Change Aspects of Faith

Sources of Increased Faith Among Norwegian Adults

"I feel more nearness to God after many difficult challenges…"

"All the daily chaos I had previously felt in 20 years disappeared. I received peace…"

(Quotes from two informants)

Abstract

This article offers an empirical approach to the field of conversion by addressing what contributes to increased faith. The material is based on a subset of a nationwide population survey of people living in Norway.

This article provides four empirical categories of sources contributing to increased faith: 1) life events, 2) increased awareness, 3) community experiences and 4) spiritual experiences. The sources contributed to increased faith through a multi-layered complexity of changes that facilitated perceived improvements in life. The changes in our material were often linked to changes in a perceived relation with a deity and a higher spiritual consciousness.

Due to the relational approach, the findings are discussed in light of the attachment theory. The empirical complexity nuanced existing research in the fields of conversion, attachment theory, and a perceived attachment relationship. Our findings revealed a need to reflect on the interplay between the various characteristics of an attachment relationship more than the safe haven characteristic or, to some extent, the secure base as isolated, independent characteristics. In addition, both relational processes and seeking personal growth and meaning emerged simultaneously. We argue that the notion of meaning would gain from being understood within a socio–cultural approach, where relations and meaning cannot be separated. Lastly, the conversion occurred both abruptly and gradually, and often in dynamic interaction where the informants could be both passive and active at the same time, "pactive", in interactions with their circumstances.

Keywords: increased faith, religious/spiritual conversion and transformation, empirical

Introduction

What contributes to increased faith? The aim of this article is to empirically analyse sources of increased faith. Some of our informants described sources contributing to longer processes of change, illustrated by the first quote after the title, describing a perceived closeness to God through difficult experiences. Others reported sudden and radical change, as described in the second quote above, from chaos to peace. Nevertheless, all described changes, and we have studied the reasons for change in religious belief and behaviour. The material is based on a subset (n=60) of a nationwide population survey of people living in Norway, and in this population, increased faith was mainly related to the Christian faith and practices.

Approximately 70% of Norwegians belong to the Church of Norway, a Lutheran denomination, and approximately 7% are members of other Christian denominations (Statistics Norway, 2019).[1] The Church of Norway membership is slowly decreasing, supposedly due to secularisation and an increasingly multi-religious society.

Despite the large numbers of members in Christian congregations, the Christian faith is modestly expressed, and the field of increased faith appears as a muted phenomenon in the Norwegian context.[2] The silence surrounding Christian faith expressions can have many reasons. One reason might be the experienced taboo of being a religious believer. Surveys show that one of five are sceptical of people with a Christian faith in Norway.[3]

Even though the personal expression of Christian faith emerges as reserved in the Norwegian context, research has recognized significant positive associations between religion and physical and mental health among habitants in Norway. Religion provides experienced meaning and security, humility, fellowship, and norms for society and co-existence (Fugelli & Ingstad, 2009, p. 413). The results of the positive associations of faith are in line with international research, emphasizing, for instance, felt security and perceived personal relationship with the Divine (Granqvist, 2002; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Kirkpatrick, 2005) and meaning (Paloutzian & Park, 2013; Schnell & Pali, 2013; Schnell & Schnell, 2021). Although research shows that faith can have positive associations in people's lives, to our knowledge, there is little research on what might contribute to increased faith in the Nordic countries and in Norway. Thus, in this article, we attempt to answer the following research question:

What characterises the sources related to increased faith among Norwegian adults?

By *sources* in this article, we mean what is reported to initiate the processes of increased faith.[4] In this article, increased faith is used as an umbrella concept. By *increased faith,* we lean on, among others, Anczyk and

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[1] Statistics Norway. 2019. Available online: https://www.ssb.no/en/kultur-og-fritid/statistikker/kirke_kostra/aar (accessed on 24 August 2020). Most members use the Church of Norway for transitional rituals, particularly funerals, confirmation and weddings. Far fewer numbers actively participate in Sunday services and other church activities. Additionally, there are about 250 migrant churches providing services in different languages.

[2] According to measurements provided by Ipsos (https://www.ipsos.com/en), the proportion who answer that they believe in God has gradually fallen from 53 to 30 percent the last 35 years in Norway. "God" is not defined, but referred to in capital letter. https://www.ipsos.com/nb-no/krisens-effekt-pa-nordmenns-verdioppfatninger-nye-tall-fra-norsk-monitor.

[3] 21% of the respondents in a survey done by the directorate of integration and diversity (IMDi) in Norway reported to be sceptical of people with Christian faith. file:///C:/Users/marnyg/Desktop/Mary,%20meaning%20making%20article/Artikkel%20%C3%B8kt%20tro/integreringsbarometeret-2018-holdninger-til-innvandrere-og-integrering.pdf (page 73).

[4] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/source

Vencálek's (2013) definition of conversion "*understood as change in religious behaviour and beliefs*" (p. 161), which contributes to strengthened faith.

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Although the study is based on the Norwegian context, we believe the article may also be of interest to those concerned with sources that contribute to increased faith in other societies described as secular and religiously pluralistic. The findings provide insights into the complexity that both fit and challenged established approaches in the study of conversion (Granqvist, 2003; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004; Rambo & Bauman, 2012; Rambo & Farhadian, 2014; Sandage & Moe, 2013). In the following section, the findings are discussed considering Kirkpatrick and Granqvist's research on the psychology of conversion using attachment theory because our findings essentially correspond with elements of attachment theory and relational approaches with a perceived deity (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Kirkpatrick, 1995, 1997, 2005; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). The theoretical framework, comprising definitions related to spiritual/religious conversion and transformation and attachment theory, is presented before the research overview in an attempt to make the attachment theory concepts easier to understand. After the research overview, the results and analysis are presented, followed by a discussion and the conclusion.

