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Religious Conversion of Adolescents: Testing the Lofland and Stark Model of Religious Conversion*

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In a study among 92 Dutch adolescents we tested the Lofland and Stark model of religious conversion. Our results show that the model offers a fairly adequate set of conditions *of conversion, but is inadequate as a model for the* process *of conversion. Young people are attracted to religious groups for two reasons: First, the group offers them a new perspective on life and so liberates them from entrapment in their own problems. Second, the group provides them with a satisfying personal network.*

The model offered by John Lofland and Rodney Stark has been studied more than most other models of religious conversion. These authors define conversion as the process by which "a person gives up one . . . perspective or ordered view of the world for another" (1965:862). Conversion implies that the convert renounces his or her former life pattern, joins a given religious movement or sect, and becomes an adherent of this group's teachings.

Lofland and Stark developed their model in a study of the Divine Precepts. The model consists of seven conditions for conversion which the authors formulate as follows:

For conversion a person must:

1. Experience enduring, acutely felt tensions
2. Within a religious problem-solving perspective
3. Which leads him [her] to define him [her]self as a religious seeker
4. Encountering the D.P. [Divine Precepts] at a turning point in . . . life
5. Wherein an affective bond is formed (or pre-exists) with one or more converts
6. Where extra-cult attachments are absent or neutralized
7. And, where, if he [she] is to become a deployable agent, he [she] is exposed to intensive interaction (1965:874).

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Lofland and Stark's model contains both dispositional or "predisposing" and situational conditions. The dispositional conditions (1, 2, and 3) are personality attributes which make people potential converts (Lofland, 1966:33; cf. Lofland, 1977, 1978). The situational conditions (4 through 7) turn a potential convert into a factual one. Accordingly, the model may be characterized as markedly interactionistic: conversion is understood as a function of the interaction between (characteristics of) the individual and the social environment.[1]

Lofland and Stark hold that these seven steps represent the necessary and sufficient conditions for conversion. The conditions of their model, they say, have a "tunnel-like" effect. For every subsequent condition met by a potential convert, the factual number of potential converts becomes smaller, but for those remaining, the possibility that they will convert increases. That is, the more conditions are met, the smaller the number of potential converts left, and the greater their chance of actually converting.

As we said, the model has been studied a great deal. To assess it, certain problems peculiar to conversion research must be taken into account. One of these is conceptual, the others are methodological (see also Hoenkamp-Bisschops, 1982).

The conceptual problem concerns the definition of conversion. Conversion implies both an objective and a subjective break in one's life. The occurrence of an objective break is not difficult to ascertain; the convert joins a group or movement, and because of this his or her situation (home, environment) changes. It is harder to determine a subjective break: at what point can one justifiably speak of a *radical* change in a person's perspective on life?

Richard Travisano (1970) has made a rather elaborate attempt to solve the problem. He defines conversion as a change of someone's general or "pervasive" identity. A general identity, that of a priest for example, defines (1) a person's world view or life perspective, (2) many aspects of one's personality, and (3) for a large number of situations, prescribes how a person should relate to others and vice versa. Conversion, then, is a revision of one's world view such that one's self-image and notions as to how to deal with others undergo radical change. Travisano is prepared to speak of "radical change" when the new identity contrasts with the old on the three points mentioned.

According to Travisano, an objective and a subjective break need not occur simultaneously. A person can join a religious group without radically changing his or her perspective on life — for instance, when transfering from one Christian group to another. Travisano holds that use of the term "conversion" is warranted only if the two kinds of breaks occur together. To join a group without undergoing radical change in world view is to "alternate" rather than to convert.

