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Mapping the Concept(s) of Belonging

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Abstract

Various epistemological changes – such as the linguistic, narrative, and cultural turns that have influenced humanistic and social scientific studies since the 1980s – have contributed to the increased academic interest in politics, discourses, processes, and practices of belonging. During the recent decades, the idea of belonging or not-belonging have been discussed and theorized in various fields with diverse parallel and/or overlapping conceptualizations. These include, for example, identity, place-making, displacement, and their representational, intersectional, and fluid nature. In recent years, several scholars have aimed to discuss the topics framed by the above mentioned concepts and points of view with a new conceptualization: ‘Belonging’ has been operationalized as a theoretical and analytical tool in the investigation of various contemporary forms of communal interaction. This paper explores ‘belonging’ as a scholarly concept with the method of concept analysis. By analysing a selection of recent academic publications in various fields we seek to answer the following questions: What does ‘belonging’ comprise? How is it used and defined in recent research? How does it relate to other similar concepts employed in the studies of belonging? What kind of added value does the concept bring to these studies? As a result, the paper presents tables and figures indicating the diversity in the notions of belonging and the links and relations between it and other related concepts. The paper concludes by discussing the problems and advantages of the concept of belonging in research.

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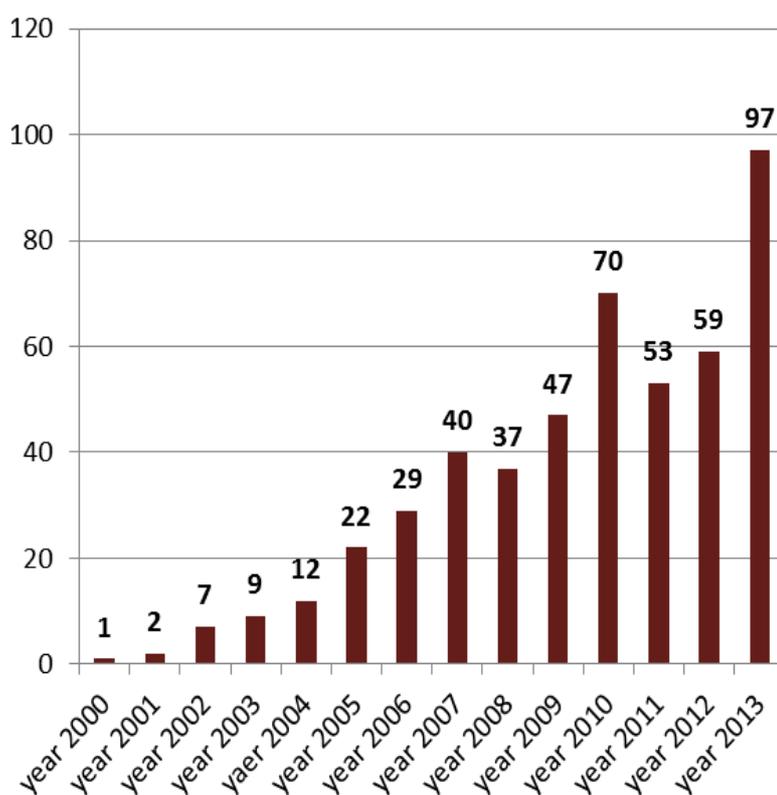
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Introduction

Various epistemological changes – such as the linguistic, narrative, and cultural turns that have influenced humanistic and social studies since the 1980s – have contributed to the increased academic interest in politics, discourses, processes, and practices of belonging. During the recent decades, the ideas of belonging or not-belonging have been discussed and theorized in various fields with diverse parallel and/or overlapping conceptualizations such as identity, identification, place-making, exclusion, inclusion, displacement. Attention has been drawn to their affective, performative, narrative, representational, intersectional, multilayered, and fluid nature. In recent years, an increasing number of scholars have addressed the topics framed by the above-mentioned concepts and points of view with a new conceptualization: ‘belonging’ has been operationalized as a theoretical and analytical tool in the investigation of various contemporary forms of communal interaction.

Lately, the increased academic interest in the various aspects of belonging has led to a notable rise in the number of academic research articles touching the issue of belonging (see fig. 1). Although used extensively by scholars in various fields, the concept itself has often remained vague and ambiguous. The concept has been used to cover a wide variety of phenomena. For while there is an extensive and ever-growing body of literature related to ‘belonging’, the concept itself is in need of further clarification. Thus, also the studies that focus on the various aspects of belonging, would benefit from critical exploration and discussion of the idea of belonging as an experience, a process, and a concept.

Figure 1. The number of articles published between 2000 and 2013 with ‘belonging’ as an author-supplied keyword found by Academic Search Elite.