Increased faith through the lenses of attachment theory and religious representations
Increased faith

"Increased faith" does not appear as an established concept in the research field of conversion.[5] Nevertheless, we relate "increased faith" to the mentioned field because of the changes in religious behaviour and beliefs corresponding with our study. In the research field of conversion, various concepts are used, for instance, spiritual/religious transformation, and spiritual/religious conversion (Mahoney & Pargament, 2004; Pargament, 2006; Rambo & Bauman, 2012; Rambo, 1993; Sandage & Moe, 2013; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998). What appears to be common for all of these notions is the focus on *changes*. Rambo (1993) described *religious conversion* as "*a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic field of people, events, ideologies and orientations*" (Rambo, 1993, p. 5). Johnson-Miller (Johnson-Miller, 2005) emphasises *religious transformation* as one change or complex series of changes, enabling movements from one religious tradition to another or new

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[5] Search in Academic Search elite showed no relevant hits on "increased and faith or spiritual or religious and empirical studies or empirical research".

ways of being within the same tradition (Johnson-Miller, 2005). Anczyk and Vencálek define *religious conversion* "*as change in religious behaviour and beliefs*" (Anczyk & Vencálek, 2013, p. 161). Pargament describes *spiritual transformation* as changes in the character of the sacred (Pargament, 2006, p. 19). In this article, we limit ourselves from the debate of the concepts of religious and spiritual.[6]

By increased faith in the present article, we lean on and combine the four mentioned notions (Anczyk & Vencálek, 2013; Johnson-Miller, 2005; Pargament, 2006; Rambo, 1993), and refer to reported changes in spiritual/religious behaviour and beliefs that might include movements from one religious tradition to another, or new ways of being within the same tradition. The processes of change might take place in a dynamic field of people, events, ideologies, and orientations, and the changes strengthened the faith.

Attachment theory and religious representations

Our understanding of attachment theory and religious representations builds on Ainsworth's term 'attachment relation' (Ainsworth, 1985; Bowlby, 1969, 1988, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2005, p. 56; Kirkpatrick, 2012). Attachment relationships are different from other sorts of relationships and require meeting five criteria: proximity maintenance, a safe haven, a secure base, separation distress, and an attachment figure stronger and wiser than oneself (Birgegard & Granqvist, 2004; Granqvist, 2002; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2013, 2016; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2005, p. 57). By religious representations, we refer to mental representations mediated through perceived religious attachment-like figure(s) (Nygaard, Austad, Kleiven, & Mæland, 2020).[7]

The first crucial characteristic of an attachment relationship is seeking and maintaining proximity. The biological purpose of attachment is to preserve a child's emotional and physical proximity to protective attachment figures (Bowlby, 1969). According to Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2016), seeking protective attachment figures bears a resemblance to attachment processes with religious attachment-like figures.

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[6] Religious conversion can be regarded as a subset of the broader category of spiritual transformation. The psychological research has focused most on religious conversions. Transformation, however, can occur beyond the religious contexts (Sandage & Moe, 2013, p. 408). It is argued that spiritual transformation can be seen as a broader category with religious conversion as a subgroup (Sandage & Moe, 2013, p. 408; Paloutzian, 2005). Spiritual transformation can be defined as changes in the "meaning system a person holds as a basis – for self-definition, the interpretation of life, and overarching purposes and ultimate concerns" (Paloutzian, 2005, p. 334).

[7] We know that mental representations of religious attachment-like figures may also be mediated together with for instance mental representations of parental attachment figures.

The second criterion is that an attachment figure serves as a safe haven against possible danger. A safe haven can be understood as a place to turn when faced with potential danger. The danger that might activate the attachment system and search for a safe haven can, for instance, be crisis, distress, illness, injury, death, and grieving (Kirkpatrick, 2005, pp. 61–65). The third criterion is the provision of a secure base. A secure base is the point from which one can make excursions into the outside world. Bowlby (2012) argued that only when we are confident in our base do we dare to press forward and take risks. A secure base may provide a sense of security from which you explore the environment (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016).[8] The role of the secure base is being available, ready to respond when called up (Bowlby, 2012, p. 12). "The availability of secure base is the antidote to fear and anxiety" (Kirkpatrick, 2005, pp. 63–64).

The fourth criterion for an attachment relationship regards the fear of separation from an attachment-like figure (Ainsworth, 1985). However, it is difficult to claim that God matches this criterion because 'God does not die' (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 921). Nevertheless, believers may feel anxiety about spending eternity separated from God or being unable to experience an earlier felt closeness with God (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). The fifth criterion emphasises that the attachment figure must be regarded as stronger and wiser than oneself. The criterion stresses the asymmetrical character of attachment. Believers may recognise God as stronger and wiser than themselves (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 920).

These five criteria, particularly the safe haven and secure base functions, emerged as important analytical lenses describing increased faith in our study. The attachment theory represents the largest body of theory—driving psychological research in the empirical studies of conversion and spiritual transformation (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 2005; Sandage & Moe, 2013, p. 415). However, it is not clear to us whether these criteria are regarded as independent or interdependent of each other.

Research overview of spiritual/religious transformation and conversion

International research has categorized the field of spiritual/religious transformation and conversion along three main approaches: *spiritual dwelling, spiritual seeking, and dialectical approaches* (Sandage & Moe, 2013). Attachment theory is often used in the approach *spiritual dwelling,* which refers to conversion and transformation as "attempting to find a relational experience for dwelling in emotional security" (Sandage &

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[8] Insecure relationships to attachment-like figures tend to negatively affect children's ability to explore the world (Mothander et al., 2010).

Moe, 2013, p. 409). Research has suggested that 80% of the converts reported a triggering period of emotional distress before the conversion (Sandage & Moe, 2013, p. 409; referring to Ullman, 1989). Possible threats and new challenges that exceed earlier experiences might activate the attachment system. Activating the attachment system means that a search for support in an attachment figure (s) is triggered. Such a search can include support from a religious attachment—like a figure. Considerable research suggests that illness, death, and other negative life events are frequent conditions under which people, at least in Western Christian traditions, are most likely to seek God's support and comfort (Kirkpatrick, 2005, p. 61; referring to Hood, 1996).

The process of seeking support, seeking a "safe haven," is the most emphasized criterion in the attachment theory used in the research field of conversion. According to Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, there is significantly less evidence of the secure base criterion of a perceived religious attachment figure. Nevertheless, some research supports the indirect effects of a secure base when psychological outcomes associated with "attachment to God" are examined (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 921).[9] To the best of our knowledge, the "safe haven" and "secure base" criteria are researched as the two main but separated entities in the research field of conversion using attachment theory. As far as we know, the other criteria are described as parallel and often separated entities in the research field of conversion using attachment theory.

