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# **The relevance of religion and religiosity in the biographies of single women estranged from the church and young girls and women associating with the church: Methodological considerations on empirical biographical research**

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## **1. Introduction**

The rapid social transformation necessitates context-oriented research into social relationships, environments, and lifestyles. Qualitative analyses are particularly suitable to explain the contexts of living in specific groups and individual life histories. In view of individualisation and pluralisation, empirical biographical research is vital to obtain insight into a diversity of life designs and the models which justify them. Biographical research has shown that the concrete reality of a subject's everyday life design is simply not the random result of the individual's path in life, but that societal contingencies show up in biographical processes (cf. Fischer-Rosenthal 1996, 148f.; Fischer-Rosenthal 1995; Kaupp 2007a). This means that individual life histories always have a collective side as well.

Empirical biographical research aims for an approach which is as expansive and authentic as possible with regard to the perspective of the investigated persons. This is why it largely dispenses with pre-formulated theories about subjects, and why existing theories are constantly changed during the course of the research process. Qualitative research is therefore oriented towards the everyday life and everyday knowledge of the investigated persons, and takes an interpretive approach as its epistemological principle (cf. Flick/Kardoff/Steinke 2000, 22-24).

Despite the methodological diversity within a qualitative research paradigm, it has three characteristic fundamental features (cf. Hildenbrand 1995, 256f):

- Firstly, investigations reconstruct an (individual) case before comparative or universal statements can be developed. Because an individual case is not detached from the context, its analysis leads to statements broader than the case itself via historical, societal or environment-specific relationships.
- From a logical scientific point of view, a basic premise is that gaining access to the construction of reality can only be established by interaction, through conversations and discourses. Latent sense structures and rules enable communication and make research of reality possible.
- Statements by subjects (transcribed sound recordings or videos, autobiographical texts) form the empirical basis for the reconstruction of a case, and ensure a far-reaching possibility to verify theory building. A common feature of all approaches within qualitative research is that they “proceed from a characteristic of social reality which is informed and conveyed in a symbolic and linguistic manner” (Schütze 1987, 235).

The investigative perspectives of biographical research can be divided into a meaning perspective, a functional perspective and a structural perspective: “What *meaning* and relevance did biography bring forth for members of society in the course of socialisation and socio-historic developments? Which *function* does it have on the level of the lifeworld of social action, and which function does it have in society as a whole? In which way are biographical *structures* formed, retained and dispersed?” (Fischer-Rosenthal 1995, 253).

Both our studies show that a biographical research design has to be adapted, depending on target group and research question respectively. In the following article, two different investigations into the religiosity of women are presented: The research groups are, on the one hand, single women who are estranged from the church (Chapter 2), and on the other hand, young women who socialise within church circles (Chapter 3). The studies differ with regard to their phases of enquiry and methods of analysis; the age group of the persons investigated and their biographical orientation towards the topic ‘religion’ also influenced the studies. Chapter 4 looks at important research-related and practical findings about the backgrounds of both studies.

Single people form a social group which has up to the present been rather neglected in the field of religious adult education. Furthermore, this social group is growing rapidly. Even though young people are definitely taken into account in religious studies, the development of the interaction between life histories, gender and religiosity in adolescence has up to now hardly been researched.

## **2. A qualitative empirical study on the relationship between lifeworld and religiosity of single women**

The research question of the empirical investigation into the relationship between the lifeworld and religiosity of single women already shows up in the title: “Ich weiss nicht, wo da Religion anfängt oder aufhört” (“I don’t know where religion starts or ends”) (Reese 2006), one of the quotations obtained from the interviews. Because the women interviewed during the pilot study positioned themselves as estranged from the church, the question had to be answered whether, and if so, when, to which extent and in which form religion and religiosity play a role in the lives of the single women who were interviewed. The aim was to have an unbiased and open approach to the more church-free lifeworld of the interviewees.

### **2.1. The starting point of the investigation**

One can distinguish the following phenomena as key features of religiosity in modern times: *Firstly*: More and more people express their religiosity independently from church and

congregational contacts. Churchliness and religiosity drift apart more and more. *Secondly*: Individualisation is a defining feature of contemporary western European societies, and consequently also of expressed religiosity within and outside of churchly institutions. The challenge to individuals is to form their own autonomous religiosity and create their own, individual 'world of belief'. *Thirdly*: Expressed religiosity and religious interpretive models are embedded in a particular lifeworld. Ways of expressing religion are strongly tied to a particular everyday life, social contacts and individual contexts of living. In the same way, one can assume that life history and lifestyle shape the fleshed-out religiosity of modern people (Englert 1991, Gabriel 2000, and others).

Here, the investigation linked to a crucial first hypothesis: When the lifeworld decisively influences individually shaped religiosity, one can hypothesise that changes in the lifeworlds of modern people could bring about interesting observations regarding their expressed religiosity. Therefore, a group of adults with a special form of individualised and non-traditional lifestyle was selected: single women of roundabout 40 years of age without children.

The study particularly aims to unveil (new) aspects of religiosity of childless single women as representatives of a modern lifestyle: Which specific manifestations show up in the relationship between religiosity and a specific lifeworld. In order to determine this, it was crucial to question the meaning of the social dimension of religiosity; perhaps looking for places and people shaping this. Likewise, it had to be taken into account whether (characteristic) religious interpretive models take shape in the lifeworld of a single woman, and to which traditions these women link their religiosity. A third pressing question was about religious practice and its function in their lives (for example, in their social involvement, in strengthening their identity, in coping with contingencies and crises, etc.). Finally, the religious self-image of the women had to be studied.

## **2.2. Who is a single woman?**

The question of who precisely is a single woman is not at all answered consistently in relevant studies on single persons. Are they the statistically easily identifiable unmarried people? Or are they only the people living on their own? For some investigations, the age is important, by definition. Others recognise as real single women only those who are not in a specific relationship, irrespective of marriage certificate or situation of living. In the most recent study of single people by Baas/Schmitt/Wahl (2008, 24f.), the key criterion for a single person is simply a self-confession of not living with a partner. In the last few years, this claim has been obtained from single people themselves.

Many researchers (Schneider/Rosenkranz/Limmer 1998, 29; Reese 2010d, 175 and others) complain that studies on single people deal with more or less disparate conceptions of single people and therefore, strictly speaking, investigate different samples. As a consequence, comparing the results is often precarious and dubious. Externally, ways of life with the same structure can have very different qualities, depending on the age when they occur, out of which phases they developed, according to which self-image they are lived out, and how long they already exist. In order to classify, critically evaluate and compare the results of studies on single people with each other, one therefore has to work in a consistent way, and explicitly disclose the concept of singleness that one takes into account in the analysis.

The concept of singleness in this study regards single people as those who do not live in a steady partnership and do not have any children. Life as a single person is regarded as the opposite of a couple-oriented life, and it correlates more or less to the everyday understanding of singleness and the above-mentioned non-traditional and individualised lifestyle. Because this is a

qualitative study, the personal statements of the interviewees could therefore be used as a criterion without any problems.

The selection of childless single women of roundabout 40 years appeared to be promising to gain innovative insights because (1) it constitutes a way of life which 20 years ago was only the exception. This clearly distinguishes single women from single men, who can more readily fall back on existing models for ways of living and prevailing examples (cf. Reese 2006, 84-90). (2) In addition, one can expect that they depart from old roles (formed by religious ways of life, such as mother, spouse) and that they take up new roles, and (3) the age of roundabout 40 years marks a decisive phase in the life of women when the conflict of possible/impossible, wanted/not feasible motherhood becomes more prominent.

