. In general, the balance of gains and losses in deconversion appears to have clearly tip to the side of the gains.

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[69] We can refer for this thesis to a considerable number of research results which suggests the beneficial effects of affiliation with a new religious groups – which Galanter (1999) called "relief effect" (Buxant et al.: 2007; Galanter: 1999; Lilliston/Shepherd: 1999; Murken/Namini: 2004a; 2004b; Richardson: 1985; 1995; Saliba: 1995; Ullman: 1989) and which may correspond to what Freud (1921) has called "Schiefheilung."

[70] The importance and the specific needs of counselling and intervention for deconverts from new religious groups deserves more attention (Genia: 1995; Murken: 1998; Saliba: 1995; Streib: 2000b).

10.3.3 Gains

As summarized already in the beginning of this chapter (10.1.1), quantitative analyses of the scales used in our questionnaire, but also faith development evaluation indicate that deconversion in United States and Germany has specific cross-culturally valid characteristics and, in addition, a series of culture-specific characteristics. There, these characteristics have been considered for profiling the conceptualization of 'deconversion' in light of our data. Here, we take a second look and identify gains and benefits that may be associated with deconversion.

From the list of general cross-cultural characteristics, we may take into consideration that deconverts have, compared to in-tradition members, a significantly higher *openness to experience* and a significantly lower inclination to agree with *religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism* and also with claims of absoluteness of the *truth of texts and teachings* of their own religious group.

Compared to in-tradition members we see a higher sense of *personal growth* and *autonomy* – something that can also be considered a gain. While German deconverts have only slightly higher scores on these scales, there is a significant difference for the deconverts in the United States and thus these factors qualify as rather culture-specific characteristics.

Similar is the result for two schemata of the *Religious Schema Scale, fairness, tolerance and rational choice* and *xenosophia, inter-religious dialog;* they indicate a significant difference for the deconverts in the United States only and lead to a significant difference in the *Religious Schema Scale* total scores for deconverts in the United States. This also may be considered a gain.

Finally, we have results from the faith development interview evaluation which may indicate gain and growth: we see from the quantitative distribution of faith stage assignments that Individuative-Reflective Faith (Stage Four) is generally more frequent among deconverts – which can be interpreted as general trend for transformation in terms of faith development in association with deconversion, or even as general trend to engage in structural deconversion.

Thus, generalizing from these results, the ideal deconvert would be characterized by the predominance of gains: a person who open-mindedly explores new religious orientations, is ready for inter-religious encounter, rejects fundamentalism, authoritarianism and absoluteness claims, has advanced and transformed in faith development, and, especially when living in the United States, owns a strong sense of personal growth and autonomy. A third of our exemplary case study deconverts presented in previous chapters (Samantha, Christoph, Pia, Peter, Elisabeth, Erica and Konrad) may

qualify as candidates for this ideal type of deconvert, and, if we accept the exception of one factor, also some others (Gina, Tom, Jasmin, Fiona and Adam).

However, questions arise: a) What about the other deconverts who are different? Do not results which aim at commonalities conceal differences? b) Can we distinguish predictors and outcomes precisely enough? c) What justifies the determination of gains?

a) The interpretation of faith development score means of deconverts as evidence of structural deconversion as a rule, to begin with, would be an illegitimate generalization. The inspection of the cases has revealed not only exceptions – which could be understood as confirming the rule –, but other directions and trajectories of religious developments (as we see in the cases of Franz, Sabina, Viviane, Melina) which would have to be interpreted as regression, if we strictly remain in the structural-developmental paradigm. This requires attention to the faith development interviews and narrative interviews of the single cases.

Further, we have cases in our sample – and these assemble in but are not restricted to the *finding a new frame of reference* type of deconvert – whose deconversion is associated not with lower, but with higher scores on *religious fundamentalism* or *right-wing authoritarianism* (Viviane, Melina, Dan, Tom, Gudrun). And also *openness to experience* is not in all deconverts higher compared to the means of in-tradition members (as we see in the cases of Gina, Viviane, Melina, Gudrun). And finally, there are signs of losses and crises in the deconversion process, as we discussed above (10.3.1).

