Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Religious Studies

The Nomothetic-Idiographic Opposition and a Proposal of Building Bridges

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Overview

1. Theoretical: Reflections on Methodology
   a. Proposals of mixed-method approaches and the integration of qualitative and quantitative data.
   b. Nevertheless a difference cannot be ignored: the difference between nomothetic and idiographic
   c. ‘Triangulation’ as more precise term (?)
   d. What exactly happens in the triangulation process? An important element is “bracketing” – a key principle of a phenomenological approach.
   e. Conclusion: Toward a processual or kinesthetic phenomenological approach

2. The Cross-Cultural Study on Deconversion (see new book: Streib et.al., 2009)
   a. Overview on concepts, research design, instruments and key results
   b. Methodological questions
   c. Example case studies for demonstrating triangulation
The hostility between proponents of qualitative and proponents of quantitative methods declined and has given way to proposals such as:

- using the paradigms in flexible combination
- mixed-method approaches
- triangulation strategies
Mixed-Method Approach

1. Tashakkori & Teddlie (2003), in their final chapter, describe the advantages of an mixed-method approach:
   - that it can answer questions which other methods cannot
   - that it provides better (stronger) inference
   - that it presents a greater diversity of views.

2. The distinction between various mixed designs:
   - concurrent mixed method /mixed model designs
   - sequential mixed method /mixed model designs
   - multistrand mixed method /mixed model designs
   - and conclude with a fully integrated mixed model design

Mixed-Method Approach – Critique

- The mixed-method movement is a step forward, but shortcomings have to be noted:
  1. too many different concepts – which, given the practical-pragmatic origin and orientation of “mixed method” (“how to...” questions) may not be sensitive enough to paradigmatic differences,
  2. too little discussion of the question WHY we should use which method resp. method combination
  3. insufficient precision what the “mix” is all about, what is going on.

- The criticisms require further reflection...
  1. on the difference and complementarity of nomothetic and idiosyncratic perspectives and designs
  2. on the various objects of research and how they require which method resp. which combination of methods
  3. about triangulation – perhaps it is a more precise term.
While mixed-method approaches and models of triangulation appear to solve all our problems, I point to a difference which cannot be ignored, but perhaps help to clarify things: the distinction between nomothetic and idiographic.

I suggest to reconsider the distinction between nomothetic and idiographic approaches suggested by the German philosopher W. Windelband and introduced in the psychology of religion by G. Allport.
Nomothetic vs. Idiographic

The German philosopher W. Windelband probably was the first to introduce this distinction in his inaugural speed as Rector of the Universität Strassbourg:

“The sciences of experience (Erfahrungswissenschaften) seek in the knowledge of reality either the general in the form of a law of nature or the unique in historically determined form; they view, for one part, the always identical form, for the other part, the unique, self-determined content of the real process. The former are sciences of natural laws, the latter are sciences of occurrences; the former teach what always is, the latter what has occurred once. The scientific thinking is – if I may coin new terms – in the one case nomothetic, in the other case idiographic. If we adhere to the usual terminology, we may speak in this sense of a opposition between natural-scientific and historical disciplines, provided that we keep in mind that, in this methodological meaning, psychology belongs to the natural sciences.”

Nomothetic vs. Idiographic

G. W. Allport 1946:

“Psychology in the main has been striving to make of itself a completely nomothetic discipline. The idiographic sciences, such as history, biography, and literature, on the other hand, endeavor to understand some particular event in nature or in society. A psychology of individuality would be essentially idiographic. The dichotomy, however, is too sharp: it requires a psychology divided against itself. As in the case of the two psychologies (the analytical and the descriptive) advocated by Dilthey and Spranger, the division is too drastic. It is more helpful to regard the two methods as overlapping and as contributing to one another. ... (B)iography is clearly idiographic, and yet in the best biographies one finds an artful blend of generalization with individual portraiture. A complete study of the individual will embrace both approaches.”