### **2.3. The methodological layout of the empirical research**

The decision for a qualitative empirical method depends on the focus of the research and the research object to be studied. Because the present study devoted itself to an up to now almost disregarded object of study, an exploratory approach had to be used. An open approach, without a template of predetermined fixed concepts and categories, also allowed “not only the search for Christian churchly religion in fellow human beings, but also subjective religious search movements” (Ziebertz 2002, 59) as challenges to observe Christian theology and take it seriously. One had to be able to detect situations and present-day experiences which are relevant to religion within this gradually increasing group of people who are more or less estranged from the church. Furthermore, qualitative individual case studies were in this instance considered to be more objective and ethically more suitable, because religiosity and lifestyles are at present highly individualised.

The main feature of the methodological course of action for this qualitative empirical study was a *multi-perspective method selection* as a form of triangulation in the qualitative procedure. During the investigation, a data triangulation (cf. according to Flick 2000, 310) was conducted. Several interview impulses (e.g. pie charts, photos of the own home, creative writing manuals) invited the women to express themselves through other media than by spoken language only. This means that apart from texts, visual and written forms of expression (photos, sketches of pie charts, etc.) were also collected and analysed. The method of triangulation, however, formed the focus. Taking Flick’s concept of episodic interviews further (Flick 1995, 124-130), where he worked out the ‘within-method-triangulation’, approaches to methods of biographical and episodic narratives (experiences with living alone: Tell me about the last celebration that you had!) were linked to specifically aimed explicit questions on subjective definitions (What do you associate with religiosity?), attitudes (e.g. What does it mean for you not to live in a relationship?) and theories, in order to systematically connect the respective strengths of the approaches with each other. Apart from the tangible subjective and successive experiential perspective which emerged through the narratives (of situations) (‘when I first started living alone...’), the explicit questions gathered abstract descriptions of the situations (‘I understand religion to be...’), argumentative elaborations (‘I reject the concept, because...’) or even subjective theories (‘For me, religiosity, or rather spirituality, means...’). This dual approach presented an illuminating view on the subject, at the same time keeping the perspective on the interviewees’ ways of experiencing things. As a result, the different aspects of subjective involvement with social reality within the individual became clear.

Apart from the multi-perspective approach, *the combination of a theory-driven and an open exploratory approach* to the research design is significant. This was applied to the different techniques of interview analysis (explicit questions about problem areas of being single drawn from literature, combined with open, narrative impulses to tell a story, and photo presentations),

as well as to the analysis of the collected data (explorative appraisal in the detailed semantic-syntactical analyses and the perspectives of questions obtained from the detailed analyses for the reductive analysis, combined with topic-related and theory-driven questions of the reductive analysis). Additional leading principles were *focussing on the subjective view of the interviewees* and the *principle of convergence from openness towards content-relatedness* in the execution of the interview impulses as well as in the approach to the data during the evaluation (at first intensive dealing with and analysis of the first narrative (cf. Oevermann 1980, 43), then selection of dense passages for the detailed analysis and finally topic-related reductive procedures). These principles are characteristic for the concept of enquiry and the concept of evaluation (cf. Reese 2006, 165ff) in this study.

The *principle of convergence* is crucial, particularly when *dealing with the concept of religion*. While one consciously steered clear of using religious terminology during interview impulses in order to elicit unbiased concepts of own choice about reflection on and forms of lifestyles, the interviewees' explicit understanding of religion and religiosity and their subjective religious self-conception were only requested by the end of the second interview. Answering these questions at the end of the interview implies on the one hand that they opened up their subjective understanding of religiosity and religion, or accounted themselves about their personal use of the concepts. On the other hand, the assumed complexity and ambiguity of the word 'religious' had to become visible in the ensuing substantiations, explanations or relativisations. The subjective (religious) self-conception which was explicated could subsequently be compared in the analysis to answers from the remaining interview impulses.

The following table (Fig. 1) gives an overview of the methodological steps taken during the process of collection and analysis, and clearly presents the theory-driven and exploratory approaches.

<b>Methodological steps</b>	<b>Theory-driven approach</b>	<b>Exploratory and data-driven approach</b>
<b>1. Development of guidelines for both interviews</b>	Theory-driven questions in guidelines (e.g. questioning the self-concept of being single; dealing with crises, concept of religion, organisation of celebrations)	Open invitations for narratives (open first narrative impulse for telling about experiences of living alone, open photo presentation)
<b>2. Conducting 8 interviews in the pilot study to test the guidelines</b>		
<b>3. Adjusting the guidelines</b>	Amending and deleting some of the impulse questions	Amending open enquiry at the end of both interviews
<b>4. Making sound recordings and completing 8 interviews in the main study and selecting 3 women</b>		
<b>5. Transcribing the interviews</b>		
<b>6. Segmenting and making a rough analysis of all the interviews</b>		
<b>7. Sequential analysis of the first narrative</b>		First open self-presentation of the women

<b>8. Selection of key passages on the basis of the rough analysis and the first narrative</b>	Criterion for topic-related relevance	Criterion for authenticity and the subjective personally relevant key topics about conceptions of life
<b>9. Detailed analysis of the key passages</b> 9.1 Analysis in interpretation groups 9.2 Detailed written semantic-syntactical analysis 9.3 Summary of the detailed analysis with key results 9.4 Topic-related perspective of the questions from the interpretive models obtained from the key passages for the reductive analysis		Detailed semantic-syntactical analysis: Three key passages per person
<b>10. Topic-related reductive analysis</b> 10.1 Entering all the interviews in MAXqda 10.2 Structuring the material according to the key topic-related questions 10.3 Case-oriented topic-related reductive analysis 10.4 Processing the results and presentation of the results of individual cases by comparison	Theory-driven questions e.g. meaning of the job, dealing with time/loneliness, important places.	From the case-specific questions obtained from the detailed analysis, individual topics related to life and interpretive models, e.g.: nature as a resource, life as a development process, forming an active relationship with oneself.
<b>11. Topic-related reductive analysis of the meaning of religion and religiosity</b> 11.1 Processing the implicit range of questions 11.2 Interpretation of the explicit enquiry process 11.3 Reflective comparison of the answers of the implicit and explicit range of questions		

Figure 1: Overview of the steps of collection and analysis

### 2.3.1 Steps in the collection process

In two interviews conducted 1-2 weeks apart, the women were prompted to tell about their life histories and episodes in their lives, and then to argumentatively explain and reflect on their situation and attitudes in life. Biographical narrative impulses (experiences of living alone), episodic narrative impulses (do you remember situations in which things went very well with you?) and explicit questions about attitudes and self-conceptions (about being single) were alternated. Moreover, a photo presentation was made of photos they took themselves, in which

the meaning of the photos for them personally had to be pointed out. In the next section, the different procedures of collection are justified and validated theoretically.

### ***(1) Biographical improvisational narratives***

Following the classical narrative interview according to Schütze (1983, 283-293) and Hermanns (1995, 182-186), which was for the first time thoroughly worked through and applied in theology by Stephanie Klein (1994, 78-159), this study attempted at the beginning of the first interview to generate biographical narratives focussing on the topic of the experience of living alone, by means of a single starting impulse. Apart from argumentation and description, the expressive format of the narrative awarded special attention to the subjectively experienced and interpreted reality. Narrative interview impulses aim towards a specific type of narration characterised by spontaneity, personal involvement, inner continuity, and sequential piling up of experiences. The topic of such autobiographical improvised narration can only be events which the informant firstly experienced herself, and which secondly can be told in the form of a story. The narrator once again relives the external sequence of the event as well as her inner reaction, in chronological order. As a result, the structures of the subjective experience and interpretation and even the pre-reflective aspects of experience become apparent. The reserved behaviour of the interviewee during the impulse aims to actuate the autonomy of her structuring capacity. The women should be incited to report freely and independently about events in retrospect, and the correlation between occurrences in their biographies. Only after ending the entire biographical narrative, and with the aim to bring to the fore very realistic situations and everyday experiences of living alone, a more concretising enquiry ensued about good and bad experiences of living alone.