The aim of this paper is thus to deepen the understanding of the notion of ‘belonging’ and its uses in current discussions. The recent upsurge in the popularity of the concept of belonging is related to the parallel processes of transculturality, transnationality, interculturality, glocalization, mobility, connectivity, immigration, and multiculturalism that characterize the present cultural and social situation in many places. Yet, in the recent research the concept is discussed in conjunction with certain themes, topics and debates more frequently than others, and which also calls for a detailed examination of the concept itself and its various uses.

Thus, in the following, we explore ‘belonging’ as a scholarly concept with the method of concept analysis. By analysing a selection of the abstracts of recent academic publications in various fields of social sciences and humanities, we seek to answer the following questions: What does ‘belonging’ comprise? How is it used and defined in recent research? How does it relate to other similar concepts employed in the studies of politics, discourses, processes, and practices of belonging? Furthermore, based on our findings, we ask what kind of empirical and theoretical studies address the questions of belonging directly. What kind of added value does the concept bring to these studies?

The paper presents tables and figures indicating the diversity of the notions of belonging, and the links and relations between belonging and other related concepts. It concludes with a discussion of the problems and advantages of the concept of belonging in research, and addresses the question why issues related to ‘belonging’ are currently being debated so intensively.

Previous conceptualizations of ‘belonging’ and its relations to other concepts

Belonging is, in Nira Yuval-Davis’ (2006, p. 197) words, “about emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’, and, about feeling ‘safe’”, and it is often “articulated and politicized only when it is threatened in some way”. According to this tentative definition, belonging relates to emotional or affective processes, material attachments, and social relations. Yuval-Davis emphasizes the need to see belonging as a dynamic process rather than a reified fixity, and the requirement to differentiate the three levels of the analysis of belonging, i.e. social locations; identifications and emotional attachments; and ethical and political values (ibid.).

The questions of belonging are often conceptualized in academic research as questions of identity, identification, or communality (Lähdesmäki, 2014). The concept of identity originates from the Latin word *idem*, meaning the same. Thus, the connotations of oneness and coherence are associated with the concept. In psychology, identity is commonly discussed in the context of individual personhood and growth. In social psychology and sociology, the concept has typically been regarded as relational (Rossi, 2008). The popularity of the concept has led to a severe critique of identity as sameness, and the establishment of the “anti-identity thinking” in, for example, the queer movement (Rossi, 2008, p. 34). As a response to this critique, identity has been conceptualized, for instance, in poststructuralist, feminist and queer theory as processual, inherently multiple, and changing (Butler, 1990; Scott, 1995). However, to Robert Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000), the concept of identity remains too ambiguous to be used as a tool for social analysis: it either

means too much in its essential form, too little when its fluidity and multiplicity are emphasized, or nothing at all.

In cultural studies, the concept of identity has been discussed in conjunction with race and ethnicity since the influential work of Stuart Hall (1990; 1992) which focuses on the concept of cultural identity, the politics of black diasporic identities, and the possibilities of hybrid identities. A number of scholars in this field have also engaged in the study of identity politics and the politicization of the questions of identity, such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and territoriality (see, for example, Rossi, 2008, p. 33; Lähdesmäki, 2014). Although identity politics often aims to empower certain groups of people and strengthen identification with them, it may also lead to the exclusion of other groups (Rajchman, 1995; Scott, 1995; West, 1995). This is why the concept of identity has been criticized for being essentialist, stable, and even violent in its implicit emphasis of coherence and sameness (Bell, 2007; Rossi, 2008). However, the need to belong and a sense of belonging are central to identity (*ibid.*).

Like identity, belonging has been one of the major themes of classical psychology and sociology (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 198). The concept of belonging emphasizes the social aspects of living in a world with others and relating to others in a certain historical and cultural context. This sense of belonging or not-belonging is, however, structured and directed by power and hegemonies, which can be analysed with the help of the concept intersectionality. Intersectionality originates from feminist theory (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005; Ferree, 2011). It refers to a critical understanding of the workings of power in positioning people hierarchically in certain social categories such as ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, social class, or bodily ability. Which ones of these categories are the most relevant, is, however, a question that has been heavily debated (Karkulehto et al., 2012; Mulinari & Neerdgard, 2012; Keskinen, 2013; Norocel, 2013; Lähdesmäki & Saresma, 2014).

Both belonging and intersectionality thus refer to the idea of identities as multilayered or hybrid (Staunæs, 2003, p. 101). In sociology and sociolinguistics, the complexity and interaction of social formations has also been addressed by the concept of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007; Blommaert & Rampton 2011). This concept has been used in particular to explain the social and cultural processes of migration and globalization that are characterized by the dynamic interplay of diverse variables such as ethnicity, language, religion, cultural values, and the legal and societal position of migrants.

Data, methods and analysis

Concepts are essential in producing scientific knowledge and conferring theoretical paradigms. In addition, concepts are produced in political debates and adopted from academic contexts to public and political discussions. The use of vague, complex, or fluid concepts in political discourse often includes a political intention: concepts are transformed into political tools. In research, vague and poorly understood concepts may lead to invalid and false results and conclusions. Belonging as a fluid academic and easily politicized concept thus requires a closer conceptual study.