The methodological problems have to do with the consequences that the process character of conversion has for research and with the use of control groups. As the model by Lofland and Stark indicates, the process of conversion can extend over a long period. Ideally, conversion research should keep track of potential converts throughout the process. But in practice this is hard to do, since intensive tracing of

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[1]In the Netherlands this group is known as the *Verenigingskerk*. Internationally it has gained some renown as the Unification Church. Its members are also referred as "Moonies" (after their leader, the Rev. Moon).

people for periods of six months or more is almost invariably precluded by temporal and financial constraints, the more so since proportionally few of those who become acquainted with a group actually end up joining it. This is why conversion research is nearly always retrospective and yields only data concerning people who actually went through with conversion. There is little wrong with this — as long as a control group is questioned as well. After all, what we want to know is whether the findings apply to converts exclusively. Many studies, however, do not seem to meet this rather self-evident requirement.

These considerations provide us with a number of criteria by which research in terms of the Lofland and Stark model may be evaluated (see Table 1):

1. *Definition of conversion as subjective break.* Does the study explicitly define conversion as a radical change of life perspective?
2. *Selection.* Are the sole respondents researched those who by this definition may be designated as "converts"?
3. *Retrospective data gathering.* Were the respondents interviewed during or after their conversion?
4. *Control group.* Did the researcher(s) have recourse to a control group?

For each of Lofland's conditions we record the average percentage. Condition 6 is divided into two: 6a stands for absence of positive social ties with parents, friends, and so on, while 6b represents neutral reactions in the personal network to the respondent's contact with the group.

The table shows that most studies do not cover the whole Lofland and Stark model; certain conditions only are selected. This raises the question as to what conclusions may be drawn from the table.

It is evident that the model's conditions apply to a substantial part of the respondents in the various studies. This may mean that Lofland and Stark have indeed isolated a number of conditions relevant to conversion. There are two reasons, however, why this conclusion cannot be drawn. First, we do not know whether the figures relate to converts or to persons who become members of a group without radically changing their perspective. In Travisano's terminology, some may be "alternators" only. Conversion is defined in terms of an altered world view in no more than 12 of the 25 studies, and in fact just one study (Austin, 1977) used this definition in the selection of respondents. Second, only three studies make use of a control group.[2] Consequently, it remains entirely possible that Lofland and Stark's conditions would apply equally well to persons who did not join a religious group or movement.

The conclusion is inescapable: some twenty years of research have failed to yield adequate empirical evidence for the conversion model developed by Lofland and Stark. In the present study an attempt is made to procure such evidence. To that end we implement three principles.

1. We adopt Travisano's definition of conversion. That is to say, when a respondent joined

[2]In the three studies that did make use of a control group, reporting concerning the differences between converts and the control group is unclear to the point that no conclusions can be drawn from it.

a religious group a radical change in life perspective or world view (Travisano: "universe of discourse") must have occurred as well.

2. The selection of converts is based on this. We looked for respondents who renounced a nonreligious world view when they joined a religious group.
3. A control group was formed which matches the group of converts on a number of background characteristics.

TABLE 1

Research Characteristics and Results in Terms of the Lofland and Stark Model
(Total number of studies: 25)

	Number of Studies	*Relevant Study**	*Mean Percentage of Respondents for Whom These Conditions Obtain*
Research Characteristics			
1. Definition of conversion as subjective break	12	1,2,3,4,5,10,11, 12,19,20,21,22	—
2. Selection according to this definition	1	1	—
3. Data gathering retrospective	19	1,2,3,5,6,7,8,14, 15,16,17,18,19, 20,21,22,23,24,25	—
4. Control group	3	6,12,13	—
Results Relative to Lofland Conditions			
1. Prior tensions	9	1,2,13,15,16,17,20, 22,23	67
2. Religious perspective	13	1,2,4,13,15,16,17, 19,20,21,23,25	65
3. Self-definition as seeker	5	1,12,15,16,23	31
4. Turning point	3	1,13,23	67
5. Affective bonds in group	13	1,2,7,8,11,13,14, 15,16,17,18,22,23	67
6a. Social ties absent	8	1,15,16,17,18,19, 20,22	32
6b. Social ties neutral	3	1,15,16	44
7. Intensive interaction	4	1,13,19,20	74

*Clarification: the numbers given under "relevant study" refer to the studies as given below. Studies 7 and 8 are reported in one article, as are studies 15 and 16.

