

Deconversion

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Including a chapter on deconversion in a handbook on conversion is not only appropriate, but also necessary. It is no longer possible to ignore the fact that a growing number of people choose to convert more than once in their lifetime; multiple conversions are unavoidable in cultures in which religion is no longer a single tradition in a mono-religious environment but plural in a pluralistic environment. Multiple conversions, however, involve deconversion(s) as well as conversions. While some researchers use the term “conversion” for both the disaffiliation *and* the re-affiliation, I focus on “deconversion” in order to include disaffiliations *without* re-affiliation, in response to the growing attention to atheists and apostates, especially in the United States.¹ Disaffiliation processes constitute an independent field of study that deserves special scientific attention. Here, the term “deconversion” may serve as a reminder of the depth and intensity of biographical change and the new orientation of one’s life that eventually is associated with disaffiliation and is not confined to conversion alone. In this chapter, I start by discussing how to conceptualize deconversion, then discuss recent quantitative and qualitative research, and finally draw conclusions and suggest directions for future research.

Conceptualizing “deconversion”

For a conceptualization of deconversion, three basic elements are necessary: criteria for a definition, a typology of deconversion trajectories, and a model of the religious field that is the context. As a point of departure for a conceptualization of deconversion, John D. Barbour’s work is significant.² Barbour presents an analysis of published autobiographies of leading theologians, philosophers, and other writers who have engaged in deconversion. He interprets the rise of and interest in deconversion as being due to the increasing individualism and religious pluralism in modernity. Using the term deconversion in a broad sense to mean loss or deprivation of religious faith, he identifies four criteria of deconversion that come together in most deconversions: 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 that consists of grief, guilt, loneliness, and despair; and finally, 4) disaffiliation from the community.

A comparison of Barbour’s definition with Charles Y. Glock’s five dimensions of religion³ reveals that Barbour’s list of deconversion criteria does not explicitly include the *experiential* dimension. It may, however, be important to attend to the loss of sometimes very specific religious experiences as a feature of deconversion. Therefore, Heinz Streib and Barbara Keller include the experiential dimension in their list of elements of deconversion and thus propose a set of five characteristics: 1) loss of specific religious experiences; 2) intellectual doubt, denial, or disagreement with specific beliefs; 3) moral criticism; 4) emotional suffering; and 5) disaffiliation from the community.⁴

Using these five characteristics to conceptualize deconversion prevents the reduction of deconversion to termination of membership in a religious organization. Conversely, disaffiliation from

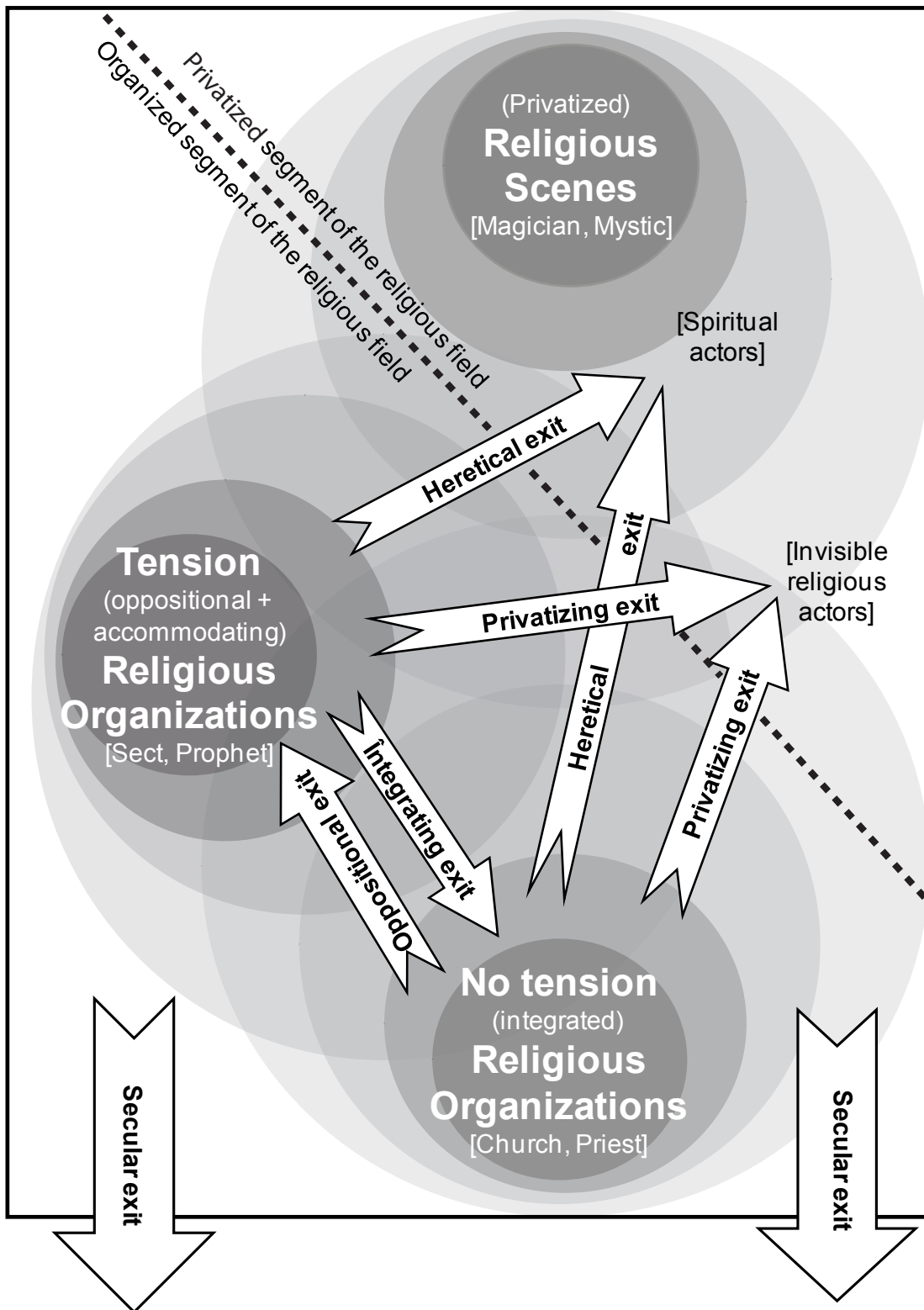
the community does not exclusively mean the termination of membership; for example, it can consist of total withdrawal from participation without formally terminating the membership. This is especially important in regard to religions without formal membership, such as Islam. The polythetic conceptualization of deconversion using these five criteria aims at a multi-perspective interpretation of deconversion and can be used to identify biographical accounts as deconversion stories. These characteristics have also been used in empirical research.⁵

Aside from this set of core characteristics for defining deconversion, a conceptualization of deconversion should also identify the potential deconversion avenues and eventually construct a typology. Already, simple observation reveals that deconversion can be a change from one religious organization to another, which thus takes place within the zone of organized religion, but it can be also an exit from the religious field altogether. But there may be even more options. Streib et al.⁶ suggest a set of six possible deconversion trajectories: 1) *secularizing exit*: termination of (concern with) religious belief and praxis and, in addition, disaffiliation from organized religion; 2) *oppositional exit*: adopting a different system of beliefs and engaging in different ritualistic practices, while affiliating with a higher-tension, more oppositional religious organization,⁷ such as conversion into a fundamentalist group; 3) *religious switching*: migration to a religious organization with a similar system of beliefs and rituals and with no, or only marginal, difference in terms of integration; 4) *integrating exit*: adopting a different system of beliefs and engaging in different ritualistic practices, while affiliating with an integrated or more accommodated religious organization; 5) *privatizing exit*: disaffiliating from a religious organization, eventually including termination of membership, but continuation of private religious belief and private religious praxis; and (6) *heretical exit*: disaffiliating from a religious organization, eventually including termination of membership, and individual heretical appropriation of new belief system(s) or engagement in different religious praxis but without new organizational affiliation.⁸

Deconversion can be viewed as migration within and out of the religious field. The religious field can be understood, with reference to Pierre Bourdieu,⁹ as an arena in which a variety of religious 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 Weber's classical distinction, Bourdieu profiles three ideal types of actors or competitors in the religious field besides the lay people: priests, prophets, and magicians. Aside from—or instead of—magicians, we may, with reference to Ernst Troeltsch's work,¹⁰ define *mystics* as the third group of actors in the religious field. While all three, priest, prophet, and magician/mystic, are actors in the religious field, there is a clear distinction between them in regard to the structure and degree of organization, which are classically defined as church, sect, and private office. Taking this just one step further, I divide the religious field into two segments: one segment with clear organizational structures (church, sect) and another segment without organizational structures, which I call the unorganized segment of the religious field. In sum, the variety of deconversion trajectories can be drawn as migration movements within and out of the religious field. Figure 1 presents this ideal type of the religious field, including the deconversion migrations.