The traditional methods of concept analysis have been criticized for the lack of extensive empirical investigations (e.g., Botes, 2002). In what follows, the concept of

belonging is explored with a concept analysis based on a broad empirical qualitative and quantitative research. As a theoretical point of departure for this investigation we adopt Mieke Bal's (2002) notion of the 'travelling' nature of concepts within and between distinct discourses and societal and scholarly domains. Our aim is to find out where (in which geographical locations, disciplinary fields and in relation to which other concepts) theories and studies of belonging have emerged, and how belonging is defined and operationalized.

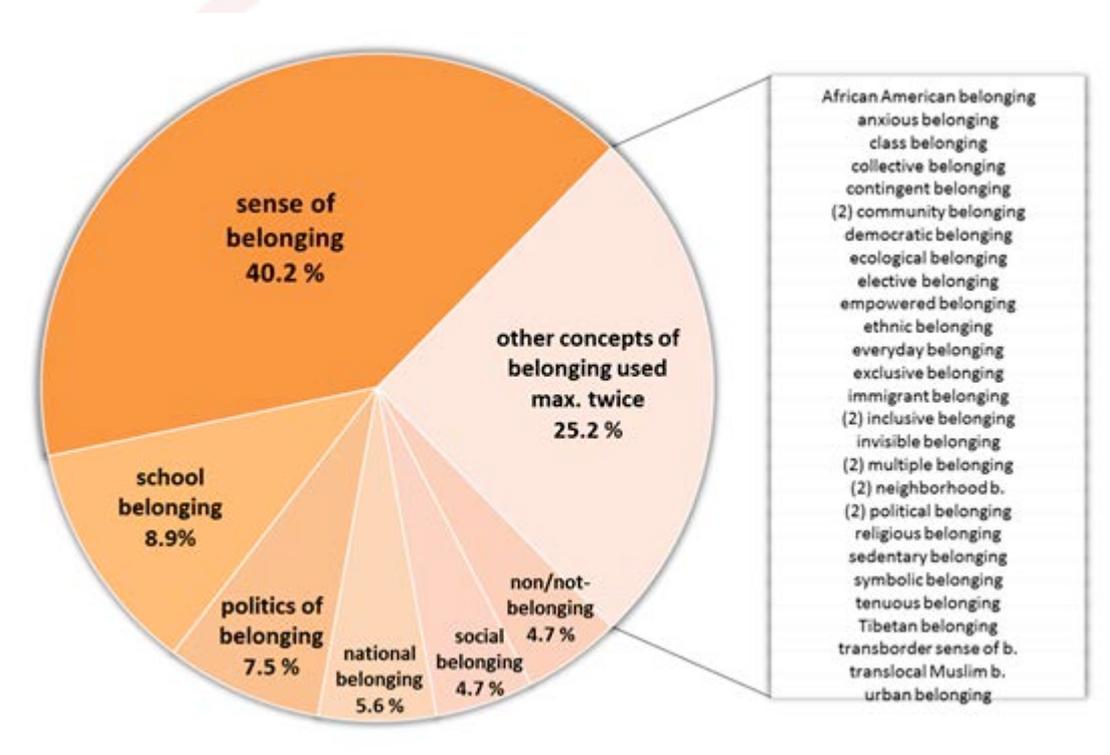
The research data consists of abstracts of scholarly peer-reviewed English language articles that were found in the Academic Search Elite (ASE) in April 2014. ASE was chosen as the database for gathering data due to its extensive content, interdisciplinary character, and emphasis on socio-cultural aspects. Disciplinary subject categories in ASE cover, for example, ethnology, history, pedagogy, sport, philosophy, religion, social work, sociology, information technology, music, political science, communication, languages, literature, arts, agriculture, biology, chemistry, engineering, environment and life sciences, applied science and technology, and multi- and interdisciplinary inquiries. In this study, the investigation falls on abstracts that were published in 2012 and 2013 with 'belonging' as an author-supplied keyword. With this framing (excluding nine abstracts in which the keyword was used in relation to molecular biology or chemistry), the data was composed of 147 abstracts of peer-reviewed articles, which were then chosen for a closer qualitative and quantitative analyses.

The 147 studies included in the data were published in 119 academic journals covering a wide range of publications in humanities, social sciences, and related fields of inquiry. Eleven (7.5 %) articles were published in the *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, six (4.1 %) in the journal *Identities*, four (2.7 %) in the *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, three (2.0 %) in *Social & Cultural Geography*, and three (2.0 %) the *Journal of Homosexuality*. Considering the scope of these journals, it thus seems that the notion of belonging invites authors to publish their articles in publications specializing in interculturality and identity-related issues. Alternatively, the journals specialized in the questions of interculturality and identity are the ones that – perhaps more readily than others – welcome articles dealing with belonging.