(1) Austin, 1977
(2) Baer, 1978
(3) Balch and Taylor, 1977
(4) Bromley and Shupe, 1979
(5) Christensen, 1965
(6) Downton, 1979
(7) Ebaugh and Vaughn 1, 1984
(8) Ebaugh and Vaughn 2, 1984
(9) Gerlach and Hine, 1970
(10) Gordon, 1974
(11) Harrison, 1974a
(12) Harrison, 1974b
(13) Heirich, 1977
(14) Hoenkamp-Bisschops, 1979
(15) Lans and Dahlmans 1, 1982
(16) Lans and Dahlmans 2, 1982
(17) Lynch, 1978
(18) Nordquist, 1978
(19) Richardson, Harder, and Simmonds, 1972
(20) Richardson, Stewart, and Simmonds, 1979
(21) Roberts, 1965
(22) Seggar and Kunz, 1972
(23) Snow and Philips, 1980
(24) Straus, 1976
(25) Wimberly et al., 1975

METHOD

92 young people participated in the survey, 46 of them converts and 46 in the control group. Their ages ranged from 15 to 25 years. Most of the converts joined a charismatic Christian denomination over the past two or three years: they became members of the Unification Church or the Pentecostal Church.[3] Typical of adherents of these groups is their complete surrender of life and person to a higher, religious power experienced in a daily, continuous, and intensely personal relationship. We recruited these respondents with the assistance of youth leaders and clergy, and by written invitation sent to persons whose names occurred on a mailing list of a gospel music publisher.

To recruit a matched control group, we first asked converts to give us the name of a person whose background was similar to their own in terms of age, gender, training, occupational level of father, and degree of urbanization. We asked such persons to participate in the survey — 48 percent agreed to do so. The other 52 percent were recruited via schools, community centers, and the university.

The average age in both groups was 21 years; 54 percent were male, 46 percent female; 57 percent were trained at lower secondary or vocational schools (low-level training), 43 percent at O/A level secondary schools or colleges (high-level training). The two groups did not differ significantly on these points. Degree of urbanization and parental occupational level were the same as well.[4]

The data were gathered in face-to-face interviews of at least 90 minutes each. The respondents were asked to answer many written questions, to fill out some questionnaires, and to respond to a number of open questions. Answers to the open questions were categorized.

One special problem in the interviews was their retrospective character. The interviewer kept having to lead the respondent to recall a period of up to three years prior to conversion. For conditions 5 through 7, he asked about the period when the respondent first came into contact with the religious group. For the variables used to measure the presumed effects of conversion, the questions covered a span of 1.5 years subsequent to conversion. The interviewer asked the control group members

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[3]The remaining 30 percent experienced conversion on average 4.5 years ago.

[4]Background characteristics of converts (n = 46) and the control group (n = 46):

	Converts	*Control Group*
age	21.1	21.2
gender m/f	57/43%	52/48%
training		
low	59%	54%
high	41	46
occupational level of male parent		
low	26%	28%
intermediate	33	33
high	41	39
urbanization		
rural	15%	20%
urbanized area	43	41
urban	41	38

to go back in time for a period of three to five years relative to the Lofland and Stark conditions; to check for the presumed effects of conversion, he had them recall the past two years. To avoid errors of recollection as much as possible, we invaribly asked about tangible factual events and actual behavior. It is much easier for respondents to report these then to recall aspirations and convictions in an unbiased way.