Theoretical approaches to *spiritual seeking* emphasize seeking new meaning and the complexity of conciseness. Conversion can also be argued to start due to a "new way of seeing" and not only as "emotionally problem-solving" (Sandage & Moe, 2013, p. 410; referring to Hay, 2001, p. 244). The seeking might be activated by discrepancies, disruptions, and doubts (Hill, 2002; Paloutzian, 2005; Sandage & Moe, 2013, pp. 410–411). Empirical research on seeking-oriented approaches highlights strivings for meaning and resolutions of existential questions as activation of spiritual transformation (Sandage & Moe, 2013, p. 413; referring to Hill, 2002; Kalfoss et al., 2020; Paloutzian, 2005).

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[9] Kirkpatrick and colleagues have developed a two process models of spiritual and religious change; correspondence and compensatory pathways. The correspondence hypothesis emphasizes that in the context of loving, supportive families, children have a tendency to adopt religious beliefs that correspond both to their parents' belief and to their own mental models of attachment relationships. The compensation hypothesis addresses children who could not establish secure attachments to parents, and that they are likely to seek "surrogates" or substitute attachment figure as a "stronger, wiser other who reliably proves to be accessible and responsive to attachment" needs (Kirkpatrick, 2005, p. 128). We do not have enough information in our study to determine which pathway that was most relevant.

There are also frameworks that seek to integrate spiritual dwelling and spiritual seeking in a *dialectical approach*. Rambo (1993) offered a dialectical and process-oriented stage approach of religious conversion. This approach consists of seven stages (context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences) (Rambo, 1993) (Rambo & Bauman, 2012). The stages include the impact of the environment on conversion, humanistic and transpersonal perspectives, and social/holistic approaches in the study of religious change (Rambo & Bauman, 2012). According to Rambo and Bauman, both passive and active modes of a person's role in conversion exist. "A person's mode of response falls along a continuum that ranges complete passivity on the one end to intentional, consciously self-directed activity on the other" (Rambo & Bauman, 2012, p.884).

Kahn and Green (2004) empirically tested Rambo's (1993) approach of religious conversion. Their findings corresponded mainly with Rambo's notion[10] and supported the need for multidimensional approaches of transformation and conversion (Sandage & Moe, 2013, p. 414). Recently, Taylor (2021) also empirically discussed Rambo's approach and argued for more attention to affect and the multi-agent nature of contemporary religious conversion processes. Empirical research on conversion in the Nordic context is scarce.[11]

Nevertheless, empirical research has been conducted in Nordic countries that focused on such related topics as religious coping and cancer and the influence on people's religiosity/spirituality (Lundmark, 2017; Pedersen & Zachariae, 2008; Pedersen et al., 2013; Saarelainen, 2016, 2017; Torbjørnsen, 2011; Torbjørnsen et al., 2021). The research emphasises how health issues and religious coping may transform religiosity/spirituality through, for instance, emotional distress, doubts and increased seeking. The research highlights, among other concepts, how spiritual sources are used and/or changed as part of coping processes employed for dealing with illnesses. However, to our knowledge, little empirical research in the Norwegian context has been completed that investigates in particular the nature and sources of changes related to *increased faith*. Thus, the present article provides an empirical contribution to an almost unresearched in the Norwegian context.

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[10] The research questioned the theoretical connections between questioning and conversion "such as how seeking eventuates in conversion in some cases versus ongoing searching in others" (Sandage & Moe, 2013, p. 414).

[11] Search in Academic Search Elite Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals 2004 – 2020 on the words "Norwegian or Norway" and "religion or religious or religiousness or religions or religiosity or spiritual or spirituality or faith" and "conversion or transformation" and "empirical study or empirical research" did not provide hits. However, reports about migrants converting from Islam to Christianity in the Norwegian context are provided, but the focus is mainly on asylum assessments (NOAS, 2014, 2017).

Methods

Procedure and sample

The secondary data for this study were based on a subset of a nationwide population survey of Norwegian people. First, 3000 individuals between the ages of 18–75 years were randomly selected, followed by an additional random selection of 500 individuals between the ages of 60–75 years, as we expected a lower response rate for elderly individuals. A total of n = 654 (22%) chose to participate by returning the questionnaire by prepaid post. A sub-sample of 60 (9%) persons also described sources of strengthened faith. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and approved by the Norwegian Data Inspectorate (NSD) and the Regional Committees for Medical and Health Research Ethics (REC).

Establishing the qualitative material

Qualitative approaches to conducting surveys and analysing their results may provide surprising potential (Braun et al., 2017). Comments about the *strengthening of faith* were assessed with the question: "Has your spiritual/ religious faith grown considerably stronger in a particular phase or transition in your life?" Answer alternatives were (1) no and (2) yes. Additionally, a space was provided to describe the experience for those who answered yes. Respondents were also asked to record how old they were when they experienced their spiritual/ religious faith as becoming strengthened.

To establish respondents' *religious/non-religious affiliation,* they were asked to select one of the following eight options in response to the question 'are you a member of a religious/non-religious community': *(1) Church of Norway (Lutheran), (2) Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, (3) Roman Catholic Church, (4) Pentecostal movement, (5) Islamic community, (6) Norwegian Humanist Association, (7) No membership, or (8) Other membership (open-ended question).* These denominations constitute the largest religious communities in Norway (Statistics Norway 2013). *Other demographic variables* included gender, education, marital status, religiosity, and life view. Table 1 offers sample characteristics.

Table 1

Thematic analysis The analysis of the written descriptions describing sources of strengthened faith was first read independently by three researchers to obtain an overall impression of their content. All researchers then transcribed these descriptions into a main document. Each researcher read this main document independently to get a feeling of the depth and breadth of the whole data set. A form of thematic, inductive content analysis method proposed by Burnard (1991) was then applied. This method was used because it is a step-by-step method suitable for inductive analyses. With the ensuing steps, each researcher read the transcript document repeatedly to become more immersed in the data while making notes on general themes and excluding any unusable issues that were not related to the topic. Several themes were then written down that described all aspects of the data in a table form ("open coding.") The themes were then reduced by collapsing them into broader categories and subheadings. This step was also done independently by the researchers and then subjected to critical discussion within the research group, resulting in certain modifications. The next step was to classify examples of data extracts illustrating the categories and subheadings, which were again done independently. The transcripts and tables were then reread by all researchers, and adjustments were made until agreement was reached regarding a list of categories, subheadings, and illustrative data extracts. After reading the analysis as a whole, all the researchers discussed and compared the findings until agreement was reached. Even though agreement was reached, we saw that some quotes could have been placed in other categories due to their complexity.

