



THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ



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Research Statement

My research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration. Beginning with a postdoctoral fellowship in 2004, my research focused on religious diversity in Canada. Working with a team comprised of Peter Beyer, Lori Beaman and Nancy Nason-Clark, we worked on a project that explored religious expression and identity of second generation young adults from Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist backgrounds growing up in Canada. This project extended into a new project that is currently exploring attitudes of religious diversity and multiculturalism in Canada amongst young adults from diverse religious/cultural backgrounds across the country.

Carrying forward from this research, I have begun focusing on the impact of global events on identity construction. Through this exploration, I am exploring how media images impact immigrant youth living in Canada. In the process of this exploration, I am currently examining how Canadian Muslim youth, living in a post 9/11 world, are constructing their identities in relation to often hostile and demeaning media representations of Islam and its followers. The role of media, in the maintenance and negotiation of religious identities amongst immigrants in new host societies, is an untapped field and yet its importance in shaping identities is immense. Scholarship in the field clearly illustrates that media is used not only to maintain and strengthen identity boundaries, but also creates new, shared spaces in which syncretic cultural forms, such as new ethnic identities, can be formed.

Another complementary area of research examines how and why gender and sexuality act as flashpoints in debates on religious freedom. A recent topic that has created a clash between freedom of religion and human rights specifically based on sex and gender is the wearing of the niqab by Muslim women. To better understand how gender relates to human rights and religious values, I am examining how Muslim communities in European countries and North America are now dealing with state sanctions based on the niqab. The banning of the niqab is an important issue for examination as it raises questions about the

rights of Muslims as citizens and issues of freedom of expression, as well as questions about security, accommodation and obligations of citizenship.