A large number of questions were asked relative to the conditions as specified by Lofland and Stark and regarding each of various consequences of conversion. Through factor analysis and scaling, the relevant variables were categorized into one

TABLE 2

Operationalizations of the Lofland and Stark Conditions and the Presumed Effects of Conversion

Condition	*Operationalization*	*Type of Measurement*	*Variance Explained* (%)*	*Cronbach's Alpha*
1. Tensions	Personal problems	factor score 1	38	.73
	Social problems	factor score 2	24	.71
	Personal problems relative to one's person	nominal		
	Problems with one's situation	nominal		
2. Religious perspective	"Religious reflection"	nominal		
3. Self-definition as seeker	Self-definition as seeker	nominal		
Actively searching	Actively searching	scale score		.89
4. Turning point	Moving house	nominal		
	Change of jobs	nominal		
	Life-event	nominal		
5. Affective bonds	Frequency of contact with friends in the group	scale score		.72
6a. Social ties absent	Spare-time contact with parents	factor score 1	29	.66
	Spare-time contact with peers	factor score 2	20	.53
	Emotional support by peers	factor score 1	44	.66
	Emotional support by parents	factor score 2	24	.68
	Material support by peers	factor score 1	41	.76
	Material support by parents	factor score 2	30	.73
6b. Social ties neutral	Neutral reaction by parents	scale score		.85
7. Intensive interactions	Interaction frequency with groupmembers	interval		
Changes, presumably effected through conversion	Change of general ideas	factor score 1	71	
	Reduced contact with (close) relatives	factor score 2		.64
	Reduced contact with peers	factor score 2	22	.66

*"Variance explained" concerns the corresponding factor in a factor analysis with varimax rotation; cf. note. 5.

or more measures.[5] Most of these measures were newly designed for this study (see Table 2). We discuss the Lofland and Stark conditions first.

1. To measure prior tensions a questionnaire was used and open questions were asked. The list inquired about tensions on account of personal problems (loneliness, feelings of inadequacy, etc.), and tensions due to concern with social problems (unemployment, peace and security, natural environment, etc.). Factor analysis yielded a two-factor structure: *personal problems* and *social problems*. By way of an open question, we obtained information on various aspects of personal problems. The answers were put into two categories: *personal problems relative to one's person* (e.g., lack of self-confidence or inadequate self-acceptance) and *problems with one's situation* (e.g., feelings of meaninglessness, boredom, or lack of challenge).

2. The religious problem-solving perspective was traced by putting an open question to the respondent concerning the manner in which he or she dealt with important problems. The answers indicate a number of approaches. One of these, "*religious reflection*," was taken to define operationally the prior perspective of religious problem solving.

3. The definition of self as "*seeker*" was determined by an open question of whether the respondent would describe him or herself as "a person in search of a group with similar ideas." In addition, we checked the degree to which a respondent in fact engaged in this search (in terms of the scale "*actively searching*"), by noting attendance at informational meetings, courses taken, or participation in action groups. A respondent whose answer for condition 2 was "religious reflection" and for the self-definition and the scale replied positively to the designations "seeker" or "actively searching," was taken to be a religious seeker or active religious seeker respectively. Since this occurred in but a few cases (on account of the small number of positive responses to "religious problem-solving perspective"), the designations "seeker" and "actively searching" were used in the analysis as separate variables. These variables may be seen as secularized versions of the variable "religious seeker" introduced by Lofland and Stark.

4. Operational turning points are *moving house* and *change of job*. In addition, an open question was asked concerning incisive happenings immediately preceding contact with the group (*life-events* such as the death of a parent, parents' divorce, running away from home).

5. Friendship with members of the group: the scale "*frequency of contact with friends in the group*" records how often these friends were contacted.

