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Deconversion and Identity Formation in Adolescents: The Role of Internal Dialogs and Religiousness of Parents

Małgorzata M. Puchalska-Wasyl, Małgorzata Łysiak, and Beata Zarzycka

Institute of Psychology, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin, Poland

ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a period of exceptional sensitivity to the ideals that are subject to verification. Therefore, a phenomenon of deconversion (i.e. abandonment of religion) is observed among adolescents. The paper aims to analyze deconversion and its connections with the identity formation as well as mediators and moderators of these relationships. Participants were 272 adolescents aged between 14 and 18. Three scales were used: the Circumplex Identity Modes Questionnaire, the Internal Dialogical Activity Scale-Revised, and the Adolescent Deconversion Scale. We found that identity modes such as moratority, diffusion, and defiance are positively related to deconversion, whereas socialization and normativity are negatively related to deconversion. The negative relationships between normativity and deconversion exist if the parent (especially mother) is assessed as religious or very religious. Moreover, internal dialogs moderate and mediate links between different identity modes and dimensions of deconversion.

Introduction

Marcia (1980), the author of the paradigm of identity statuses, is of the opinion that apart from sexual orientation and vocational direction, ideological stance creates the framework of the emerging identity. Adolescence is a period of exceptional sensitivity to the ideals that are subject to verification, it is a time of shaping the worldview and moral views. Young people are confronted with different beliefs, values, and roles and begin to ask existential questions and seek goals (Paloutzian et al., 2013). Phenomena of a religious and spiritual nature, such as questioning the worldview and values, looking for meaning and purpose, the desire to experience transcendence and the search for the sacrum should be considered as developmental tasks of this period (King et al., 2013; Levenson et al., 2013). The religious transformation observed in adolescence is characteristic of various populations (Hood et al., 2018, 1996; Regnerus & Uecker, 2006; Streib & Keller, 2004). It is multidimensional. Its effect may be both an increase and a decrease in religiosity (which may precede another increase, sometimes related to a change of religion). Although research on religiousness in adolescents is extensive (e.g., Desmond et al., 2010; Pearce et al., 2019; Petts, 2009), most of the studies have focused on religious development and on the conversion process (Halama et al., 2013; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Longo & Kim-Spoon, 2014). Less attention has been given to the phenomenon of deconversion (i.e. abandonment of religion), and factors that characterize it (Streib, 2021). This paper is an answer to this gap. Its aim is to analyze the phenomenon of deconversion and its connections with the identity formation as well as mediators and moderators of these relationships. We pose three research questions:

(1) Which dimensions of deconversion are most intensively experienced in the group of adolescents?

CONTACT Małgorzata M. Puchalska-Wasyl ✉ wasyl@kul.pl 🖂 Department of Personality Psychology, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Al. Racławickie 14, Lublin 20-950, Poland.

(2) What is the relationship between the deconversion and identity formation modes proposed in the circumplex model?

(3) Do the adolescents' internal dialogs and their parents' religiosity play the role of moderators/ mediators of the relationship: identity formation modes-deconversion?

In response to these questions, five hypotheses were formulated, which will be presented below after discussing the variables relevant to the hypotheses: deconversion, identity formation modes, and internal dialogs.

What is deconversion? Paloutzian et al. (2013, p. 408) describe deconversion as "the depth and intensity of biographical change that can be associated with disbelief and/or disaffiliation." According to Nowosielski and Bartczuk (2017), deconversion is a withdrawal from the current system of beliefs, practices and morals, as well as the abandonment of a religious or spiritual community. Streib and Keller (2004) proposed five dimensions of deconversion: (1) loss of specific religious experience (loss of the previously held meaning and purpose of life, loss of the experience of God, as well as a sense of both trust and fear of God); (2) intellectual doubts (denial or disagreement with specific beliefs); (3) moral criticism (rejection of religion-specific moral commands or reaching a new level of moral reasoning); (4) emotional suffering (loss of the sense of rootedness, support, and stability and security that religion provides); (5) resignation from belonging to a religious community (withdrawal from participation in religious community meetings and/or abandonment of religious practices). These five dimensions suggest that deconversion is an intense process characterized by both individual and social aspects: experiential, emotional, intellectual, social, and moral; they allow us to distinguish deconversion from mere dissatisfaction with the group (Paloutzian et al., 2013). In Poland, where our research was conducted, there has been a clear decline in the level of religiosity among young people over the last two decades. The research results suggest that, in general, young people in Poland are less religious than adults. Questioning of religion by adolescents can be expressed as a violent rebellion, a change in religious affiliation, the acceptance of a rationalistic attitude to life or the complete rejection of all religiosity (Mariański, 2016). A decline in the level of religiosity of adolescents in Poland has been clearly demonstrated in a report prepared in 2018 by the Polish Public Opinion Poll Center (CBOS). In 2008, 81% of students in the last grades of secondary schools defined themselves as believers, compared to 63% in 2018. In 2008, 84% of such students attended religious services, compared to 65% in 2018. The number of young people attending religion class is also decreasing in Poland: form 93% in 2010 to 70% in 2018. Fewer and fewer Polish adolescents participate in religious practices, such as mass, religious services, or religious meeting. In this context, behavioral indicators of deconversion (resignation from belonging to a religious community and deconversion behavior understood as abandonment of religious practices) seem to be the main way for adolescents to manifest their opposition to a religion that does not respond to their needs. Therefore, our first hypothesis is as follows:

H1. Withdrawal from the community and deconversion behavior are the most intensively experienced dimensions of deconversion in the group of adolescents.

During adolescence, looking for meaning and purpose, questioning the worldview and values, and searching for transcendence and sacrum coincides with intense processes of identity formation (King et al., 2013; Levenson et al., 2013). The research on identity formation is very extensive. Among theoretical approaches that are predominant in this field there are as follows: three-dimensional model by Crocetti et al. (2008); the five-dimensional model by Luyckx et al. (2008), and Berzonsky's social-cognitive model of identity styles (Berzonsky, 1989). All of them refer to Marcia's (1966) paradigm of identity statuses, which was the first attempt to operationalize Erikson's (1959) ideas.