### ***(2) Episodic narrative impulses***

The method of collecting episodic narratives according to Flick (1995, 124-130) links with the narrative analysis approach. It conveys knowledge via narrative dynamics, narrative constraints and the intentional deliberation to make statements about small, easily discernable episodic narratives. In everyday situations, one would come across such spontaneous and concise descriptions as elaborate presentations of an entire life history. Episodic narratives are generated in the same way by means of an unambiguous narrative impulse, but they can be more narrowed down to the topic and therefore be steered towards the specific focus of the research by the researcher. Topic-related episodic narrative impulses about what the individual's childlessness meant, the handling of crisis situations, the meaning of the 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, the organisation of personal celebrations, and the observation of the Christmas holidays, were included in the guidelines. The strength of an episodic narrative is that this data collecting technique is more natural, that is, a more everyday communication situation and it promotes interaction on a more equal footing.

### ***(3) Making their own photos and the photo presentation***

Photos as a place of recollection form an indispensable ingredient for constructing modern ways of living. Apart from using only language, making reference to and collecting photos as visual material offer a complementary approach. "Disclosing visual material as a source apart from textual and language-oriented approaches, opens up new perspectives in the analysis of complex social fields" (Fuhs 1997, 266). While the social meaning of his or her world is anything but totally clear to a person, it cannot in social processes be fully communicated via language. By using photos, unconscious aspects and issues which the subjects cannot communicate via language can be brought to the fore. Bourdieu pointed out that social meaning is written deeply into the bodies of people, into their actions and into the things which surround them (Bourdieu



1987, 122ff). Objects such as clothing, pictures, furniture, and others can symbolise a specific group's lifestyles and attitudes towards life, and are just as important in analysis as expressions through language.

Using photos is beneficial particularly when complex social phenomena symbolising via visible objectifications and difficult to understand through language, have to be investigated. In this respect, photographic images were also instructive in this study, because potential social embodiments of interpretive models of lived-through religiosity (e.g. photos, objects) could be observed. Photographic images could be used as a method of 'photo elicitation' (Harper 2000, 414). Within the framework of a photo interview, photos which are supposed to 'elicit' particular interpretations of the images and memories are shown to the person to be investigated. Photos served here as a stimulus and aid for telling a story.

In this study, the women under investigation were involved in the photographic process itself. The women were asked to take photos, within the time span of one week, of places and objects inside and outside of their homes which were particularly revealing and meaningful to them. The captured pictures were so-called 'commissions' by the researcher, with specific questions steered by the focus of the research. Five of these photos had to be selected and presented to the interviewer at the second discussion. The assignment was that the women should look at their world from a photographic perspective for one week. The everyday dealings with the camera went hand in hand with a specific "school of seeing" (Fuhs 1997, 270). An aesthetic result of relevant living places, constructed and reflected on by the interviewed women, was captured in the process. The photos moreover presented important aspects of their self-concept and self-observation.

**Which areas, objects, places or spaces in your home or elsewhere are especially revealing and meaningful for your life and to you as an individual?**

Where can you relax, find peace, come to your senses, or reflect on life? Which places outside of your home do you visit once in a while? Which places/areas in your home are changing, or do you constantly rearrange? Where are places in your home or elsewhere for recollections, where are the ones for present wishes and future planning? What is your favourite area, your favourite place / where do you feel especially well? To which objects are you particularly attached? Which object characterises you particularly, in your view?

Figure 2: Photo assignment for the interviewed women

At the beginning of the second interview, the women were invited by means of a single open impulse to present (structured by themselves) their photos, and were requested to tell what is important to them in each photo. Where necessary, questions were added by the researcher to obtain more specific information ('why' with an argumentative focus; 'most successful photo' as a kind of 'stock taking'). Connecting the photo analysis with the interview made it possible to link a photo with the interviewee's specific interpretation (as in the study of Wuggenig 1988). A photo presentation can on the one hand contain a personal interpretation of the image; that is, the attempt to put into words and to interpret the expressive intention of the photograph. Because symbolic objectifications are always ambiguous, this can only happen in approximation. The selected group can, on the other hand, use their photos as a stimulus to talk, since the pictures they took stimulate memories of personal life images, through associations (cf. Fuhs 1997, 280).

While the content (motive for selection) and the aesthetic presentation have to be investigated in a classical analysis of photos, the focus of this study was on the individual's intentions to make statements and the interpretations of the women themselves. The focus was not on analysing the

images objectively and pointing out the multiplicity of potential interpretations, but rather to release the subjectivity of those who perhaps simply view the pictures differently from the researcher. When a photo is interpreted – that means, transferred into verbal meanings – its complexity is reduced to a few significant features. During the presentation of the photos, the reduction of the multiple meanings was in the hands of the women. There was no analysis of the photos beyond the individual interpretations by the interviewees. A description of the photos was only done within the framework of the interpretative template already started by the single women, in order to take into account their meaning, the verbalisation of which apparently seemed to be difficult for the interviewees.

**(4) Holistic approaches and forms of expression: Pie charts, imaginary time travels and creative writing impulses**

Apart from the presentation of self-made photos, the interviewees were offered additional holistic forms of expression and narrative impulses.

The *pie chart* is a methodological instrument in the reflection of personal life planning. The women received a sketch of a pie chart and got enough time to divide this into differently sized ‘pie pieces’ which would indicate their most important spheres of life. By means of the circle which had to be filled in, symbolising their entire lives, they were asked to become aware of the present structures of their lives and the different areas in their lives (work, family, leisure time, friendships, etc.). In the investigation, the sketched pie chart served the narrator as an aid to structure and tell, and the interviewer as an orientation, in order to capture all the relevant areas of life. It gave a comprehensive and at the same time compact overview of the individual and the structural conditions of her everyday way of living. In addition, it referred to different systems of relevance to which one could always come back in later phases of the interviews.

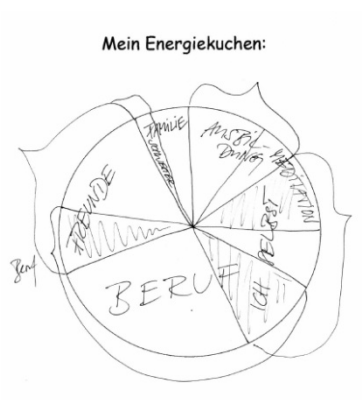


Figure 3 (Example of a pie chart by Paula)

The *imaginary time travel* into the future as a projective procedure created personal ideas, wishful visions and images of successes in life which could not be perceived by purely verbal communication. The women had to imagine a wishful vision of their lives by the age of 60 in the form of a controlled fantasy trip. Imaginary and projective procedures can emerge in the unconscious and conscious areas of the mind and consequently release processes which cannot be appropriately processed in an interview setting. Therefore, after the pilot study, the decision was made not to request realistic future expectations, but rather positive feelings in the form of wishful visions which are nevertheless grounded by bearing reference to the individual’s life circumstances.