Agreement was reached on four main categories, which we have called *life events, increased awareness, community experiences, and spiritual experiences.* The category of *life events* refers to significant events that occur throughout an individual's life, such as the birth of a child, illness, or death of a close family member. *Increased awareness* relates to the informants' processes in which they looked for resources for growth and development. *Community experiences* emerged in our material as sources of fellowship in Christian congregations and/or friendship. The category *spiritual experience*[12] refers to a subjective experience where our informants reported contact with a perceived transcendent reality and/or an intimate encounter or union with the Divine, which strengthened their faith.[13]

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[12] "Spiritual experience" is closely linked to concepts such as religious experience, sacred experience, or mystical experience (Geels, 2014; la Cour & Hvidt, 2010). As already mentioned, we withdraw our self from the conceptual debate of spiritual/religious/sacred/mystical in this article, but in the category of "spiritual experiences" we use "spiritual" because "spiritual" is associated with "a subjective experience of the sacred" (Vaughan, 1991, p. 105) in (la Cour & Hvidt, 2010).

[13] We reflected on whether the results could be discussed in light of Rambo's stage model (Rambo, 1993 (Rambo & Bauman, 2012) instead of the attachment theory. To some extent it could, but our material did not have narratives describing stages in conversion processes.

Results

The majority of informants reported that their sources of strengthened faith appeared during adolescence (11–20 years, n = 24) and young adulthood (21–30 years, n = 14). Those in young middle age represented the third largest group (31–40 years, n = 10), followed by middle age (41–60 years, n = 5) and people aged (60–70 years, n = 2). The youngest age in which one's faith increased was a three-year-old child, followed by two children who experienced events at the age of seven and 10. 62 years represented the oldest experience. Two informants did not provide information about their age at the time when their faith increased.

In summary, sources of increased faith were categorized into four main categories: 1) life events (n = 24), 2) increased awareness (n = 13), 3) community experiences (n = 12), and 4) spiritual experiences (n = 11).

Based on the current study, we could not explicitly distinguish whether increased faith was a spiritual and/or religious transformation and/or a conversion.

Major sources of increased faith

The comments in the first three categories were often short, consisting of one or two words, while the responses in the last category consisted of several sentences, reflecting more of the informants' own thoughts. Thus, the fourth category provided more data for analysis.

Life events

The main source of increased faith was related to a variety of life events causing substantial changes in people's life. [14] Illness was the most reported life event that contributed to increased faith. There were different explanations for why illness was reported as a source for augmented faith. For instance, three respondents communicated that due to their illness, they started new processes of searching. One said that she/he "I searched more within myself than taking part in active sports". Another sought 'discussions with my homeopath and literature', and the third explored 'time to think—loneliness'. It seemed like illness increased reflections about life.

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[14] https://psychologydictionary.org/life-events/

Two respondents mentioned "cardiac illness" as a reason for increased faith, without any explanations. Three respondents communicated other reasons for change. One, who was diagnosed with skin cancer, had experienced a message from God to '…get a specific mole removed', which increased the sensation of God's care and the value of self through the experienced intervention. Another who struggled with depression wrote, "I became a Christian when I became "healthy." She stated that her faith from early childhood was revitalized after recovering after health issues. Lastly, one respondent did not refer to experiencing his or her own's illness, but responding to his/her parents' illness, "where God's closeness gave me strength and security." This quote emphasised the experience of God's strengthened proximity.

The second most reported life event was the death of loved ones. Increased faith was related to "the hope people who meet death will be watched over and that there is a larger meaning behind all things." Afterlife, care for loved ones, and hope for a deeper meaning beyond life emerge in this quote as a wish. The thought of an afterlife might also help in alleviating pain. Two other respondents mentioned the loss of grandparents as a reason, without describing why. Increased faith was also related to "comfort in prayer and being out in nature" when one's father died. The other said, "[I] do not have any concrete answer "…" why the death of loved ones increases faith." Many respondents described the search for comfort and new options during such life events as the loss of health and loss of loved ones.

Other situations of loss were car accidents, traumatic experiences described as drowning, and "I've experienced many challenges and traumatic experiences". Divorces were mentioned as a life event that increased faith, as illustrated by the quotation "(I) had to search for a sense of security within myself. I was very alone with four young sons with a small network and little money." Another informant described being without parents and "needed strength," and another was in a "transitional crisis". The search for strength and support emerged as approaches in the described traumatic experiences.

One exception from the negative life events, such as illness, death, and traumas, was the life event of giving "birth to a child". In our study, the "birth of a child" was reported to provide increased faith, enhancing superior meaning and control. One said that "I feel there must be a meaning in all the injustice that occurs in the world and with children. Something above with control". "Birth of a child" was characterised as the opposite of loss and as a significant enrichment in life. Two respondents stated that the birth of a child was like a miracle. One of them expressed, "It felt like a miracle, and it became very clear that such happiness could not be destined by

fate." Thus, the birth of a child was described in our study as a positive and graceful substantial change in life that contributed to increased faith.

Together, life events, described as loss of health, loved ones, and traumatic experiences, emerged as the most frequent sources of increased faith in the study. Nevertheless, one life event stood out as a contrast, namely "birth of a child," which was described as an enrichment.

Increased awareness

The second major category of augmented faith was processes of increased awareness. In our study, awareness was related to increased consciousness, such as looking for resources for growth, development, comfort, and access to new information. The difference between the processes of seeking in this section and in the previous one is due to the fact that life events were not directly mentioned as sources for increased faith. Instead, the sources were related to processes of searching for growth, personal development, and so on.

Four respondents described increased awareness based on the need for personal development and the need to discover new answers. For instance, one said it was about "personal uncertainty and searching," another stated that he/she had become more self-confident, but still reflected on "how little we really know of all we know". A third person experienced an "existential crisis and had not really reflected over life before then". Processes of seeking, based on the need for deeper understanding and an existential crisis, contributed to increased awareness.