According to my conceptualization, deconversion is an intense biographical change that includes individual and social aspects. Among the constitutive criteria for the definition of deconversion, the experiential, motivational, intellectual-ideological, and moral-critical aspects are individual aspects that call for psychological investigation. Changes or termination of membership and the entire variety of migrations within and out of the religious field are social aspects which call for sociological investigation that must take into account ongoing changes in the religious landscape.

Figure 1. Deconversion as migration movements within and out of the religious field



Empirical studies of deconversion

Proceeding from conceptualization to empirical research on deconversion, it should be kept in mind that, in contrast to a century-long tradition of research about *conversion*, research about *deconversion* is relatively young and began as a rather unsystematic and occasional enterprise. A more detailed description of extant research on deconversion can be found elsewhere,¹¹ but here it may suffice to briefly mention three developments. 1) Large-scale surveys have, on occasion, included items in their questionnaires concerning the respondents' and their parents' religious affiliations and participation when the respondents were in late childhood.¹² This information allows for inferences about deconversion, although based on a limited understanding of deconversion. 2) The discussion in the 1980s about new religious movements and public concern about cults triggered some interest in research, mostly interview studies, about apostates or defectors from controversial new religious groups.¹³ 3) A series of studies of church-leavers and secular apostates in Europe and the United States indicates a shift of research focus in the 1990s to mainstream religions and the religious landscape as a whole.¹⁴ This focus of research continues today, with a special interest in atheist and agnostic milieus that appear to be something new, especially in the United States.¹⁵

In the following sections I restrict attention to the most recent studies. I focus on specific sets of questions, the first of which is the following: Are there any reliable data about the frequency of deconversions in the religious field? What do we know about the reasons why people disaffiliate from their religious tradition? What are the aims and directions of deconversion moves? These are questions that are primarily appropriate for national and international surveys. Another set of questions regards the psychological predispositions and consequences of deconversion: Is deconversion related to personality? What do we know about the well-being, growth, or religious development of deconverts? These questions can be answered using psychological methods and instruments, especially qualitative research methods.

Deconversion in light of recent survey data

For the questions concerning the frequency and the directions of deconversions and religious migrations, quite recent data are available, including the results of the *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life* (2009) and the data from the *International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), Religion III*.¹⁶ I present a summary of these recent survey results about change of religious affiliation in Table 4. But first I describe and discuss the results of these two surveys in some detail.

Results of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

The Pew study used a sample of 2,867 U.S. citizens who were selected from Pew's *Religious Landscape Survey* conducted in 2007 among a sample of more than 35,000 U.S. citizens; after the initial survey, disaffiliates and new affiliates were re-contacted for a detailed interview. This recent study reveals new and interesting data about the high number of people who have changed their religious affiliation or denomination once or even more than once. The Pew Report's most striking results are the statistics that 44% of the respondents do not currently belong to their childhood faith and that most changes of religious affiliation occur before the age of 24. The Pew data focus on migration within the field of organized religion, giving special attention to religious switching within the field of Protestant denominations in the United States. The Pew results document that 15% of American citizens have engaged in denominational switching. If these denominational switchers are set aside, the Pew study counts almost 30% who have changed religious affiliation in some way—that is, have migrated between, exited from, or newly affiliated with Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or other organized religions.¹⁷

One of the questions in the study of religious disaffiliation regards the assessment of multiple changes.¹⁸ Here, the new Pew data fill a gap and reveal striking results. Counting all of the disaffiliation paths, the Pew data identify more than 50% who report that they have changed their religious affiliation more than once. Within the group of Protestants, the multiple changers/switchers amounts to 70%.

Another interesting piece of information regards the age of the person when they first disaffiliate. Here, the most noteworthy group is that of the disaffiliates with no re-affiliation: approximately 79% (former Catholics) or 85% (former Protestants) of this type of exiters report that disaffiliation from their childhood faith occurred before the age of 24. If we include all respondents under the age of 35 years, the Pew results reveal that between 97% (former Catholics) and 96% (former Protestants) of non-reaffiliates left their childhood faith before the age of 35.

When asked for the reasons why they left their childhood faith, respondents in the Pew study reported, as key motives, that their spiritual needs had not been fulfilled, that they had stopped believing in the religion's teachings, or simply that they had gradually drifted away from their former religion. Attending to the answers to open questions about disaffiliation motives, the loss of belief in the former religion or in any religion stand out, along with dissatisfaction with institutions, practices, and people.

The Pew data also allow for detailed portraits of denominational groups in regard to their adherents' religious involvement over the course of their life cycles, because the study assessed the frequency of church attendance, participation in youth groups, and strength of belief in God as a child, as a teen, and as an adult. This results in a very detailed profile for each of the disaffiliation or re-affiliation paths. The Pew study pays special attention to Catholics and Protestants and dedicates a special section to the switchers within the Protestant denominations.

The most common deconversion motives according to the Pew study appear to be, in my terms, intellectual doubt and moral criticism and, to a lesser degree, the loss of religious experiences.¹⁹ Thus, in the framework of my conceptualization of "deconversion," I assume that most disaffiliates in the Pew research have engaged in deconversion, with exceptions perhaps in the groups of Protestant denomination switchers who, as the Pew Report notes, "are much less likely to cite beliefs as the main reason for leaving their former religious group" (2009, 7).

Results from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), Religion III

The other source of recent information about disaffiliation and deconversion is the ISSP 2008, Religion III survey, for which data was collected in the spring and summer of 2008. This survey presents data for the U.S. population but also allows for a cross-cultural comparison. For such a cross-cultural comparison I refer to the situation in Germany, which can be understood as somewhere near the middle of the European nations in regard to level of religiosity.

For the assessment of deconversion, I have used three ISSP variables: change from pre-adolescent religious affiliation, change of belief in God, and self-identification as a religious or spiritual person. The first variable is my own construction on the basis of two ISSP variables: religious affiliation in pre-adolescence and present religious affiliation. Table 1 presents values and frequencies for this new variable. The second variable is taken directly from the ISSP data bases. Table 2 presents the items and frequencies of change in belief in God. The third variable is also taken directly from the ISSP data, namely from the ISSP's first-time inclusion of a set of four questions related to self-identification as a religious or spiritual person (see Table 3 for items and frequencies). I have included this variable in the calculation in order to fine-tune the deconversion trajectories, namely to distinguish between heretical and privatizing exiters and also between religious and spiritual switchers.