The latest approach which is designed to integrate the various concepts describing identity formation in the Erikson–Marcia tradition and which will be the basis for our empirical analyses further presented is the circumplex model of identity formation modes proposed by Cieciuch and

Topolewska (2017; Topolewska & Cieciuch, 2017). These authors, in line with Marcia (1980) and Berzonsky (2011), define <u>identity</u> as a personal cognitive structure consisting of those elements that the person considers relevant to who he or she is (self-definition or self-identification). According to them interindividual differences in identity formation can be described using the identity mode category. <u>Identity mode</u> is understood as a type of identity management, which is a coherent whole consisting of specific cognitive, affective, and behavioral mechanisms. Modes are rooted in personality traits, but they are not fully determined by traits; therefore, the person may switch between different modes in the process of identity formation and management (Cieciuch & Topolewska, 2017; Topolewska & Cieciuch, 2017).

Cieciuch and Topolewska (2017) propose eight identity modes arranged around a circumplex, which is structured by two axes: Exploration vs. Petrification (concerning self-theory) and Socialization vs. Defiance (pertaining to social expectations). These dimensions are inspired by Marcia's (1966) model – they are its reinterpretation in the light of personality psychology and reflection on commitment in contemporary world. The first axis corresponds to the personality metatrait of Plasticity, whereas the second one is in line with the personality metatrait of Stability (DeYoung et al., 2002). Modes located on the circumplex next to each other are similar at some point, while those at opposite ends of the axes are the most different. As this typology will be analyzed in our empirical study presented further, below we characterize the eight modes. We will present them in the order in which they occur when we move the circular model clockwise, with socialization corresponding to 12 o'clock.

Socialization consists in defining oneself in such a way as to perform one's life roles properly in accordance with the current stage of life. In this mode, beliefs about oneself create a coherent and stable system related to the sense of being in the right place. We talk about **consolidation** when a person explores various options and uses this information to build a relatively stable identity structure. The individual undertakes long-term commitments but may modify them because he/she is open to other options. **Exploration** is expressed in an active commitment to build the identity structure and solve dilemmas and problems related to identity. The person examines his/her possibilities and tests whether the activity is suitable for him/her. **Moratorivity** is characterized by actively seeking one's place in life by exploration combined with commitments and engagements to make sure whether they will be proper for oneself in various respects. This search is associated with a desire for a permanent commitment, which may create tensions given the temporary nature of one's current commitments. In **defiance** it is typical for a person to believe that he/she has not found his/her place in life, therefore there is a risk that the commitment made will be in sharp opposition to social norms. **Diffusion** means the lack of a stable identity structure. A person's actions, beliefs and decisions are guided by situational variables and environment rather than the cognitive structure of identity. **Petrification** is a lack of interest in thinking about oneself and developing an identity structure. The cognitive structure of identity is quite poorly developed, and its fragmented elements are rigid or even frozen. As a result, the person may exhibit inconsistent behavior in different roles, e.g., being submissive to colleagues at work, caring for family, and aggressive toward supporters of other football teams. **Normativity** is related to forming the identity structure based on the expectations of others (e.g., parents). These expectations are usually adopted uncritically, without being evaluated. Taking into account the definition of identity modes and their location around two axes, we hypothesize that:

H2. Socialization, consolidation, and normativity are negatively related to deconversion, whereas moratorivity, defiance, and diffusion are positively related to deconversion.

Normativity is the mode of identity that is most closely related to parental expectations, probably also in the area of religion. Additionally, as some studies showed, religiousness of parents is a significant predictor of their offspring's religiousness (Dillon & Wink, 2007; Leonard et al., 2013). In

this context, we assume that the youth in the normativity mode will not have a tendency to abandon their parents' religion, especially if their parents are genuinely religious. Therefore, our third hypothesis is as follows:

H3. Negative relationship between normativity and deconversion is moderated by religiousness of parents. The relationship is significant in the group of adolescents who assess their mother/father as a religious person and loses its significance with low parent's religiousness.

The process of identity formation involves confronting different visions of oneself, evaluating matters from different perspectives, taking into account and considering the opinions heard about oneself (Batory et al., 2016). This implies adopting different points of view, juxtaposing them with each other, and conducting an internal dialog between different viewpoints, which becomes possible thanks to the development of cognitive functions during adolescence. It is conceivable that internal dialogs can play an important role in the relationship between identity formation modes and deconversion.

The concept of internal dialog is strongly rooted in the dialogical self theory (DST; Hermans, 2003; Hermans & Gieser, 2012). Dialogical self is understood as a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions representing different viewpoints/perspectives available for a person. Each I-position, shaped in a particular social context, has a voice (the voice of a culture, a community, a significant other, or one's own voice) and is intertwined with other I-positions resembling people in social relationships (Hermans, 2003). As a result, not only external (interpersonal) but also internal (intrapersonal) dialogs are possible. We assume that a person is engaged in internal dialog when he/she adopts (at least) two different viewpoints in turn, and the utterances formulated (silently or aloud) from these viewpoints respond to one another (Puchalska-Wasyl, 2019, 2020).

Dialogical self allows a young person to "try on" various personal and social roles and reject some and accept others. Internal dialog can foster identity formation in such a way as to reduce discrepancies within the self (Borawski, 2011), strengthen the sense of meaning in life (Oleś et al., 2010) and acquire wisdom (Hermans & Oleś, 2013). Among various types of internal dialogs, Oleś(2009; cf. Oleś et al., 20202020), distinguishes the so-called identity dialog. It is an internal dialog in which questions and answers are asked about: identity, life values, and preferences, meaning of life. Such dialogs serve to search for and strengthen authenticity and may precede decisions of great importance in life (e.g., abandoning the religion passed on by parents, as a system of values that deviate from one's own). Thus, our next hypothesis is following:

H4. Negative relationship between normativity and deconversion is moderated by identity internal dialogs. With a high frequency of these dialogs, the relationship loses its significance.