In the creative writing impulse, the women were asked to complete the sentence 'To me, ... is sacred.' Not only the method of creative writing, but also this impulse of the topic 'to me, ... is sacred' has already been used in research in the pedagogy of religion (such as Hilger 1998, 246-263). The adjective 'sacred' serves as a 'translator' to build a bridge as a third party, linking religious and tradition-oriented connotations to present-day secular meanings. The concept 'sacred' was chosen because it is not used very often in everyday language, and is therefore open to interpretation. This method of collecting data is about a written form of expression, a struggle to find words, and spontaneous associations.

#### ***(5) Explicit questioning – questions about subjective attitudes, definitions and theories***

This phase of explicit questioning can be compared to the second phase of the episodic interview according to Flick (1995, 124-130). Here, specific definitions of the self and therefore subjective theories were once more questioned. The focus was therefore not on narrative elaboration, but rather on an argumentative examination of externally imposed concepts and ideas. These questions formed a type of external questioning in comparison to the previous data collected, in the sense that the women were questioned about their understanding and the meaning of different categories and basic concepts of this study (e.g. the concept of singleness and the self-concept of being single, the concept of religion and the self-concept of being religious).

The explicit questions about their subjective understanding of singleness aimed to capture the subjective self-concept of women as single persons and the everyday meaning of this life design. The status of being single was a very crucial category in this study, functioning as a selection criterion for the target group. Questioning the attitude towards this life design and the contentedness with this form of living helped to validate the understanding of the concept, and the placement of the particular interviewed women in the entire population.

#### **2.3.2 Steps in the analysis procedure**

The qualitative analysis of the data obtained by the interviews took place through several tasks (cf. the numbering in accordance with the above-mentioned table): (4) making recordings, (5) transcription of the data, (6) segmenting and making a rough analysis, (7) sequential analysis of the first biographical narrative, (8) selection of key passages, (9) detailed semantic-syntactical analysis of the selected key passages, and (10) reductive analysis of the content.

#### ***(7) Sequential analysis of the first biographical narrative***

The first spontaneous biographical narrative at the beginning of the first interview received special attention (cf. Oevermann 1980, 43). In a sequential semantic-syntactical analysis, the beginning of the interview interaction, in which the interviewees positioned themselves and basic topics normally important to the women already came up, was thoroughly processed by the interpretation group. In the sequential analysis of the first narrative, an effort was made to follow the step-by-step logic of the text with extreme rigidity. In the text-bound and semantic-linguistic process of deciphering the meaning, the aim was to release various interpretations and detect a coherent pattern in the self-presentation.

#### ***(8) Selection of key passages***

Reading the interview text several times, the tabled results of the interviews' rough analysis and the knowledge obtained from the first narrative's sequential analysis gave a grounded basis on which key passages could be identified for the detailed semantic-sequential analysis in accordance with formal and content-related criteria:

*Firstly:* The selected text passages had to be relevant to the topic, which means they had to be categorised under the following evaluating questions: How do the women shape their lives? How do they deal with crises and contingencies? How do the women interpret their lives? To what extent does falling back on religion and faith play a role in the shaping of and coping with their existence?

*Secondly:* The key passages had to be highly authentic. Indicators for authenticity of the narrated and experienced stories which refer to the stories' embedment in experience, are the way in which the conversations flowed by themselves, the density of the content, and the verbal and non-verbal recognisable emotional involvement (valency) in the narratives.

*Thirdly:* The text excerpts had to be easily understandable and coherent by having a clear linguistic beginning and end. The texts should neither be too short nor too elaborate.

*Fourthly:* The key passages had to 'contain a secret'. This means that the text might have been opaque when read for the first time.

### ***(9) The interpretation groups' detailed semantic-syntactical analysis of key passages***

As in the case of the sequential analysis of the first narrative, the selected key passages were subjected to a detailed semantic-syntactical analysis. In the first step, the language code was deconstructed, word after word and sentence by sentence. Here, linguistic textbooks were particularly valuable for the analysis. In a second step, the successive reconstruction of the meaning of strange personal utterances and meanings with subjective intentions got special attention. In a concluding step, the reconstructed results and interpretations were subjected to empirically-based reflection, thus interpretation. Both of the last steps took place in the interpretation group.

### ***(10) Reductive content analysis according to theory-driven and text-internal categories***

The questions directing the topic-related reductive analysis were on the one hand obtained from theoretical knowledge of research on single persons and the leading topic-related evaluating questions, and on the other hand in an exploratory way from the idiosyncratic case structures. The following topic-related aspects were processed: (1) Biographical data of the single women interviewed, (2) Self-concept of (single) women, (3) Personal meaning attached to childlessness, (4) The special challenges and risks for people living alone, (5) Resources to shape life or cope with life (social, ecological, personal and non-material resources), (6) The religion and religiosity of the single women interviewed. After entering all the interviews in MAXQDA, the text corpus was sorted according to previously worked-out topics. The text segments under each topic were then read several times, paraphrased and reduced, to delete redundant text passages and consolidate similar utterances. Interview passages dense with content were put together as citations for specific interpretations. The word-by-word transcription of these citations was finally processed according to criteria for reader-friendliness (e.g. deleting "uh", striking out repetitions and incomplete words).

## **2.4.A perspective on important content-related results**

After finalising the empirical study and analysing the data, four key topics crystallised in the research process: established types of lifestyle, the relevance of (religious) traditions, religious and quasi-religious forms of expression, and gender-specific aspects of lifestyles and ways of

coping with life. These results have already been dealt with extensively in other places and discussed in relation to their practical theological relevance (cf. in depth in Reese 2006, cf. Reese-Schnitker 2010a/b/c). The present article concentrated on the methodological approach of the studies.

The results, which directly correlate with the methodological approach of the study and are informative for this contribution, constitute the handling of the concept of religion: after the open impulse questions, the women did not use the concepts 'religion' and 'religiosity' in their descriptive and interpretive attempts. In their response to the final explicit question of what they associate with the concepts 'religion' and 'religiosity', they emphatically distanced themselves. In the very first place, they associated church-bound forms of expression with religion and religiosity. After a couple of minutes of thinking aloud, and on the basis of the life histories they had told, they nevertheless showed an amazing willingness to rethink these concepts once again with a view to them personally. At the end of the interview – that is the amazing result – all the women answered positively to the question about their religious self-concept. Apparently a change took place during the interview itself, or perhaps even a process of religious education? Even the East-German woman who was estranged from the church used the attribute 'religious' for the first time when referring to her life.

How can one interpret this result? Of course, not all women are to be regarded as religious because of this statement about the self at the end of the interview. What is important, however, is the distinction between self-description and ascription. What exactly happened here? By focussing with openness in the interview impulse on phenomena relevant to religion, many diverse forms of expression were narrated and put into words for the first time. These forms of lifestyle were often only consciously perceived for the first time. The situation in the interview; taking time to narrate calmly, to remember and put into words personal experiences; combined with an interested listener; all this apparently led to an appreciation of these forms of expression and the religious dimensions contained in them. Through the process of reflection instigated by the interview, an awareness of the religious dimension in their personal lives came about – a small plant of a 'religious self-concept' started to sprout.

### **3. Presenting young women's religious identity**

Whereas religious topics are often omitted from psychological and pedagogical research, developmental psychological research on this age group also attracts only marginal attention in theological gender research. The interaction between gender and religious educational or socialisation processes are to date hardly explored with a view to social processes of change.

The research question of this study was how religiosity develops and changes in Catholic younger women (between the ages of 16 and 25 years) within the context of a modern society shaped by Christianity.