6a. To measure (lack of) other social ties, the personal network was demarcated

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[5]In constructing our measurements we assumed a number of limiting conditions. For factor analysis we took note of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sample adequacy and Barlett's test of the identity-matrix. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin varies from .50 to .68. This is average. The values for Bartlett's test vary from 17.48 through 273.71, p varies from $< .00001$ to .00003. In view of this very small p we may safely assume that the correlation matrixes used are not identity matrixes. Factor analyses were carried out using principal factor solution. Rotation followed the Varimax method. Variables with a factor loading $< .35$ were deleted from further analysis. Factor scores were subsequently dichotomized at the zero point. Nominal variables were dichotomized at the median. When constructing scales based on dichotomous variables it would seem obvious that a Guttman analysis be used. But this yielded no useful results. We turned to Cronbach's alpha next, finding values varying from .53 to .91. This means that the reliability of the scales is adequate to good. Scales were dichotomized at the median. Results concerning simple variables were always related to recoded dichotomous variables. Dichotomizing occurred at the median.

with the aid of the role-relation method (Meeus, 1989). In this method the respondent indicates to what extent he or she relates to a standard set of persons, each of whom has a distinct position and corresponding role with respect to him or her. This standard set consists of one's partner, close friend, father, mother, brother(s), sister(s), other relatives, friends, and acquaintances. For each of these nine reference persons the respondents indicated how much of their spare time was spent with them and how much material or emotional support they received from them. A seven-point scale was used for this, ranging from 1 (very much) to 7 (almost none). As in a previous survey (Meeus, 1989), a two-dimensional factor structure was found for each of the three domains: *spare-time contact*, *material help*, and *emotional support* from *parents* and from *peers* respectively.

6b. Neutral reactions on the part of other social ties are measured by means of the scale "*neutral reactions of parents.*" A scale "*neutral reactions of peers*" proved impossible to construct.

7. Intensive interaction with group members was measured by one Likert-type item: "*interaction-frequency with group members.*"

Changes, presumably effected through conversion, were defined operationally as follows:

1. Via a scale "*change of general ideas*" we established whether or not converts had altered their ideas regarding school, work, and relationships.

2. Via the role-relation method we investigated whether contacts with the various members of the personal network had diminished. As in the case of condition 6a, factor analysis of the contact scores with the different members of the network resulted in a two-factor structure: factor 1 stands for *reduced contact with family and relatives*; factor 2 refers to *diminished contact with peers.*

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONVERTS AS A GROUP

What sort of young people convert from a nonreligious background to a sectarian Christian group? As a group they differ from the control group in a number of attributes (see Table 3).

Converts have experienced personal problems far more often: 67 percent, compared to 20 percent who had no such experience. Preoccupation with social problems is less: 7 percent compared to 26 percent. Both seekership and active searching is more common among converts than among the control group members: the ratios are 54:24 percent and 91:54 percent respectively. Converts further experience a turning point in their lives more often: they move house more frequently (80:57 percent), and they are exposed to a life event more often (67:46 percent). The personal network of converts is of lesser quality. They spend less spare time with peers (a ratio of 62 percent for converts compared to 30 percent in the control group), and more converts feel that peers provide poor emotional support (67:28 percent). Also, they receive less emotional support from their parents (79:37) and less material help from peers (63:28 percent).

The converts' ideas regarding school, work, and other people have changed far more than those of nonconverts. Converts distanced themselves from peers who belonged to their old personal network more than nonconverts did. Accordingly,

TABLE 3

Converts and Nonconverts Compared in Terms of the Lofland and Stark Conditions, and for Effects of Conversion

	Converts (%)	*Nonconverts (%)*	*Significance*
Conditions of Lofland and Stark			
1 Personal problems	67	20	< .01
Social problems	7	26	< .05
Personal problems relative to one's person	7	4	
Problems with one's situation	59	50	
2 "Religious reflection"	22	7	
3 Self-definition as seeker	54	24	< .01
Actively searching	91	54	< .01
4 Moving house	80	57	< .05
Change of jobs	33	52	
Life-event	67	46	< .05
5 Frequency of contact with friends in the group	80	—	
6a Absence of:			
Spare-time contact with parents	64	46	
Spare-time contact with peers	62	32	< .01
Emotional support by peers	67	28	< .01
Emotional support by parents	79	37	< .01
Material support by peers	71	38	< .01
Material support by parents	59	33	< .05
6b Neutral reaction by parents	27	—	
7 Interaction frequency with group members	67	—	
Changes, presumably effected through conversion			
Change of general ideas	78	17	< .01
Reduced contact with (close) relatives	43	39	
Reduced contact with peers	60	34	< .05

The results are presented in conformity with Lofland and Stark's formulations. That is to say that for negatively formulated conditions, such as 6a, "absence of other social conditions," the percentages indicate the degree to which this absence is the case.

converts may be described as follows:

1. They have relatively many personal problems, which they seek to solve. Hence they are not likely to be much interested in social problems.