Table 1. Disaffiliation from pre-adolescent religious affiliation

	ISSP 2008 United States (N=1,348)	ISSP 2008 Germany (N=1,669)
No change (current religious affiliation same as in pre-adolescence)	67.7%	59.4%
Change of religious affiliation (current different from pre-adolescent)	12.4%	5.0%
New religious affiliation; none in pre-adolescence	3.9%	1.6%
Termination of pre-adolescent religious affiliation (no current)	11.4%	14.0%
No religious affiliation, neither current nor pre-adolescent	4.6%	19.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 2. Change in belief in God

Which best describes your beliefs about God:	ISSP 2008 United States (N=1,323)	ISSP 2008 Germany (N=1,482)
I don't believe in God and never have.	4.2%	28.3%
I don't believe in God now, but I used to.	5.4%	15.2%
I believe in God now, but I didn't used to.	7.3%	8.5%
I believe in God now and I always have.	83.1%	47.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

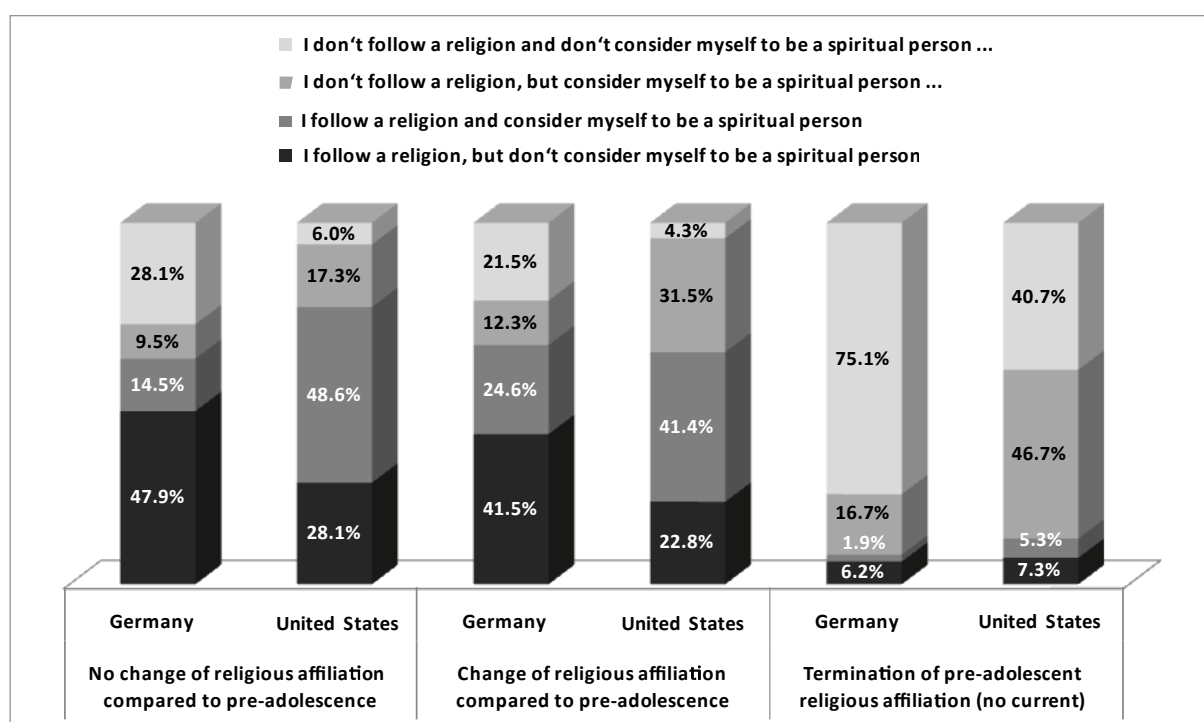
Table 3. Religious/spiritual self-identification (ISSP 2008, Religion III)

What best describes you:	United States (N=1,298)	Germany (N=1,452)
I follow a religion and consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural.	40.7%	9.8%
I follow a religion, but don't consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural.	23.4%	30.9%
I don't follow a religion, but consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural.	24.0%	11.5%
I don't follow a religion and don't consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural.	11.9%	47.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

In an intermediary step, I have related the first and third variables, which allows for attending to spiritual/religious self-identification in relation to disaffiliation.

Figure 2 presents the results of a cross-tabulation of the constructed variable on affiliation changes (Table 1) with the question about self-identification as a spiritual person (Table 3). For this cross-tabulation, I have selected three groups: 1) people without change of affiliation or denomination; 2) people who deconvert/convert *within* the field segment of organized religion; and 3) people who exit the field segment of organized religion. Between the first and the second group there are only small differences. Almost 50% of the people in the United States who remain within the field of organized religion self-identify as “equally religious *and* spiritual” whether they change affiliation or not. There is, however, a considerable increase in self-identification as “spiritual, but not religious” among people who change affiliation.

Figure 2. Spiritual/religious self-identification and change of religious affiliation in Germany and the U.S. in 2008