#### **3.1. Research approach**

The research question was: "How do young women present their religious identity?" Research was done to find out whether interdependencies exist between female religious identity formation and the institutional church with its agencies of socialisation; whether religious identity formation correlates with female identity formation in general; and how social changes manifest themselves in the religiosity of women.

The following correlations between religiosity and identity formation were taken as a basis (cf. Kaupp 2007a). The *first* premise was that an interaction exists between society and individual,

which means that changes in the nature of religion within a society influence the expression of personal religiosity. *Secondly*, the assumption was made that a change in society's perception of gender roles affects individuals' conception of their roles and self-images, and that this has consequences for the manifestations of religion and religiosity as well. *Thirdly*, one can presume an influence of social and religious socialisation agencies (e.g. family, school, congregation, etc.), with their forms of socialisation, on the development and forms of religious expression, which may manifest differently according to gender.

On the basis of these considerations, the following leading questions were formulated:

Which relationships exist between a life history and the personal history of faith? Which features typically characterise religiosity in Catholic young women? To what extent do these features correlate with the descriptions of female identity formation in general research on young people? Does the institutional church have an influence on female religious identity formation? What is the effect of androcentric conduct and communication within the church, such as perhaps the androcentric image of God? What consequences does this investigation have for the theory and practice of the pedagogy of religion?

### **3.2. Conceptual premises**

The qualitative empirical investigation was based on scientific theoretical and methodological approaches of narrative psychology and social autobiographical research (cf. Lucius-Hoene/Deppermann 2002; Rosenthal 1995; Schütze 1983, 283-293) and used the instrument of "narrative interviews" (cf. Schütze 1983, 283-293; Glinka 1998).

Identity, religiosity and gender were understood as narrative constructions within the framework of the interviews (cf. Kaupp 2007b).

#### ***(1) The concept of 'narrative identity'***

The basic premise was that impromptu narratives would do justice to social reality by stimulating the materialisation of past events through memorable images in the mind, and expressing series of events, former orientations and perspectives (cf. Schütze 1987, 37-47). To a large extent, the impromptu narratives enhanced the self-assurance of the changes in the individual identities. The social sciences approach of 'narrative identity', which builds on the concept originally coined by Paul Ricoeur, presupposes a link between the narrative and the identity of the narrator. Narrative identity can be described as the "way in which a person achieves identity negotiation, as a narrative presentation and creation of relevant aspects of his or her identity particular to a specific situation, through tangible interaction" (Lucius-Hoene/Deppermann 2002, 55). The analogies between general concepts of identity and their narrative presentation enable a logical research approach to personal identity, based on the analysis of biographical narratives. The presentation of identity furthermore gives information about society, because "the narrative structures are [...] not created by the individual herself, but anchored in the social context and influenced by it" (Krauss 1996, 160). The formation and change of narrative identity interact with social processes. The identity presented in the interviews therefore has to be regarded as narrative identity.

#### ***(2) The concept of 'process structures' in biographical narratives***

One can identify specific models of biographical processing in biographical interviews, namely, so-called "process structures" (Schütze 1984):

- 1) Biographical plots: They can be planned by the carrier of the biography, and the order of the experiences then consists in the successful or unsuccessful attempt to materialise them.
- 2) Institutional biographical ordering patterns: They can [...] be expected from the carrier of the biography, and the ordering of experiences then consists in the timely, accelerated, delayed, impaired, aborted processing of the individual steps of expectation.
- 3) Curve of progress: Biographical events can completely overwhelm the carrier of the biography, and he/she can initially only react 'conditionally', in order to carefully reclaim [...] a fragile state of equilibrium.
- 4) Processes of change: [...] In contrast to plots, unfolding processes of change can be surprising, and the carrier of the biography experiences them as systematic changes to his/her possibilities for experience and action. (Schütze 1984, 92)

The research investigated which process structure described the particular life histories and whether this was also mirrored in the religiosity presented.

### *(3) The concept of doing gender*

Gender is described according to what it has become socially, not with regard to its biological predetermined state. The concept coined by Candace West and Don Zimmerman of doing gender means "creating the difference between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential or biological" (West/Zimmerman 1987, 137) as a reproduction of gender in everyday interactions. The goal of the research was to analyse the ascription as well as the observed and presented models, by means of which the reality of belonging to a gender and relationships between identity and gender are constructed.

### *(4) The concept of doing religion*

The spectrum of the concept 'religion' is differentiated as follows: a) Religion as objectified form, b) religiosity as subjective form, c) churchliness and d) (Christian) faith. Linking with the concept of doing gender, active religiosity can be described as doing religion, because it also takes shape subject to individual and social conditions. Narrative religious identity was investigated within the dimensions of religious sensitivity, the content of religiosity, behaviour of religious expression, religious communication, and a way of life motivated by religion (cf. Hemel 2002, 6-11). The institutions of socialisation are family, youth work in the church, religious education and catechesis in the congregation.

## **3.3. The group investigated**

Because of their age, development and social conditions, the young women find themselves on the brink between being girls and women. Therefore one can assume that they presently grapple with questions about gender identity and gender roles. In order to make it possible to compare beyond a single case, the group investigated was specified as follows: The interviewees were between the ages of 16 and 25, so that one can presuppose a developed ability to reflect on their individual life histories. Limiting the research to female youths and young women enabled comparison within the group as well as comparison with results of general social research on females. All the girls and women had passed through religious socialisation within the framework of the Catholic Church (baptism, communion, confirmation, religious education), whereby the relation between churchly socialisation and religiosity was most prominent and potential confession-related differences in socialisation could be excluded. There is a striking difference in the conditions of religious socialisation and development between the eastern and western states of Germany; therefore only women in the western states were interviewed.

The individual cases present the life histories of five interviewees: Tanja (17, middle school student); Michaela, Karin and Ursula (all three of them 19 years old and high school graduates); Barbara (24 years, student); (complete transcription, cf. Kaupp 2005b).

### 3.4. The methodological approach

The following table (Figure 4) summarises the steps as well as the processes of collection and analysis.

<b>Methodological steps</b>	<b>Theory-driven approach</b>	<b>Exploratory and data-driven approach</b>
<b>1. Development of guidelines</b>	Enquiry into narratives, argumentations and descriptions Theory-driven questions in the guidelines (e.g. question about specific living situations, religious socialisation, religious perceptions and religious practice)	Open invitation to narrate a biographical account in relation to the aspect 'religion' (at the beginning of the interview) and conceptions about the future (at the end of the interview)
<b>2. Letter to and taking up contact with multipliers</b>	The interviewees should not be known to the interviewer	
<b>3. Conducting 2 interviews to test the guidelines</b>		
<b>4. Adapting the guidelines</b>	Making some of the impulse questions more precise  Elaboration by means of a questionnaire as a case-specific and case-overarching validation instrument	
<b>5. Conducting additional 22 interviews in the main study</b>		
<b>6. Drawing up an inventory of and segmenting the interviews</b>	Criterion of topics, way of narrating and structural features of the entire autobiographical text	
<b>7. Transcription of the main narratives of 20 interviews</b>		
<b>8. Selection of 5 interviews for detailed analysis</b>	Selection criteria: independent main narratives, Catholic socialisation, according to the criterion of 'maximum contrast' (way of telling, family situation, school education)	
<b>9. Segmentation and</b>		Categories: Key statements



