

one's personal information. Facebook "friends" are people who have deliberately activated a particular structural feature (i.e. the friend request and its acceptance) that displays both parties as mutual friends on the site. When people (such as former romantic partners) who are not Facebook "friends" obtain personal information, this is often perceived as "creepy" (p. 145) and an etiquette violation. Similar feelings have been observed in other new media such as MySpace and text blogging. Identifying such discrepancies in interpretations of "publics" is important from theoretical and policy perspectives. Even when privacy settings are activated, Facebook "friends" may give "non-friends" access to private information, a practice that illustrates the porousness of online information distribution. Gershon is self-reflexively sensitive to different cultural understandings of media use and conceptions of publics.

The book will be an interesting and thought-provoking read for scholars and students interested in new media, communication, relationships, semiotics, emotion, and youth sociality. Because of its straightforward prose, it will also be valuable for general readers interested in learning about the byzantine dilemmas that young people must navigate when accomplishing emotional work through constantly-changing, public media.

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**Words upon the Word: An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study.** James S. Bielo.  
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In popular and often in academic discourse, evangelical Christians in the United States are depicted as rote followers of others' words. Whether those words come from charismatic pastors, political leaders of the Christian right, or the Bible itself, evangelical lay believers are frequently derided as speaking and working in lock step. If they are voicing the beliefs of Focus on the Family, people seem to suggest, they cannot actually be voicing their "true selves" or their own beliefs. As Webb Keane (*Christian Moderns*, University of California Press, 2007) and others have noted, modernist language ideologies demand that speakers authorize religious and political speech from within, whether that sense of interiority is recognized as rationality or authenticity. To the secular ear, this demand for interior validity (itself a "social" fact, even if pertaining to an ideologically autonomous or "non-social" individual) seems to be flaunted by Evangelicals in the United States.

However, as James S. Bielo argues persuasively in *Words upon the Word*, U.S. Evangelicals also hold to this demand for interior authenticity, and work hard to make their religious speech and reading practices fit within it, doing so primarily in the context of group Bible study sessions. If secularists do not recognize this work, it is to a large extent their lack of familiarity with the tropes and genres of Evangelical speech that is to blame. Bielo's ethnography of evangelical group Bible study is thus a crucial contribution to the growing anthropology of Christianity, an ethnography that brings attention to an overlooked but central site of evangelical engagement with language, text(s), and belief. Far from being tied to the singular Bible text, Bielo demonstrates that U.S. evangelicals foster their religious subjectivities in the context of robust critical dialogues ranging across many topics and texts. As Bielo notes, "American Evangelicals . . . are not only people of the Book, but are people of books" (p. 110).

Bielo conducted ethnographic field research among several different Bible study groups from a number of evangelical churches in and around Lansing, Michigan. Some of these groups were organized around particular demographics (for example, men of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod can opt to meet separately from women of that church), some were organized around a sense of shared outlook ("the Iconoclasts" saw themselves as free thinkers in contrast to the rest of their church), some were simply the product of those who happened to express interest when the group was first put together. Each body chapter in the ethnography focuses on a different group as well as a different theme, including textual authority, the creation of personal relevance of the Bible text to members' lives, the integration of biblical and non-biblical texts into a

coherent reading strategy, the proper form of witnessing and evangelism, and the negotiation of denominational identities. Participants argue about biblical interpretation, about politics, about how to examine their lives in biblical terms, or about how to define their Christianity all in these informal weekly meetings among friends and acquaintances who sit huddled together over whichever book is up for discussion. Taken together, the chapters present a complex picture of evangelical reading practices in the formation of religious subjectivities.

The material analyzed in this ethnography largely comes from audio recordings of the group Bible study sessions that Bielo attended over the course of several years. Extended transcripts of specific moments from these sessions offer readers the chance to examine the ways in which participants organize and construct their experiences, beliefs, and reading strategies in these collective exegetical events. Bielo analyzes these transcripts with care, although linguistic anthropologically-minded readers will also be able to parse these texts even more fully if they prefer. Bielo's methodological nuance is particularly apparent, however, in his first substantive chapter on the complexities of studying evangelical Christians in the U.S. Bielo takes his cue from Susan Harding's analysis of her experience with the Reverend Milton Cantrell (*The Book of Jerry Falwell*, Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 33–60), in which the interaction quickly turned from ethnographic interview to evangelical witnessing session. As Harding, Bielo, and many others have said, there is no neutral territory for the anthropologist of Christianity, when both one's professional colleagues and ethnographic informants require that the analyst continually answer the question "are you a Christian?"

But Bielo takes this even further. Although in the simplest formulation, Bielo is able to answer "yes" to this question, he notes that this was often the starting-point for a number of complications and further questions, not their culmination. "What kind of Christian?," "How long have you been one?," "Is your family Christian?," and a number of other questions emerged, differing according to the churches he worked with and the particular set of people in the Bible groups he studied. This is not simply reflexivity for reflexivity's sake, though, since this further complication of Harding's original analysis speaks directly to the point Bielo is arguing for throughout the book. That is to say, these methodological complexities develop the point that evangelical Bible study groups are sites where participants put themselves and their fellow group members through extensive critical engagements with texts and talk.

At various points in the book, Bielo expresses his surprise at how neglected group Bible study has been in accounts of U.S. Christian communities, anthropological or otherwise. By the end of the book, one is similarly convinced of this institution's centrality and shares Bielo's sense of amazement that it has thus far stayed below the scholarly radar. Given this critical oversight, Bielo is at pains to point out that this is simply the first account of group Bible study, and he hopes to see many more come after this work. Other accounts are certainly needed to place evangelical Bible study groups into a larger context. Bielo specifically keeps his focus on the study group sessions themselves, and the reader is richly rewarded for this. However, this focus makes it difficult to evaluate how the critical dialogues of the study sessions compare, for example, with sermon discourse or other kinds of events encompassing the congregations at large. While the reader gets an in-depth account of the study group, she is not able to place this within a larger context of other genres of speaking, forms of textual authority, or negotiation of religious subjectivities established by particular churches or denominations that surround or inform the activities of study groups. Similarly, there is little discussion of the churches from which these groups originate or the history of the small group Bible study itself. Why small groups? Why is this a social form that is largely confined to evangelical Christians? How might this emphasis on an informal, intimate, and "personal" meeting form contribute more broadly to the construction of a religious subjectivity that requires an informal, intimate, and "personal" relationship with God? Echoing Bielo's own comments, one hopes to see further analyses of these events that pick up on these and other issues.

Overall, this is a very good introduction to and analysis of small group Bible study in evangelical life that demonstrates how evangelical Christians construct themselves and their approaches to texts, language, interaction, and history. Bielo's analysis, with copious transcripts of moments from these events, provides readers with rich material. A relatively brief ethnography, it would be perfect for undergraduate and graduate courses in linguistic anthropology, the anthropology of Christianity, or studies of contemporary American life.

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