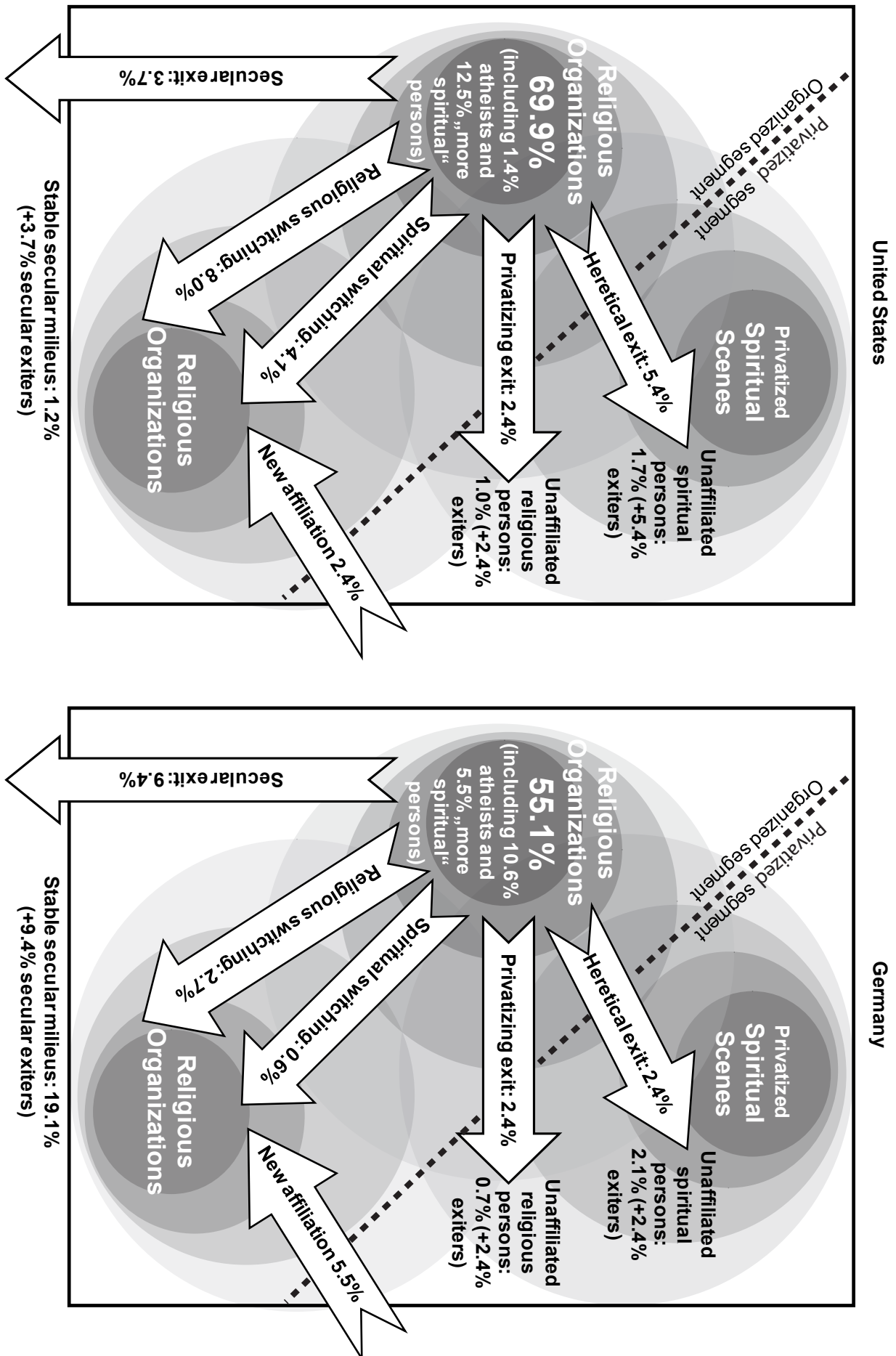


Source: ISSP 2008, Religion III

The surprising difference comes with the respondents who have terminated their pre-adolescent religious affiliation and have left the organized segment of the religious field. This group, as would be expected, self-identify in large part as *not* following a religion (United States: 87.4%; Germany: 91.8%), if we combine the two answers in which the respondent indicates he or she follows no religion. However, 46.7% of those who have emigrated from the organized segment of the religious field in the United States self-identify as “spiritual” persons. We see significant cross-cultural differences here, for the portion of “spiritual” disaffiliates in this group is only 16.7% in Germany. Taken together, these results shed some light on the disaffiliates who leave organized religion. Not all of them simply dwell in secularity and have exchanged belief for unbelief; in fact, one in two exiters from organized religion in the United States and one in six exiters from organized religion in Germany consider themselves “spiritual” persons although they do not follow a “religion.”

We may draw the following conclusion from the ISSP results discussed so far: the high (United States) and considerable (Germany) proportions of “spiritual, but not religious” self-identifications in the group of disaffiliates suggests that a further differentiation of the deconversion trajectories is needed. There is more than one type of exiter from the field of organized religion. This differentiation is done in the next and final step of variable construction that I perform using the ISSP data.²⁰

Figure 3. Deconversion trajectories in the United States and Germany quantified on the basis of the ISSP 2008 Religion III Survey



The cross-tabulation of all three variables allows for an assessment of the deconversion trajectories as defined in the first part of this chapter. To give some examples, disaffiliation from a religious organization without re-affiliation with another religious organization can be distinguished into three different kinds of exits: a) secular exit, which involves not only disaffiliation but also loss of belief in God *and* self-identification as neither a religious nor a spiritual person, b) privatizing exit, which, aside from disaffiliation, involves the continuation of belief in God *and* self-identification as a religious person, and c) heretical exit, which involves disaffiliation, continuation of religion or religious quest, and a spiritual but not religious preference. Further, change from one religious affiliation or denomination to another is divided into spiritual switching and religious switching.²¹ The percentages of the deconversion trajectories in the religious fields, based on the ISSP data, are presented in Figure 3.²²

Conclusions drawn from the quantitative results related to deconversion

As the synopsis of frequencies in Table 4 shows,²³ the Pew results and my calculation of the ISSP results largely correspond for the U.S. landscape, although there are some differences.

Table 4. Changing religious affiliation: synopsis of recent survey results for United States and Germany

	Pew 2008 United States (N=2,867)	ISSP 2008 United States (N=1,348)	ISSP 2008 Germany (N=1,669)
Do not currently belong to childhood religion	29%	27.7%	20.6%
Raised in a religious tradition, now unaffiliated	11%	11.4%	14.0%
Raised unaffiliated, now affiliated	4%	3.9%	1.6%
Change of childhood religious affiliation	5%	12.4%	5.0%
Other change in religious affiliation (Pew)	9%		
Switching between Protestant denominations	15%		
Same faith as in childhood	56%	67.7%	59.4%
Changed faith at some point	9%		
Have not changed affiliation	47%		
Never affiliated with any religious tradition		4.6%	19.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The differences are particularly significant in regard to the percentage of Protestant denomination switchers, which could not be quantified on the basis of the ISSP. This is the unique result of the Pew data, which included very careful and detailed investigation of denominational migrations. The problem with the Pew's detailed analysis of denominational switching is an understanding of disaffiliation which is slightly different from how I define deconversion. The Pew data focus primarily on reported membership and are rather detailed for particular denominations; furthermore, as explicitly stated in regard to Protestant denominational switchers, the Pew research did not seriously take intellectual doubt and denial into account as a criterion, but this criterion is central to my definition of deconversion.

Overall correspondences can be seen in regard to the number of deconverts from childhood religion. Apart from denominational switching, 27.7% (ISSP) or 29% (Pew) of the U.S. population report major changes later in life in respect to their religious orientation in childhood. Going into more detail, the number of deconverts who remain unaffiliated corresponds even more precisely in the Pew and ISSP data: 11% (Pew) or 11.4% (ISSP) did not re-affiliate with a new religious tradition. Taking a closer look at the milieu of the disaffiliated population suggests further differentiation. The Pew Report concluded from the Landscape survey: “Not all those who are unaffiliated lack spiritual beliefs or religious behaviors; in fact, roughly four-in-ten unaffiliated individuals say religion is at least somewhat important in their lives” (2009, 8). In the ISSP data (see Figure 2), I have identified for the United States 7.3% religious, 5.3% religious *and* spiritual, and 46.7% spiritual persons who are not affiliated with a religious organization; thus this group may be even somewhat larger. Six in ten of the unaffiliated respondents, according to the ISSP data, believe in God or search for or practice religion or spirituality one way or another. This, again, casts new light on the population of deconverts who do not affiliate anew; not all of them have lost their faith or have given up concern with religion and spirituality.

Concluding the discussion of recent quantitative contributions to deconversion research, I would like to emphasize that, instead of simply repeating and summarizing numbers and statistics, my attempt has been to incorporate these data and results in my pre-defined typological model of deconversion. This indicates that purely quantitative survey data such as the ISSP allow for the differential reconstruction of a variety of options—but only if there is a pre-defined conceptual model that accounts for this variety of options, in our case: the variety of deconversion trajectories within and out of the religious field.

Deconversion in light of psychometric and biographical research: The Bielefeld-based Study on Deconversion

Is deconversion related to personality? What do we know about the psychological well-being and growth of people who deconvert? How is deconversion related to faith development? These questions cannot be answered on the basis of the surveys discussed so far, because answers to these questions require research using psychometric scales or qualitative methods.

Concerning these questions, I present the research results of the Bielefeld-based Cross-cultural Study of Deconversion (Streib et.al., 2009).²⁴ This research was conducted in the years 2002 to 2005 in the United States and in Germany and included a total of 129 deconverts in the two countries. Narrative interviews and faith development interviews were conducted with 99 of these deconverts.²⁵ Aside from these qualitative instruments, an extensive questionnaire was answered by all deconverts; in addition, in-tradition members also answered the questionnaire (“In-tradition members” is the term used in the Bielefeld-based deconversion study for members of the religious group from which the deconverts have disaffiliated), the goal being to interview ten in-tradition members per deconvert. Thus, the quantitative database includes questionnaire data from 1,067 in-tradition members and 129 deconverts. The measures included in the questionnaire assess spiritual/religious self-identification, personality traits, psychological well-being and growth, religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism, and religious styles.²⁶ In addition to the 99 faith development interviews of deconverts, 177 faith development interviews with in-tradition members were conducted. As can be seen from this brief characterization of the data, this research on deconversion is based on an innovative design triangulating quantitative and qualitative data, and the study is aimed at comparing deconverts and in-tradition members.

Using the biographical information from the interviews, the deconversion trajectories of the 99 cases could be identified. All types of deconversion trajectories are represented:²⁷ 29 secular exiters, 24 privatizing exiters, 9 heretical exiters, 13 religious switchers, 16 integrating exiters, and 8 oppositional exiters. Using the quantitative data, the deconverts could be profiled and contrasted to the in-tradition members, allowing many aspects such as personality, well-being, and faith development to be addressed that could not be answered by previous research.

