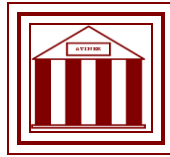


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ATINER's Conference Paper Series

PSY2013-0504

Maintenance of Cultural Identity

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URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

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ISSN 2241-2891

2/08/2013

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ATINER started to publish this conference papers series in 2012. It includes only the papers submitted for publication after they were presented at one of the conferences organized by our Institute every year. The papers published in the series have not been refereed and are published as they were submitted by the author. The series serves two purposes. First, we want to disseminate the information as fast as possible. Second, by doing so, the authors can receive comments useful to revise their papers before they are considered for publication in one of ATINER's books, following our standard procedures of a blind review.

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This paper should be cited as follows:

Avgoulas, M-I and Fanany, R. (2013) "Maintenance of Cultural Identity"
Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: PSY2013-0504.

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Abstract

The aim of this qualitative study is to explore the transmission of health beliefs among three generations of Greek families in Melbourne, Australia and the way they understand both health and disease as an aspect of cultural maintenance in the context of the larger Australian society. More specifically this paper will discuss the extent to which the immigrant generation has created a memory culture and how this has affected the sense of cultural identity of the first and second generation Greek Australians. Unlike the mainstream Australian community, the Greek population has so far maintained a traditional framework due to the importance they ascribe to both culture and traditions that have been handed down from from the immigrant generation to the first and second generation Greek Australians. However, it is not only the immigrant generation that holds on to these traditions. More and more the first and second generation Greek Australians are set on maintaining their Hellenic heritage, and many community organizations in Melbourne, Australia are now largely supported by the younger generations. The results of this study have practical applications in elucidating how the memory culture that has been created by the immigrant generation may impact this cultural group's conceptualization of health and the potential this may have to impact the use of health care by providin insight into the role of culture in forming individual or group conceptulizations of health in this community.

Keywords:

Corresponding Author:

Introduction

The way individuals and/or groups conceptualize and understand both health and illness is a marker of their identity. These culturally acquired ways of thinking that are not necessarily based on medical fact or on something that has been scientifically tested, instead they are things that have withstood the test of time and generally are shaped and learned by the society an individual lives in as well as language. These acquired ways of thinking are widely accepted as 'trustworthy', and over time have been embedded in one's culture through traditions and beliefs that have been handed down from one generation to the next. This qualitative study investigates the transmission of health beliefs among three generations of Greek families in Melbourne, Australia and the way they understand both health and disease, as an aspect of cultural maintenance in the context of a larger Australian society. A total of 15 families, (45 participants) all female, with each family consisting of a grandmother, mother and daughter/granddaughter, and where the grandmother was part of the initial immigrant generation took part in this study. These participants were chosen purposively to ensure enough people were interviewed to allow for their experience and overall health beliefs to be understood and elucidated. Furthermore all participants of this study are female, as it has been suggested that grandmothers in particular play a role in the maintenance of the community language and often care for grandchildren in many Australian subcultures. Pauwels (2005) and Georgas et al. (2006) note that Greek families tend to be very traditional in the way they function, particularly in maintaining the traditional family roles where females take on the caring responsibility for the health of their kin. For this reason, it is expected that transmission of health information between grandmothers, mothers and daughters is of great significance. Participants were recruited either from the Greek Orthodox schools of Melbourne, the Greek Orthodox churches of Melbourne or various Greek specific social groups. The findings provide insight into the nature of cultural transmission in this community and also elucidate specific ideas about health that originate in the Greek culture of the immigrant generation and that may have been passed on to the children and grandchildren. The use of thematic analysis and semiotics to understand the role of culture in forming individual and group conceptualizations of health in this community contributed to the understanding of the nature of Australian society and the experiences of one of its major cultural subgroups. More specifically this paper presents initial findings of the memory culture that has been created by the immigrant generation and how this may affect the sense of cultural identity of the first and second generation Greek Australians.

Greeks in Diaspora

In 1952 an agreement was made between the Australian and Greek governments that allowed for Greek people to migrate to Australia in the

