
On the Edges of the Mosaic: Ethno-Cultural Identity Among Greek and Jewish Second Generation Youth in Halifax

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Halifax Context of Study



- The realities of immigration to Atlantic Canada are quite different from the rest of the country and present unique challenges for identity maintenance. Low numbers of immigrants and immigrant concentrations
 - Immigrant share of Halifax population: 7% (2001). By contrast that of Canada was 18% (2001 Census)
 - Greek Community: established in 1934, most parents of youth investigated migrated before 1986, when Greece was among the 10 leading source-countries of immigration
 - Jewish Community: origins go back to 1700s, only 30% consider themselves immigrants
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Halifax Context of Study Cont.



- **We expected to find an increased pressure on young people from non-majority groups to look like everyone else, to speak English only, and to organize their leisure time around activities outside their ethno-cultural and/or religious community, compared to what would be found in larger Canadian metropolitan centres.**
- **The Greek and Jewish immigrant communities of Halifax are among the oldest in the area and continue to have a strong presence although there is little current immigration. Prominent families may still send their daughters to Greece, Israel or Canadian urban centres in search of a proper match. Greek and Hebrew schools are well maintained as a result of strong volunteer commitment.**
- **In an era of increased transnational travel and the internet, close contact with the countries/communities of origin as well as with larger diasporic communities is maintained and even increased.**

Project Objectives



- **1) to explore the experiences of Canadian youth of Greek and Jewish origins in Halifax with respect to ethno-cultural identity issues (e.g. intergenerational communication and conflict; self-identification; community participation)**
- **2) to identify their strategies in dealing with challenges and opportunities arising from ethno-cultural identification;**
- **3) to compare and contrast the experiences of Greek and Jewish – origin youth;**
- **4) to assess the impact of ethno-cultural identification on the Canadian identity of youth;**
- **5) to identify the everyday ways of negotiating parental, family and social expectations with individual desires and goals.**

The Public – Private Continuum: Gender

Expectations in the Greek Community (Men)

- A typical Greek male youth is expected to be serious, respectful, educated, married, and a good provider for his family:
- *“Get married young, have a good job, have kids, um. Pretty much just follow your father how he was when he was young, your age, follow them exactly. Take care of your parents when you get a little older, um. That's pretty much it. Just very very family oriented I find, and some kids don't feel- a lot of kids feel pressured to feel that way even if they don't want to”* (male participant).

The Public – Private Continuum: Gender Expectations in the Greek Community (Women)



- A typical Greek female youth is expected to be proper, to cook and clean, be educated, and to be married by mid-twenties and to have children as soon as possible.
- *“Um, well I think that they expect that, you know, you finish your school, I don't even know what they consider finished and educated, it's either finishing high school or maybe a bachelor degree in university and finding a husband, basically. Well I think for the older generations it would be, yeah, to find a Greek husband, and most preferably find a Greek husband. Yeah. Get married, start a family, not as quickly as possible, but, yeah, and raise good Greek kids” (female).*

Feminine and Masculine Roles: Ideas and Practices about Gender



- *“Um, yes only for my sister because she's a girl, I uh expect different things for her, anything she does to match me is totally fine, but I uh expect things from her that are slightly different. For example, within the house I expect her to help my mother a lot more and my brother and myself to help out my father a lot more. Of course if she's there for my father that's fine, and we're there for mom it's fine, it's a good thing, however in general I think that's a little more expected, a little bit of a gender role. Also, she's more than willing and supported to get as high a level of education as is possible, however if she chooses not to and if she chooses to marry a gentleman, a Greek gentleman who is, oh who could be a good provider and could be a good supporter and she chooses to stop her education, that too I would support, I would be fine. However, if my brother chose to stop his education to marry some well off supportive, providing wife, I would tell him "Costas, it's not a good idea, I suggest continuing your education".*

Dating in the Greek Community



- Many participants also discussed the expectations surrounding relationships between youth in the community.
- *“Cause people talk far too much, because it's not like two friends in high school who can go out, hang out, whatever, and just have a good time, cause once two Greeks do it, they're expected that it's got to go farther or something of the sort, like if it breaks up, then, you know, he was beating her, or something foolish like that. I mean you can't even start because there are too many assumptions already made about how it's going to work out, like it's so difficult for itself to play out naturally because there are so many expectations, so many prying eyes it's absolutely ridiculous” (male respondent)*

