

Study into national character of Australia's active atheists

August 8 2016, by Mark Smith



Credit: University of Western Sydney

As Australians prepare to nominate their chosen religious beliefs in the national census, a Western Sydney University researcher is looking into an ambitious section of Australian religious society - active atheism.

Active atheists are people who actively participate in pro-atheist organisations, many of which advocate on behalf of non-believers, such as the Atheist Foundation of Australia.

PhD candidate Rhys Gower, from the Religion and Society Research Cluster at WSU, says the last census indicated just under a quarter of Australians are non-religious, and that number may rise in the upcoming 2016 census.

"A number of Australian active atheist groups are taking a great interest in the upcoming census, as seen in the Atheist Foundation of Australia's 'Mark No Religion' campaign," he says.

"Campaigns such as this indicate active atheists are mobilising to ensure that religious views are not over-represented within government decision-making. My research will examine how and why Australians become active atheists, and what they believe."

"It will also seek to map the national identity of Australia's active atheists by comparing the similarities and differences with their counterparts in North America."

As part of the study, Mr Gower will:

- Attend active atheist organisation gatherings, such as Sydney Atheists and the Atheist Foundation of Australia, to grasp collective beliefs and diversity
- Identify how active atheist groups are organised, as well as their demographic characteristics and collective goals
- Observe active atheist websites and online forums, including social media activity
- Interview active atheists to ascertain their experiences prior to identifying as active atheists

Rhys Gower says compared to the vast abundance of studies on Australia's religious groups, there's a lack of research on how and why individuals turn towards non-religion.

"The character and philosophies upheld by atheists have been acknowledged in past studies, but debate regarding the development of an active atheist identity is still in its infancy," he says.

"This study will investigate the factors that compel an individual to not only reject the religious norm, but in many cases fights for non-religious perspectives to be recognised."

Mr Gower is presently seeking atheist group members who would like the opportunity to discuss their beliefs as part of his study. If you are interested in participating in a research interview, please email Rhys on r.gower@westernsydney.edu.au. Volunteers need to be over 18 years old, be fluent in English, and attend [atheist](#) events regularly.

Provided by University of Western Sydney

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