Among other types of internal dialogs, maladaptive and ruminative dialogs are mentioned (Oleś et al., 2020; Oleś, 2009). Maladaptive dialogs are treated as undesirable, unpleasant, and burdensome, they make it difficult to focus on the effective implementation of goals and fulfilling life roles. Ruminative dialogs are a dialogical form of rumination with self-blame, discussing the causes of failures, evoking unpleasant contents and experiences as typical elements. They can be used to work through or release unpleasant thoughts and experiences (Oleś et al., 2020; Oleś, 2009). These two types of dialog do not lead to constructive solutions: they can deepen the feeling of guilt, helplessness, incompetence, closing a person in maladaptive thinking patterns. Therefore, when a young person experiences transcendental emptiness, that is, existential difficulties connected with religion, emotional void, feelings of rejection, sadness, sorrow, and intellectual doubts (Nowosielski & Bartczuk, 2017), these two types of dialogs may support these unpleasant states. As we hypothesized that moratorivity, defiance, and diffusion are positively related to deconversion (H2); consequently, we can also hypothesize a positive relationship between these identity modes and transcendental emptiness as a dimension of deconversion. In this context, we pose the fifth hypothesis:

H5. Maladaptive and ruminative dialogs mediate positive relationships between three identity modes: moratorivity, defiance and diffusion, and transcendental emptiness.

Methods

Sample size estimation

The required sample size was estimated a priori using the G-power calculator. We established it on the basis of H2, which we took as the main hypothesis, because it assumes the existence of relationships between the different identity modes and deconversion. Assuming that: H2 is one-tailed and that the hypothesized correlations will be weak (effect size = 0.2), and that type I error (α) is 0.05, and power is 0.95, it was established that the required minimum sample size is 262 people. Our actual sample was greater by 10 people, in case it was necessary to remove outliers from the analyses.

For the remaining analyses, we estimated the *post-hoc* power of the tests, knowing the size of the sample we studied and the size of the effect obtained. *A priori* estimation requires predicting the effect size, which is very difficult when there is no prior research in the area.

Participants

Participants were 272 Polish adolescents[1] aged between 14 and 18 (M = 15.82, SD = 1.19). Women constituted 75.4% of the sample. Among the respondents, 40.8% came from rural areas, 36.4% came from large cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants, and 22.8% came from smaller cities. Participants declared their religious affiliation, religious background, and subjective religiosity. Most participants were Roman Catholics (n = 212, 77.9%). The other religious denominations were as follows: Orthodox (n = 2, 0.7%), Protestant (n = 2, 0.7%), Muslim (n = 2, 0.7%), Pentecostal (n = 1, 0.4%), and Buddhist (n = 1, 0.4%). Twenty-one respondents declared themselves as agnostics (7.7%), 14 (5.1%) as atheists, 5 (1.8%) as others, and 12 (4.4%) did not identify themselves with organized religion. In regard to religious background, most participants were brought up as Roman Catholics (n = 254, 93.4%); the other religious settings were as follows: Orthodoxy (n = 3, 1.1%), Protestantism (n = 2, 0.7%), Greek Catholicism (n = 1, 0.4%), Buddhism (n = 1, 0.4%), other religion (n = 2, 0.7%), atheism (n = 5, 1.8%), and agnosticism (n = 1, 0.4%). Three respondents declared that they were raised outside any religious context (1.1%). The participants had the following attitudes toward religion: 9.9% (n = 27) described themselves as very religious; 32.4% (n = 88) as religious, and 23.5% (n = 64) as rather religious; 15.1% (n = 41) as religiously indifferent; 7.4% (n = 20) as rather non-religious; 7.7% (n = 21) as non-religious; and 4.0% (n = 11) as definitely non-religious. Most of the respondents (n = 206, 75.7%) declared that they had never changed their religion. Among those who changed their religious affiliation, 47 individuals (17.3%) did it once, 15 (5.5%) – a few times, and four respondents (1.5%) – many times. Participants also rated their mother's (M) and father's (F) religious attitudes choosing from the following options: very religious (63 M; 36 F), religious (121 M; 107 F), rather religious (43 M; 61 F), religiously indifferent (26 M; 31 F), rather non-religious (12 M; 14 F), non-religious (4 M; 11 F), and definitely non-religious (3 M; 12 F).

Measures

Participants completed three measures in the order presented below. The procedure was approved by The Research Ethics Committee at the Institute of Psychology at the university of the authors' affiliation.

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[1]It was a different group from the one mentioned in the article by the same authors entitled "Deconversion processes and quality of life among Polish adolescents: The mediating role of social support".

Circumplex Identity Modes Questionnaire (CIMQ)
This measure was developed by Topolewska and Cieciuch ([2017](#)). It consists of 40 items, forming eight subscales, corresponding to the eight modes of identity presented in the Introduction. Each subscale contains five items. The subscales are as follows: (1) Socialization (a sample item: "I have a feeling that I am fulfilling my life roles well."); (2) Consolidation (e.g., "I have a clear idea of my goals, but I am also willing to consider other options."); (3) Exploration (e.g., "When I am not sure what decision to make, I actively search for additional information and evaluate it critically."); (4) Moratorivity (e.g., "I see myself as an enquirer, but I have not yet found my answers."); (5) Defiance (e.g., "I am not sure where I am going in my life."); (6) Diffusion (e.g., "I see myself as a person who adapts to others, even against my own views."); (7) Petrification (e.g., "I do not care about having my own views."); (8) Normativity (e.g., "When making decisions, I primarily rely on the advice of people close to me."). The answers are given on a Likert-like scale ranging from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*very much like me*). The Cronbach's alpha indices calculated for CIMQ in this study are presented in [Table 1](#).

