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Constructions and performances of atheist identities in online settings

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Abstract

This research examines the ways in which atheist identity is constructed and performed in online settings worldwide. The study focuses on the discursive methods through which atheism as an identity is constructed and performed, and the social functions that the use of such methods may serve in these settings. The qualitative method of discursive psychology is used to analyse the performative aspects of blog posts and forums which display instances of atheist identity performance and construction. Three methods of construction and performance are identified, namely the use and contestation of labels and their boundaries, the use of analogies, and the resistance of negative constructions of atheist identity. These methods draw on discourses such as morality versus amorality, intellectualism versus anti-intellectualism, and adult versus child-like beliefs, in order to construct boundaries and produce individual identity performances. Taken together, these performances achieves the construction of a minority collective identity, as well as destigmatising the minority.