



## THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ

### **Project Report:**

Title: *A Web-based Survey Instrument on Religious Identity (IV): Longitudinal and Contemporary Case Study*

#### 1. Project Goals

This was the fourth phase in a project to develop and apply a web-based survey instrument on religious identity. Previous phases developed and pretested the core questionnaire (I); validated the questionnaire through its actual use in a concrete research setting with a select panel of participants who represented a broad cross-section of possible religious identities (II); use the questionnaire in a first study that gathered responses from about 800 18-45 year-olds in Canada and began follow-up interviews with a selection of them (III); and, in the current phase, to expand this study to reach over 1,000 responses with 50 follow-up interviews, as well as begin to conduct interviews with a panel of longitudinal participants who also took the questionnaire (IV). The overall goal has been to ascertain how Canadians in this age range construct and understand their religious identities and religious diversity in the Canadian context. A second goal, which remains to be achieved in a last phase of the project, is to further refine and improve the survey instrument itself on the basis of the results of the first phases, especially to improve the effectiveness of the survey in being able to detect and understand non-standard religious and also non-religious identities.

#### 2. Researchers and Students Involved

The project was carried out primarily by Peter Beyer & Solange Lefebvre, with the collaboration of several research assistants, but the two that were engaged with phase IV were primarily Alyshea Cummins (PhD, University of Ottawa) and Scott Craig (Ph.D University of Ottawa).

#### 3. Rationale

The primary question of reference for Strand 1 research asks how different groups, agencies, and institutions in Canada construct and understand religious identity and religious diversity. Given the relational nature of such identities in a context of presumed religious plurality, carriers of religious identity can be expected always to understand their own identity both in terms of its own unique characteristics, and in contrast to other formally homologous religious identities. Such identity constructions can therefore be expected to vary from religious group to religious

group and from individual to individual, but also show certain similarities as ‘differences within identity’. Researching religious identity constructions therefore requires methods that take this into account, that allow the measurement of how different religious identities are constructed ‘identically’ – or not. The survey instrument was designed to contribute to the possibility of such measurement, and the qualitative interviews (along with qualitative questions on the survey itself) were designed to provide depth insight into how and why those identities are constructed in the way that they are. In this context, a main impetus was to be able to find and understand such religious identities as received survey instruments used in the various disciplines have either not been able to find or have had difficulty in finding; and this includes identities which are understood and lived as expressly non-religious.

#### 4. Methods

The primary case study for this project adopted the methods already outlined. The survey instrument, in its revised and refined format was launched in February 2014. Recruitment to the survey was accomplished primarily through engaging the cooperation of RDP team members and members of the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion, who were asked to distribute the recruitment text in such ways as they could. Social media, above all Facebook, were used to solicit participation from a wide variety of Facebook groups. Since a previous project had already composed the list of longitudinal participants, these were solicited for interviews and for taking the survey. The survey contained a question asking if respondents would be willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview, and through the responses to this question a list of potential interviewees was contacted and recruited. The results were transcribed and analyzed through a variety of techniques and using a variety of software.

#### 5. Ethics, permissions (include any delays)

An ethics approval application for the Ottawa-based project was submitted in the fall of 2013 and approval was granted in January 2014. This allowed recruitment to all phases of the project to begin in February 2014; and this certificate has been renewed to January 2017.

#### 6. Summary of Activities

In Phase IV, the number of survey respondents was increased to over 1000; 833 of these were useable and within the 18-45 age range. 50 follow up interviews were conducted and 20 longitudinal interviews with survey participation were conducted. At the time of this report, we are still pursuing the incorporation of more longitudinal participants. The survey results were analyzed and reports to the results were written and delivered/published

#### 7. Provisional Findings

Analysis of the survey results and follow-up interviews revealed clusters of four types of religious identity. Standard religious identities adhered to and participated in one of the recognized religions along the more or less orthodox lines standardly expected with respect to those religion. Marginal and eclectic standard religious identities were much less consistently so involved but also did not add much or any non-standard cognitive and performative components.

Spiritual but not religious identities significantly moved outside the standard religions but also featured a great many people whose spiritual identities were marginal to nominal, containing little content. Finally, non-religious identities contained little to no religious or spiritual elements, although the survey was not able to detect what they did contain. These results indicate that the survey was well able to 're-find' what other research has found in the Canadian context, and also to isolate and distribute better the so-called 'religious nones'. Analysis of the results, however, suggests that the survey needs to be improved and developed further if it is to be able to find yet further sorts of religious and non-religious identities, or to more conclusively be able to demonstrate that such are actually not out there in the population to any significant extent.

## 8. Outputs

One main output is that the survey instrument itself appears to have been somewhat effective in capturing much of the variety in religious identity construction that exists in the Canadian population, but it has also likely missed some of that variety (at least that is our provisional hypothesis). It is thus already an effective instrument that can in all likelihood be used effectively in subsequent research projects, whether within the context of the RDP or not. Other significant outputs have been five workshop and conference papers reporting the results, two chapters published in refereed collected volumes, and one journal article.

### 1. Finances

#### **Student Information:**

#### **Research Assistantships:**

The project engaged three student assistants (S. Craig, A. Cummins, and M. Singamsetty), who were responsible for a) preparing the survey for launching, b) recruiting participants to the survey, c) recruiting for longitudinal and follow-up interviews, d) conducting the interviews, e) helping to analyze the survey results and follow-up interviews, and helping to write and publish the results. Some of the money was used to engage other students to do the transcription of the interviews. At the time of this report, about \$6,000 of the \$20,000 had not been used, but will shortly be used to engage one of the two assistants to a further contract for completing the work just listed.

<b>Breakdown of Expenses (approximate)</b>			
<b>Student Funding*</b>			
	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Dates</i>
Student Assistantships	\$6,000	Alyshea Cummins	January 2015 - August 2016
Student Assistantships	\$4,000	Scott Craig (further contract to be	January 2016 - August 2016

	(\$6,000)	issued)	(September - December 2016)
	\$1,000	Manvitha Singamsetty	June - August 2016
Transcribing	\$3,000	Various	January 2015 - June 2016