<b>preparation of the structure of the entire narration</b>		in the segment, persons mentioned; perspective of narrative and time, conspicuous language, topics, text type
<b>10. Sequential analysis of the first narration</b>		Starting with the first lines of the interviews
<b>11. Selection of key passages on the basis of the structure of the entire narrative and the first narrative</b>	Criterion of the relevance of the topic	Criterion of the density of the narrative and the relevance of the topic
<b>12. Detailed analysis of the first narration and key passages</b> 12.1 Analysis in interpretation groups 12.2 Detailed semantic-syntactic analysis 12.3 Summary of the detailed analysis with key results 12.4 Perspective of the topics of the questions by means of the interpretive models obtained from the key passages for the reductive analysis	Criterion of the relevance of the biography and topic in view of religious and gender-related topics	Detailed semantic-syntactical analysis alongside the main biographical narrative
<b>13. Topic-related reductive analysis of the research section</b> 13.1 Entering all the interviews in MAXqda 13.2 Processing the implicit questionnaire section 13.3 Interpreting the explicit questionnaire section	Theory-driven questions e.g. about religious and gender-related socialisation	Individually different setting of priorities
<b>14. Presentation of case structures</b>		General and religious identity development,  Gender identity  Comparison with the results of the questionnaire
<b>15. Summarising comparison</b>	Theory-driven summary according to aspects of the case structure	

Figure 4: Overview of the steps in the collection and analysis

### **3.4.1. Steps in the investigation procedure**

#### **(1) Narrative interview**

The investigation was done by 'narrative interviews' in two phases described by Schütze: A first narrative and an investigative section. The beginning question was as follows:

*I am interested in the entire life history of girls and young women; that means from childhood up to the present. In the process, I would also like to know how youths in your life experienced religion, and how their faith developed or changed in the course of time. I am interested in the memories you associate with religion in your life, and which persons are important to you in this regard. But not only that, also how your life has evolved up to now. I would be nice if you could use stories to describe your life experiences from early childhood up to the present; what shaped you. The best would be if you could start with your earliest memories and tell me how it went on later. I won't interrupt you in-between. I'll only take some notes when I do not understand something and shall ask you about it later on. You can take the lead now. Tell absolutely as much as you can remember and want to tell.*

The interviewer assumed a supportive attitude which did not disturb the flow of the narrative by the interviewee. The goal was to present an overall picture of which the analysis could give an image of the 'narrative identity' of the interviewee.

#### **(2) Questionnaire**

After the end of the interview, the interviewees were requested to fill out a standardised questionnaire (cf. Beile 1998, 252-255) by means of which, apart from the personal data, the individual attitudes towards various concepts of God, Christianity and the experienced religious socialisation processes via the parents (mother and father) could be sorted out, using scales. After analysing the interviews, the questionnaires served as a validation instrument and enabled the following comparisons: case-specific between the qualitatively and quantitatively obtained statements, case-overarching with other interviews, and external of the investigation with Beile's results. Because the questionnaires were only filled out after the interviews, the answers may have been influenced by the conversation, but not vice versa.

### **3.4.2 Steps in the analysis procedure**

The structure of the analysis procedure of both investigations was similar, as the tables (Figures 1 and 4) show. Therefore, only content-related methodological aspects which showed up differences between the two studies are described in the next sections.

#### **(1) Structure of the complete autobiographical text**

Complementary to the identification of text types according to Schütze, the first narratives were analysed based on Lucius-Hoene/Deppermann (2002, 109-175), taking into account the following aspects: a) The preparation of the sequential topic-related structure explains the narrative's structural principles and gives information about internal relations or discrepancies. Topics on a higher or lower level or lines of narration and discontinuation of topics can be identified. b) The way in which the narrator deals with time (the relationship between topic, narrating time and narrated time, the order and frequency) shows the things with subjective meaning or relevance for the questioning. Narrative congestion can refer to particularly important experiences. For a life history, it is typical to narrate a framework with characteristic transition points (e.g. childhood – primary school – adolescence). It is therefore significant

which elements of the life history are not presented, and which are presented in full detail. c) The narrative requires a selection of topics particularly relevant from a subjective point of view. Overarching models of presentation (material objects, motives, topics) are informative because they are shaped by culture, influence experiences and provide templates for interpretation which presuppose meaningful action. Interpretive models originating from a worldview, cultural orientation or specific bodies of knowledge place the narrative in a broader context. d) The narrator's perspective (perspective of time, outsider's view and insider's view, change and dominance of perspectives) is relevant. The analysis gives information about the interaction between a specific topic and the biographical phase of the narrator. Changes in attitude can also be identified.

## ***(2) Detailed analysis of the autobiographical narrative***

The analysis method is based on biographical analysis (Schütze 1983; idem 1987) which was expanded by approaches of narrative analysis (Rosenthal 1995; Rosenthal/Fischer-Rosenthal 2000) and the reconstruction of narrative identity (Lucius-Hoene/Deppermann 2002).

The analysis followed a strictly sequential procedure, because this correlates with the narrative logic of the narrators, who normally have the goal of disclosing an overall picture of their life histories (cf. Rosenthal 1995, 99-166). The detailed analysis was based on the approaches of Schütze and Oevermann, expanded by elements from the analysis of conversations and positioning following Deppermann/Lucius-Hoene (2002), who suggest a three-step procedure:

*Questioning the data:* What is being presented? How is it presented? Why is it presented now in such a way? Why is this presented – and not something else? Why is it presented in this way – and not in another way? Why is it presented here – and not somewhere else? In this way, connections and the meaning and function of individual topics can be elicited for the narrator. The pragmatic functions (= why questions) were changed to reconstruct individual cases, e.g. by tentatively excluding or reorganising some text elements in order to recognise the specific power of these elements. An analysis of the context asks which context is associated, and the analysis of the expected outcomes formulates considerations for an ensuing presentation which was based on a statement. Finally, the implications of the interaction were developed with a view to the interacting participants in the presentation, and with a view to the interaction between narrator and listener (cf. Lucius-Hoene/Deppermann 2002, 184-195).

*Analysis of positioning practices:* Language practices, by means of which people present themselves and others, were analysed using the concept of 'positioning' (cf. Lucius-Hoene/Deppermann 2002, 196-212). This approach revealed the concept of self and other, and the specific characteristics of the narrating person, such as e.g. Ursula, who wanted to distance herself from others:

*"I always was a bit in opposition to many other people (((chuckling))) who were more nonchalant than me" (Ursula 102/105).*

The following practices are possible: Positioning within the narrated event, as a positioning act of the narrated I and the interacting participant in the story; self-referential positioning of the narrating I through the positioning of the narrated I and other persons within the story (cf. the above-mentioned example), and positioning between the narrating I and the listener.

*Analysis of the communicative procedure taking place through language:* This approach deals with the way in which a single statement is presented: categorisation of persons, actions and events, reformulations, tropes (= formulations which cannot be understood literally), deixis and

pronouns, vagueness and allusions, negations and conjunctions. Voices and perspectives: re-enactments and renderings of dialogues, scheming and assessment, prosody and para-verbalisation, using modalities and finally the management of the interaction: directly addressing the interviewer, activities of confirmation, organisation of the right to speak, meta-narrative comments (cf. Lucius-Hoene/Deppermann 2002, 213-270).

### ***(3) Preparation of the case structure and comparison of the cases with each other***

In preparing the case structure, abstracts were made from the text in order to bring about 'overarching structural features' and relationships between individual aspects. The preparation was not structured according to the progress of the interview, but rather according to crucial aspects of reconstruction, from the perspective of the research question. This structure was compared to the results of the questionnaire, which made it possible to corroborate or refute the results. Thus, one interviewee talked at length about evening prayers with her father while she indicated in the questionnaire that her mother usually performed the evening prayers; the difference between frequency and subjective meaning showed up here. After preparing the individual case structures, the cases were compared with each other, during which process additional applicable research results were incorporated.

