

**Believing in Connected Selves:
how young people are shaping religion
in London & the world**



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Theme



What does it mean, for young adults today, to believe? How do they talk about that? How does that differ from oldest generation?

How does it matter?

Youth of Today (and tomorrow)



- **Disadvantaged for the age of austerity (age of neoliberalism)**
- **Tough times for young people, other vulnerable people**

Young People?



- **Comparative term**
- **In relation to....**
- **Generation X, Y, Z, 'Millenials', Digital**

Ten year UK study



Young people: Secondary school: Year 10+

University students

Early career

UK - Longitudinal 2002 – 2012 c. 250 ‘participants’

Egypt & Tunisia



January, February, March 2012

- 64 ‘young people’; interviews and focus groups in Egypt
- Small workshop in UK

informal discussions. Skype, email since.

Cross cultural comparison



- **Small towns in rural England**
- **UK cities**
- **Large cities in Egypt (Cairo and Qena)**
- **Three generations**

UK Longitudinal 2002-2012



**C. 250 participants; 68 interviews N England, 25
'young'**

Age 14-83, M/F, socio-economic mix

**Non religious questions: narratives revealed
'believe in belonging'**

**Religious identifications complement other social
and emotional experiences of relatedness**

Qualitative only



- Large surveys too clumsy
- Asking a stupid question once is bad enough: asking it 10,000 times does not make it a better question

‘ordinary god’ (Abercrombie et al. master’s research)

Why is this important?



- **Religion is an important social force**
 - Harmony
 - Chaos
 - Cohesion
 - Division
 - Wars
 - Peace



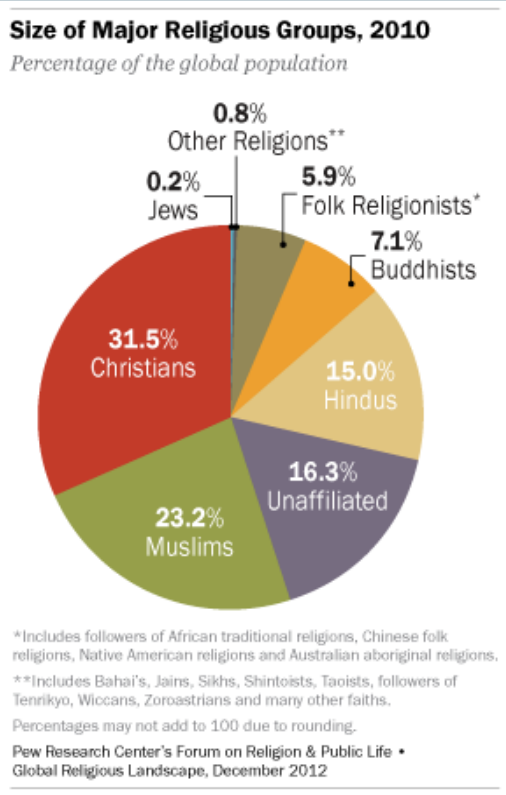
Donald Trump called for a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims” entering the U.S. until the country “can figure out what is going on.”

⋮ Generational Shifts



- Billions of people around the world are religious, with many adhering to their faith's key tenets and rituals.
- Christianity is declining in Euro-American countries.
- Biggest growth in UK is 'no religion'.
- Generational shifts favour young

Pew Research Centre



What's going on...



Requires a sociological imagination:

- Answers questions
- Provides insights
- May predict future actions
- May influence policy

C. Wright Mills: The Sociological Imagination:



‘The sociological imagination enables us to grasp

**history and biography and the relation
between the two**

within society. That is its task and promise.’

Looking at religion sociologically:



Tracing and grasping that essential relationship between

- History
- Biography
- Beyond personal experience (eg. Psychology)
- Structural changes
- Institutional changes

How do we do that?



- **Observe - that's interesting!**
- **Research – what's going on?**
- **Identify issues – seems to be about...**
- **Apply/generate theory - this may explain it!**

Example:



- Observe – Catholic priest comes out as gay. This is against Catholic teachings. He's fired.

Polish priest Krzysztof Charamsa (left) (AFP/Getty Images)



Sociological response:



Research - history of Catholic position, response; interviews, survey.

- **Issues – lack of change (compare, for example, American Episcopal church with gay bishops); changing demography of church (aging profile)**
- **Theory – gender and sexuality, institutional power.**

Seeking theory:



- Theory is:

‘an explanatory scheme comprised of a set of concepts related to each other through logical connectivity.’

M.Birk & J. Mills (2011) *Grounded Theory*, London: Sage, p.113.

What is religion?



- **In pairs/trios ...**
- **Come up with a definition.... 5 minutes**

Sociologically...