The majority of the articles, 85 (57.8 %), came from English-speaking countries, which, given the fact that the search was restricted to articles written in English, is understandable. Universities from the United States were involved in 33 articles, British universities in 27, Canadian universities in 12, Australian universities in 12, and a university from New Zealand in one article. 49 of the articles (33.3 %) came from European universities. There were seven articles from Asia (China, Japan, Malaysia), three from Middle-East (Lebanon, Israel, and Iran), and one from Central-America (Mexico). However, a great number of articles were co-written and in many cases the writers represented different universities, countries, and even continents. The university department (including "schools", "institutions", and "centers") was mentioned in 74 articles. The fields of academic study that appeared most often were: social sciences (in 26 articles, including philosophy), humanities (15 articles), environmental sciences (13 articles), educational sciences (11 articles), and health sciences (11 articles). It must be noted, however, that in many co-authored articles the writers came from different departments and disciplines.

In the abstracts, defining the concept of belonging was not stated as an aim of the studies. Only one study engaged in conceptual analysis of belonging: it focused on the use of the term in academic research in order to guide measurement approaches aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of community-based programs for people with disabilities. In one abstract, ‘belonging’ was defined in negative terms: the authors proposed to widen the commonplace understanding of the notion by introducing new dimensions to it, thereby defining the commonplace understanding of belonging. In another abstract, the authors sought to define the concept by providing other concepts to circumscribe the scope of the notion. In general, the approach in the studies in our data tended to be empirical rather than conceptual.

Figure 2. The word ‘belonging’ used as a combined concept (N = 107) in the abstracts of articles published in 2012 and 2013 with ‘belonging’ as an author-supplied keyword (found by Academic Search Elite).