Nomothetic vs. Idiographic

G. W. Allport 1946:

“Somewhere in the interstices of its nomothetic laws psychology has lost the human person as we know him in everyday life. To rescue him and to reinstate him as a psychological datum in his own right is the avowed purpose of the psychology of personality. To aid in this re-establishment a number of unfamiliar but important tenets have been proposed. Their import is not essentially iconoclastic. They do not aim to destroy the traditional structure of general psychology, but rather to expand it. .... The proposition that psychology seeks laws has not been denied, but it has been shown that a general law may be a law that tells how uniqueness comes about.”

Allport adopted the distinction between nomothetic and idiographic, questioning their incompatibility. The difference – or the “dance” – in psychology continues.

Allport used this distinction, while claiming that personality is a unique field of study and requires the inclusion and primary role of an idiographic approach.

Thus following Allport’s arguments: Why not at the same and in one and the same project apply nomothetic AND idiographic approaches? Why not formulate hypotheses, select instruments, collect data and analyze them in order to (re-) construct nomoi? Why not at the same time elaborate single case studies based on interviews that have been collected through theoretic sampling and analyzed using qualitative methods?

But: Even when we are in favor of a simultaneous use of qualitative and quantitative methods, it is important to keep in mind the difference between nomothetic and idiographic. This sharpens the question, including one of the most difficult in our context: what it means to relate methods or results that (re-) construct psychological laws with methods or results attending to the unique case.

Exactly this is included in my understanding of triangulation ...
For a clear, however broad concept of triangulation, the work of Norman Denzin (1970) is of special importance. But it has to be kept in mind that previous research has used triangulation without that name.

If it is correct that Campbell & Fiske (1959) were the first to introduce the term triangulation in social science, then it is clearly taken from geodesy. Triangulation then describes a model which is necessary to determine the exact position of an object by using at least two distinct points of reference or perspectives. Thus it is understandable that in the early times the primary expectation and aim of using triangulation was achieving objectivity and accuracy: The – rather optimistic – assumption was the correction of biases and errors of one approach through the other, thus minimizing observer bias and achieving a more accurate assessment of supposedly “objective reality.”
Denzin (1970) distinguishes four forms of triangulation:
1. Data triangulation
2. Investigator triangulation
3. Theory triangulation
4. Method triangulation (within; between)

Primary aim also for Denzin: minimizing observer bias (which is more likely when using one perspective, one method, one researcher only)
Triangulation says more than just a mix and mingle of perspectives. Triangulation, I maintain, is revealing difference. Thus it is an illusion that triangulation brings us closer to the one “objective” reality; instead, as Fielding and Fielding (1986, p.33) state, the triangulating of theories and methods should be done “with the intention of adding breadth or depth to our analysis, but not for the purpose of pursuing ‘objective’ truth”. Triangulation means relativization: A new angle of vision is introduced, while, at the same moment – and if only for a moment –, the previous perspective is put into brackets. After the new perspective has bee constructed, we attend to the difference moving back an forth. (Note the kinesthetic metaphor!)

The conflict of interpretations (Ricoeur) is probably the most productive way for arriving at the most adequate portrait we can afford and for avoiding mono-perspective narrowness. This is what I take as important contribution of the phenomenological approach – which I briefly need to mention for rounding up the aspects of my methodological approach...
Keyword in the phenomenological approach is *Reduction* in the sense of “bracketing” the natural world and any previous interpretation of it in order to see the phenomenon in its essence and in its own right. (In order to prevent misunderstanding, I avoid the term ‘reduction’ and instead rather use ‘bracketing’.)

With reference to Husserl (1913; 1936) and Merleau-Ponty (1964), this is the key principle of a phenomenological approach which has been introduced also in psychology and has found some resonance (e.g. in phenomenological psychology).
Access to the life-world is opened by “the epoché of objective science” (Husserl, 1936/1970, p. 135).