Internal Dialogical Activity Scale-Revised (IDAS-R)
Designed by Oleś ([2020](#),[2009](#); cf. Oleś et al., [2020](#)), it is a 40-item method aimed at measuring eight different kinds of inner dialogs, corresponding to the eight subscales. Each subscale contains 5 items. The answers are given on a Likert-like scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). The subscales are as follows: (1) Identity Dialogs refer to questions and answers about identity, life priorities, and values, and may precede important life choices (a sample item: "Through internal discussions I come to certain truths about my life and myself."); (2) Maladaptive Dialogs are perceived as undesirable, unpleasant, and even irritating, because their content and occurrence may interfere with the performance of tasks or their avoidance (e.g., "The conversations in my mind upset me."); (3) Social Dialogs reflect past and future conversations; they consist in continuing conversation with others, preparing for conversation, ending discussion, or creating alternative conversation scenarios (e.g., "I continue past conversations with other people in my mind."); (4) Supportive Dialogs are conducted with loved ones who give or have given support in the past, they strengthen self-esteem, give a sense of closeness and serve to maintain the bond and overcome loneliness (e.g., "I carry on discussions in my mind with the important people in my life."); (5) Spontaneous Dialogs refer to the spontaneous consideration of different thoughts or opinions, as well as to the dialogical form of self-awareness (e.g., "I talk to myself."); (6) Ruminative Dialogs, which reflect general ruminative tendencies, involve blaming oneself, mulling over failures, and recalling of sad or annoying thoughts or memories (e.g., "After failures, I blame myself in my thoughts."); (7) Confronting Dialogs are conducted between two sides of the self (e.g., "good self" vs. "bad self"), and result in a sense of incoherence, polarization and even fragmentation of the self (e.g., "I argue with that part of myself that I do not like."); (8) Change of Perspective refers to a change in viewpoints in the service of understanding difficult situations or seeking solutions; such dialogs may consist in adopting a fruitful or conflicting perspective of another person (e.g., "When I have a difficult choice, I talk the decision over with myself from different points of view."). The Cronbach's alpha indices calculated for IDAS-R in this study are presented in [Table 1](#).

Adolescent Deconversion Scale (ADS)
The scale was created by Nowosielski and Bartczuk ([2017](#)). Five dimensions of deconversion described by Streib (Streib & Keller, [2004](#); see Introduction) have been used as the basis for defining deconversion processes. These dimensions have been enriched by the dimension of the disorder in personal relationship with God, distinguished by Nowosielski ([2008](#)) on the basis of qualitative research on the religious crisis in adolescence. The ADS consists of five subscales, which measure following processes of deconversion: (1) Abandoning Faith – an intensification of doubts and thoughts of abandoning faith for agnosticism or atheism (6 items, e.g., "I have begun to doubt that God exists"); (2) Withdrawal From the Community – losing the bond with the current group of fellow believers (7 items, e.g., "The religious community (Church) is becoming less and less important to me"); (3) Experiencing Transcendental Emptiness – an intensification of unpleasant emotional states, such as emptiness,

Table 1. Correlation coefficients between study variables, mean scores, standard deviations, and internal consistency.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1 Socializ	—																					
2 Consol	.54***	—																				
3 Expl	.34***	.47***	—																			
4 Morator	-.57***	-.23***	.03	—																		
5 Def	-.72***	-.41***	-.16**	.71***	—																	
6 Diff	-.24***	-.20**	-.01	.31***	.43***	—																
7 Petrif	-.08	-.19***	-.34***	-.08	.12	.32***	—															
8 Norm	.23***	.07	.25***	.01	-.05	.37***	.25***	—														
9 Faith	-.12*	.05	.08	.14*	.13*	.07	-.12	-.25***	—													
10 Commun	-.18**	.08	-.02	.07	.10	.13*	.03	-.26***	.62***	—												
11 Empt	-.23***	-.06	-.04	.22***	.29***	.26***	.10	-.16**	.51***	.49***	—											
12 Moral	-.14*	.07	.08	.17**	.10	.02	-.05	-.26***	.66***	.65***	.48***	—										
13 Behav	-.13*	.09	-.06	.04	.10	.16**	.14*	-.18**	.50***	.83***	.52***	.53***	—									
14 Decon	-.19***	.06	.01	.15*	.17*	.15*	.03	-.27***	.80***	.90***	.71***	.81***	.85***	—								
15 Id	.06	.15*	.29***	.13*	.03	-.01	-.23***	-.03	-.04	.01	.03	.02	.03	.01	—							
16 Maladap	-.17***	-.11	-.06	.21***	.28***	.21***	.12*	.03	.03	.01	.28**	.02	.12	.10	-.11	—						
17 Social	-.19***	-.03	.13*	.30***	.30***	.23***	-.04	.10	.03	.08	.10	.07	.00	.06	.42***	.05	—					
18 Supp	-.23***	-.08	.14*	.33***	.29***	.30***	-.01	.16*	.03	.05	.13*	.05	.04	.07	.39**	.19**	.68**	—				
19 Spont	-.09	.06	.17**	.28*	.28*	.09	-.11	-.01	.01	.02	.10	-.01	.03	.03	.64**	.01	.54**	.50**	—			
20 Rumin	-.34***	-.10	.14*	.44***	.52**	.37**	-.09	.02	.07	.08	.27**	.10	.06	.13*	.38**	.31**	.57**	.63**	.53**	—		
21 Confr	-.19***	-.06	.14*	.34**	.35**	.34**	-.05	.04	.04	.12*	.28**	.07	.12*	.15*	.35**	.36**	.36**	.52**	.43**	.70**	—	
22 Persp	-.18***	-.01	.15*	.30**	.33**	.27**	-.02	.07	.01	.09	.20**	.07	.14*	.12*	.55**	.28**	.54**	.58**	.59**	.67**	.63**	—
M	2.87	3.40	3.61	3.37	2.95	2.44	2.06	2.86	0.66	1.16	0.62	0.95	1.16	0.91	3.03	2.39	3.56	2.82	3.20	3.13	2.52	2.68
SD	0.80	0.69	0.67	0.82	0.95	0.82	0.62	0.73	0.79	0.98	0.67	0.84	0.95	0.69	0.81	0.70	0.94	1.00	1.02	1.01	0.93	0.87
α	.73	.63	.66	.76	.81	.74	.49	.64	.86	.87	.80	.85	.85	.94	.74	.62	.78	.78	.82	.81	.77	.71