Deconversion and personality

The relation of deconversion to personality is indicated by the mean differences between in-tradition members and deconverts as presented in Table 5. Here, *openness to experience* is the subscale that indicates significant differences for deconverts in both the United States and Germany, with the greatest difference in the United States. *Openness to experience* also emerged as one of the key characteristics of deconversion in a series of other calculations, including linear regression analysis, in which it emerged as one of the most effective predictors of deconversion.

Table 5. Significant differences on the “Big Five” personality subscales between deconverts and in-tradition members in the United States and Germany

	Germany				United States			
	In-Tradition Members (n=368)		Deconverts (n=53)		In-Tradition Members (n=658)		Deconverts (n=66)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>openness to experience</i>	41.22	5.82	46.00	5.75	38.63	6.24	46.91	6.00
<i>extraversion</i>	40.57	5.75	38.23	7.52	42.08	7.30	42.08	7.30
<i>agreeableness</i>	46.34	4.82	44.15	5.57	42.20	5.81	44.29	5.07
<i>conscientiousness</i>	45.26	6.03	41.30	7.23	43.55	6.07	42.74	6.06
<i>emotional stability</i>	41.66	7.07	35.43	10.15	39.28	7.61	41.26	6.65

Significant difference between deconverts and in-tradition members for specified country ($p < .01$) are in **bold**; significant differences between countries ($p < .01$) are in *italics*.

Another interesting result reflects a cross-cultural difference between Germany and the United States. In contrast to the deconverts in the United States, for the German subjects all Big Five subscales display significant differences between in-tradition members and deconverts, and all of these except *openness to experience* are *negative*. This involves, primarily, *emotional stability*. What do these results indicate? Deconversion in Germany appears to be associated with some kind of mild crisis. Confirmation for this characteristic of German deconverts comes from a closer inspection of the results of the *psychological well-being and growth* scale that attends specifically to the consequences of deconversion.

Deconversion and psychological well-being and growth

As Table 6 shows, the consequences of deconversion, as indicated by all six subscales of Ryff’s Psychological Well-Being and Growth Scale, are completely different in Germany than in the United States. While in the United States we see significant gains in *autonomy* and *personal growth* and no significant differences in the rest of the subscales as a result of deconversion, the opposite is the case for German deconverts: *environmental mastery*, *positive relations with others*, *purpose in life*, and *self-acceptance* are all significantly lower for deconverts compared to in-tradition members.

Table 6. Significant differences on the subscales of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being and Growth Scale between deconverts and in-tradition members in the United States and Germany

	Germany				United States			
	In-Tradition Members (n=367)		Deconverts (n=53)		In-Tradition Members (n=660)		Deconverts (n=66)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>autonomy</i>	31.66	4.47	32.60	4.97	32.20	4.76	35.56	4.32
<i>environmental mastery</i>	33.61	4.59	29.66	6.74	32.16	4.87	32.55	4.58
<i>personal growth</i>	35.05	4.18	36.47	4.14	34.38	4.56	38.08	4.46
<i>positive relations with others</i>	34.98	4.26	31.98	6.19	34.05	5.53	34.03	5.36
<i>purpose in life</i>	35.09	4.09	32.28	5.06	34.30	4.90	35.12	4.35
<i>self-acceptance</i>	34.27	4.52	31.09	7.34	33.46	5.10	35.02	4.67

Significant difference between deconverts and in-tradition for specified country ($p < .01$) are in **bold**; significant differences between countries ($p < .01$) are in *italics*.

The conclusion is this: many U.S. deconverts are able to associate personal gains with their deconversion, but a higher percentage of German deconverts report losses rather than gains and indicate some kind of mild crisis associated with deconversion. In the United States, by comparison, deconversion is associated more strongly with openness fueled by a quest for personal growth and autonomy. In this sense, many of the American deconverts seem to be involved in what might be referred to as explorations of self-realization within a generalized “spiritual” context. This suggests the necessity of taking a closer look at religious/spiritual self-identification.

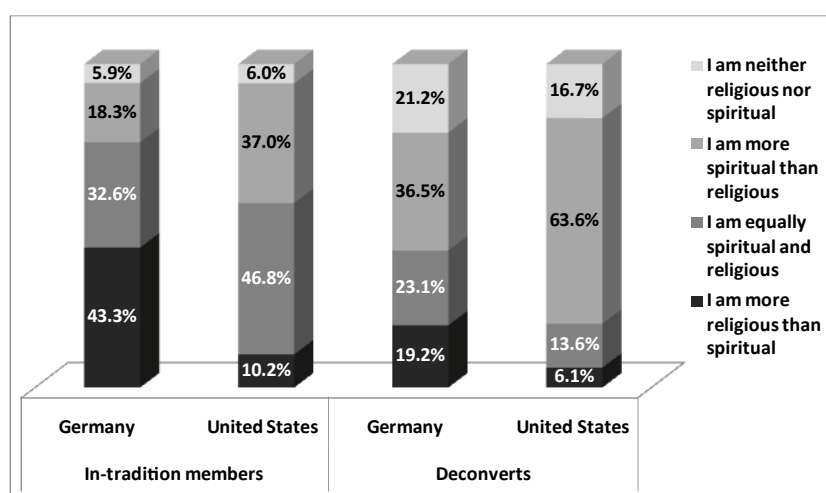
Deconversion and religious/spiritual self-identification

The questionnaire included four questions that probe for spiritual and religious self-identification. Questions and results are presented in Figure 4.

Less striking are the results for the in-tradition members in both cultures; the big difference is found in the results for the deconverts in both cultures. More than one third (36.5%) of the German deconverts and almost two thirds (63.6%) of the U.S. deconverts identify as “more spiritual than religious.” In the United States, a great majority (80.3%) of deconverts are hesitant to identify with “being religious” one way or the other; among the German deconverts, reservations against a religious self-identification are indicated by 57.7%.

These results are based on samples which included only respondents who are, or have been, active members in religious communities. Therefore, results for religiosity and for spirituality are very high and must not be read as being representative of the population as a whole (for that purpose, refer to the results of the 2008 ISSP study as presented in Figure 2). However, both the ISSP and the Bielefeld-based deconversion study indicate that deconverts have an extraordinary increase in spiritual self-identification. The number of self-identified “more spiritual” deconverts in the United States is almost twice as high as that of the in-tradition members. In both the United States and Germany, deconversion is associated with a reluctance to identify with religion combined with a preference for identifying with “spirituality.”

Figure 4. Spiritual/religious self-identification and deconversion in Germany and the United States



Source: Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study on Deconversion

Deconversion, faith development, and religious schemata

Deconversion is also associated with changes in religious styles, whether we assess these using faith development interview or using the Religious Schema Scale (RSS).²⁸ There are differences between in-tradition members and deconverts in both the U.S. and the German samples.

Table 7. Differences on the faith development interview scores and the subscales of the Religious Schema Scale between deconverts and in-tradition members in the United States and Germany

	Germany				United States			
	In-Tradition Members		Deconverts		In-Tradition Members		Deconverts	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>truth of texts and teachings</i>	17.17^a	4.38	14.41^b	5.31	17.35^c	4.14	11.42^d	4.38
<i>fairness, tolerance</i>	20.98 ^a	2.21	20.42 ^e	1.81	19.57^f	2.49	21.00^g	2.80
<i>xenosophia</i>	15.73 ^h	4.10	16.54 ^g	4.60	16.51ⁱ	2.95	18.32^g	3.32

Notes. ^a n=226; ^b n=27; ^c n=532; ^d n=26; ^e n=28; ^f n=535; ^g n=28; ^h n=225; ⁱ n=536; **bold** = significant difference (p<.01) between in-tradition members and deconverts.