“The psychologist as such in his inquiry must ... take and have no position: he must neither concur nor refuse, nor remain in problematic dispense, as if he had some say in the validity of the persons who are his subjects. So long as he has not acquired this posture as a serious and consciously established one, he has not arrived at his true subject matter; as soon as he violates it, he has lost his subject matter.” (Husserl, 1936/1970, p. 240)
"Bracketing" is not only difficult, but this state of "disciplined naiveté" (Giorgi) can not be a permanent and final state in the research process. Instead it has been suggested, even within the proponents of a phenomenological approach, that there must be a "dance between reduction and reflexivity" (Findlay, 2008):

"(T)he researcher steps away from initial pre-understandings to gain sufficient distance from which to critically and reflexively interrogate them. As new thoughts and insights begin to challenge these pre-understandings, the researcher makes interpretative revisions ..." (17).
Phenomenological Approach - Conclusions

1. The phenomenological approach is one possible method and should be regarded as being itself subject to triangulation.

2. “Bracketing” of the natural world and any previous interpretation of it is of special importance in idiosyncratic research which aims at the understanding of subjectivities.

3. Especially in research with narrative interviews, the researcher’s phenomenological attitude of disciplined naiveté is important, e.g. in form of an “open beginning” in an open-ended interview.

4. “Bracketing” is important also in the course of evaluation (and is exactly what ‘triangulation,’ as I understand it, implies): bracketing of previous interpretations in order to – kinesthetically – let new perspectives open up and speak by themselves.

5. We can thus understand triangulation as a way of implementing a phenomenological element in the evaluation process.
Final methodological conclusion and proposal: The processual phenomenological approach

1. A purely and exclusively nomothetic approach is not adequate, because its mono-perspective view forecloses new insights. This may especially be true for the investigation of personalities and subjectivities (Allport), but also for other areas of study.

2. Likewise an exclusively idiosyncratic approach is insufficient – and here I object to much what is proposed in ethnography and so-called phenomenological psychology. The idiosyncratic process is in fact surpassed, as soon as reflexive interpretation takes place or typologies are constructed.

3. Both the nomothetic and the idiosyncratic approach are needed. The model for their relation is complementarity or triangulation – which, as I attempted to show, needs to attend to difference and conflict of interpretations. This is what I would call a processual or kinesthetic phenomenological approach.
The Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study on Deconversion

Overview on Results and Research Design
Conceptualization of Deconversion
1. **Loss of Specific Religious Experiences** (Experiential Dimension):
   Finding meaning and purpose; of experience of God; of trust and of fear

2. **Intellectual Doubt or Denial** (Ideological Dimension):
   Disagreement with specific beliefs / Heresy (Berger)

3. **Moral Criticism** (Ritualistic Dimension):
   Rejection of specific prescriptions and/or: Application of new level of Moral Judgement

4. **Emotional Suffering** (Consequential Dimension):
   Loss of Embeddedness / social support / sense of stability and safety;

5. **Disaffiliation from the community**
   Retreat from participation (meetings) and observance (practices) Termination of membership
The Variety of Deconversion Trajectories

- **Religious Organizations**
  - **Accommodating**
    - Integrating exit
    - Religious switching
  - **Integrated**
    - Integrating exit
    - Religious switching
    - Oppositional exit
  - **Oppositional**
    - Oppositional exit
    - Secularizing exit
    - Heretical exit
    - Privatizing exit

- **Termination of (concern with) religious belief and praxis**
  - 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 formal membership, but continuity of private religious belief and private religious praxis – invisible religion
  - 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 membership in organized religion**

Research Center for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion
http://wwwhomes.uni-bielefeld.de/religionsforschung
Development in the religious field was conceptualized by Weber, Troeltsch and Bourdieu as competition between the actors, but not life-span development (which was the focus in the deconversion study).
Research Design
of the Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study on Deconversion
Basic Unit of Research in Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study of Deconversion

Religious Milieu (In-Tradition Members)
- Questionnaires (Demogr.; Scales)
- Faith Development Interviews

Focus Person (Deconvert)
- Questionnaire (Demogr.; Scales)
- Faith Development Interview
- Biographical / Narrative Interview

Quantitative Analysis (SPSS)
- Evaluation of FDIs

Case Study
- Interpretation as trinagulation of data

Further quantitative analyses...

