

Innovation Funding Project Report and Student Stipend Report

Peter Beyer

Project Title: *A Web-based Survey Instrument on Religious Identity (III): Application through Case Studies*

1. Project Goals

The main aim of the project was to apply the web-based survey instrument on religious identity which had initially been developed in the context of the two previous projects (2011-2012 & 2012-2013) funded through the RDP. The first stage developed the core questionnaires and pretested them through a small group of volunteers from outside the initial research group. The second refined, tested, and 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, and who offered feedback on their experience with the instrument. This phase sought to use the thus developed survey instrument in two ways. The first was through a three-pronged study of religious identity among 18-40 year-olds in Canada. One prong solicited responses to the survey from as wide a range of individuals as possible; another was to have the survey taken by and conduct longitudinal follow-up interviews with approx. 100 second generation Canadians from various backgrounds and who had participated in previous research projects; the third was to conduct follow-up interviews with a selection of all survey participants parallel to the longitudinal ones. The overall goal was to ascertain how Canadians in this age range construct and understand their religious identities and religious diversity in the Canadian context. The other line of application was to have students enrolled in Solange Lefebvre's graduate seminar in September 2013 use and adapt the survey instrument in projects that they designed based on their specific research. In both cases, a second goal was to further refine and improve the survey instrument itself for use in future projects.

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 the grant in question were 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.

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 are to be transcribed and analyzed through a variety of techniques and using a variety of software.

5. Ethics, permissions

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.

6. Summary of Activities

At the time of this report, the project was still in the data gathering stages, with some preliminary analysis having been carried out and two preliminary reports in the process of preparation for delivery as papers at two conferences in the fall of 2014. As of the end of the 2013-2014 period, however, the survey had received 695 useable responses, of which 617 were in the target age range of 18-45 (it was decided to extend the target age range by five years). Although recruitment for the survey is ongoing, these 617 responses are being analyzed and will form a basis for the outputs discussed below. Recruitment for the longitudinal and follow-up interviews has proven to be more difficult, first efforts in the spring of 2014 yielding only a handful of interviews. Recruitment for interviews was started again to coincide with the beginning of the school year and is ongoing.

7. Provisional Findings

Although it is too early to speak about solid findings, analysis of the survey results provisionally confirms three conclusions relevant to the purpose of the study: 1) the fact that most people in Canada will mostly identify as either belonging to a single religion or not belonging to any (the religious 'nones') by itself tells us very little about how they actually conduct their religious lives, with one or two exceptions. 2) Variable religious identity construction does nonetheless appear to follow certain patterns which we are now identifying by constructing heuristic 'religious identity profiles' that appear to emerge from analysis of the data. 3) In spite of these two findings, the overwhelmingly dominant way of understanding religious diversity in Canada is in terms of 'religions' and the 'world religions' in particular.

8. Outputs

One main output is that the survey instrument itself appears to have been highly effective in capturing much of the variety in religious identity construction that exists in the Canadian population. It is an effective instrument that can in all likelihood be used effectively in subsequent research projects, whether within the context of the RDP or not. Two other outputs, already mentioned, are also emerging from the project at the time of this report. One

is a paper that will be delivered by Beyer at a workshop on religion and youth, supported by the RDP, that will take place in mid-October 2014 in Ottawa. The other is a paper that Beyer will deliver at the October meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion to be held in Indianapolis. These papers will both present the preliminary results from analysis of the survey results.

9. Finances

Student Information:

Research Assistantships

The project engaged two student assistants (S. Craig, A. Cummins), 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, and e) helping to analyze the survey results. At the time of this report, only \$12,000 of the \$20,000 had been used, the remainder slated to be used for further data collection by these assistants, and for transcribing the interviews.

Breakdown of Expenses			
Student Funding*			
	Amount	Name	Dates
Student Assistantships	\$8,000	Alyshea Cummins	September 2013 – December 2014
Student Assistantships	\$4,000	Scott Craig	March 2013 – December 2014