As detailed elsewhere,²⁹ the faith development interview ratings reveal significant mean differences between deconverts and in-tradition members of 0.32 in Germany and 0.51 in the United States. This means that, on average, deconverts score one third or half a faith stage higher than in-tradition members. The movement in faith development scores is mainly between synthetic-conventional faith (Stage 3) and individuative-reflective faith (Stage 4). The relation of deconversion and faith development can also be shown by a cross-tabulation of the rounded faith stage assignments with deconversion. Results indicate that between 70% (Germany) and 80% (United States) of the in-tradition members are at stage 3, while half of the *deconverts* in both countries are at stage 4. This is evidence that people may prefer an individuative-reflective religious style when they deconvert.

When religious style is assessed by our new instrument, the Religious Schema Scale,³⁰ there is a significant decrease in the scores on the RSS subscale of *truth of texts and teachings* for deconverts in both countries, as Table 7 shows. This reflects deconverts' reluctance to insist on the truth of their own religion and also their openness to the truth of other religions, which is indicated by their higher

means on the RSS subscale of *xenosophia/inter-religious dialog*³¹ in both countries (even though this is significant only for the U.S. respondents).

In sum, deconverts have a considerably larger share in individuative-reflective style than in synthetic-conventional style, as well as higher scores on the RSS subscales of *fairness, tolerance and rational choice*, and *xenosophia/inter-religious dialog* and lower scores on the subscale of *truth of text and teachings*. This suggests that changes in faith development, religious styles, and religious schemata are characteristics of deconversion.

A typology of deconversion narratives

Last but definitely not least, since narrative interviews with 99 deconverts constitute the core of the Bielefeld-based study on deconversion, I present the typology that has emerged from the analysis of narrative and faith development interviews and from triangulation with the questionnaire data. Four types of deconversion narratives can be identified.

The first type is called *pursuit of autonomy*. This type of deconversion narrative is characterized by a rather long-term gradual process of stepping out from the previously taken-for-granted religious environment into which one was born or brought by one's 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, lead to secular and heretical exits. It is generally associated with the prevalence of the individuative-reflective religious style and with low scores on the *truth of text and teachings* subscale of the Religious Schema Scale. Scores on *psychological well-being* appear to be high for U.S. deconverts of this type but, in contrast, moderate or low for German deconverts. Religious persons who were either born into a faith tradition or were brought by their parents to a community at a very young age tend to leave their traditions during adolescence or early adulthood and to step out away from the family and religious group, orienting towards an open and sometimes insecure future and insisting on their independence and autonomy.

The second type of deconversion narrative, *debarred from paradise*, is characterized by an emotionally deep attachment to a religious tradition that is supposed to heal early trauma and protect from personal loss—a rather deep affiliation that does not normally develop before adolescence or early adulthood. Thus, for the conversion part of their story, many of these cases are mid-life converts with all the expectations and affection of a once-in-a-lifetime decision. Characteristics of the disaffiliation process in this type of deconvert are disappointment of high expectations, abandonment of earlier hopes, withdrawal of affection for religious leaders, and the wish to give testimony of these traumatic experiences. It is an open question as to which direction the disaffiliation for those *debarred from paradise* may go—whether into secularity, private religious practice, or heretical search—but one thing is almost certainly excluded: new affiliation with a religious organization. Thus, this type of deconvert is very likely to leave the segment of organized religion, and this type is also the most intense and dramatic type of deconversion. With only rare exceptions, this type of deconvert is characterized by very low scores on the *religious fundamentalism* scale, indicating very strong rejection of the former belief system, and by high scores in faith development, including individuative-reflective and conjunctive styles.

The third type of deconversion is called *finding a new frame of reference*. This type of deconvert is characterized by searching and finding more intensity, guidance, and structure in one's religious life. This type very likely consists of disaffiliates from the mainline churches in which the deconverts grew up. These deconversion trajectories are therefore mostly oppositional exits and involve converting to a higher tension group. Deconversion here involves a conversion experience that can be seen as conversion or re-conversion. As the German cases in particular indicate, this is a very intense personal experience that leads to a new kind of personal religiosity, such as an intense personal relation to Jesus. Before the (re-) conversion, there may be a kind of moratorium that may involve orientations such as atheism, interest in other world religions, depression, or perhaps the taking of drugs. Thus, the new religiosity is portrayed as a complete change of life and morality.

The fourth type of deconversion narrative, *life-long quests – late revisions*, is characterized by leaving a religious environment once or multiple times because it does not meet one's needs and expectations. This is the type of seeker whose religious quest typically emerged in adolescence and young adulthood and led to conversion at a relatively early age, typically into a religious tradition with higher tension. So far, deconverts of this type have parallels with the second type that later is "debarred from paradise." Deconverts of this type are not "debarred," however, but mostly leave of their own free will to look for something better. There may even be a series of deconversions that usually are integrating exits but may also be private or heretical exits. Some deconverts of this type are on a lifelong journey pursuing an individual project such as coming to terms with a traumatic childhood, finding the most "fitting" mystical or spiritual environment, or attaining the inner peace that they desire.

Conclusion

The results of the recent studies discussed in this chapter—the Pew disaffiliation study, the ISSP Religion III, and the Bielefeld-based deconversion study—can be seen as complementing each other, differences notwithstanding. Two of these studies have the potential of cross-cultural comparison, putting deconversion in the United States in a larger perspective and opening up a global view. The great contribution and advantage of the ISSP and Pew results is that they are based on large samples that are representative of the population of an entire nation. This allows questions to be answered in relation to the frequency of deconversion, for example, and about migration streams within and out of the religious field. This comprises the first theme for my conclusion.

In the study of deconversion, a polythetic definition of deconversion and a conceptually pre-defined typology of deconversion trajectories in the religious field may count as advancement. I do not insist that my conceptualization and typology is the only one which can be imagined and thus should be accepted without critique. But any nomothetic approach depends on the quality of conceptualization. For the study of deconversion, such conceptualization is necessary, not just to help prevent oversimplifications such as the identification of deconversion with termination of membership. The model of the religious field that includes the segment of unorganized religion also helps to interpret empirical results that indicate that deconversion is not simply "falling from the faith," a move into mere unbelief, atheism, or secularism. On the contrary, many deconversions—certainly the majority of deconversions in the United States—can be understood as migrations within the boundaries of the religious field when we include the unorganized segment.

There is a special group of deconverts which is easily overlooked: the considerable number of deconverts who migrate into the unorganized segment of the religious field. This is supported by the results of ISSP and the Bielefeld-based deconversion study, but only because they have paid special attention to "spiritual" self-identification: In both cultures, the United States and Germany, deconversion is associated with a reluctance to identify as "being religious" and with a clear preference to self-identify as a "spiritual person." In sociological terms, these are indications that deconverts do not tend to associate with religious organizations that require self-identification as being "religious" but instead prefer affiliations which allow self-identifications of being "spiritual" or being "neither," if such organizations are available. The latter appears to be the case in the United States, but not in Germany.

The lack of religious organizations that allow members to self-identify as spiritual may be one of the reasons why there are more secular exits in Germany than in the United States. The difference between Germany and the United States in this regard is large. As Figure 3 reveals, the net loss of members in the religious field in the United States—or, viewed from the other side, the net increase in the secular realm—appears rather small (1.2% of the population) and has almost no net increase, when we compare the 3.7% secular exiters with the 2.4% converts who enter the religious field. This is completely different in Germany, where we have not only 19.1% permanently secular people, but also an increase of 9.4% in the secular milieu (this is, in part, due to the subsample of East Germany, which is very likely one of the most secular regions of the globe). Deconversion in the United States seems to be more different from deconversion in Europe than expected.