Persons → (Sorts of) Data → Evaluation → Results

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Research Instruments in Bielefeld-based study on deconversion

... and number of data

**QUESTIONNAIRE**
1,197 questionnaire data
- NEO-FFI (Big Five)
- Ryff Scale (Psych. Well-being)
- RF (Religious Fundamentalism)
- RWA (Right-Wing Authoritarianism)
- Religious Schema Scale (RSS)
- Spiritual/religious self-ident.
- Demographics

**Narrative Interview**
- 99 deconverts
  (50% in Germany and U.S.)

**Life Tapestry Exercise**

**Faith Development Interview**
- 277 FDIs
  (99 from deconverts; 178 from in-tradition members)
Summary of Important Results
of the Bielefeld-Based Cross-cultural Study on Deconversion

- Typology of deconversion trajectories in the religious field ...
- Typology of deconversion narratives based on interpretation of narrative interviews
- Big Five Personality Factors: openness to experience higher
- Psychological Well-Being: sense of personal growth higher
  - (for Germans only: lower environmental mastery and positive relations with others can indicate a (mild) crisis for German deconverts)
- Religious Fundamentalism: lower
- „More spiritual than religious“: deconverts double
- Faith Development Interview Scores: considerable more Stage 4 in deconversion groups ...
- Scores on the Religious Schema Scale:
  - subscale truth of texts and teachings: deconverts lower
  - Subscale xenosophia/inter-religious dialog: higher
Qualitative Results
Types of Deconversion Narratives

Pursuit of Autonomy
- Gina
- Samantha
- Timothy
- Christoph
- Mehmet

Debarred from Paradise
- Pia
- Peter
- Fiona
- Elisabeth
- Franz
- Adam
- Celia

Life-Longs Quests – Late Revisions
- Erica
- Tom
- Gudrun
- Konrad

Finding a New Frame of Reference
- Sabina
- Viviane
- Melina
- Dan
- Jasmin

Names refer to the case studies published in our book.
Deconversion Trajectories in the Religious Field

Numbers indicate the number of specific deconverts in the deconversion study.
Quantitative Results

Differences between Deconverts and In-Tradition Members
## Significant Differences between In-tradition Members and Deconverts for Germany and the U.S.A.

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Note: Tension=Accommodating + oppositional groups; No Tension= integrating groups; 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).
## Significant Differences between No-Tension and Tension Groups for In-Tradition Members in Germany and the U.S.A.

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<td>4.04</td>
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<td>PL</td>
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<td>3.92</td>
<td>34.78</td>
<td>4.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>34.18</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>34.40</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RF</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68.00</td>
<td>14.67</td>
<td>52.03</td>
<td>15.83</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RWA</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84.37</td>
<td>18.76</td>
<td>72.82</td>
<td>19.25</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RSS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42.82</td>
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<td>51.78</td>
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<td>ftr</td>
<td>19.88</td>
<td>2.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>xenos</td>
<td>12.24</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>17.40</td>
<td>2.92</td>
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</table>

Note: Tension=Accommodating + oppositional groups; No Tension=integrating groups; 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).
Methodological Perspectives

Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Data in Case Studies
Basic Unit of Research in Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study of Deconversion

Religious Milieu (In-Tradition Members)

- Questionnaires (Demogr.; Scales)
- Faith Development Interviews
- Questionnaire (Demogr.; Scales)
- Faith Development Interview
- Biographical / Narrative Interview

Focus Person (Deconvert)

- Quantitative Analysis (SPSS)
- Evaluation of FDIs
- Evaluation of FDIs
- Sequence Analysis; Narrative Analysis

Case Study

- Interpretation as trinagulation of data

Persons → (Sorts of) Data → Evaluation → Results

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### Levels of Analysis

- Transcripts of open-ended, narrative interviews
- Transcripts of faith development interviews
- Questionnaire data
- Life story (the person’s narrative creation of meaning)
- Faith Structures / Contents / Narratives (developmental tasks, motivations, semantics)
- Demographics / Traits / Attitudes (general dispositions & outcomes)
Case Study „Samantha“