Note. Socializ – Socialization; Consol – Consolidation; Expl – Exploration; Morator – Moratorivity; Def – Defiance; Diff – Diffusion; Petrif – Petrification; Norm – Normativity; Faith – Faith Abandonment; Commun – Withdrawal from the Community; Empt – Transcendental Emptiness; Moral – Moral Criticism; Behav – Deconversion Behavior; Id – Identity Dialogs; Maladap – Maladaptive Dialogs; Social – Social Dialogs; Supp – Supportive Dialogs; Spont – Spontaneous Dialogs; Rumin – Ruminative Dialogs; Confr – Confronting Dialogs; Persp – Perspective-Changing Dialogs. *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

feelings of rejection, sadness, sorrow, and existential difficulties related to religion (6 items, e.g., "I have begun to experience emptiness in my religious life"); (4) Moral Criticism – a rejection of the moral principles taught by religion (4 items, e.g., "I cease to understand why – according to religion – I cannot live the way I want to"); (5) Deconversion Behavior – the progressive neglect or omission of religious activities (5 items, e.g., "I rarely attend religious/spiritual services"). The answers are given on a Likert-like scale ranging from 0 (*completely untrue about me*) to 3 (*very true about me*). The participants were asked to take into account the period of the last 12 months, when assessing the changes in their religiosity. The Cronbach's alpha indices calculated for ADS in this study are presented in Table 1.

Statistical analysis

All the moderation and mediation analyses were performed using PROCESS, models 1 and 4, respectively (Hayes, 2018). The significance of indirect effects was tested using the bootstrapping procedure. Indirect effects were computed for each of the 5,000 bootstrapped samples and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals were computed. Other analyses were performed using SPSS v.24.

Results

First, we calculated the coefficients of kurtosis and skewness and applied the Shapiro–Wilk test with Lilliefors correction to each construct. These analyses indicated that the distributions of scores for the ADS subscales were slightly positively skewed (from 0.38 to 1.28). The distribution of scores for the five CIMQ subscales (socialization, consolidation, exploration, moratorivity, and normativity) were slightly negatively skewed (from −0.48 to −0.04) and for further three subscales (defiance, diffusion, and petrification) were positively skewed (from 0.10 to 0.38). Four IDAS-R subscales (identity, social, spontaneous, and ruminative dialogs) were negatively skewed (from −0.45 to −0.06) and further four subscales (maladaptive, supportive, confronting, and perspective-changing dialogs) were positively skewed (from 0.07 to 0.47). All coefficients of skewness were in the range from −0.48 to 1.28, indicating that the skewness was not great enough to threaten the validity of further analyses and could be ignored.

In response to our first question, we hypothesized (H1) that withdrawal from the community and deconversion behavior are the most intensively experienced dimensions of deconversion in the group of adolescents. In order to verify H1, we conducted one-way repeated-measures ANOVA, which confirmed that the scores on ADS subscales differed significantly across the ADS subscales (F(4, 268) = 40.44, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$). Given our sample size ($N = 272$) and the effect size actually obtained, the post-hoc power of the test was estimated to be 1.00. The Bonferroni-corrected comparisons showed that withdrawal from the community and deconversion behavior scores were the highest in the sample and they differed significantly ($p < .001$) from all other subscales and did not differ from each other, thus H1 was fully confirmed.

Referring to our second question, we hypothesized (H2) that moratorivity, defiance, and diffusion are positively related to deconversion, whereas consolidation, socialization, and normativity are negatively related to deconversion. To verify H2 Pearson bivariate correlations were calculated (Table 1). As we expected, moratorivity ($r = .15$, $p < .05$), defiance ($r = .17$, $p < .01$), and diffusion ($r = .15$, $p < .05$) were positively although weak related to the general score of deconversion. Socialization ($r = −.19$, $p < .01$) and normativity ($r = −.27$, $p < .001$) were negatively related to deconversion. Contrary to our expectations consolidation was not related to deconversion ($r = .06$, $p = .296$). Thus, H2 was confirmed for all subscales except consolidation.

In order to answer our third question, we posed three hypotheses (H3-H5). H3 was verified using two moderation analyses. It was hypothesized that negative link between normativity and deconversion is moderated by religiousness of parents: the relationship was to be significant in the group of

adolescents who assess their mother/father as a religious person. Participants rated their parents' religious attitudes. In this analysis, we adopted a binary moderator. Parents assessed as at least religious (i.e. religious and very religious) constituted the Highly Religious group, and the remaining parents – the Low Religious group.

The first moderation analysis revealed a significant interaction effect of normativity and mother's religiosity in relation to general score of deconversion ($b = -.34$, $p = .008$, 95% CI = $-.596$ to $-.091$, $R^2 = .11$) (Figure 1 A). Given our sample size and the effect size actually obtained, the post-hoc power of the test was estimated to be 0.99. It was found that in the group of Highly Religious Mothers ($n = 184$) the relationship between normativity and deconversion was negative and significant ($b = -.33$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = $-.455$ to $-.204$); whereas in the group of Low Religious Mothers ($n = 88$) this relationship was insignificant ($b = .01$, $p = .900$, 95% CI = $-.205$ to $.233$).

In the second moderation analysis the interaction effect of normativity and father's religiosity in relation to general score of deconversion was revealed only on the level of tendency ($b = -.20$, $p = .084$, 90% CI = $-.382$ to $-.010$, $R^2 = .10$) (Figure 1 B). Given our sample size and the effect size actually obtained, the post-hoc power of the test was estimated to be 0.99. It was found that in the group of Highly Religious Fathers ($n = 143$) the relationship between normativity and deconversion was negative and significant ($b = -.33$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = $-.473$ to $-.182$); whereas in the group of Low Religious Fathers ($n = 129$) this relationship was insignificant ($b = -.13$, $p = .124$, 95% CI = $-.300$ to $.036$). Thus, H3 was supported on the level of tendency in the case of father's religiosity and fully supported in the case of mother's religiosity.