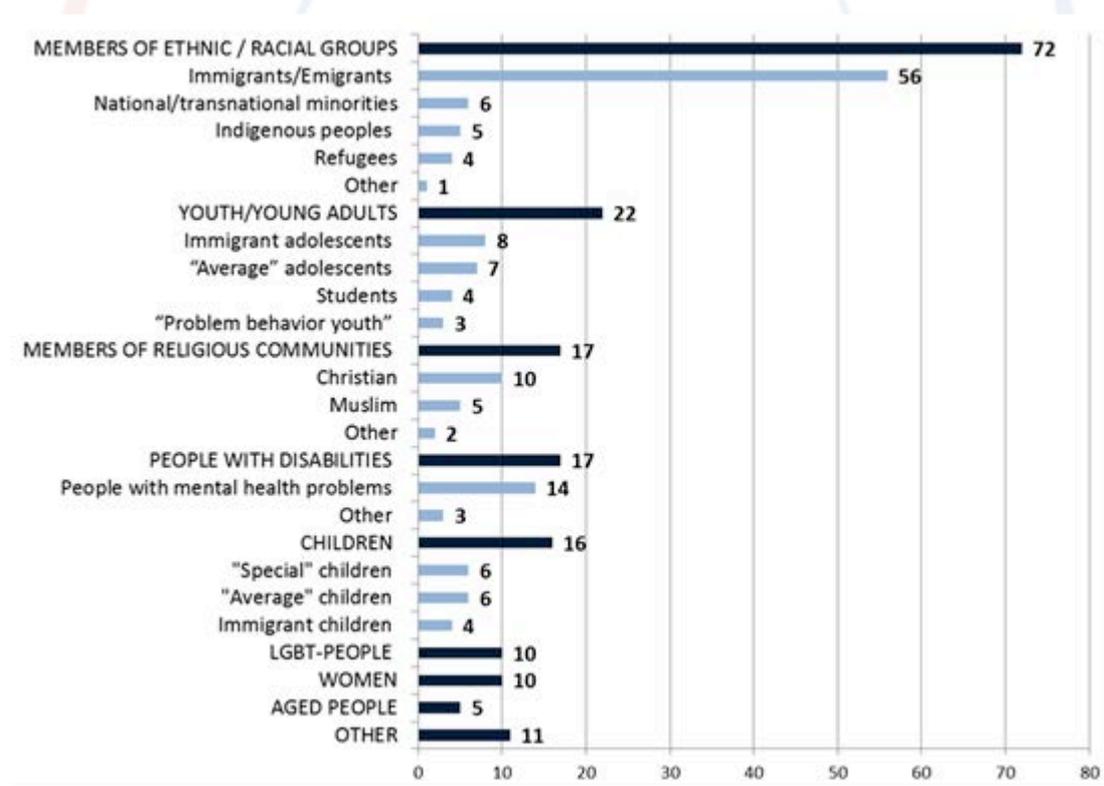


In order to better understand the conceptualization of the belonging, we also analysed the concepts that were combined with it. The abstracts included altogether 35 different co-concepts for belonging, which reveals that the concept of belonging often needs further definition. The marked variation of these co-concepts also indicates that the concept of belonging is highly flexible and that it can be applied to various approaches and types of empirical data. In some studies, belonging was used in combination with several different concepts. The co-concepts and further definitions of belonging can be divided into two categories: concepts, such as ‘national belonging’ that have a rather clear object, and more abstract and flexible combinations, such as ‘questions of belonging’. In our analysis, we omitted the latter expressions apart from three recurrent combinations: ‘sense of belonging’ that occurs in 43 articles, ‘politics of belonging’ that was mentioned eight times, and ‘not/non-belonging’ that was used five times. These formulations are closely linked to certain academic approaches and traditions while expressions such as ‘questions of

belonging' or 'relations of belonging' are less so. In the data, however, these abstract combinations were used more frequently than the other, more strictly defined concept combinations. Of these, the most frequent ones were: 'school belonging' (12 times), 'national belonging' (6), and 'social belonging' (5). Altogether 27 concept combinations were used only once or twice (see fig. 2).

The analysis of whose belonging has been studied, our data shows that research on belonging tends to focus on groups that could be described as 'vulnerable' and in subordinate positions in society (fig. 3). The overwhelming majority of the studies concentrate on members of diverse ethnic or racial groups. The majority of these studies focus on immigrants and emigrants, but also on national minorities and indigenous peoples. Particularly, the research discusses immigrants in the USA and the EU. African Americans and Hispanic Americans were the most frequently studied groups in the USA, while European research concentrates on British society. In Australia, special attention is given to aboriginal people, while the studies on Asia and Africa tend to focus on national minorities or intra-continental migration.

Figure 3. The focus of the studies on belonging in the abstracts of articles (N = 147) published in 2012 and 2013 with 'belonging' as an author-supplied keyword (found by Academic Search Elite). Main categories in dark blue and their sub-categories in light blue.



The youth, children, and elderly people tend not to be similarly subordinated in their communities as many ethnic or racial minorities, but they are 'vulnerable' when the power relations in society are considered. Together these three age groups form a considerable proportion of the people whose belonging was investigated in the studies. Furthermore, within these groups, the focus is on the children, youth, and elderly with special needs, for example, adolescents with behaviour problems,

immigrant children, or depressed aged people. Other groups scrutinized in the studies are people with mental health problems, LGBT-people, and minority women. Often, for example, in the studies exploring same-gender loving black women or depressed gay men, the different categories of vulnerability overlap significantly.

The only group whose belonging was discussed in the studies that is not in any obviously vulnerable position in society were the religious communities. Most of the studies that scrutinize the belonging of religious people concentrate on Christian communities in Western societies, where Christianity is the religion of the majority. Some of the studies, however, also investigated the position of Muslims, often in connection to questions of ethnicity or race.

Mapping the keywords and subject terms that were used together with the concept of belonging highlights the centrality of race and ethnicity in the research on belonging. The keyword/subject term that is most frequently used together with it is '(im)migration'/'(im)migrants'. 'Multiculturalism' and 'diaspora' are also recurring concepts. The great number of other concepts connected to nation, race, and ethnicity (for example, 'citizenship', 'national characteristics', 'racialization', 'ethnic groups') also signals the emphasis on ethnic and/or racial relations and differences. The studies in our data thus foreground the often problematized simultaneous belonging to a minority and a nation.

Not surprisingly, then, on the basis of the data, the study of belonging is often connected to the study of identity. Identity was supplied as a keyword/subject term in almost one third of the abstracts. These studies generally focus on group identities – or more specifically on national, social, or racial identity. Along with identity, the centrality of social and communal relations was emphasized in the listings of keywords/subject terms. There were altogether eighteen different concepts with a definition 'social' in our data. These included, for example, 'social network', 'social integration', and 'social cohesion'. The majority of these concepts emphasize inclusion and participation, while exclusion and social 'abnormality' was brought up in only a few studies.

To summarize the above: belonging is often discussed in the context of migration. The concept of belonging is employed in the analysis of political and economic systems, consumption, legislation, and citizenship, as well as in the studies on religious belief of Christians and Muslims. Schooling and education are dealt with in studies focussing especially on learning disabilities, but also in relation to community belonging, including housing and architecture. Sameness and difference are discussed by taking into account ethnic diversity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, age, and disability.

In the data, there is a considerable variation in the types of material used to measure or explore belonging. The vast majority of the studies engage with contemporary issues through data collected specifically for the purpose of the study in question, or use data recently compiled in, for example, national surveys. Even those four studies that engaged only with historical data were motivated by a willingness to better understand contemporary culture. While articles acknowledged the role of historical construction of the phenomena they sought to tackle, the focus was on the contemporary cultural, political, social, and spatial arrangements. The need to study

these arrangements and their affect on people's sense and ways of belonging is often motivated by the mobilities of people, and also innovative methods, such as circulation of songs among diasporic communities (Impey, 2013), were employed. The majority of the studies, however, engaged with belonging through traditional methods.