Others wrote about how strengthened awareness occurred due to the stressful experience of feeling afraid and alone in puberty: "I was frightened and confused. The thought of God's closeness gave me a sense of security." Another informant stated, "I moved to Norway and did not know anyone, and I was alone for almost a year. I began to meditate and then found something important within myself." The processes of searching through meditation gave a sense of finding something of significance. Both reported finding answers that helped them cope with their situation.

Three respondents reported "access to new literature" and "knowledge" as sources for increased faith. However, we do not know whether they actively accessed new literature and knowledge because they searched for it or if they passively received the new knowledge. We can only state that access to literature and knowledge was reported as a source of increased faith. Another reported source was the sensation that God is omniscient, knowing human beings and not only human beings experiencing knowledge about God. One respondent said, "… God knows what we can cope with and what kind of problems we have." In other words, increased

awareness was related to various stressors, such as "personal uncertainty," existential crisis, and being afraid and alone.

Community experiences

The third category conducive to increased faith was community experiences. This category is related to relationships, congregational community and the Norwegian Lutheran Church's tradition of confirmation (described below).

Six respondents explained that relationships and congregational communities were sources for increased faith. Three of the six respondents emphasised "friends" as an important source. Two of these mentioned friends and the congregational community. One described "good friends, a wonderful congregation, and the possibility for artistic creativity (song) together with the opportunity to demonstrate one's feelings for God and others". According to this respondent, the congregational community facilitated artistic performance and expressions of emotions. Another informant wrote about "Close sharing and good friends" in the congregational community. Friendship, congregational community, and unity were highlighted. However, the leadership was not mentioned as a significant reason for increased faith. The fellowship in itself emerged as the source contributing to Christian faith.

Another respondent indicated that "experiencing love towards another religious person" augmented his/her faith. Another stated that "many things happened" in a congregational setting that increased one's faith. One reported finding increased faith due to another person's kindness, stating, "My friend had many paper dolls. I asked if I could have one, and the mother gave me some because I did not have any." Such relationships were seemingly characterised by qualities such as openness to emotions, love, kindness, sense of unity and space for creativity, which indicates that congregational relationships are important for increased faith.

Another source of community, mentioned by six respondents, was the Christian practice of confirmation. Confirmation is considered a ritual related to entering adulthood; according to the Church of Norway, confirmation is a prayer intercession that confirms the promises God gave the baptised. As compulsory preparation for confirmation, several lessons in classes, groups, camps and sermons are provided. The focus is to 'learn what Christian faith has to do with your life'. About 54% of 15-year-old youth in Norway were confirmed in 2019 (Statistics Norway, 2019). For one respondent, confirmation pushed forward a choice of believing in God or not. Another respondent stressed that the community with other young people who believed in Christ was

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important for their increased faith. One only mentioned "friends" as an important source, while the last respondent focused mainly on confirmation as a place for learning about God.

In summary, increased faith related to the confirmation period was related to learning about the Christian faith and providing a sense of community with other young people. Thus, "confirmation" seemed to provide a sense of connectedness for young people together with providing knowledge about belief systems and faith practices. Most of the respondents in our study reported increased faith as changes framed within the same belief system. However, in the category of spiritual experiences, we found some exceptions.

Spiritual experiences

Another important source that mediated increased faith were spiritual experiences. The quotes that we categorized as "spiritual experiences" are generally more comprehensive and longer than the other citations.

Five of the respondents described themselves explicitly as being converted, changing from one belief system to another, by spiritual experiences. All were converted *to* belief systems that included God and Jesus as religious attachment figures. Only one of them said something about his/her previous religious/spiritual background. This respondent converted from Islam and said: 'I received a changed picture of God – far apart from all the religious lies about Him; I experienced within my body that God is close to me and that my prayers had been heard and [I was] helped.' In addition, the informant referred to a book that had been inspirational.

Thus, through new images of a deity described as mediated through books, perceived proximity to the Divine and the sensation that their prayers had been heard, the respondents' belief systems had changed.

Another said that he/she made a personal choice "to invite Jesus into my life. All the daily chaos I had previously felt in 20 years disappeared. I received peace. I experienced both spiritually and physically the He really exists". The informant described a radical change from long-lasting chaos to peace, together with embodied sensations of Jesus being real. Another respondent described their conversion as an experience of "society, security and love in my life". I understood that this was right for me. Because of this, my faith was strengthened." This person underlined the experiences of community, security, and love in their lives, and a cognitive conviction that this was "right," which led to increased faith.

The next quote mainly emphasizes the search for changes in belief systems and fewer bodily sensations. 'I had a wish to know whether God and Jesus exist and whether the church I belonged to was really God's true church on

this earth.' The person said that s/he studied with great diligence and concluded: 'I found belief in God and Jesus Christ and a testimony through the Holy Spirit's power that the Book of Mormon is true.'

These quotes describe a 'wish to know' that s/he had studied through which s/he had '…found belief... and a testimony received through the power of the Holy Spirit'. The words emerge as cognitively oriented, searching for new knowledge, but are combined with elements of the external power experienced. The Holy Spirit may have been perceived as bodily sensations, but the quote does not underline any sensations or changes in the body.

The last quote from one converted was that the respondent "experienced a meeting with Jesus" and described an encounter with God, although it seemed like this encounter was passively received. The citation does not give further information, only that the encounter arbitrated conversion. All the respondents described the conversion as perceived closeness to God, and/or a meeting with the Holy Spirit or God.

Two other respondents described that God met them as an active agent in difficult times. One described being "a sailor away from home" and "I was confused about several things. But then God reminded me of a song melody: "God does as Abraham, a shot with the naked eye towards heaven above," "I have control and am with you." The experience of a deity having control over the situation seemed to give peace and rest.

Another respondent who experienced "childlessness" reported that "God gave me assurance that he loved me as a woman whether or not I am a mother. This happened in prayer, and I experienced peace. The year after, I gave birth to twins." This experience seems to bring peace through the feeling of being loved by God as an active agent. Common to these citations was the fact that God was perceived as actively intervening, providing a sense of presence in challenging life situations.

The last two quotes we address here are related to the Bible as a source of increased faith and perceiving God as being alive and as love. One said that during adolescence, he/she found "a manifestation of God's word from a living Messiah." Another said that in the period from childhood to adolescence, they "met God's love through the Bible".