H4 was also verified using moderation analyses. It was hypothesized that negative relationship between normativity and deconversion is moderated by identity internal dialog. We expected that with the high frequency of these dialogs, the relationship loses its significance because identity dialogs foster youth's reflection on their own value system and its correspondence with religion. First, moderation analysis was performed with the general deconversion score as the dependent variable. This analysis did not confirm the significance of the interaction effect of normativity and identity dialogs in predicting deconversion ($b = .09$, $p = .175$, 95% CI = $-.042$ to $.227$, $R^2 = .08$). Then, five moderation analyses were conducted in which subsequent dimensions of deconversion were tested as dependent variables. These moderation analyses confirmed a significant interaction effect of normativity and identity dialogs in relation to abandoning faith ($b = .16$, $p = .041$, 95% CI = $.006$ to $.313$, $R^2 = .08$). Given our sample size and the effect size actually obtained, the post-hoc power of the test was estimated to be 0.99. The strength of the relationship was as follows: for a high level ($+1SD$ from M) of identity dialogs $b = -.16$, $p = .066$, 95% CI = $-.326$ to $.011$, for an average level (M) of identity dialogs $b = -.29$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = $-.412$ to $-.160$, and for a low level ($-1SD$ from M) of identity dialogs $b = -.42$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = $-.599$ to $-.230$. To summarize, the lower the level of identity dialogs, the stronger the negative relationship between normativity and abandoning faith (Figure 1 C). At high level of identity dialogs this relationship is insignificant.

According to H5, maladaptive and ruminative dialogs mediate positive relationships between three identity modes: moratorivity, defiance and diffusion, and transcendental emptiness. Figure 2 shows the conceptual mediation model. In order to verify H5, we conducted three mediation analyses. In each of them one of the above-mentioned identity modes (moratorivity, defiance or diffusion) was tested as a predictor of transcendental emptiness, whereas maladaptive and ruminative dialogs were tested as parallel mediators in these relationships. The multicollinearity problem was not identified in our models: the lowest tolerance index was 0.70 and the highest variance inflation factor (VIF) was 1.40. The results of the mediation analyses are presented in Table 2. Given our sample size and the effect size actually obtained, the post-hoc power of the tests were estimated to be 0.90, 0.99, and 0.97 for moratorivity, defiance, and diffusion, respectively. It transpired that moratorivity and diffusion were related to the higher level of maladaptive and ruminative dialogs, which were related to the stronger transcendental emptiness. A similar pattern was observed in the relationship between
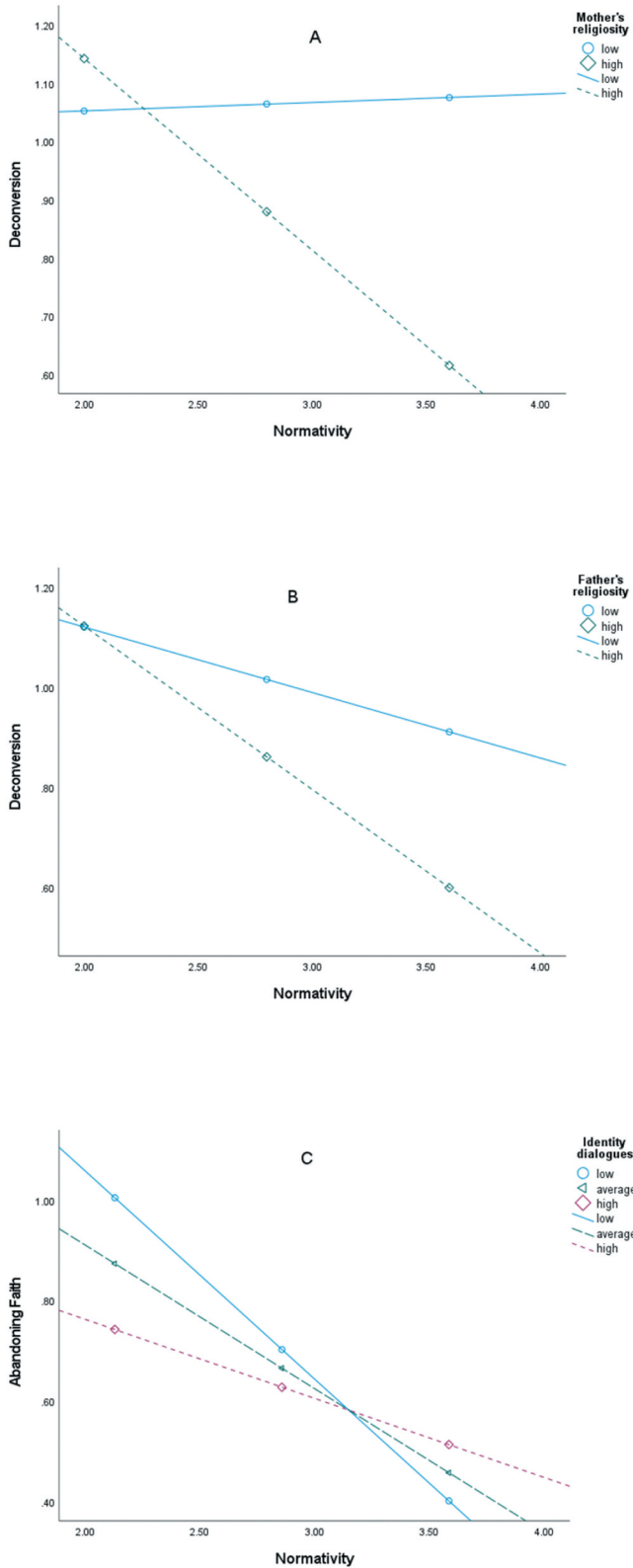
Figure 1. Simple slopes of normativity predicting deconversion for low and high level of mother's (A) and father's (B) religiosity; Simple slopes of normativity predicting abandoning faith for low (−1*SD* from *M*), average (*M*), and high (+1*SD* from *M*) level of identity dialogs (C).
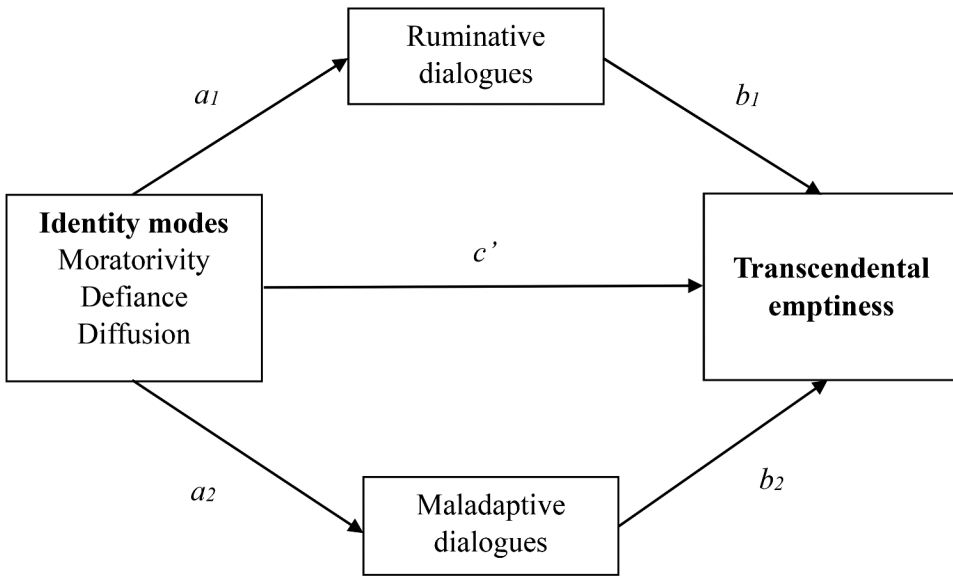
Figure 2. The conceptual model of how internal dialogs can mediate the effect of identity formation modes on transcendental emptiness. c' – direct effect of the predictor on the outcome while controlling for the mediator; a_1, a_2 – effects of the predictor on the mediator; b_1, b_2 – effects of the mediator on the outcome.