2. Their life is rather unstable. Shifts and turning points are relatively frequent occurrences.

3. They have at their disposal a less well-functioning network. From both their parents and their peers they receive relatively little social support.

4. Their notions regarding "secular" matters such as school, work, and relating to other persons have changed. With regard to relations with other people the change is not only with reference to the ideas, but actual contact with the old personal network decreases as well.

THE CONDITIONS OF LOFLAND AND STARK

Table 3 shows the differences between converts and nonconverts relative to the Lofland and Stark conditions. Except for the condition "social problems," a percentage of converts greater than that of nonconverts meets these conditions. Also shown is that to arrive at conversion one need not meet all of Lofland and Stark's conditions. There are no differences between converts and nonconverts on the matter of a prior religious problem-solving perspective.

To see to what extent these conditions together can predict conversion and nonconversion, a distriminant analysis was applied to the five conditions that relate to both groups of respondents, i.e., "prior tensions" (1), "religious perspective" (2), "self-definition as seeker" (3), 'turning point" (4), and "social ties absent" (6a).[6] The analysis indicates which of the variables contribute factually to optimal discriminability of converts and nonconverts. For each predictor in the discriminant analysis we indicate successively the name of the variable, the Lofland and Stark condition referred to, and the disciminant function coefficient. The figure of the discriminant function coefficient represents the relative contribution of the variable in the distinction between converts and nonconverts (see Table 4).

TABLE 4

Predictive Variables in the Discriminant Analysis Relative to the Lofland and Stark Conditions

Label	*Conditions of L&S*	*Type of Measurement*	*Discriminant Function Coefficient*
Personal problems	1	factor score	.50
Actively searching	3	scale score	.44
Self-definition as seeker	3	nominal	.36
Emotional support by peers	6a	factor score	.38
Moving house	4	nominal	.47
Emotional support by parents	6a	factor score	.32
Change of jobs	4	nominal	.30

The analysis shows that with the aid of five of the Lofland and Stark conditions it is possible to distinguish converts from nonconverts in 85 percent of the cases (see Table 5).[7]

[6]In a discriminant analysis it is possible to combine the recoded dichotomous variables at the nominal or ordinal level. The selection method used was to minimize the nonexplained variance between the groups. To do so the analyzed variables were first dichotomized. The dependent variable was recoded to 0 or 1. In this case, a discriminant analysis takes the form of a regression analysis. The order of importance of the independent variables is determined by way of the Pearson correlation coefficient with the discriminant function.

[7]The table shows that for nine of the 84 respondents the prediction regarding the group to which these people belong is incorrect. Additional characteristics that would distinguish these nine respondents from the others yielded no result. Perhaps this should be ascribed to the contingency that attends conversion processes no less than any other process. Untraceable, uniquely incidental factors have caused these nine to remain outside of the pattern that does allow the other 75 respondents to be categorized.

TABLE 5

Predictive Value of the Lofland and Stark Conditions

$N = 84$		*Prediction*	
Group	*n*	*no conversion*	*conversion*
No conversion	43	39 (91%)	4 (9%)
Conversion	41	5 (12%)	36 (88%)
Correct prediction for all: 89%			
Canonical correlation: .76			
Chi: 62.52 p: < .001			

Eighty-four of the 92 cases score validly on all selected variables.