Our data brings forth a wide range of methods that were employed to study belonging. Statistical analyses, surveys, and questionnaires were most often used to study old people and pupils' relation to their school or living environment. In order to grasp the multiplicity of practices through which people seek to belong, or experience, express, and produce belonging to groups and multiple localities, the scholars resorted to interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, personal reflection, observation, and analyses of cultural events and public debates. Furthermore, the studies that sought to explore the multiplicity of belonging engaged in discussions of previous scholarship, and employed discourse and concept analyses. Mixed methods were applied in several studies.

The recurrent notion of 'sense of belonging' in the data draws from social psychology and is particularly employed in quantitative studies that use scales, questionnaires, and different sorts of measurements in order to find correlations between, for example, sense of belonging and learning outcomes, motivation, and mental health issues. In contrast to these quantitative approaches, various practices of belonging are investigated with qualitative methods. Particularly the studies on the negotiation of belonging to multiple groups and localities, and discussing people whose belonging to a place was somehow 'precarious' or who seemed to be 'out of place' in their environments, resorted to ethnography, interviews, or personal reflection.

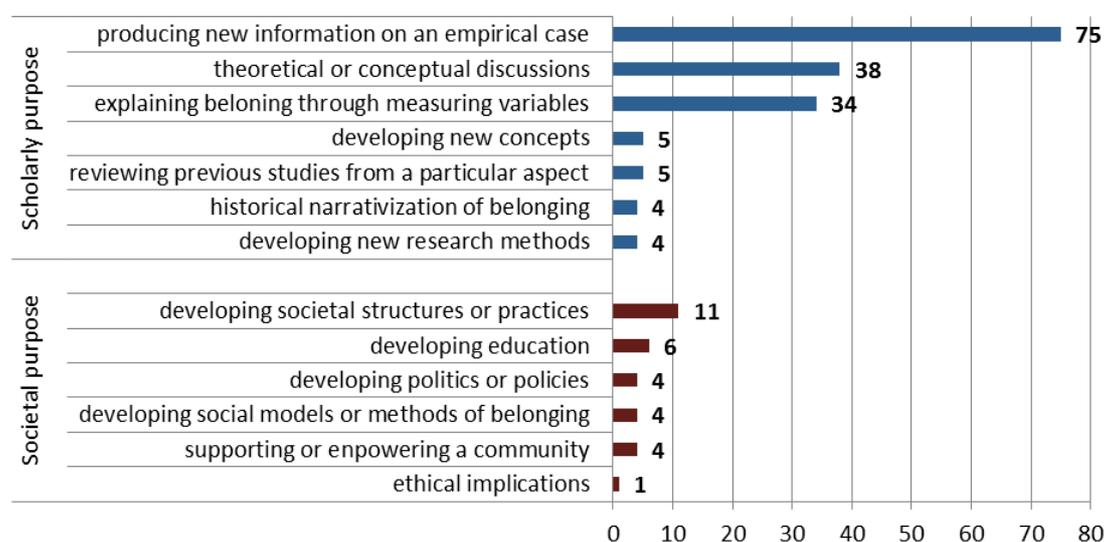
The studies in our data drew from various theoretical frameworks, such as childhood studies, child psychology, ecological framework of child development, postcolonial critique, population mobility studies, social and cultural geography, social network system theory, the investment model of decision strategies, theories of modernization, and market theory. The theoretical framework was explicated in only a few studies. It was stated, for example, that the approach is phenomenological and hermeneutic (Heggstad et al., 2013), that the study uses post-structural feminist framework (Meyer & Borrie, 2013), tourist research (Galliford, 2012), or the resource theory (Cheung et al., 2013), engages with sociological exploration of working-class place attachment (Paton, 2013), or that the study contributes to feminist, ethnic, and migration studies literature (Oliviero, 2013). Inter-disciplinary approach was mentioned recurrently, for example by stating "linking the social and the biological" (Wotton, 2013) as research aim. The strategy of reflexivity as well as the "interplay between historical research and personal experience" (Minkin, 2012) were also used as research methodologies, but the majority of the studies were based on data gathered by traditional methods, such as surveys and interviews.

In some studies of our data, belonging was discussed in a critical, postcolonial, or feminist paradigm; it was declared, for example, that the study had anti-racist or health educational aims or took an explicitly ethical or emancipatory position. Psychological framework was used to deal with individual affects, suicide, or learning disabilities, but the majority of the studies approached belonging as a social phenomenon and emphasized community identities and the relational character of

belonging. The data also includes market-oriented research and research that aims at policy making or clinical interventions. The studies also mentioned the biopolitical analysis inspired by Émile Durkheim, René Girard, Giorgio Agamben, and Roberto Esposito as well as Felix Ravaisson's philosophy, Pierre Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field, and Georg Simmel's theorization of the urban space. References to Nira Yuval-Davis's concept of 'politics of belonging' were made several times. Ash Amin's theory of multiculturalism and phenotypical racism and his notion of a politics of the commons were discussed in two studies.