Table 2. Outcomes of mediation analyses from identity modes to experiencing transcendental emptiness assessing indirect effects of internal dialogs.

						95% CI	
Model	R^2	c'	a	b	ab	Lower	Upper
MOR–MAL–ETE	.05***	.11^	.21***	.21***	.04	.013	.084
MOR–RUM–ETE	.05***	.11^	.44***	.16*	.07	.009	.125
DEF–MAL–ETE	.09***	.18**	.28***	.20***	.06	.019	.102
DEF–RUM–ETE	.09***	.18**	.52***	.12^	.06	−.005	.131
DIF–MAL–ETE	.07***	.16**	.21***	.20***	.04	.013	.084
DIF–RUM–ETE	.07***	.16**	.37***	.15*	.05	.010	.107

MOR – moratorivity; DEF – defiance; DIF – diffusion; ETE – experiencing transcendental emptiness; MAL – maladaptive dialogs; RUM – ruminative dialogs; c' = standardized direct effect of predictor on outcome while controlling for the mediators; a = standardized effect of the predictor on the mediator; b = standardized effect of the mediator on the outcome; ab = standardized indirect effect of predictor on outcome through the mediator; R^2 = amount of variance explained by the model; CI = confidence intervals;
^$p < .10$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

defiance and transcendental emptiness, however here only maladaptive dialogs act as a mediator. Thus, H5 was partially confirmed. It should be added that two alternative models were tested as well. In each of them one of the above-mentioned internal dialogs (maladaptive or ruminative) was tested as a predictor of transcendental emptiness, whereas identity modes (moratorivity, defiance or diffusion) were tested as parallel mediators. It turned out that only diffusion acts as a mediator in these relationships; however, the standardized indirect effects of predictor on outcome through the mediator were weaker ($ab = .03$ for maladaptive dialogs; $ab = .05$ for ruminative dialogs) than in the models we hypothesized.

Discussion

The aim of the research was to analyze the phenomenon of deconversion and its connections with the processes of identity formation as well as mediators and moderators of these relationships. H1 assumed that withdrawal from the community and deconversion behavior are the most intensively

experienced dimensions of deconversion in the group of adolescents. The hypothesis was confirmed. The result is consistent with the report prepared in 2018 by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) in Poland. It shows a decline in the level of participation of Polish youth in religious practices, such as mass, religious class, religious services, or religious meeting. In line with our findings are also results of studies conducted in other countries. They show that in a period of the transition to adulthood about 20% of people declare a change of religious affiliation and a significant decline in intensity of religious identity; however, even 60–70% of young adults, beginning with the high-school years, report a decrease in religious involvement, including attendance at a place of worship and participation in other organized religious activities (Uecker et al., 2007). This decline is pervasive and characteristic of all demographic groups and religious affiliation (Wink et al., 2019). In this context it should be emphasized that adolescents strive to make sense of the world and to assert their own place in it. Religion can play a vital role in searching for meaning of life and the process of identity cohesion that are crucial to adolescent development (King & Furrow, 2004; King et al., 2013). Therefore, when religion ceases to answer the question of meaning, young people uncompromisingly turn away from religion, as can be seen most in the behavioral indicators of deconversion observed by us.

H2 assumed the connection of identity modes with deconversion. It was confirmed that moratorivity, defiance, and diffusionwere positively related to deconversion. These correlations were very weak but significant. We also hypothesized that consolidation, socialization, and normativity were negatively related to deconversion. Our study did not confirmed at all significant correlation between consolidation and deconversion. The strongest, though weak, negative correlation was found in the case of deconversion and normativity. A very weak but significant negative correlation was also found between deconversion and socialization. It is worth recalling that Cieciuch and Topolewska (2017) propose eight identity modes arranged around a circumplex, which is structured by two axes. The first one, Exploration vs. Petrification, corresponds to the personality metatrait of Plasticity, whereas the second axis, Socialization vs. Defiance, corresponds to the personality metatrait of Stability (DeYoung et al., 2002). Consolidation is located in the circumplex between socialization (high Stability) and exploration (high Plasticity), whereas normativity is located between socialization (high Stability) and petrification (low Plasticity). Thus, normativity is the most "stable" mode among those three which were hypothesized to be negatively correlated with deconversion, and consolidation is the least "stable." This can explain the fact that people in normativity and socialization mode do not have the tendency to abandon the religion, which cannot be excluded in consolidation mode. As moratorivity, defiance, and diffusion are "not stable" modes, they can have inclination to abandon the religion transferred by parents and look for another religion. This seems to be reflected in our findings.