Four of the five conditions of Lofland and Stark contribute to prediction in the discriminant analysis. In view of the discriminant analysis function coefficient figure, the contribution by these four variables is a substantial one. Two points are worth noting: (1) Condition 2 does not contribute to prediction. Evidently, a religious problem-solving perspective is not an independent condition for conversion; in fact, as we saw in Table 3, it is no predictor at all. (2) The contribution of the turning point identified as "job change" runs counter to expectation. Converts change jobs less frequently than nonconverts. Evidently, to gain new employment does not constitute a turning point that would destabilize the life situation, which Lofland and Stark assumed it would; rather, it indicates ability to shift from one function to another. Converts seem less predisposed to change jobs. Turning points that destabilize the life situation are more frequent among converts; they seem less able to create new transitions themselves.

In contrast to Lofland and Stark's theory, the conditions are largely independent of each other. No significant correlations were found among the five conditions. This finding contradicts the supposed cumulativity of the Lofland and Stark model (the "tunnel"). Their claim is that a convert must meet a series of conditions in cumulative succession, which means that these conditions cannot be mutually independent. If Lofland and Stark were right, the discriminant analysis would bring out correlating conditions via the best predictor. The others would not essentially contribute to prediction and would disappear from the analysis. But this is not the case. A cumulative sequence cannot be constructed on this basis: only five out of 46 converts proved to meet the first three Lofland and Stark conditions. Our findings, then, contradict the sequence of conditions which these authors assumed for their model.

It may be concluded, therefore, that the Lofland and Stark conditions provide a good picture of converts and conversions, but not of the conversion process.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

At the beginning of this paper we demonstrated that inquiry into religious conversion has progressed little over the past twenty years. Our data show that the main reason for this is inadequate research design. The combination of Travisano's defini-

tion of conversion and the model developed by Lofland and Stark permits us to predict conversion to religious groups quite well. But the model should not be understood as being cumulative. The conditions listed first in the model are no prerequisites for subsequent ones, nor does the convert have to meet all of them in order to arrive at conversion. This means that Lofland and Stark have not designed a step-by-step model of conversion; rather, they have pointed up a set of conditions for conversion.[8]

Two of the dispositional conditions in the model proved outstandingly important in our study: enduring tension and seekership. Lasting tensions experienced by converts are due primarily to dissatisfaction with their own personality. This unhappiness seems to go hand in hand with a relatively strong fixation on the self; involvement with social problems is relatively slight among these young people. They are in search of solving their personal problems more than others are; they define themselves as seekers more frequently and undertake more activities to find a solution. Noteworthy is that the condition "religious perspective" does not influence conversion. This suggests that an experienced lack is more conducive to conversion than a positive world view. This lack may arise in dissatisfaction with one's own person or, more generally, dissatisfaction with one's situation — at least, we are inclined to understand seekership as indicative of this.

As far as the situational conditions for conversion are concerned, the life situation variables and the personal network seem important. Incisive situational changes and sudden negative life events are far more frequent among converts. Their personal networks seem to offer little solace for their problems. Neither parents nor peers are expected to give them much social support.

These factors render charismatic groups attractive to them for two reasons. First, such groups offer a wholly other perspective on life and so deliver them from their fixation on their own problems. To look for solutions by oneself is no longer necessary; henceforth a higher, charismatic power will do this. The fact that a previous religious perspective does not point the way to conversion indicates that it is not so much the content of the new perspective that appeals to converts. At issue is a formal aspect of world views: they direct life and offer certainty. Next to this solution on the level of consciousness the group provides factual support.

Eighty percent of the converts establish affective bonds with other members of the group. This is very meaningful to people who experience little support from parents and peers. It seems justified to suppose that religious groups have a twofold appeal: ideological, by offering a new perspective on life, and social, by providing a satisfactory social network.

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[8]Strictly speaking we can make no claims regarding generalization of our results. In view of the marked differences found between the control group and converts who joined two charismatic Christian movements (Unification Church and Pentecostal Church), we assume that these differences will apply also when nonconverts are compared to converts to other charismatic Christian groups.

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