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'It's as if I am torn into lots of pieces and although all of it is me, none of it is': religious students stories of not belonging on campus (0047)

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This paper draws attention to the experiences of religious students to build on Clegg's elucidation of the ways in which higher education discursively privileges rationality over emotion. Drawing on the concept of belonging, the paper highlights how the lack of recognition of religion on the secular campus not only results in feelings of isolation, rejection and disappointment amongst religious students but also produce and reproduces privilege and disadvantage.

Belonging is a multifaceted concept. At the individual level 'belonging' relates to feelings of connectedness, an impulse for 'some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being' (Probyn 1996, p. 19). Baumeister and Leary's (1995) 'belongingness hypothesis' posits that human beings have a persistent urge to form and maintain positive and significant interpersonal relationships. The need for belongingness, however, is more than the need for simple social contact. Rather there is 'a need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with a few other people... in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare' (p. 497). Through active processes of social contact and interaction we develop shared understandings of who 'we' are (Butler, 1993; Bell, 1999; Fortier, 2001). In other words, a self is only achievable through society, through other people, including though 'mattering', that is ' the feeling of counting for others, being important for them, and therefore oneself and finding in the permanent plebiscite of testimonies of interest – requests, expectations, invitations – a kind of justification for existing' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 240).

Belongingness is also rooted in time, place and space. For Miller (2002) such 'ontological belonging' is 'a sense of ease or accord with who we are in ourselves [and] a sense of accord with the various physical and social contexts in which our lives are lived out' (p. 220). The intense and enduring need for belonging can help to explain why individuals and groups behave in particular ways, for example joining clubs and societies, as well as the motivational processes that inform such behaviours – to join or not to join. Belonging, in effect, can be seen to arise from everyday practices and events (Probyn 1996) within specific social milieu.

Belongingness is temporal and fluid, dynamic and complex. Individuals may fit in seamlessly in one milieu only to struggle to find a place, space and sense of connectedness within another. Individuals need to keep creating and re-creating a sense of belonging and connectedness with the world around them (Savage et al., 2005; Fortier, 2001). In addition, belonging is not an automatic outcome of, for example, long-term residence, nor is it stable. Rather it can be a restless process 'in-between being and longing' (Probyn, 1996, p. 35) with many individuals 'caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state' (Probyn 1996, p. 19).

The emotional and social consequences of a failure to belong are well documented and can include feelings of social isolation, alienation, and loneliness and, subsequently, increases in anxiety and depression, and decreases in cooperation and self-control (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Research studies exploring student belonging in higher education have found similar social and psychological consequences for those who struggle to fit in (Read et al, 2003; Reay et al, 2010).

There is, however, a prevailing presumption, amongst (some) higher education academics and policy makers, that belonging and fitting-in in higher education (or, conversely, exclusion, rejection and 'othering') relates solely to gender (women), race (non-white), age (mature learners), class (working-class) and, to some extent, disability, and that outside of this there is uniaxiality of experience of everyone else. Where research into belonging in higher education has been conducted it has focussed almost exclusively on these social groups. This is a serious omission, however, since for many students religion is one of the strongest aspects of identity and of more importance to certain groups than any other aspect of identity, including gender, class and ethnicity.

The overall absence of studies in to the experiences of religious students means, however, that academics know little about whether, in an apparent age of 'secularity', religion and higher education are at odds with each other or how this plays out within the lives of religious students in 'secular' institutions; they know little about how these students are accepted, or not, by their non-religious peers, how they do, or do not develop a sense of belonging and the consequences for those who for who belonging remains 'in-between being and longing'. In addition, academics and policy makers also know little about how specific institutional contexts interact with the religious activities of such students and the effect this may have in terms of organisational policy and practice

The paper focuses on the social and academic experiences of Christian, Sikh, Muslim and Jewish students studying in one UK higher education institution. Through their stories the paper highlights the critical events that inform a sense of belonging or 'otherness'; the places/spaces/people that are of most significance and how religion helps to build, or work against, belonging or 'otherness'; the strategies the students adopt to develop a sense of belonging on campus or elsewhere, including 'passing' as non-religious; the emotions generated during these struggles to belong (amongst both staff and students); and the emotional consequences of a lack of belongingness. The paper concludes by drawing attention to the ways in which the institutional lack of recognition, disregard for, or blocking off of emotion not only delegitimizes the students need for belonging but colludes in privileging reason over emotion.

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