#### ***2.4.5 A perspective on the main content-related results***

Some key results which could be extracted on the basis of the research approach, which illustrate the strength of biographical research, will now be mentioned.

##### ***(1) Religious identity stands in a relationship with the presented structure of a life history***

The life histories were generally told in a chronological order, in the phases 'pre-school years', 'primary school years', 'adolescence/youth', and 'present situation'. In spite of the similarity in this setup, the narratives differed regarding the "process structures of the life histories" (Schütze 1984): Two women largely presented their life histories in the form of an 'institutional model of actions', one third presented them in the form of 'biographical models of action' and two narratives depicted elements of 'processes of change', which one woman almost formulated in the genre of a religious conversion experience. Regarding the present and future, all the women generally saw themselves as active designers of their lives (cf. 'biographical model of action'). One can also deduce from the process structures of the life histories that the young women looked back on a relatively short life span; consequently, trends could be established, but not any continuous attitude towards events having to do with life histories.

##### ***(2) Meaningful phases and events in life histories are reflected in a changed religiosity***

Although at first glance everyday life and the religious life history hardly seem to have anything in common, the process structures of the interviews correlate with the religious processes in the life histories. In addition, key stories about religion correspond to meaningful biographical experiences. In this way, adolescence and defining events (e.g. illness, relocation) were depicted as turning points and to a certain extent as triggers for processes of religious change, which led from a child's worldview to an adolescent one:

*"Since we moved, that has somehow disappeared abruptly. [...] I suddenly lost all my friends in one go, I was in a new city, and everything was totally horrible and I wanted to go back the whole time. [...] and there was also a rift with regard to my inner religiosity, I actually did not have anything to do with it anymore."* (Karin, 128/133).

### ***(3) Religiosity serves identity development within the framework of a 'religious communication environment'***

Although the religiosity of the young women feeds on the body of Christian traditions, its content correlates only to a certain extent to Christian doctrine. All interviewees considered themselves to be religious or believing in the sense of having faith, and depicted their faith as (inner) certainty or having a spiritual home. Substantially, discernable tension could be detected between their perceptions. Significant others, whose communicative skills and authenticity were emphasised more than the contents they imparted, were of great importance for the levels of religious communication and the expression of religious behaviour. It is interesting to note that the ambience and aesthetics of spaces and events for religious communication were more evocative than the content of the liturgy or situations of religious teaching and learning. The way in which the young women described religiosity corresponds to the biographical models of action of an "environment of communication" (Alheit 1986, 138f), which means that it fulfils specific needs regarding action and communication.

### ***(4) The relationship between life history and religiosity with the image of God as an example***

In the particular life histories, the basic idea of the presented image of God was, interestingly enough, a constant from childhood up to the present: as a friend and support, as a conversational partner or a last resort. The question whether the concepts of God and the types of relationships to God stay the same in later life, has to be researched further. A specific strength of the methodology of narrative interviews was the closeness between the related images of God, the prevailing life topics and the narrators' presentational intentions: For Tanja, for example, God is a guardian of the law, and she also works with questions of justice and injustice in her everyday life. Karin, who sees God as really abstract, presented herself as a small philosopher when she was a child, and she still at present loves to immerse herself in thought constructs and discussions. A comparison to crucial life topics and conceptions of God in male youths could give information on possible gender differences.

### ***(5) Perspectives on gender identity***

In contradistinction to the research hypothesis, gender-related topics were hardly mentioned in the main narrative. Possibly the young women attached more importance on their adulthood than their womanhood in the interview situation, particularly because they were interviewed by a woman. As a result, it may have been that a mutual understanding about possible explicit gender-related questions was implied, so that these areas hardly seemed worthy of mentioning. The research section proves that the women to a certain extent had to cope with gender discrimination in their lives ("I actually had to be a boy") or described an (intermittent) distance from others of their own gender ("I was not a typical girl"). The individual social recognition was secured by their contact with boys.

*"Well, I had many more male friends than girl friends, and I also was in a type of gang with usually only boys; so just among the kids of the neighbourhood, it always was very nice."*  
(Karin, 821/823).

The women reproduced the prevailing social gender hierarchy in their narrative presentation without being aware of it, or without thinking about it.

## ***(6) The relationship between religion and gender***

The women observed gender-specific differences in their contact with male and female youths in the church on the one hand, but on the other hand ignored any personal relevance (“my female friend experiences that, but I personally do not”, Ursula 858f.). A critical grappling with hierarchical role models hardly took place. One can assume that the places where faith is learned nowadays hardly affect girls adversely in an obvious way, but that they still implicitly support traditional role conceptions.

The analysis showed that the content and forms of communication differ according to the sex of the individual: forms of religious expression (with the exception of attending church services) are imparted, amongst others, by women. Communicative and relation-oriented skills allotted to women are also reflected in religious practice. Even though the interviewees attached great importance to the relationship skills of religious counterparts and to the atmosphere of spaces described as religious, they did not reflect on the question whether the sex of such a person relevant in the area of religion, had any meaning for them.

The investigation provides an insight into the achievements in narrative construction by female youths, and into their identity and religiosity. The young women described their religiosity within the language game shaped by Christianity, and distanced themselves at the same time from traditional religious orientation models. In the first place, churchly communal relationships are seen as a ‘communication environment’ which complies with their own needs for communication or status (e.g. as head ministrant). If it does not fulfil this role, the interviewees turn their backs on the community.

## **4. Reflection on the practical research experiences of two different studies on religiosity**

Empirical research is a process during which experiences are obtained, corrections are done and methodological adjustments are made to the object of research. In this study, the practical research experiences of both studies, which were approached very differently, should be thought through and stock should be taken regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the methodological decisions made.

### ***(1) The methodology of qualitative research***

*Reflection on the investigation phase:* Both studies showed that the amount of effort that went into the preparation for the pilot study and the training for the interviews was indispensable and necessary. Here, the influence of the interviewer and the interview impulse questions came into view, in order to develop sensitivity for conducting interviews and carefully formulate the guiding questions for the interviews. Most of the time, researchers underestimate the influence the questions and the selected method have on the findings (cf. Klein 2005, 3). Empirical investigation methods require a thorough preparation and supervision in order to deal with different empirical approaches in an accurate and well-founded way, and therefore enable the selection of a distinct and appropriate method suited to the particular object of study and the research question. In doing so, it is important that the investigating agent should be aware of his/her particular presuppositions and subjective perspective on the topic and the object of study.

*The interpretation group as basic instrument of analysis:* As many empirical researchers have already pointed out, the interpretation group has proved to be a very basic instrument of analysis in the detailed analysis of dense text passages. The exchange in a group with different viewpoints and horizons of understanding is most helpful for understanding text passages written

by unknown people, and in our view indispensable. The danger that narratives will only be used as a 'minefield' to provide evidence for specific topics or one's own points of view can be avoided in this way.

*A combination of reductive and explorative methods of analysis:* In order to do justice to the density of the texts and the diversity of the data in the phase of analysis, an effort was made in the study on single women to use reductive and explorative methods of analysis which could stand on equal footing next to each other; which could complement each other but could also contradict one another. The problem of qualitative research still remains, namely, to present the diversity of the data and the substantial results of the analysis in an appropriate and reader-friendly way without cutting down the obtained results in an unfounded way. The effort to present the study in an appropriate manner has to be rated as an autonomous task in the ranks of qualitative studies, and appraised critically.