We conclude from this that, while there may be a general tendency towards an ideal type of deconvert with the gain characteristics as summarized above, there are deconverts who do not fit into this pattern and require attention in the faith development interviews and narrative interviews.

b) Gains and losses cannot be attributed unquestionably to the deconversion process. As discussed above, in regard to the causes of loss and crisis (p. 228), we should in many cases reckon with a pre-existing crisis or personality structure. Likewise, as discussed above in regard to openness (p. 79), it is not easy to decide whether a trait or attitude emerged during deconversion, or had already existed before and perhaps shaped affiliation with the group – and disaffiliation as well.

Thus, also in regard to a discussion of gains, we cannot exclude the possibility that what appears as gain of deconversion has pre-existed and determined both membership and disaffiliation. We have to note this also in regard to faith development scores and the interpretation as structural or lateral deconversion: As long as we cannot refer to other evidence, such interpretation has to be viewed tentatively and the possibility cannot be

ruled out that transformation in terms of faith development might have occurred long before. Such evidence is available in the narrative material, even if not for all cases.

But also in the narratives, we cannot expect infallible information that benefits and gains actually occurred in the process of deconversion. We have to be aware that these narratives are reconstructions and are narrated after and in light of a – sometimes very intense – change and turning point; thus, as in conversion narratives, deconversion narratives tell more about the present and are shaped by the message the deconvert intends to communicate to an audience. This may determine the narrator's selection and reconstructive interpretation of the past, including the deconversion process.

Nevertheless, the narratives are the most detailed and most reliable information about the deconverts we have, also in terms of the question of benefits and gains of deconversion. And, taking the above cautions into consideration, narrative analysis is an independent avenue to an interpretation whether deconversion is seen as a gain (or a loss); this also means that the narrative analysis is a way to evidence or counterevidence results from the scales which may indicate a gain of deconversion. That this is an effective and solid way, can be seen from our case studies, e.g. on deconverts who may qualify as ideal types for deconversion as gain.

c) What is a gain? This question makes us step back and address problems which concern the very foundation of our interpretations and conclusions. It cannot be denied that the interpretation of a change being a *gain* rests upon value judgments. To a certain extent value judgments are consensual in psychology, sociology, and religious studies. This can be assumed for the value judgment inherent in the well-being scale: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relation with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance are achievements which are valued highly and asuuredly. We can also expect broad consent regarding the assumptions on which the *right-wing authoritarianism scale* and the *religious fundamentalism scale* are based. If there is need, we can refer to the expertise from the philosophy of religion and theology such as P. Tillich's decided and strict opposition to fundamentalist orientations. He interpreted fundamentalism as having "demonic" traits (Tillich: 1951, 3; 1963, 380).

This is somewhat different in the faith development model, but also with the *Religious Schema Scale*. It is legitimate to ask whether the individuative-reflective style should be valued higher than the synthetic-conventional style, or why *xenosophia, inter-religious dialog* should be valued higher than the adherence to the absoluteness of the *truth of texts and teachings*. Here again, the justification comes from outside: e.g. from philosophy (Waldenfels: 1990; 1997; 1999), philosophy of religion (Tillich: 1925; 1942).

To conclude, the question of gains of deconversion could be answered from results on the measures in our questionnaire – but we have to keep in mind the reservations that (a) the possibility is not excluded, but has to be taken into account that personality traits, well-being attitudes and religious styles precede deconversion (and perhaps affiliation) and (b) such interpretation has to be open for a critical second perspective by the qualitative analysis of the narrative interview and the faith development interview. Thus, also the question of gains and losses of deconversion calls for due attention to the deconversion narratives and to a triangulation perspective – which has been our principle in evaluating our data and case study material.