Verification of H3 allowed to state that the identity mode of normativity may be a "protective factor against deconversion," but only when the parents are religious. Normativity is the mode of identity that is based mainly on expectations of parents. If mother and father are religious people and religion is important to them, their adolescent in normativity mode will be willing to follow their religious commitment. Therefore, such teenager's attitude toward deconversion should be negative, which was observed in our results. If the parents are not especially religious, they probably do not expect a religious worldview from their child. They may describe themselves as Catholic, as most people in Poland, but their expectation toward offspring do not concern the religion. Thus, remaining or abandoning the religion of parents will depend more on personal choice of the teenager. This seems to be reflected in our results as the lack of connection between normativity and deconversion, when parents present low religiousness. Some studies are consistent with this line of thinking, although contrary to our study, they do not consider identity modes. For example, Dillon and Wink (2007) and Leonard et al. (2013) showed that religiousness of parents is a significant predictor of their offspring's religiousness. Similarly, Hardy et al. (2011) found that family religiousness positively predicted individual religiousness and spirituality. Other studies show that family formation is related to increased religious participation (Myers, 1996; Stolzenberg et al., 1995); however, according to

Chaves (2011), it is particularly true of "traditional families" with two parents and children. As H3 was supported on the level of tendency in the case of father's religiosity and fully supported in the case of mother's religiosity, our outcomes suggest that mother may play a more important role than father in preventing the deconversion of an adolescent who is in normativity mode. How this can be explain? Many studies in this area have emphasized that early attachment of a child is of utmost importance in predicting children's religiousness (Boyatzis et al., 2006; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2003; Hardy et al., 2011; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). The main assumption of attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 2015; Bowlby, 1991) is that the mother–child interaction can be a model and a cognitive representation for all later relationships and behaviors, including the relationship with God. We are aware that in most research on religiousness the mother–child interaction has been interpreted as the parent–child interaction, however the crucial role of the mother, emphasized by the attachment theory authors, can find its manifestation in our above-mentioned findings. It is worth emphasizing that our other study on deconversion among adolescents (Łysiak et al., 2020) seems to confirm this reasoning, namely: one of two negative predictors of deconversion was mother's (but not father's) care, apart from friend support.

H4 assumed that negative relationship between normativity and deconversion is moderated by identity internal dialogs. The hypothesis has been confirmed only in regard to the dimension of abandoning faith. With low and medium (average) intensity of identity dialogs, the relationship between normativity and abandoning faith was negative, whereas with high intensity of these dialogs the link lost its significance. However, one should not think that identity dialogs are always contrary to religion or faith. Puchalska-Wasyl and Zarzycka (2020) found that identity dialogs correlate positively with upward prayer focused on the human–divine relationship, as opposed to inward prayer focused on self-examination, and outward prayer focused on strengthening human–human connections (Ladd, 2017; Ladd & Spilka, 2006). Additionally, identity dialogs act as mediators in a positive relationship between upward prayer and well-being. The essence of identity dialogs is seeking answers to questions about one's own identity, life values and preferences, and the meaning of life. Such dialogs are used to search for and strengthen authenticity and may precede important life decisions (Oleś et al., 2020; Oleś, 2009). In this context, the obtained result becomes understandable. Normativity is related to forming the identity structure based on the expectations of significant others. These expectations are usually adopted uncritically (Cieciuch & Topolewska, 2017). Therefore, one can assume that religiousness is also adopted in the same way, without being evaluated. If a young person, conducting internal identity dialogs, begins to intensely ask about his/her own values and meaning of life, he/she may sometimes decide to abandon religion passed on by his/her parents in order to replace it with something that better meets the real needs of the adolescent.

According to H5 maladaptive and ruminative dialogs mediate relationships between three identity modes: moratorivity, defiance and diffusion, and experiencing transcendental emptiness. The hypothesis was fully confirmed in regard to moratorivity and diffusion, while partially confirmed in regard to defiance. In the latter case, only maladaptive dialogs mediated the relationship with experiencing transcendental emptiness. Ruminative dialogs, which are a dialogical form of rumination, consist in self-blame and recalling unpleasant content and experiences (Oleś et al., 2020; Oleś, 2009). Additionally, Zarzycka and Puchalska-Wasyl (2020) showed that ruminative dialogs mediate the relationship between religious struggle and well-being, contributing to the reduction of well-being. It is understandable, then, that these dialogs may be conducive to experiencing transcendental emptiness. Maladaptive dialogs are also undesirable and burdensome, because they hinder effective realization of aspirations and life roles (Oleś et al., 2020; Oleś, 2009). These two types of dialogs do not lead to constructive solutions, but rather deepen feelings of guilt, incompetence and helplessness. Therefore, if a young person experiences transcendental emptiness, these dialogs may foster it, which seems to be reflected in our findings.

Limitations

Our study has some shortcomings. First, a phenomenon of deconversion was examined in a Polish culture that is highly homogeneous in terms of religion, almost exclusively Catholic. Given this, deconversion in Poland seems to be more difficult decision in comparison with countries where deconverts can choose between different religious options. This fact makes this study heavily culturally linked and to a certain degree reduces the possibilities for generalization of the results. Second, our sample was dominated not only by Polish Roman Catholics, but also by teenage women. It was taken from a limited number of high schools, from one country. Therefore, our findings need replication in gender-balanced samples with inclusion of people of different schools, countries, and religious backgrounds. Third, the measures used in the present study were based on self-reports, and the response bias could not be controlled. It would be beneficial for further research to go beyond self-report and include qualitative data. Fourth, based on cross-sectional data we sometimes suggested a causal pattern that can only be established with longitudinal or experimental data. Thus, in future research it would be advisable to employ a longitudinal design, which will take into account the stages of adolescence in order to examine how identity modes and deconversion processes change over time.

Consent to participate

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethical approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The Research Ethics Committee at the Institute of Psychology, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, approved the study (KEBN_44/2020).

Data availability statement

The data described in this article are openly available in the Open Science Framework at http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12153/1491

Open scholarship

This article has earned the Center for Open Science badge for Open Data. The data are openly accessible at http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12153/1491.

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