In summary, in the category of "spiritual experiences," almost all quotes narrated difficult situations and emotions, which turned into positive experiences through the perceived presence of a deity. The quotes communicated subjective experiences in which the respondents reported a perceived presence of a living God, often intervening as an active agent in challenging times of life.

Findings across the four categories

Almost half of our respondents were in adolescence when the increased faith occurred. If we add young adulthood to adolescence, this accounted for approximately two–thirds of the respondents' age when increased faith emerged. In other words, the majority of the respondents were between 10–30 years old when their faith was strengthened.

The four categories contained overlapping elements. In the categories "life events," "increased awareness," and "spiritual experiences," demanding experiences were mentioned by half of the informants. Thus, hard experiences and difficult emotions emerged as a common starting place that contributed to increased faith across the categories. However, one category stood out as a contrast in the way it contributed to increased faith: "community experiences," which underlined the significance of relationships often described with qualities of love and connectedness to other people and the congregational community contributing to augmented faith. "Birth of a child" was also one exception *within* the category of life events, contributing to increased faith through the sense of an external power of control.

Discussion – Sources contributing to increased faith in the lenses of attachment theory

In this article, we have asked: What characterises sources related to increased faith among Norwegian adults? The four main empirical categories described above emerged, all contributing to changes in religious/spiritual beliefs and behaviour. Some changes were caused by abrupt occurrences that initiated a search for security (life events). Other changes originated from a need for personal development (increased awareness). Some changes appeared as a response to good community experiences, whereas others were from sudden perceived intervention from God (spiritual experiences). The findings underline how important relations are to increased faith, relation to a deity, a community, and oneself. Thus, to better understand the sources and change, we have discussed the findings in light of the research on conversion using attachment theory. Nevertheless, our empirical findings indicate some limitations in how attachment theory is normally used in the field of conversion, and we have suggested some expansion of the use of the theory in the present research field.

Increased faith through distress and search for security

Mainly in the category of "life event," but also in "increased awareness" and "spiritual experiences," we found quotes that correlated with the search for a safe haven. Most of our respondents reported emotional distress as a source contributing to increased faith. This finding is supported by the research referenced that shows most conversions are triggered by emotional distress (Ullman, 1989). In addition, and as previously noted, approximately two–thirds of all informants reported that their increased faith appeared during adolescence and adulthood. This corresponds with Granqvist and Kirkpatrick's notion that spiritual and religious transformations are often prompted by experiences of loss or developmental transitions, such as adolescence (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004). [15] Actually, the majority of the young respondents reported some kind of loss in developmental transitions during adolescence and adulthood. Thus, a double reason for searching for security emerged: loss and developmental transition.

Different types of loss were noted. Of major life events, illness and death were, as mentioned, the most frequently reported reasons contributing to increased faith, but divorce and trauma were also cited. Our findings support the notion that a health crisis is one of the everyday life events for which the boundaries between sacred and secular seem most permeable (Ammerman, 2014, p. 302). Additionally, our findings underline health challenges as sources for change aspects of faith (Lundmark, 2017; Pedersen et al., 2013; Saarelainen, 2016, 2017; Torbjørnsen, 2011; Torbjørnsen et al., 2021). In particular, our findings support that change aspects of faith may emerge as an intensification of existing religious expressions or as new religious expressions (Lundmark, 2017, p. 77).

Moreover, according to Bowlby (1969), illness, injury and death are natural dangers that trigger the attachment system and elicit attachment behaviour. In particular, death and separation of attachment figures might trigger the attachment system (Bowlby, 1969; Kirkpatrick, 2005, 64). According to Kirkpatrick (2005), the loss of an attachment figure and a triggered attachment system would predict that religious behaviour should increase faith during times of bereavement. Loss of loved ones might activate the attachment system and search for another attachment figure (p. 64). [16]

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[15] An additional reason for the emphasis on increased faith among young people might be that the majority (70%) of respondents were under 50 years old when they responded.

[16] Kirkpatrick argued that there are at least three factors related to attachment in religious responses to bereavement. In addition to the loss of loved ones per se activates the attachment system, loss is often followed by other stressors as consequences of the loss. For instance, challenging practical and economical

However, our study revealed complexity. For instance, some responses in the category of "increased awareness," which is normally linked to spiritually seeking, encompassed distress, such as personal insecurity and fear, which motivated the search for safety. Search for a safe haven also appeared in "spiritual experiences," where chaos and doubts moved some towards search for security in a deity. Thus, search for a safe haven appeared in the seeking processes and in spiritual experiences. Further, illness which is often reported to be linked to the safe haven approach, was reported by some informants who started new processes of seeking due to, for instance, more time to think. Also death of loved ones contributed to seeking greater meaning. These examples show that the "spiritual dwelling" and "spiritual seeking" categories empirically overlapped.

Increased faith – processes of seeking

The second major category of augmented faith was processes of increased awareness. As already mentioned, various stressors, such as existential crisis, being afraid, and feeling alone, contributed to the seeking processes. In contrast to the category of life events, the circumstances that contributed to increased awareness were defined by long-lasting processes and not a sudden disruption. The respondents appeared to seek personal development and new options for dealing with their challenges. The need for dealing with the challenges in ways that include a perceived deity is supported by existing research in the Nordic context (Lundmark, 2017; Torbjørnsen, 2011; Torbjørnsen et al., 2021).

At first sight, attachment theory could not help us with this category. In the research literature, relational needs are described as separate from the seeking processes (Sandage & Moe, 2013, p. 410; referring to Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004, p. 226). The seeking processes where referred to as a cognitive search for existential meaning and questioning.

Increased awareness can easily be seen in the light of theoretical approaches to spiritual seeking (Sandage & Moe, 2013, p. 410). One perspective relevant for our category is "quest". "Quest is a process in which people seek to maximize meaning and purpose in life. Under crisis active searching intensifies, people look for resources for growth and development to "fill the void"" (Rambo & Bauman, 2012, p. 884). Consistent with our findings, studies exploring spiritual quest seeking during emerging adulthood, for instance, have shown that this

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changes might appear. Third, the loss of principal attachment figure (for instance parent or a spouse) might trigger an increased dependence on previously secondary figures, for instance God or Jesus. It might also activate a search for a substitute or surrogate caregiver (Kirkpatrick, 2005, p. 64).

phase of life intensifies existential questioning and exploration in many areas of life, including faith and identity (Cook et al., 2014; Kelley & Miller, 2007).