10.4 Deconversion Dynamics in the Religious Field

Concluding the final chapter and the book, we contextualize the variety of deconversion trajectories and deconversion narratives in the religious field. This means that we pick up the thread from our conceptual framework about the dynamics of deconversion from a sociological perspective in Chapter One (1.4. and 1.5). In the analysis of our data, we have effectively used the typology visualized in Figure 1 (27) and Figure 2 (32) which describes the dynamics of deconversion as migrations in the religious field. The integrative perspective of placing our results within this framework has already begun in Chapter Five (5.3 on p. 97) where we presented frequencies of deconversion trajectories of deconverts from tension and no-tension groups (Table 17 on p. 99). Now we draw the typological framework and all our results together, including the coding of deconversion trajectories in the narrative interview, but also the results of interpretation from which the four types of deconversion narratives have emerged as detailed in the case study chapters and summarized in the beginning of this final chapter. A visualization of our conclusion is presented in Figure 6 on p. 236, however, but not all information could be entered in the figure and is therefore detailed in the text.

Figure 6. Deconversion Dynamics in the Religious Field Quantified
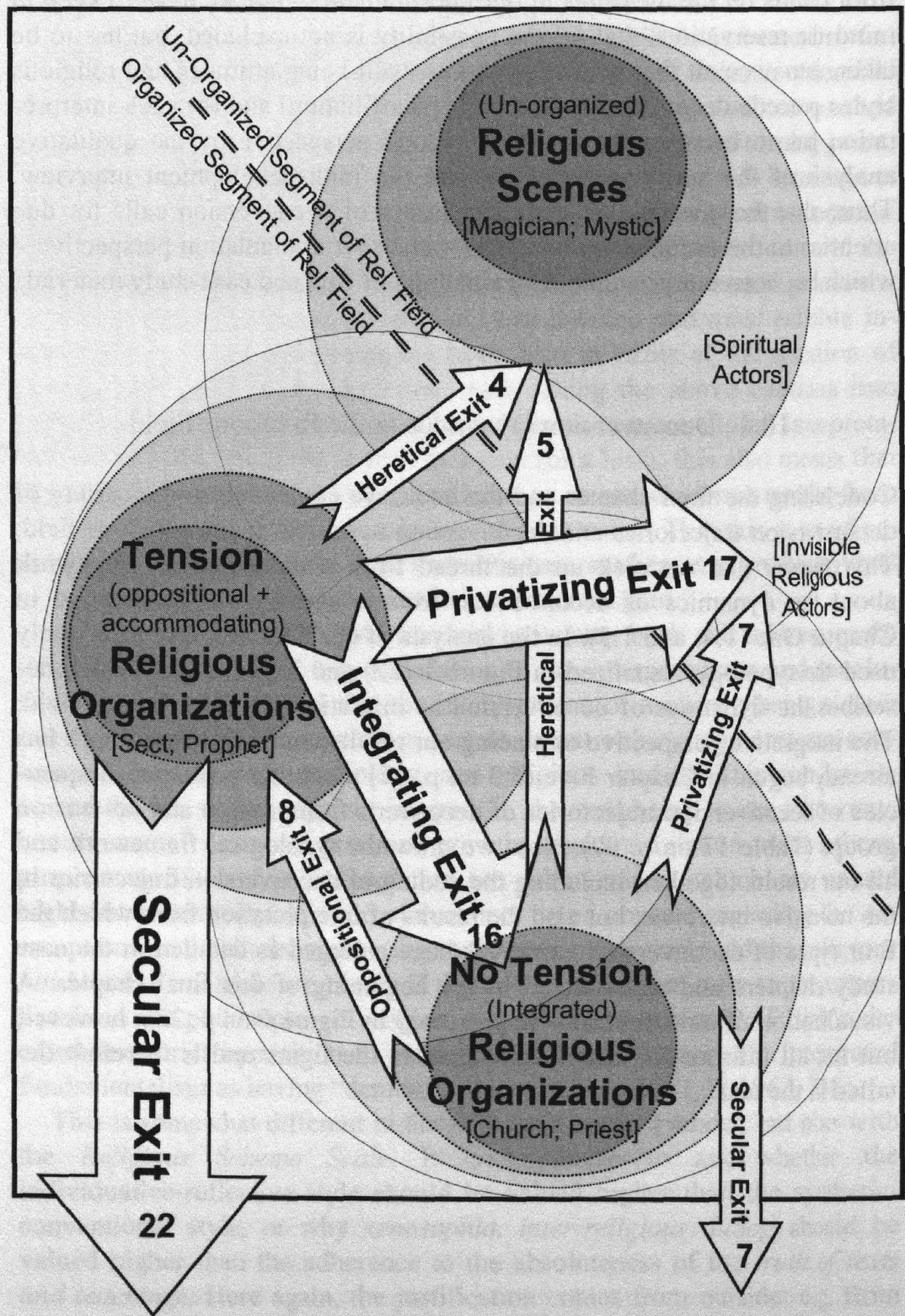
The religious field has boundaries: there are people who are part of the religious field and people who are not. The study of deconversion calls attention to this, but accounts for the dynamics of migrations: There are deconverts who leave the religious field with no indication of returning in terms of a new affiliation with a religious organization; and there are deconverts who remain in the religious field switching between religious organizations, taking integrating or oppositional exits, but also migrating into the segment of the religious field where religion is practiced in private or heretical forms. Certainly, our results in numbers and the size of the arrows in Figure 6 do not represent the religious fields in the United States or in Germany quantitatively, but rather reflect the characteristics of our sample which contains 50% deconverts from oppositional and accommodating groups. Irrespectively, the figure gives a portrait of deconversion avenues and their distribution in the fields which we were able to include in our study.