The difference between the religious fields in the United States and Germany may help to explain the difference in empirical results in the Bielefeld-based study of deconversion regarding personality factors and well-being, which indicate a mild crisis associated with deconversion. The options for social association and integration—the likelihood of finding a new religious community that responds to one’s spiritual quest or simply to one’s religious crisis—makes a difference. German deconverts appear to have fewer options and thus to be more likely to be left alone without a religious community after deconversion than deconverts in the United States.

The second theme of this conclusion is the creation of a summary portrait of deconversion from an analysis of the psychometric scales and biographies. Deconversion appears to be a step into freedom, autonomy, and personal growth. The comparison of deconverts and in-tradition members in the Bielefeld-based study on deconversion, as shown above, indicates this, especially for deconverts in the United States. The interpretation of the biographical material has resulted in the emergence of the “pursuit of autonomy” type of deconvert, which the “life-long quests – late revision” deconversion narrative type resembles.

Yet, upon re-considering the pre-defined deconversion criteria (which have been key in defining what can count as deconversion), there is something new emerging from the research using the psychometric scales and from the analysis of the biographical material. The deconversion criteria, as defined with reference to Barbour’s work,³² reflect a crisis and focus on negations that are associated with the disaffiliation process. The results of the Bielefeld-based study on deconversion shed light on the fact that a crisis can be a turning point to something even better. This can be demonstrated in some detail by a review of the deconversion criteria one by one. Loss of religious experience corresponds to *openness to experience* on the Big Five subscale, which has emerged from empirical analysis as one of the key characteristics of deconversion. Intellectual doubt and denial may indicate the cognitive crisis that precedes faith stage transition and structural conversion in classical faith development theory³³; in any case, a change in religious style appears to be another key characteristic of deconversion, as the data from the Bielefeld-based study on deconversion indicate. The crisis of deconversion could very well lead to a new cognitive structure, to a new interpretation of heaven and earth with a preference for new religious schemata. Moral criticism could signal the advent of the sense of *autonomy* which appears from the data to be another key characteristic of deconversion. Emotional suffering can be exchanged for a sense of *personal growth*. This is especially relevant for the type of deconvert who is or feels “debarred from paradise.” But even here, when interpreting the biographical accounts of these cases, we have seen, with some exceptions, instances of post-traumatic growth. Finally, disaffiliation from the community indicates a loss, and deconverts struggle with the compensation for this loss. And indeed, *positive relations with others* in the Ryff Scale are lower for German deconverts and indifferent for the U.S. deconverts. On the other hand, however, there are gains in regard to a sense of connectedness (apart from the lucky ones who immediately find a new community); a kind of new identity appears to emerge which is associated with the self-identification as “spiritual person.” This self-identification as “spiritual” has also emerged as a key characteristic of deconversion. Perhaps the formation of “spiritual scenes” —which, to be sure, are largely unorganized—is a new development, especially in the United States, and one that may help deconverts feel at home.

In sum, exceptions notwithstanding, the portrait of deconversion, as I see it emerging from the psychometric and biographical analyses, is that of an active deconvert resembling the “active convert” as profiled by James T. Richardson,³⁴ a profile which has been a major turning point in conversion research.

I conclude with a note on methodology for the study of deconversion. For a detailed portrait of deconversion, a mixed-method approach that includes psychometric scales and semi-structured or open-ended interviews is best. The construction of the typology of deconversion narratives in the Bielefeld deconversion study would not have been possible without the thorough interpretation of narrative and faith development interviews and the triangulation of all sorts of data in the case studies.

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Notes

- ¹ See Heinz Streib and Constantin Klein, "Atheists, Agnostics, and Apostates," in Kenneth APA *Handbook of Psychology, Religion and Spirituality*, eds. Kenneth Ira Pargament, Julie Juola Exline, and James W. Jones (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, forthcoming).
- ² John D. Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion: Autobiography and the Loss of Faith* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994).
- ³ Glock, Charles Y., "On the Study of Religious Commitment," in *Kirche und Gesellschaft. Einführung in die Religionssoziologie*, ed. Joachim Matthes (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1969), 98-110.
- ⁴ Heinz Streib and Barbara Keller, "The Variety of Deconversion Experiences: Contours of a Concept in Respect to Empirical Research." *Archive for the Psychology of Religion / Archiv für Religionspsychologie* 26, no. 1 (2004): 181-200.
- ⁵ Heinz Streib, Ralph W. Hood, Barbara Keller, Barbara, Rosina-Martha Csöff, and Christopher Silver, *Deconversion: Qualitative and Quantitative Results from Cross-Cultural Research in Germany and the United States of America*, Research in Contemporary Religion, 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ With reference to Bromley's distinction of religious groups as subversive, contestant, and allegiant religious organizations, but modifying Bromley's typology in a way that attends primarily to the degree of tension with or integration in society, Streib et al. (*Deconversion*) distinguish between oppositional, accommodating, and integrated religious organizations. See David G. Bromley, "The Social Construction of Contested Exit Roles: Defectors, Whistleblowers, and Apostates," in *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*, ed. David G. Bromley (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 19-48.
- ⁸ *Privatizing exit and heretical exit* correspond largely to what Luckmann called "invisible religion." Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan 1967).
- ⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field," *Comparative Social Research* 13 (1991): 1-44; Pierre Bourdieu, "Legitimation and Structured Interest in Weber's Sociology of Religion," in *Max Weber: Rationality and Modernity*, eds. Scott Lash and Sam Whimster (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 119-136.
- ¹⁰ Ernst Troeltsch, Ernst, "Das stoisch-christliche Naturrecht und das moderne profane Naturrecht," *Verhandlungen des Ersten Deutschen Soziologentages vom 19-22. Oktober 1910 in Frankfurt a.M.*, Schriften der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie, Erste Serie (Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1911), 166-214; Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, vol. 2 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956).
- ¹¹ See Chapter 2 of Streib et al., *Deconversion*, for a more detailed summary of extant research on deconversion prior to 2007.
- ¹² Here I refer especially to the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) that includes longitudinal data on religion from 1991, 1998, and 2008. Such data for the United States are integrated in the General Social Survey (GSS 1972-2008).
- ¹³ Examples of this kind of study are L. Norman Skonovd, *Apostasy: The Process of Defection from Religious Totalism* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ann Arbor, 1981); Saul V. Levine, *Radical Departures: Desperate Detours to Growing Up* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984); Janet L. Jacobs, *Divine Disenchantment: Deconverting from New Religions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Stuart A. Wright, *Leaving Cults: The Dynamics of Defection* (Washington: Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1987). Somewhat later, but still belonging in this category, the Enquete Commission on "So-called Sects and Psycho-Groups" of the 13th German Parliament initiated some qualitative studies in which I participated. See Heinz Streib, "Sub-project on 'Biographies in Christian Fundamentalist Milieus and Organizations,'" in *Final Report of the Enquête Commission on "So-called Sects and Psychogroups*," ed. Deutscher Bundestag, Referat Öffentlichkeitsarbeit (Bonn: Deutscher Bundestag, 1999), 402-414; Heinz Streib, *Biographies in Christian Fundamentalist Milieus and Organizations: Report to the Enquete Commission of the 13th German Parliament on "So-called Sects and Psychogroups*," translated by Ella Brehm, CIRRuS Research Reports, No. 1 (Bielefeld: University of Bielefeld, 2000), <http://repositories.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/biprints/volltexte/2009/2134>.
- ¹⁴ As examples of these studies, see Bob Altemeyer and Bruce Hunsberger, *Amazing Conversions: Why Some Turn to Faith and Others Abandon Religion* (New York: Prometheus, 1997); for a study in the United States, see Bruce Hunsberger, "Swimming Against the Current: Exceptional Cases of Apostates and Converts" in *Joining and Leaving Religion: Research Perspectives*, eds. Leslie J. Francis and Yaacov J. Katz (Leominster, England: Gracewing, 2000), 233-248; for research on church-leavers in the United Kingdom, see Philip Richter and Leslie J. Francis, *Gone But Not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1998); for a study in New Zealand, see Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys beyond the Churches* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002).
- ¹⁵ For America, again, Bob Altemeyer and Bruce Hunsberger's study stands out; see *Atheists: A Groundbreaking Study of America's Nonbelievers* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006); see also Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, "Secularism and Secularity: Contemporary International Perspectives," 2007, <http://prog.trincoll.edu/ISSC/Book/Chapters.asp>.
- ¹⁶ For my calculations, I have used the data from the *International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), Religion III*, released 2-14-2011. Country-specific data sets for the United States have already been included in the database of the *General Social Survey (GSS 1972-2008)*, and the data for Germany is included in the *Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften (ALLBUS 2008)*.
- ¹⁷ In the presentation of the Pew study, 9% was labeled "other changes in religious affiliation." The report explains: "This group consists of converts from a variety of different backgrounds, including converts to Catholicism and converts from or to religions other than Catholicism or Protestantism. Because this is such a disparate group, it is not analyzed in most of this report." Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Faith in Flux: Changes in Religious Affiliation in the U.S.," 2009, 1n.