As the analysis above shows, the studies in our data use the concept of belonging to discuss various social, societal, political, and cultural topics. Although a number of these studies highlight discriminative, oppressive, or unequal social practices and address various different concrete conflicts or barriers in social and cultural situations, in the abstracts, the scholars rarely explicitly aim to tackle these problems (see fig. 4). In the abstracts, the purpose of these studies is more commonly related to the academic context: in 94.6 per cent of them it is stated that the study has some kind of scholarly purpose, while 5.4 per cent of the abstracts describe the purpose of the study in practical terms. Both practical social or societal, and scholarly aims were brought to the fore in 13.6 per cent of the abstracts.

Figure 4. The purpose of the research stated in the abstracts of articles (N = 147) published in 2012 and 2013 with 'belonging' as an author-supplied keyword (found by Academic Search Elite).



This analysis indicates that scholars have relatively little interests in broadening the scope of their studies from academic contexts and scholarly discussions to solving concrete problems in society. The studies in our data concentrate mainly on producing new information and deepening the understanding of restricted cases. They provide theoretical formulations and conceptual discussions on belonging or not-belonging, and explain belonging by measuring diverse variables in particular contexts. Although the results of these studies offer various possibilities to participate in societal and political discussions and to influence social, societal, and political practices, relatively few scholars explicitly point to these possibilities in their abstracts. The results

suggest a modest interaction between the academia and social agents. For although a number of scholars use empirical data gathered from the 'field', they rarely explicitly aimed to 'return' their results back to this field in order to develop and improve the structures and practices that were found to be at fault.

Conclusions

In recent academic studies, the concept of belonging is used to refer to multiple groups and feelings, and a wide range of methods and sets of data are employed in research that seeks to operationalize it. As a concept, belonging, however, remains open, ambivalent, ambiguous, and flexible. This becomes problematic when belonging is measured in quantitative research. For although the concept itself is defined in the quantitative studies, the results are categorized and provide models or patterns rather than refined understandings of how and through what kinds of means people seek to belong.

Our analysis shows that studies on belonging tend to focus on 'vulnerable' groups through empirical methods. Belonging is mostly understood as a positive. What is foregrounded is how people, sometimes against the odds, manage to integrate themselves into institutions, nations, etc. The failure to belong is not in focus. While the studies in our data often engage with people or groups who can be seen as multiply oppressed (depressed gay men, for example), intersectionality or superdiversity as theoretical frameworks do not surface in the abstracts. The scarcity of studies engaging with cultural products as means and manifestations of belonging is also remarkable. While the request by Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) to study belonging on the levels of social locations, identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political values has thus been responded to in the choice of empirical data in recent studies, a more rigorous theoretical engagement with socio-cultural frameworks is called for. We also suggest that cultural practices and phenomena should be taken far more seriously to the focus of research.

It seems that questions of belonging have emerged in recent research for at least two reasons. First, in connection to claims of identity and indigenusness, they are part of the "return of the local", as has been suggested by Peter Geschiere (2009). Second, questions of belonging entail practical and political implications, and in the contemporary world the acts of inclusion/exclusion, identification, and struggles over identity have become ever more topical.

As a concept, belonging is closely linked to identity. There seems to be, however, a movement in scholarship away from the notion of identity towards belonging, which indicates a movement away from the assumption of sameness embedded in the notion of identity towards belonging, which is understood as multiple, shifting, simultaneous, temporary (or even momentary), and located in – or oriented towards – multiple locations. But if identity is already understood as "something that all people have, seek, construct, and negotiate" (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 2), as relational instead of a stable or coherent entity every individual 'has', do we need the concept of belonging?

It is possible that identity has become somewhat worn out in academic debates, and that scholars are simply in search of another concept. In our data, belonging seems to have surfaced alongside with the concept of identity: this emergence as well as the

upsurge of the notion of belonging in recent research can be interpreted as critique of the notion of identity. Belonging does emphasize the relationality of subjectivity more readily than identity. Furthermore, as the studies in social psychology manifest, belonging can be understood as scalar: one can (feel to) belong to certain groups to a certain degree, for a moment. Thus, while identity implies sameness and coherence within a group or an individual and assumes a shared basis, belonging can account for that which can change and shift in time and place.