Within the field segment of organized religion, we count at total of 13 deconverts who engaged in religious switching (not visualized in this figure), and 16 deconverts moved to more integrated and eight to more oppositional religious organizations. More spectacular is the fact that two thirds of the deconverts left the field segment of organized religion, in different direction however: while a slight majority of them (29 cases) took secularizing exits, a considerable part went on to practice their religion in private (24 cases), and another third group took heretical exits (nine cases) who, without re-affiliation or new membership, pursue their own kind (or patchwork) of being religious or "spiritual".

Thus, our study is able to document migrations to invisible religion (Luckmann: 1967) and reflects changes in the religious field.[71] Furthermore, our data alert to a deficit in extant research results on religion in which the privatizing and heretical forms of religion are widely overlooked or incorrectly interpreted. When the focus is primarily on membership, the privatizers and heretics are not accounted for as *religious* persons, but mixed up with secularists, even though they may practice or search for their religion – although not in traditional and organized locations. Perhaps many of them should be understood as spiritual seekers and may agree to a "more spiritual than religious" self-identification.

Relating our four types of deconversion narratives to this portrait of the religious field, we see further polarities and differences: Most clearly the *debarred from paradise* type of deconverts (Pia, Peter, Elisabeth, Adam, Fiona, Celia – which are all but one of the cases presented for this type), but

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[71] See our discussion on un-organized religion and religious scene on page 30.

also a majority of the *pursuit of autonomy* type deconverts (Gina, Mehmet, Timothy) take a secularizing exit, while only some chose integrating (Christoph), privatizing (Franz) or heretical (Samantha) exits. In contrast, the two other types of deconverts, *finding a new frame of reference* and *life-long quests and revisions,* primarily include deconverts who stay in the segment of organized religion. Thereby, the deconverts who are in desire of a new frame of reference leave their mostly less demanding integrated religious organization taking an oppositional exit (Sabina, Vivane, Melina, Jasmin, Dan – all cases presented for this type) The life-long seekers, on the other hand, look for a rather integrated religious community, thus engage in religious switching or take integrating (Tom, Gudrun) or heretical (Erica, Konrad) exits.

