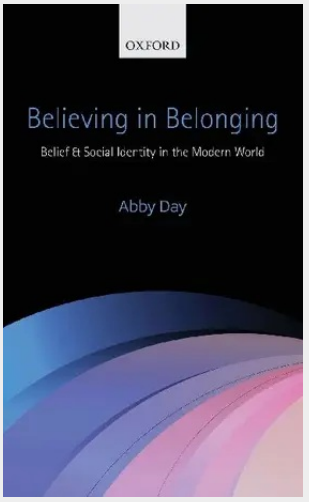
Day

Believing in Belonging

Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World



The first work to analyse and synthesise anthropological and sociological understandings of belief The first work to offer a qualitative critique of the religious question on the national UK census Makes cross-cultural comparisons of belief in European and American societies Pilots a unique method of researching religion without asking religious questions Provides a new response to Grace Davie's 'believing without belonging' theory, one of the most accepted theories within the sociology of religion worldwide Believing in Belonging draws on empirical research exploring mainstream religious belief and identity in Euro-American countries. Starting from a qualitative study based in northern England, and then broadening the data to include other parts of Europe and North America, Abby Day explores how people 'believe in belonging', choosing religious identifications to complement other social and emotional experiences of 'belongings'. The concept of 'performative belief' helps explain how otherwise non-religious people can bring into being a Christian identity related to social belongings. What is often dismissed as 'nominal' religious affiliation is far from an empty category, but one loaded with cultural 'stuff' and meaning. Day introduces an original typology of natal, ethnic and aspirational nominalism that challenges established disciplinary theory in both the European and North American schools of the sociology of religion that assert that most people are 'unchurched' or 'believe without belonging' while privately maintaining beliefs in God and other 'spiritual' phenomena. This study provides a unique analysis and synthesis of anthropological and sociological understandings of belief and proposes a holistic, organic, multidimensional analytical framework to allow rich cross cultural comparisons. Chapters focus in particular on: the genealogies of 'belief' in anthropology and sociology, methods for researching belief without asking religious questions, the acts of claiming cultural identity, youth, gender, the 'social' supernatural, fate and agency, morality and a development of anthropocentric and theocentric orientations that provides a richer understanding of belief than conventional religious/secular distinctions.

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