- 22 years old at the time of the interview
- Nazarene Church, later Southern Baptist Church (following her parents)
- Doubts occur while attending high school and lead to terminating membership at age of 17. No church participation in college.
- Exploring Judaism and Buddhism.
- Faith Development Interview total score: 3.8
- “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 attitude. Her faith development interview evaluation indicates that she has moved to an individuative-reflective faith.” (Streib et.al., 2009, p. 124)
# Table for Questionnaire Data in Case Study „Samantha“

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single Case Questionnaire Data of Samantha</th>
<th>In-Tradition Members in No-Tension (Integrated) Religious Organizations in United States</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Big Five Personality Factors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Openness</em></td>
<td>53.00</td>
<td>37.80</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Transformation</em></td>
<td>97.00</td>
<td>80.72</td>
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<td><strong>Psychological Well-Being &amp; Growth</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Well-Being (total)</em></td>
<td>230.00</td>
<td>200.81</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Autonomy</em></td>
<td>39.00</td>
<td>32.08</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Personal Growth</em></td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>34.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>RF</em></td>
<td>26.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>RWA</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Schema Scale</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>RSS total score</em></td>
<td>57.00</td>
<td>47.66</td>
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<td><em>Truth of Texts...</em></td>
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<td>18.07</td>
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<td><em>Fairness, Toler.</em></td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>19.42</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Xenosophia</em></td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>16.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
Case Study „Gina“

- 21-year-old
- Born into Latter-Day Saints (LDS)
- Deconversion from LDS at age 19 (following her future husband who earlier engaged in doubts and disaffiliation), secularizing exit
- Self-identifies as „neither religious nor spiritual“
- Faith Development Interview total score: 3.8
## Table for Questionnaire Data in Case Study „Gina“

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single Case Questionnaire Data of Gina</th>
<th>In-Tradition Members in No-Tension (Integrated) Religious Organizations in United States</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Big Five Personality Factors</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Openness</em></td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>37.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Big Two (Higher-Order) Personality Factors</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Transformation</em></td>
<td>79.00</td>
<td>80.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological Well-Being &amp; Growth</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Well-Being (total)</em></td>
<td>217.00</td>
<td>200.81</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Autonomy</em></td>
<td>37.00</td>
<td>32.08</td>
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<td><em>Personal Growth</em></td>
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<td>34.36</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>RF</em></td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>64.75</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>RWA</em></td>
<td>65.00</td>
<td>92.16</td>
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</table>
Conclusion

The Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study on Deconversio has followed a research design which can be characterized, in terms of Tashakkori & Teddlie (2003), as “concurrent mixed method design;” simultaneously we have collected quantitative and qualitative data.

The phenomenological attitude of “bracketing” was implied in the biographical interviews which has lead to the reconstruction of 99 deconversion narratives.

We can also speak of “bracketing” in interpretation of these interviews: We started with sequence analysis which, according to Oevermann, implies the maximal ignorance of every context knowledge and pre-understanding.

Triangulation, as defined above, took place especially in the further elaboration of case studies: we have related the results of the statistical analyses on personality, well-being, fundamentalist attitudes and also the faith development scores to the single case.

Looking back, I see shortcomings exactly here: we could have paid more attention to the differences between the quantitative and qualitative results.
Conclusion

I leave to the readers to make a judgment about the successful integration of quantitative and qualitative, nomothetic and idiographic approaches, and the use of triangulation in the Bielefeld-Based Cross-Cultural Study of Deconversion.
Thank you for your attention!

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

Results and Design of the Bielefeld-Based Study of Deconversion
You may also visit our
www.uni-bielefeld.de/Deconversion
This presentation is
http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/theologie/CIRRuS-

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http://wwwhomes.uni-bielefeld.de/religionsforschung