Thus, deconversion as investigated in our study and documented by our quantitative and qualitative data can be seen as part of the dynamics of the religious field. Then deconversion appears as withdrawal or disaffiliation from being a client of a religious supplier (e.g. the priest or the prophet). And disaffiliations are a migration in different directions: While there is some migration within the field segment of organized religion which consists, in smaller part, in religious switching, but also in a movement back and forth between the organizations of the priest and the organizations of the prophet (oppositional and integrating exits), the majority of deconversions are disaffiliations by which both the organizations of the priest and the organizations of the prophet lose clients in manly two directions. One destination is secularity, and secularizing exits are most frequent among the seekers for autonomy and those debarred from paradise. The other destination is an area still within the religious field which, however, has less precise contours: no organizational structure, at most the structure of a network or scene, no membership, no fixed roles, no established tradition – and no clear name (thus, perhaps, many find the label "spirituality" attractive).

Many deconverts (in our sample they amount to one third) find themselves attracted to this segment of the religious field in the first place when they search for private religious experience or spirituality. Thus, cross-cultural differences notwithstanding[72], it is this segment of the religious field which, we think, deserves closer attention in the future. Therefore, we close with an outlook on deconversion and spiritual quest.

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[72] We see a cross-cultural difference in our data in regard to the migration to the un-organized segment of the religious field: privatizing and heretical exits are more frequent in our U.S. sample. We have noted this cross-cultural difference (see p. 98) that emerges from a comparison of deconversion trajectories in the United States and Germany (see Table 17 on p. 99).

10.5 Deconversion and Spiritual Quest – An Outlook

In our investigation of deconversion we identified a variety of trajectories out of which two avenues appear to be specially frequented: secularizing exit from the religious field and migration in its un-organized segment. While deconversion as a change into secular identity has emerged with a clear profile in our data, it appears less spectacular than the spiritual quest of the privatizing and heretical exiters. That deconverts secularize is probably not new – neither to public opinion nor to scientific knowledge. Migration movements to invisible religion or spirituality are new, overlooked for too long and not sufficiently researched. Thus the results of our research which speak to these new developments may be of interest.

Our study has revealed surprising results about the relation of spiritual-self-identification and deconversion. This was presented and discussed in detail in Chapter Four (4.4.2). While, as Table 14 (p. 83) shows, 20.3% in our German sample and 39.3% in the U.S. sample identify as "being more spiritual than religious," Table 15 (p. 86) reveals that more than one third (36.5%) of our German deconverts and almost two thirds (63.6%) of the deconverts in the U.S. sample identify as "more spiritual than religious." We concluded that in both cultures, the United States and Germany, deconversion is associated with a reluctance to identify as "being religious" and a strong preference to self-identify as being "more spiritual than religious" or, to a lesser degree, as being "neither religious nor spiritual".

This appears to be consistent with the portrait of deconversion trajectories in the religious field: deconverts may not tend to associate with organizations which they have recently left and which would require to self-identify as being "religious"; thus a self-identification as "more spiritual" is more likely. And given the large portion not only of secular, but of heretical and privatizing exiters, the large number of "more spiritual" deconverts seems plausible.

However, it is not really clear from the questionnaire responses what our respondents associate with "spirituality". The negative association of spirituality with fundamentalism may be taken as an indication (which, as detailed in 4.4.3, applies especially to the German deconverts, however). We also have indications, published elsewhere (Streib: 2008), that self-identification of being " more spiritual than religious" in comparison to a "more religious than spiritual" self-identification in general is associated with higher *openness for experience* and greater openness for the other and

the religion of the other (*xenosophia*), with a higher sense of *personal growth*, and respectively with lower agreement to authoritarian statements and to claims for absolute truth of one's own religion (*truth of texts and teachings*). Above and beyond that, "more spiritual" self-identification generally appears to be associated with higher interview scores in faith development.