However, the category of increased awareness also showed *complexity*. Increased awareness seemed to be related to a search for security and safe haven. Through processes of seeking, a perceived closeness to God gave a "sense of security". The search for security often included a search for something wiser and parallels the attachment criterion of someone being wiser and stronger (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 920). The search for something wiser emerged as looking for resources of growth within the religious literature and practices, or looking to God as a wise attachment figure. For many of our respondents, the seeking process seemed to include both a search for meaning and security. The processes of increased awareness did not, in our study, include other human beings but access to literature, knowledge, and God.

To sum up, increased awareness seemed to contribute to a relived situation. The relived situation can be understood as an increased experience of union with a perceived wise religious attachment figure and a more nourishing understanding of oneself and the circumstances. The seeking processes included both a search for meaning, comfort and security. Complexity also emerged in favourable experiences that contributed to increased faith.

Increased faith through favourable experiences—interplay between safe haven and secure base

"Birth of a child" in the category of life events and the category "community experiences" emerged as two groups that emphasised life-giving, nutritious sources of increased faith.

In our study, the birth of a child seemed to activate appreciation and worship. In this sense, the attachment approach was not primarily a search for a safe haven but rather for a secure base, overall control, and a place to show gratitude. In our study, this superior control emerged as a religious attachment figure wiser and stronger than themselves (Granqvist, 2002, 2016). Birth of a child was not described as a crisis in our study, even though it was a disruptive change. Nevertheless, the birth of a child may be experienced as a crisis that triggers the attachment system related to the safe haven function or a combination of a place to both give thanks and search for support.

A combination—the interplay between a safe haven and a secure base—emerged in the category of community experiences. In contrast to life events mainly being reported as restrictions of possibilities, the reported community experiences were portrayed as spaces for creativity, possibilities and belonging. The sense of belonging refers to more than positive relationships; secure feelings of fitting in are also involved in our material. This corresponds with belonging as closely related to finding meaning in life (Lambert et al., 2013). Moreover, the use of talents and the expression of emotions can indicate that the communities represented a secure base for the informants from where they made excursions into meaningful fields of life. This corresponds with Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2013), who said that communities can be regarded as a "sense of secure base for exploration of the environment" (p. 920).

Furthermore, the communities seemed to provide a safe haven function. The attachment to friends and other relationships might have offered a safe haven to turn to. For example, openness to engaging in dialogue about spirituality and religiosity in the context of friends has been found to be a robust facilitator of spiritual development among adolescents and emerging adults (Kalfoss et al., 2020; Kelley & Miller, 2007). In the group of informants that mentioned confirmation as important for increasing faith, connectedness to young people was emphasised besides practices that involved them in belief systems.

The interplay seemed to represent attachment qualities to approach for both emotional support and exploration. We think that the emphasis in our study on good friends, great unity, and the opportunity for artistic expression and expressing feelings for God and people supports the hypothesis of the importance of relational qualities that one can turn to in difficult times and explore new possibilities and express creativity.

Contact with other human beings was the main source expressed in the category of community experiences. Nevertheless, human beings were described as relationally connected to a perceived religious attachment figure. Thus, the interplay between a safe haven and a secure base appeared with "double relationships," including both people and a perceived religious attachment figure. According to Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, a community sharing the notion of God being "by my side" and "watching over me" and God as omnipresent and omniscient can contribute to increased confidence that a religious attachment figure will be available to him/her whenever s/he desires it (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2013, p. 921).

This possible 'double relationship' between human beings and a perceived religious attachment figure may have contributed to a sense of the community serving as a complex source of both safe haven and secure base. However, as stated, no informant mentioned congregational leaders as important to their increased faith. This

does not mean that leaders were unimportant in creating good fellowship, but it seems that the fellowship appeared to be more important than the leaders.

In summary, increased faith through positive experiences challenges the notion of either a safe haven or secure base. Instead, an interplay emerged with a possible "double relationship" to both people and a perceived religious attachment figure, representing an interplay *between* safe haven and secure base.

Increased faith through the perceived presence of God

In the last category, "spiritual experiences," no human beings were reported as sources for increased faith. Most of the respondents described experiences of an external deity that approached them in their challenges. The perceived deity was often described as an active part of the perceived encounter, providing a sense of love and security. This approach can be understood as the provision of a secure base with an attachment figure stronger and wiser than oneself (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). The perceived deity was felt as near and as one that had control and an overview of the situationCommon to many of the quotes in this category was the combination of changes in the belief systems and embodied sensations, such as peace, love, and perceived closeness to a deity. No other categories described the embodied sensation of being touched by perceived external power. Thus, the experiences could not be understood as pure cognition isolated from the body. Instead, the cognitive aspects seemed closely intertwined with what was experienced in the body.

In contrast to the quotes in the category of increased awareness, the category of spiritual experiences was normally related to sudden changes. The informants described spiritual experiences often as abrupt turning points leading to favourable changes in their lives, from chaos to sudden peace, love and felt security. This corresponds with Geels' (2001) notion that the steps from a crisis towards religious conversion are not long because chaotic life situations can be turned spontaneously to feelings of harmony (p. 155).

In the category of spiritual experience, we found complexity. Elements from the two approaches of "spiritual dwelling" and "spiritual seeking" emerged. Both relational aspects appeared, for instance, in the perceived encounters with a deity and processes of seeking, exemplified by wishes of knowing more about God.

Furthermore, all the categories point to sources predicting meaning and meaningful orientations. The empirical sources emerged in line with Schnell's predictors of meaning (Schnell, 2021, p. 60), and the findings included sources such as religiosity, care, harmony, development, social commitment, creativity and attentiveness. The sources also related to the strongest predictor of them all, according to Schnell: generativity, or 'doing or

creating things of lasting value' (Schnell, 2021, p. 61). The lasting value our material referred to were, among other things, connectedness to and orientation towards an eternal deity. The life took on new meaning and the informants' actions could be seen in light of a long-lasting perspective.

Passive and active roles at the same time?

In all four categories of sources contributing to increased faith, we found combinations of the converts' roles as both passive and active. The informants "received" and responded to circumstances and environment. They "received" and responded to stressful events in life and/or perceived helpful experiences from an external power.