In scholarly discussions, the concepts of identity and identification seem to refer to a state where subjects or groups recognize the existence of certain identities as a part of people's subjectivity – whether as a static, 'achieved' state, or a flexible on-going process of becoming. Human relations and attachments to other people and cultural phenomena are, however, profoundly nuanced, and the level of attachment varies and transforms. People may feel that they belong to something without necessarily describing the feeling as an identification or identity. The idea of belonging thus seems to form a conceptual sphere that is useful in theoretical investigations of subjectivity and group dynamics. It opens perspectives to discuss people's social relations, and social and cultural practices embrace, for example, feelings, emotions, and affects. In order to function as an academic concept and an instrument in scholarly investigations, however, belongingness – i.e. belonging as a particular relation to other people and as social and cultural practices – needs to be carefully defined.

The strength of the concept of belonging lies in the fact that it enables the inclusion of both social and societal dimensions. Belonging is not simply a private feeling as it comprises both emotions and external relations. It includes a political aspect and points to the norms, restrictions and regulations that enable or hinder belonging. The prevalence of studies and debates on migration in our data points to this aspect. Compared to identity belonging is also 'democratic'. While identities often draw on shared traditions, are politically charged, and centre on debates over inclusion and exclusions, belonging, by drawing attention to practices, enables more nuanced analyses and understanding of the multiplicity of attachments to a range of material and immaterial objects – groups, products, and spaces.

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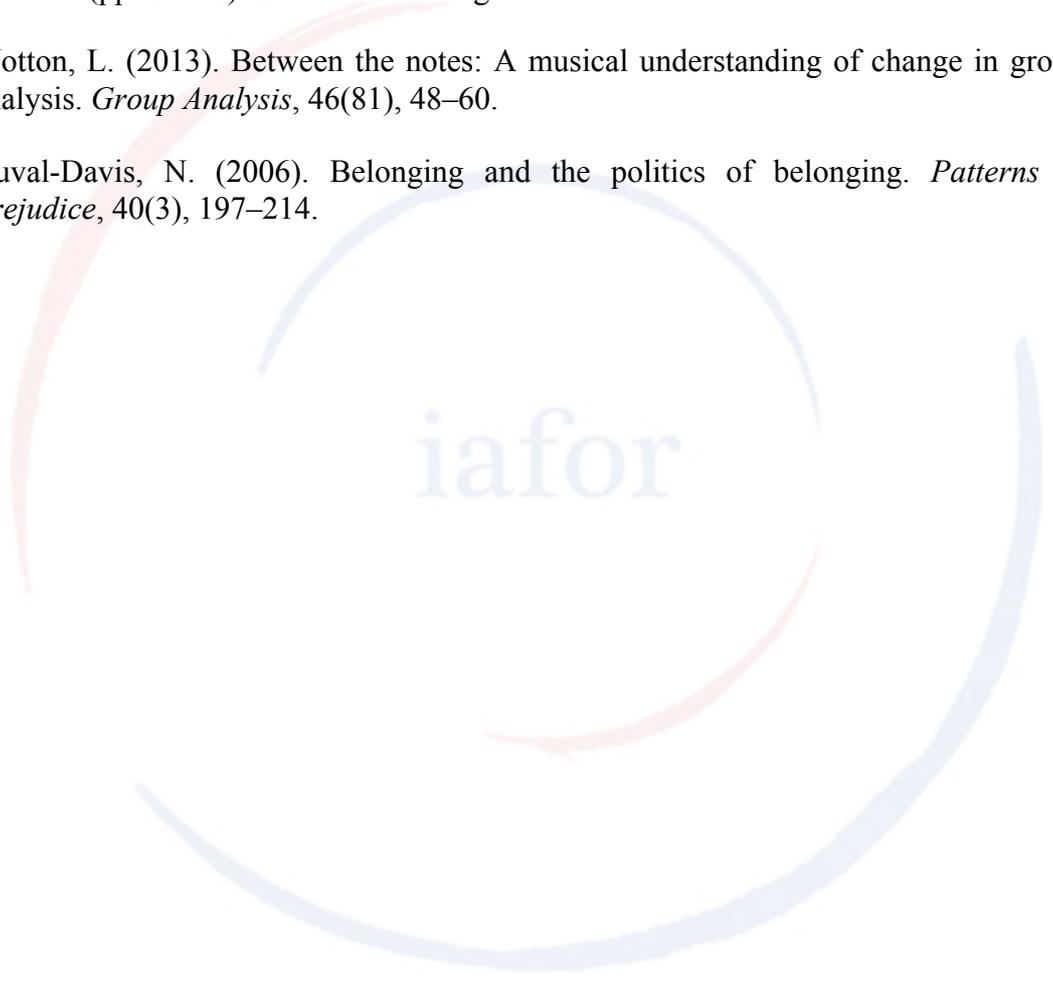
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The logo for the International Association for Cultural Studies (iafor) is centered on the page. It features the lowercase letters 'iafor' in a light blue, sans-serif font. The text is enclosed within a circular graphic composed of two overlapping, semi-transparent arcs: a light blue arc on the left and a light red arc on the right, which together form a partial circle around the text.