Also, from a careful reading of the faith development interviews – in which we have answers to the question 'Do you consider yourself a religious person?' –, we derive some results: "Spirituality" is characterized by "more spiritual" self-identifying research participants in the U.S. as referring to a non-material dimension of existence. "Spirituality" for them is embedded in personal experience. Further characteristics are flexibility and openness. Above and beyond that, "spirituality" is understood as the universal core of all religions and tied to the purpose of human life. "Spirituality" can be associated with belief in a higher being or higher presence. "Spirituality" for the interviewees in the German sample is basically similar to the U.S. interviewees' definition; differences are that Germans mention the importance of sharing these experiences and mention specific practices like meditation. Germans also feel the need to reject a negative cultural stereotype: They do not want to be called esoteric. Though these may be first indications about what respondents associate with "spirituality" and though we can refer to at least some research for the Untied States (Greenwald/Harder: 2003; Zinnbauer et al.: 1997), further research is needed about the semantics of spirituality in a cross-cultural comparison.

To conclude, these perspectives indicate that a "more spiritual" self-identification perfectly associates with the kind of openness and search for autonomy which, as we see in many deconversion narratives, has lead to disaffiliation from organizations of the priest or the prophet and to a search for something different, may it be expected in the magician's, the mystic's or another un-organized religious actor's hemisphere – or, rather traditionally, outside the boundaries of the religious field.

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Author Information

ROSINA-MARTHA CSÖFF, Dipl.-Soz., was scientific assistant at the Research Center for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion at Bielefeld University and working in the Bielefeld-Based Cross-cultural Study on Deconversion. She has presented biographical case studies on several international conferences. Beginning in July, 2008, she has been appointed research assistant in the multi-national study "Abuse of the Elderly in the European Region" (ABUEL) at the Ludwigsburg-Reutlingen Protestant University of Applied Sciences.

RALPH W. HOOD, JR., Ph.D., is professor for psychology at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He was research partner and supervisor of field work in the U.S.A. for the Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study on Deconversion. He is a former editor of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* and is currently a co-editor of the *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*. He is a past president of division 36 (psychology of religion) of the American Psychological Association and a recipient of its awards (William James Award, Mentor Award, and Distinguished Service Award). He has published 200 articles in the psychology of religion and has authored, co-authored, or edited numerous book chapters and nine books, all dealing with the psychology of religion.

BARBARA KELLER, Dr. Dipl.-psych., was post-doc researcher and project coordinator of the Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study on Deconversion at the Research Center for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion, Bielefeld. She works as a clinical psychologist at the Zentrum für Psychotraumatologie, Alexianer Krankenhaus Krefeld and for the Deutsches Institut für Psychotraumatologie (DIPT e.V.). Her recent publications include: Toward a Multidimensional Conception of Faith Development: Deconversion Narratives in Biographical Context. In J. Belzen/A. Geels (ed.): *(Auto) Biography and the Psychological Study of Religious Lives.* Amsterdam (in press); The Variety of Deconversion Experiences: Contours of a Concept in Respect to Empirical Research. *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 26, 181–200 (co-author: H. Streib).

CHRISTOPHER F. SILVER, MS, MA is currently a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He served as the field work coordinator in the United States and was active researcher for the Bielefeld-

Based Cross-Cultural Study on Deconversion. Currently he is research director in the United States for an international study exploring "exceptional experience" with a team from the University of Northampton in the United Kingdom. He has presented on a variety of academic panels on fundamentalism, on new religious movements in the southeast United States, and on ritual aspects of Serpent handling of Appalachia. He is currently a psychometrics consultant and teaches Tests and Measurements and Social Psychological theory part time at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

HEINZ STREIB, Ph.D., is professor for religious education and ecumenical theology at Bielefeld University and directs the Research Center for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion. He was project leader of the Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study on Deconversion. He is currently a co-editor of the *Archive for the Psychology of Religion/Archiv für Religionspsychologie*. He has published 80 articles or chapters in practical theology, religious education and psychology of religion and has authored, co-authored, or edited eight books. His most recent publications include: *Lived Religion — Conceptual, Empirical and Practical-Theological Approaches* (Leiden 2008) and *Religion inside and outside Traditional Institutions* (Leiden 2007).

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