The literature on conversion has portrayed "conversion as a continuum that ranges from complete passivity on one end to intentional, consciously self-directed activity in the other." (Rambo & Bauman, 2012 p. 884). Our study revealed a more complex notion of the convert's role. Instead of seeing conversion as a continuum between passivity and activity, our material revealed that these processes, which include receiving and responding, could appear at the same time in interactions with the environment.

This dynamic of being both passive and active at the same time can be illustrated by the Swedish professor in philosophy Jona Bornemark's concept of "*pactive*" (Bornemark & Sandberg, 2017). A pactive process is one in which both passive and active approaches appear at the same time. Bornemark used the birth of a child as an example of a pactive process; something is happening outside the mother's control but is still dependent on her response. She is normally both a passive and an active part of the birth.

The "pactive processes" can amplify the notion of conversion as a continuum and illustrate more dynamic interactions between these two dimensions as intertwined and not easily separated from each other. Still, we agree that it is necessary to conduct studies that explore the full range of response modes (Rambo & Bauman, 2012, p. 884; Rambo, 1993).

Increased faith as the complexity of changes

Our findings provide four empirical categories that contribute to increased faith. Further, the findings indicate that sources contributing to increased faith consist of a multi-layered complexity. With multi-layered complexity, we understand dialectic elements that emerge simultaneously.

We found 1) an interplay between a safe haven and a secure base. In this interplay, the characteristic of an attachment person being stronger and wiser also emerged. The research field of conversion and attachment

theory has strongly emphasised the safe haven approach (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). To us, the focus on the safe haven appears as one independent criteria. Our study reveals a need to reflect on the interplay between the various criteria of attachment theory.

An example of such interplay is suggested in the "circle of security" model developed by Hoffman et al. (2006). Hoffman and colleagues developed a model to study the circular patterns of the child and the attachment caregiver in the physical environment. The primary caregiver, in this model, may be understood as stronger and wiser, as a safe haven for affect regulation and as providing a secure base for exploring the world. There have been suggestions to modify the model "to better understand the attachment relationship with a perceived religious attachment-like figure" (Nygaard et al., 2020). The modified model might illustrate the interplay between an adult and a safe haven and a secure base, represented by a perceived religious attachment-like figure that is perceived as stronger and wiser.[17] We think that a model illustrating the interplay between the criteria in the attachment theory could better reflect the complexity of sources contributing to increased faith in our material.

2) The overlap and interplay between the two main approaches of "spiritual dwelling" and "spiritual seeking" in the research literature emerged. Both relational processes and seeking personal growth and meaning emerged simultaneously. Thus, our findings support Rambo's (1993) dialectic and process-orientated focus, emphasising "contextual, relational, emotional, and meaning oriented dimensions of change" (Sandage & Moe, 2013, p. 411). To our knowledge, the concept of meaning in the research literature of "spiritual seeking" emerges as a cognitive concept. We argue that the notion of meaning would gain from being understood within a socio-cultural approach (Robert, 1985). Baird argued that the human being is always in interactions with the context and that the relations in the context represent sources for possible meaning. Thus, in our view, relations and meaning cannot be separated. 3) Lastly, we think that the "pactive processes" can illustrate a dynamic interaction of the person in processes of increased faith.

All four empirical categories consist of changes in spiritual/religious behaviour and beliefs. The majority of the informants reported changes as new ways of being within more or less known Christian traditions. Only a few reported movements from one religious tradition to another. The processes of change took place in a dynamic

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[17] The article "Place Spirituality: An attachment perspective" suggests an interplay of place and spiritual attachment. The article focuses on "the concept of 'place spirituality' as a psychological mechanism, which allows the religious believer or non-believer to achieve an organised attachment strategy" (Counted et al., 2019, p. 12) involving the interplay of place and spiritual attachment.

field of life events, people, and sources for increased awareness and learning communities and spiritual experiences that strengthened the faith.

The changes in our material were often linked to changes in a perceived relation with a deity. Further, the changes were reported as favourable, for instance, as experiences of comfort and support, increased insight, community experiences providing well-being and creativity, and perceived closeness with a deity wiser and stronger than themselves. The changes facilitated higher spiritual consciousness. We believe that our findings might be of relevance for people in the field of pastoral care who are involved with people in processes of change that might lead to increased faith. However, further research is needed on studies that compare the same sources that lead to different outcomes. For instance, why does the death of loved ones lead to increased faith for some but spiritual struggles and decreased faith for others (Kalfoss et al., 2020)?

Limitations

There are certain limitations to our study. Most of our sample were members of the state Lutheran Church, and our response rate was very low, limiting the generalisability of our findings. Further, those who took time to describe their experiences of increased faith could represent a group of select groups whose faith or religion is of deep importance. In addition, approximately two – thirds of our sample were women. Thus, the material did not represent a gender balance. Our data were also collected at only one point in time, so we do not know how or if feelings of their strengthened faith remained from a longitudinal perspective. However, our data were based on a nationwide population study, which lends strength to our study.

Conclusion

In this article, we have presented insights into the question: *What characterises the sources related to increased faith among Norwegian adults*? The study is based on a subset of a nationwide population survey of people living in Norway. The study has provided four empirical categories contributing to increased faith: 1) life events, 2) increased awareness, 3) community experiences and 4) spiritual experiences. The sources contributed to increased faith through the multi-layered complexity of changes that facilitated higher spiritual consciousness. The changes reported by our respondents were often linked to changes in a perceived relation with a deity, facilitating higher spiritual consciousness.

The empirical complexity nuanced existing research in the field of conversion and attachment theory. Our findings revealed a need to reflect on the *interplay* between the various criteria of the attachment theory, more than the safe haven criterion or, to some extent, the secure base as isolated, independent criteria. Notably, overlaps and interplay between the two main approaches in the research literature, "spiritual dwelling" and "spiritual seeking," emerged. Thus, we argue that a dialectic approach combining both the relational and emotional processes and processes for growth in context seems to be of importance to understand the complexity of conversions. We argue that the notion of meaning would gain from being understood within a socio-cultural approach, where relations and meaning cannot be separated. Lastly, the conversion occurred both abruptly and gradually, and often in dynamic situations where the informants could be both passive and active at the same time—"pactive"—in interactions with their circumstances.

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