- We want to know how people define religion themselves
- ... and why
- It is a social process - whether or not God exists (not a sociological question)
- And usually study it through three Bs.

Three Bs:



- **Belief**
- **Belonging**
- **Behaviours**

Some classic definitions



- **E. Durkheim: A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.**
- **William James: "the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto."**

More classic definitions



- **Bronislaw Malinowski:** "relieves anxiety and enhances social integration."
- **Karl Marx:** "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."
- **E.B. Tylor.** 'belief in spiritual beings.'

More definitions



- **C. Geertz:**

A religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."

Substantive v functional Definitions



- What religion **is** (God, the holy, karma)
- What religion **does** (gives meaning, creates social cohesion)

Probing beliefs



What is important to young people?

- Good family/social relations

- Securing a good education/job

Long-term relationships



- **Grandma watching over...**
- **Brother watching over...**
- **Not afraid of death**

Notes from Egypt



3rd year female Law student:

‘I want to make my father and mother happy, satisfied with me’

3rd year female Medical student:

‘By doing my best every day, to have friends and a family who like you, to have great teachers’.

Family transmission



UK – parents/grandparents, so-called ‘gangs’, 3rd generation,

Egypt – many ‘activists’, 3rd generation (Israel, Palestine, Iraq)

Egypt chants



**‘We’re your sons and daughters too –
What we’re doing is for you’**

Egyptian question



Young people asked:

What is my contribution to civil society?

How can I do it?

Belief narratives: stories we tell



- Polyvocal - 'fishing'
- Interdependent
- Emotionally-charged
- Stories of belonging

Wider large studies



Smith and Denton 2005) Clydesdale 2007; Mason et al. 2007;

Savage et al. 2006;

They found young people derive meaning, happiness and moral frameworks from social relationships, not religion.

Believing in belonging PhD: 2002-2006



- **2001 UK Census: 72% “Christian’ in an apparently secular country**
- **narratives revealed ‘believe in belonging’**
- **choosing religious identifications to complement other social and emotional experiences of relatedness**

Is there a problem with social reliance?



Smith, Savage et al. Mason:

They argued that was a problem.


I suggested it was an opportunity (Day 2010).

Testing: Return to the field

- **First explored as a ‘snapshot’ during my doctoral research in 2003/4 ; North Yorkshire UK**
- **Some were as young as 14 and as old as 83.**
- **Originally 68 interviews: targeting 30-50**
- **Five case studies**

Rapid changes

- **Rapid life transitions – rapid societal transitions**

- 
- Adolescence to adulthood
 - Leaving home
 - University
 - Careers
 - Families
 - Arrests
 - Generational conflicts

Gemma, 14:



- **A:** Some people have pretty strong ideas about what they think might be good, bad or wrong or right or good or evil. Do you have any views about that?
- **J:** Um. Just like, always being nice to people. Stuff like that.

Gemma, 20:



“I don’t think much has changed like. I don’t know. I think I’m a bit of a nicer person now cos I was a bit of a cow when I was in year ten. . . Bit of a stresshead. I can still be like that with my mum (*laughs*). But I’m not like that with anyone else anymore. But I were.. I could be back then. Bit naughty sometimes. Played up a bit. But I’m alright now. I’ve grown out of it: grown up.

UK young generation



Less religious (Christian) than parents:

- Higher numbers of atheists
- Lower confirmations
- Decreased church attendance
- Less belief in God

Cultural change?



- **Decreasing religiosity**
- **Decreasing nationalism amongst young people (Tilley and Heath 2007)**
- **Decreasing racism - improved education, increased social diversity, general societal discouragement of racist discourse (Ford 2008).**

Main finding from longitudinal research



- Religious or non-religious beliefs stable over time
- Beliefs and practices changed only with significant social change
- Social relationships sufficient: no ‘grand search for meaning’...no ‘existential crisis’

What is belief?



Belief creates boundaries

Analytical belief model: Holistic and dynamic



Content

Sources

Practices

Salience

Function

Time

Place

UK Youth



Compared to older generation:

Less: religious, nationalistic, racist, paternalistic.

More: belief in social relations, social media.

Meaning of belief



Needham (1972) on belief - belief too narrow, too Christian, not cross cultural

Ruel (1982) faith is preferable term, more inclusive

Anticipates Asad (1993) what is religious varies by time and place – according to what is ‘authorised’

Day 2011/2013: Belief is relational



- **‘I believe’ – statement of identity.**
- **Beyond, or against, evidence: ‘I believe’.**
- **Belief creates a boundary as it marks territories of identity.**

Young people believe in:



Family and friends: intimate social relations

Legitimate authority

Mediated through social rather than 'official'

Right to have a voice

Right to belong

What do you think?