Family Expectations: Jewish Families



- Family pressure was seen to be exerted primarily in terms of finding someone Jewish to marry:
- *“I do notice though that when it comes to dating a Jewish girl, my parents are a lot more accepting, sure stay out late, here take the car, here's some extra cash, take the Jewish girl out, where as if it's a normal girl it's like have a good time, get out of here, don't do anything stupid, and come home alive.”*

Personal Expectations: Jewish Youth



Not surprisingly, the participants also emphasize marriage in their own sense of Jewish expectations. One participant emphasizes how this relates to being from a minority culture:

- *I want him to ... the experiences that I have had, that have to do with being Jewish... I don't even want the... to really take the opportunity to celebrate Christian holidays because in a world where every one, ...where Judaism is a minority and Christianity is a majority, they're obviously going to go with the majority, it's easier. ...and if I marry someone who is Christian, even if they convert, their parents are still going to want to celebrate the holidays with my kids and then my kids are going to have experienced it and I don't want that.*

Between Borders: 2nd Generation Greek Youth in Halifax



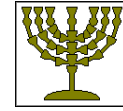
- The majority of participants stated that living in Halifax means that you get the best of both worlds: living in “*one of the best countries*” in the world and sharing a heritage “*with one of the greatest cultures in the world*”.
- Yet a few participants responded that for them it is a minus to live in a city where everyone knows everyone else: “*the negatives are the gossip, and all, being so involved in your life and you don’t even know these people, you know what I mean*” (female respondent).
- The Canadian official multicultural philosophy and policy is well liked and adopted as a world view, by contrast to U.S. practices.

Living in Halifax: Jewish Youth



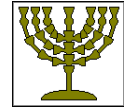
- Most participants noted that one had to “work at” being a Jew/Jewish in a small community/city like Halifax. They noted positive and negative aspects of this, such as the closeness of the community and proximity to other groups (as opposed to the more enclaval quality of larger cities) versus the relative lack of knowledge about Jewishness from others in the region. They also identified the greater risk of “losing” one’s Jewish identity because of the small number of Jews and Jewish events/activities.

Some Conclusions: Similarities and Differences (1)



- **A shared sense of pride and uniqueness in their communities, especially in light of their small numbers in the city and region**
- **A sense of connection to their own culture but also to the broader national culture in terms of how they defined their identities – Significance of “space”**
- **Similar experiences of learning about identity and culture**
- **Similar feelings of Otherness, including the experience of racism, and how this emphasized the need to maintain community and traditions**
- **Similar sense of importance of community participation in a city like Halifax with small immigrant / ethnic populations, though also recognition of diminished visibility**
- **Similar experiences of close-knit families, connection to peers from the same ethnic group**
- **Similar experience of difference between themselves and youth in Greece and Israel**
- **Similar ambivalences about settling in the region**

Some Conclusions: Similarities and Differences (2)



- **Both groups acknowledged the challenges and risks (e.g. loss of identity, assimilation) of living in the Atlantic region, as well as the positive things associated with it.**
 - **A major difference exists in the experience of religiosity of the two groups, although there was some similarity in terms of the experience of being seen as less observant than might be expected in a larger centre.**
 - **Gender differences were less marked in the Jewish cohort, although both groups made discussions of marriage and expectations around marriage central to their discussions of identity.**
 - **The conversion experience, which is quite common in the Halifax community, is less familiar among Greek youth**
 - **Little diversity within communities in a smaller town: community means mostly the religious community**
- *** It should be noted that most of the Jewish youth are 3rd or even 4th, rather than 2nd, generation Canadians (or North Americans)**

Future Directions



- **Decline of ethnic identity?**
- **Need to focus on ethnic identity performance of specific ethnic groups and not lump all immigrants together (and their second generation)**
- **What is most clearly pointed to by our work is the need for more, as well as bigger, studies that look at the experience of minority young people outside of the major urban centres of Canada and the United States. The complexity with which the young people in our study expressed their experience of pride and marginality needs to be given further expression in order for us to be able to draw a much fuller picture of the experience of social difference and Canadian identities in Canada as a whole, not just in Canada as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. The experiences of minority young people living outside major diasporic communities has a lot to teach us about what it means to be Canadian and may enlighten regional leaders, community-based and policy-makers, about how to make their cities and towns into places where minority youth feel welcome today and want to stay tomorrow.**