*Reflection on the principle of economy:* In view of the time limitations in a qualitative study, the question arises about economy, i.e. the relation between effort and performance (cf. Reese 2003, 226 on this). The enquiry, transcription and the first steps of analysis of both investigations were highly labour-intensive. The effort of such an empirical study with an open design could, according to us, be reduced somewhat by involving a research team studying and discussing empirical methodological approaches as well as giving a guarantee regarding methodological and technical support.

*Surplus data:* The data, which was only exhausted in a very rudimentary way in both studies, provide many more incentives for posing questions in the pedagogy of religion and undertaking additional empirical analyses. The empirical findings can furthermore also lead to researching additional case studies. The groups questioned could be enlarged qualitatively (e.g. single men, women in relationships, religious identity of men; religion and gender of different age groups) and quantitatively (investigating more cases).

## ***(2) The relevance of text types for investigating religiosity***

On the basis of the multidimensional approach of the studies, the present assumption of why mainly and exclusively narrative texts are productive as a basis for the qualitative empirical analysis of research problems in the pedagogy of religion can be questioned. In the selection of key passages for the detailed semantic-syntactical analysis in the study of single women, narratives particularly proved to be dense text passages indeed. The women could present, first and foremost, special events such as festivals, times of crisis, concerts, in a narrative format. But other methods of investigation, such as the pie chart, the presentation of self-made photos, in which narratives were not so prominent but descriptions were rather used, also proved to be informative in obtaining insight into the women's everyday life and normal circumstances. Likewise, the analysis of argumentative passages, where the women philosophised about their personal worldviews and self-interpretations (e.g. their view of being single), was relevant and productive for the reductive topic analysis and the analysis of the women's understanding of religion. In their argumentative passages, the young women mirrored the way in which their parents solved problems, their parents' standards, as well as justifying their own positions.

Kaupp (2005a, 341f) established that discussion of the topic of religious aspects in life histories often happens in the format of argumentation and evaluation. She suspects that this is due to the object of research. The presentation of individual religiosity requires a comment on a worldview. It requires the formulation of explanations, rationales, justifications and evaluations, which may be of a more argumentative nature (cf. on this also Klein 1994, 274, 297ff). Explicit religious interpretations are not put into words in a chronological order or in narratives, but rather in

personal constructions and symbolisations. The question therefore arises whether in principle one can appropriately gather data on reflective objects of study, such as 'religion' and 'religiosity', via narratives.

In contrast to Schütze's emphasis on narration, descriptions are also highly relevant in the presentation of religion (cf. Kaupp 2005a, 342). In the course of the analysis it became clear that religious experience is often associated with specific spaces and atmospheres, and expressed by a textual description. The interviewees illustrated the experienced space in their personal histories (e.g. places, scenes, persons, relationships, feelings and behaviour patterns) as well as spaces in which they encountered forms of religious expression, or experienced and active religiosity, through descriptions. An invitation to narrate which does not only ask about experiences but also about portraying the atmosphere of religious communicative spaces, enables the teller to relive her (religious) lifeworld of earlier days. Therefore an analysis of descriptive text elements is helpful, and concentrating solely on narratives may possibly ignore important aspects of the emotional and aesthetic qualities of religiosity which may not be communicable through language.

In our view, it will be a shortcoming to narrow down the empirical focus exclusively to narratives as relevant text types for empirical qualitative analysis. Because different text types convey different topics and uncover different stadia of grappling with experiences, all text types with their unique features should be taken into account in qualitative analysis.

### ***(3) Obtaining information by means of different methodological approaches to religiosity and faith***

How can one assess the different approaches to the phenomena religion, religiosity and faith, used in both studies?

In the study on single women, the supplementation of an open, exploratory investigation by means of a final explicit section about the concept of religion and religious self-concept proved to be very fruitful and valuable, because within an individual case, the different approaches and answers could be compared to each other and could be taken into account in the interpretation for reciprocal validation.

The study on single women firstly went into the interviews with openness and without fixed concepts. This study in the first place dealt with understanding the self-perception and self-appreciation of the women, as objectively as possible. How do these people understand and interpret their lives, on which notions, concepts and theories do they fall back and which do they reject? The women who are the most alienated from the church narrated objectively about their lives – something that directly affects them. In the self-descriptions of the women, the concepts 'religion' and 'religiosity', 'faith' and 'God' were used sparingly, or not at all. Only when they were explicitly asked about this at the end of both interviews, they distanced themselves from these concepts. It became clear that these were not notions and concepts with which they would like to describe and interpret their lives. They exclusively associate church-bound forms of religion with these concepts, and did not want to link these strange attributes to their own lives. Only when a relevant dimension was discerned in their personal lives and linked to the attribute religious, something changed. With the motivation of appreciating a relevant dimension in their own lives, the women started practicing the use of religious self-descriptions, which eventually even led to giving religious self-descriptions in a careful manner.

The communication situation, or the intention observed in it, was relevant for the development of the self-observation during the course of the interview. Was the religious self-attribution being



negated when distancing from institutional forms of religion, or affirmed with the intention of appreciating the self? In our view, it is therefore essential in each analysis of religion and religiosity to critically ask whether the situation focuses on attributing the self or others, and what the intentions or the worst consequences could be for this self-attribution or attribution of others.

In the analysis of research in the pedagogy of religion, the attribution of the other is certainly also relevant – namely, the question whether these women can indeed be considered religious in a substantial way. Here, the intention of the question is also meaningful: Does one want to exclude the women from ‘true religion’ by this statement, or vice versa, does one want to include the women for the sake of one’s own religion, thus for the sake of one’s own goals? Or are we dealing in the first instance with a scientific conceptual ability to differentiate between various forms of religious presentation? One’s motive could also be to strengthen the appreciation of the religious dimensions in the lives of people. Each researcher should be aware of and disclose his or her research agenda in advance when dealing with sensitive research topics such as ‘religiosity’ or ‘faith’.

The investigation on the religiosity of young women went in a different direction: its purpose was to research the meaning of religion and religiosity in the life histories (functional perspective) as well as how religion and religiosity substantially present themselves (substantial perspective), and what correlation exists between Christian religion and personal religiosity on the basis of the cultural context of a society which is (still) highly shaped by Christianity. Therefore the initial question already incorporated the dimension ‘religion’. The presupposition was that religion is reflected as an institutionalised interpretation model in the embodiments of the interviewees’ subjective religiosity. In the process, one had to distinguish between ‘experienced religiosity’ and the ‘presented religiosity’ which came out in the interviews. This distinction takes into account the fact that one cannot completely assume that there is a match between the presentation of religiosity in a research situation and the actual practice in everyday life. By means of this approach, one could demonstrate that young women who were socially near the church could use linguistic forms of speech with religious connotations and could name positive or negative experiences in the area of religion. It became clear that they freely interpreted (or only accepted) notions and expectations set by the institutional Church when they match their self-image. In addition, we could determine that the process of identity development in youths finds expression in thinking about religious notions. All in all, we can state that the increasing individualisation of religious notions is also reflected in the environment close to the church.

In thinking about the two different studies on religious biographies of modern-day people, it should in conclusion be recorded that, in the research of religiosity, the influence of the methodological approach and the selected interview situations differ according to the context and the biographical conditions of the target group. Therefore, it is necessary to disclose and analyse the concrete situation of communication and the intentions of those involved, namely the interviewer and the interviewees.

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