- ¹⁸ Previous results concerning the frequency of multiple changes are outdated. They date back as long ago as 1988 (e.g., the GSS) and report 23.8% with one previous preference, 9.1% with two, 2.2% with three, and 0.6% with four or more previous preferences. Most other previous studies, however, only allow a comparison of the present religious affiliation with the affiliation in childhood and thus do not account for the religious migrations that may have occurred between childhood and the present. Likewise, a person who, after a tour through different religions, re-affiliated with her or his childhood faith could not be identified as a deconvert.
- ¹⁹ This portrait emerges from the Pew Report, even though it may be noted that the motives could be grouped together more systematically. For a more systematic portrait of deconversion motives, I would suggest either a conceptual approach using the deconversion criteria as defined by Streib and Keller ("Variety of Deconversion Experiences"), or a purely statistical procedure such as a factor analysis. Unfortunately, the data base of the Pew research on disaffiliation had not been released before this manuscript was completed. So, I can only discuss here what is presented in the Pew Report ("Faith in Flux").
- ²⁰ Figure 2 corresponds to results from the Bielefeld-based cross-cultural study on deconversion (Heinz Streib, "More Spiritual than Religious: Changes in the Religious Field Require New Approaches," in *Lived Religion: Conceptual, Empirical and Practical-Theological Approaches*, eds. Heinz Streib, Astrid Dinter, and Kerstin Söderblom (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 53-67; Streib et al., *Deconversion*). These results, even without the distinction between the various deconversion trajectories, indicated high percentages of deconverts who self-identify as "more spiritual than religious," namely 63.6% for the United States and 36.5% for Germany (see Figure 4). For an explanation of the difference between the deconversion study and the ISSP, we may refer to the different ways of asking the spirituality question, to the different assessments of deconversion or disaffiliation, to the different amounts of time since the disaffiliation took place, and to the different samples in respect to representativeness and number of deconverts.
- ²¹ Unfortunately, the ISSP data sets do not allow the reconstruction of the distinction between church and sect or, in the terms of the deconversion study, the distinction between integrated and oppositional religious organizations. The data set for Germany lacks any information which would allow for such an assessment, and the data set for the United States has information only about a (limited) variety of Protestant denominations which perhaps could be divided into integrated and oppositional (e.g., by expert rating), but even then it would only cover a rather limited field segment of (Protestant) denominations in the United States.
- ²² The results from my ISSP calculations can be used to assess the quantity of disaffiliation/re-affiliation migrations in the religious landscape with more precision. Thus, this assessment of deconversion trajectories was entered in Table 4 and used for the comparison with the Pew results. This calculation from the ISSP data sets allows what could not be accomplished on the basis of the data of the Bielefeld-based study of deconversion, namely, the quantification of the deconversion trajectories on the basis of a large-scale survey representative of the populations in the United States and in Germany.
- ²³ I have slightly rearranged the table offered in the Pew Report ("Faith in Flux," 1). Further, it should be noted that the values from the ISSP for the United States and for Germany are recalculations based on my own construction of a variable for the deconversion trajectories, which is the basis for the values in Figure 3.
- ²⁴ Streib et al., *Deconversion*.
- ²⁵ Methods and instruments used for the qualitative part of the Bielefeld-based Cross-cultural Study on Deconversion: 1) The *narrative interview* was the core instrument of the study focusing on the deconversion process, religious socialization in the past, and consequences for the present. These interviews were transcribed and evaluated in a computer-assisted procedure. Cases selected according to the emerging typology were elaborated into case studies. Quantifiable results were entered into an SPSS database; 2) The *faith development interviews* were conducted and evaluated according to James W. Fowler, Heinz Streib, and Barbara Keller, *Manual for Faith Development Research*, 3rd ed. (Bielefeld: Research Center for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion, 2004), <http://www.whomes.uni-bielefeld.de/religionsforschung/>. Evaluation of this semi-structured interview is interpretative, but it was done in a computer-assisted procedure. These results were also entered into SPSS.
- ²⁶ The questionnaire included not only demographics but also a set of four items to assess the spiritual/religious self-identification (see Figure 4). Scales included in the questionnaire were: the Big Five Personality Factor Instrument (Costa & McCrae, 1985; McCrae & Costa, 1987) in its NEO-FFI version probing for extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (which was reverse-coded into emotional stability); C. Ryff's scale on Psychological Well-Being and Growth (Ryff & Singer, 1996), which assesses six characteristics related to personal growth and well-being (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1998a; 1998b): autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, and purpose in life; the Religious Fundamentalism Scale (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992); the Right Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer, 1981); and finally 78 new items designed for the assessment of religious styles, which became the basis for the Religious Schema Scale (Streib et al., 2010).
- ²⁷ The distribution of deconversion trajectories in the Bielefeld-based study of deconversion does not exactly correspond to the distribution as calculated for this chapter on the basis of the ISSP data (and presented in Figure 3), because the sampling strategy applied methods of theoretical sampling and did not start with a sample representative of the population.
- ²⁸ Streib, Heinz, Ralph W. Hood, and Constantin Klein, "The Religious Schema Scale: Construction and Initial Validation of a Quantitative Measure for Religious Styles," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 20, no. 3 (2010): 151-172.
- ²⁹ Heinz Streib, "More Spiritual than Religious: Changes in the Religious Field Require New Approaches," in *Lived Religion: Conceptual, Empirical and Practical-Theological Approaches*, eds. Heinz Streib, Astrid Dinter, and Kerstin Söderblom (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 53-67; Streib et al., *Deconversion*.
- ³⁰ Streib, Hood, and Klein, "Religious Schema Scale."

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- ³¹ Xenosophia, it should be explained, is the wisdom (*sophia*) of the strange or alien (*xenos*); it is thus the opposite of xenophobia and exceeds the attitude of tolerance to include the appreciation of the alien and strange as a source of creativity and inspiration. See Yoshiro Nakamura, *Xenosophie: Bausteine für eine Theorie der Fremdheit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000).
- ³² Barbour, *Versions of Deconversion*.
- ³³ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).
- ³⁴ James T. Richardson, ed., *Conversion Careers: In and Out of the New Religions* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1978); James T. Richardson, "Psychological and Psychiatric Studies on New Religious Movements," in *Advances in the Psychology of Religion*, ed. L. B. Brown (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1985), 209-223; James T. Richardson, "The Active vs. Passive Convert: Paradigm Conflict in Conversion/Recruitment Research," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24, no. 2 (1985): 163-179; James T. Richardson, "Clinical and Personality Assessment of Participants in New Religions," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 5, no. 3 (1995): 145-170.