- **Small groups**
- **Consider each point**
- **20 minutes**

Question



- **What do young people ‘believe in’?**
- **How do you know?**

Social relations



Myth of 'individualization': UK and Egypt

Social relations take precedence over individualism (a cultural and academic 'trope' in Euro American countries)

Respect for 'legitimate' authority



**UK and Egypt: Not 'anti-authority', respect for family,
good teachers, good role models**

Beliefs remarkably consistent over time



Change occurs via social relations

Religion is a sub set of belief

Belief is generational and global

Multidimensional

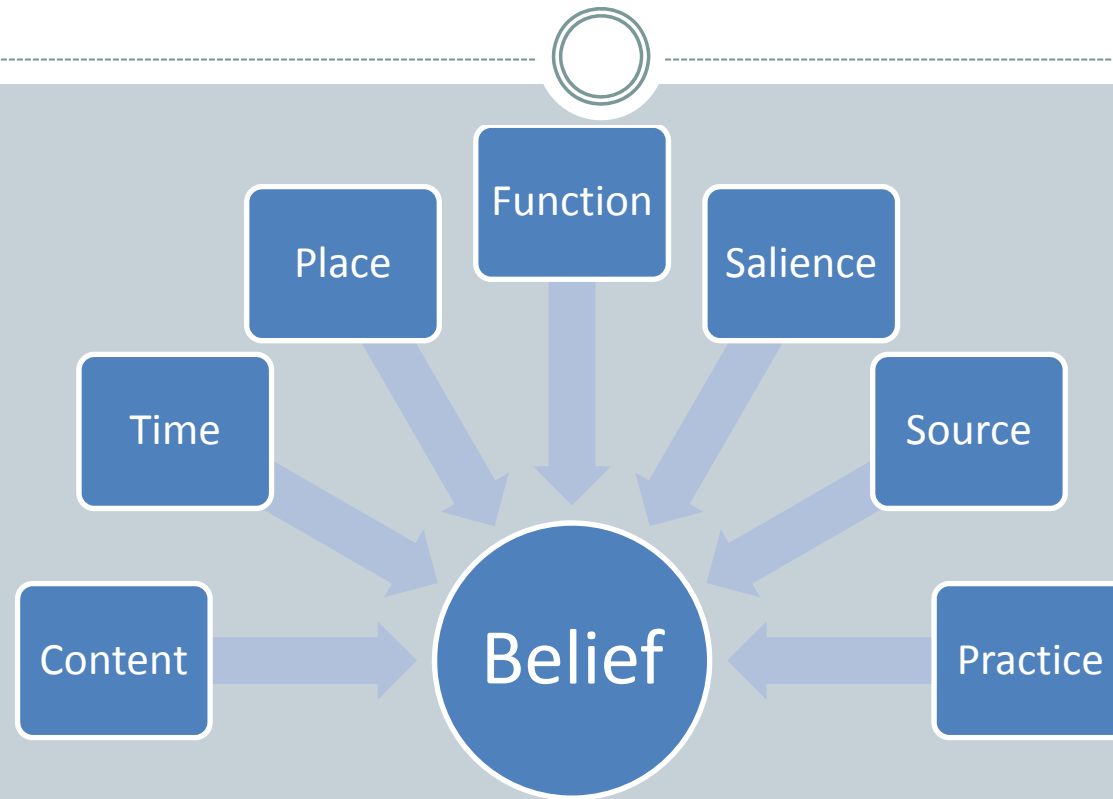


Figure 1: Belief: A multidimensional model

Trinity of Belief: a typology

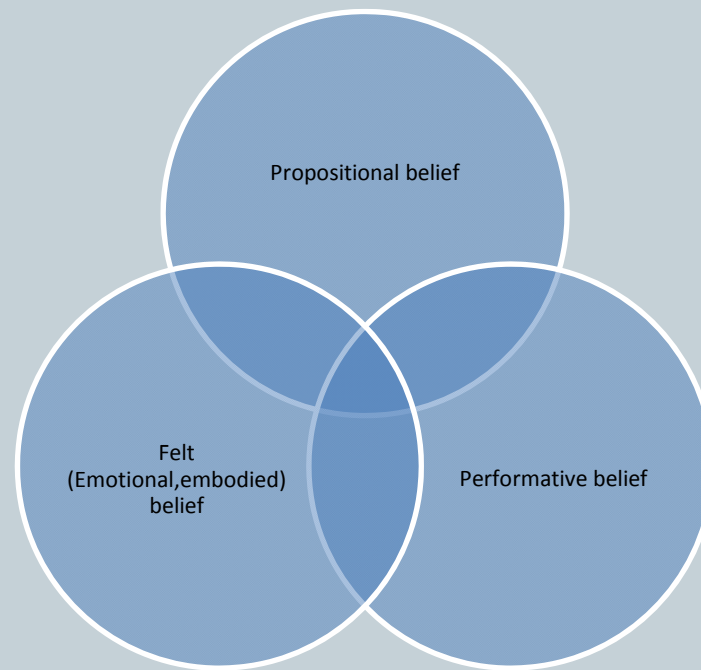


Figure 2: A typology of belief

Belief does:



‘Belief’ has more explanatory and analytical purchase than ‘religion’

Creates and marks boundaries

Intersects with politics, culture, law etc.

Unbelieving Christian



- A: What do you believe in?
- J: Nowt. (*nothing*)
- A: Sorry?
- J: I don't believe in owt (*anything*). I don't believe in any religions.
- A: You don't believe in any religions.
- J: No. I'm Christian but I don't believe in owt. (Jordan 14)

What is your religion?



- 'I am Abdul; I am 11 years old; I have a mum and a dad and two brothers; I am a Muslim.'
- Another boy had written:
- 'I am Kawaljit Singh; I am 11 years old; I am a Sikh.'
- A third boy wrote:
- 'I am John; I am 11 years old; I am nothing.'

(Rudge,1988:155)

Future



- Young people increasingly non-religious
- Churches will close as older generation dies
- RE will be a battleground - tensions between non-religious/humanist
- Study of Religion within Social Studies, Politics, Culture etc. (eg BA Religion Goldsmiths)

*Religion most
important
social force
today*

*What's going on?
Globalised world
Rise of Far Right
Civil wars
Terrorist attacks
Sectarian violence
Mass shootings*

Distinctive Approach

Inter disciplinary

Innovating Methods

*Active and creative
environment*

*What does this
mean for you?*

*Taught by leading
researchers in the field*

*Kept in touch with the latest
debates and developments*

*Interdisciplinary and
thematic sociology*

*What is a
Goldsmiths
BA Religion
like?*

**They're not all the same, but...*

Topical

*Develop a 'sociological
imagination'*

*Think rigorously and
creatively*

*Be critical and self-
reflexive*

BA Religion

BA Religion

Sociology

Anthropology

Politics

Media and Communications

+ Work Placements

Programme Outline



1st Year

- *S Modern Knowledge Modern Power*
- *S Culture & Society*
- *P Politics of Other Cultures*
- *S Believing and belonging in London and the World*

Programme Outline



2nd Year

- *A Anthropology of Religion*
- *S The Making of the Modern World*
- *S Sociology of Religion in the Modern World*
- *S Philosophy & Methodology*
- *S & P + options of your choice*

2nd Yr Options



For example:

Life: A User's Manual; Africa in the Global Political Economy; An(other) Japan: Politics, Ideology and Culture ; Chinese Politics: The Revolutionary Era.; Sexuality; The Body - social theory and practice; Migration, globalisation and citizenship; Crimes Against Humanity

Work Placement



Work placements - TBA

show how religion relates to politics, advocacy groups, and relevant NGOs working in International Development and related.

Programme Structure



3rd Year

- *S Contemporary Social Theory and Society*

Dissertation

3rd Year Options



- **For example:**

Movements and Conflict in the Middle East: From the Arab Spring to ISIS; Colonialism and Non-Western Political Thought; Politics of Conflict and Peacebuilding in Contemporary Africa; Media and Culture in the Middle East; Beyond All Reason; Sociology of Visuality; Childhood Matters.

Sociology Option Courses

- *Sex, Drugs & Technology*
- *Marxism*
- *Japanese Culture & Society*
- *Nationalism,
Fundamentalism,
Cosmopolitanism*
- *London*
- *Art & Society*
- *Leisure, Culture & Society*
- *Space, Place & Power*
- *Creative Cities*
- *Organisations & Society*
- *Childhood Matters*
- *'Race', Racism & Social Theory*
- *Sociology of Visuality*
- *Privacy, Surveillance & Security*
- *Citizenship & Human Rights*
- *Global Development &
Underdevelopment*
- *Politics, Philosophy & Alterity*
- *Making Data Matter*
- *Organisational Ethnography*
- *Sociologies of Emerging Worlds*

BA Religion

*Postgraduate study: academic
& vocational*

*Private sector: Media, Law,
graduate employment
schemes, HR, marketing*

*Public sector: central & local
government, teaching, social
welfare, NGOs,*

*Third sector: charities &
NGOs, Human Rights, Think
Tanks, advocacy, refugee
support*

- research, policy, fundraising

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

*A-level: /BBB; Access 45 Level 3
credits
IB 33; BTEC DDM/DMM*

*Standard Offers... look at Person
Statements, Interviews,*

KEEP IN TOUCH

*Abby Day, Programme
Convenor,
abby.day@gold.ac.uk*



StudyAtGold



GoldsmithsLondon



GoldsmithsUoL



Goldsmiths