1950's and 1960's. The Greek Diaspora have called Melbourne, Australia home for many decades now, however the early years of their settlement were challenging on a number of levels examples such as; finding a job buying a house, and experiencing economic difficulties. There was no time for adjustment as, in most cases, only days after arriving in Australia they were knocking on doors asking "*Any job for me?*" These migrants worked very hard and they believed and hoped that their migration to Australia was only temporary as one day they would return to their homeland (*patrida/πατρίδα*). However, for most of them the dream was never realized as the years just passed and before they realized it, they were married with children and this was becoming a distant memory as Australia slowly became their new home, their second "patrida". When these young men and women left Greece some 60 years ago they had hopes and dreams for a better life and the vast majority of them arrived in Melbourne, Australia with very few possessions but a large store of traditions of their culture, their ancestral homeland and the Greek way of life that they saw and still see, as their most valuable possession. It is not uncommon to hear members of this population say "*water and soil from your homeland equals health and prosperity*", reflecting the rural origins of many of these immigrants and the way they saw their relationship with the land. Kaloudis (2006) elucidates that this population in particular have retained a unique attachment to their homeland as this has provided them with a sense of belonging. The need for the Greeks of the Australian Diaspora to feel a sense of connection to their homeland was of significance as they often experienced the problem of identity and in turn confusion to whether their home was Australia or Greece. This sense of not belonging is something that the migrant generation experienced over 60 years ago, however the subsequent generations are still experiencing this today and feel a mix of emotions or even a perception of having multiple identities (Bondi, 1993). This dilemma experienced by the Greek migrants has been described in one the songs of a legendary Greek singer who was considered the voice of the Greek migrant, Stelios Kazantzidis. In one particular song the words he sings are '*Στην ξενιτιά είμαι έλληνας και στην Ελλάδα ζένος*', singing, "I feel more of a foreigner in Greece than in a foreign country". This is a sentiment commonly felt by members the Greek Diaspora in Australia when they do return to Greece. They often reflect by saying, '*Η Ελλάδα άλλαξε*' (*Greece has changed*), '*ο κόσμος δεν είναι ο ίδιος*', '*και εδώ ξενιτιά έγινε*' (*the people in Greece are different*, '*we're foreigners there as well*'). These statements reflect the pain and sorrow they feel when it appears family, and their fellow countrymen they left behind, have forgotten them. The Greek migrants of Australia never forgot Greece and the Greek way of life as they felt that the difficulties they experienced, particularly very early on in their settlement in Australia, could be overcome if they maintained the knowledge of their homeland along with the Greek way of life, and things would work out. These migrants are now elderly and have been Australian citizens for many years, participating in Australian society while preserving their cultural heritage. However, despite the successful transition of its members to life in Australia and the increasing acculturation and adaptation

of the generations born in this country, many Greek Australians still feel the pull of their ancestral homeland. They still may dream of their “*patrida*,” “*Κοίταζα το φεγγάρι και ονειρευομουν την πατρίδα*” [*I look towards the moon and I dream of my country*].

Greek Community of Melbourne, Australia

The Greek community makes up a significant portion of the non-Anglo-Saxon population of Melbourne. The city currently has the largest Greek population outside Greece, with migration dating back to 1827. The vast majority of Greeks, however arrived after WWII and the civil war in Greece. While the 1st and 2nd generation Greek Australians are highly integrated into the Australian society, Greek remains one of the top 10 languages used in the nation today (ABS, 2010). At a community level, the Greeks of Melbourne are well established (Tsolidis and Polland, 2010), with churches; schools; cultural and sporting organizations. Greek Orthodox is the dominant religion with the church being more than a place of worship. Christou (2001) notes that the church is the basis of true Greek identity and is a link to the ancestral homeland of community members. This aspect of cultural maintenance was very important for these migrants as they invested very heavily in maintaining their culture and the Greek way of life over the years. In time, there was a need felt by the Greek people for the development of Greek cultural institutions in Australia particularly as the requirement grew for them to participate in a primarily English-speaking society. However maintaining their culture was not an easy task, and these three generations experienced racism in the community, often being referred to as ‘*wog*’ (Tsolidis and Polland, 2010). Another example of a challenge that these migrants experienced in maintaining the Greek language was that in the early years of migration many Greek migrants were not allowed to speak Greek at work. They were also not permitted to take time off work to attend various religious events, such as on Good Friday, and if they disobeyed the instructions of their employers, they would lose their job. The difficulties experienced resulted in a community-wide perception that handing down the traditions, values and Greek way of life to children and grandchildren was of primary importance. Interestingly, it is not only the migrant generation that has maintained its traditions and association with Greece. Increasingly, the first and second generations are connecting with their Hellenic heritage, through schools, folk dancing, clubs and the Greek Facebook world¹. While the migrant generation understood the importance of general education in Australia, they also saw Greek education as a means of cultural maintenance and considered it very important for their children to go to Greek school. It was often the case that 1st and 2nd generation Greek Australians complained

¹ Some common Facebook pages that many 2nd generation Greek Australians are members of include Dugas Victoria, Greeks and the City, I love my grannies cooking, I believe in Greece, Vanilla cakes and lounge, Hellenic Democratic Initiative and many more.

about having to go to Greek school on Saturday morning or late in the evenings during the week, but research on this topic has found, that these same young people intended to send their own children to Greek school despite their own complaints about it (see, for example Tsolidis 2001, 2002). This is of great significance highlighting the importance of cultural maintenance to members of this community even after decades in Australia and high levels of acculturation. In other words, for many Australians of Greek background, personal identity and identification have as a central element Greek cultural affiliation that remains a strong force in their conceptualization of self and community.

Transmission of Culture

Culture is something that can be both learned by and shared among individuals, groups and populations and adds a distinctive component to the understanding of both health and illness. Culture may impact behavior in unique ways that are characteristic of the culture in question and, in turn, gives meaning to an experience. For example, in both health and illness, culture can influence how one perceives symptoms of illness, what measures are taken upon diagnosis, and risk of disease based on cultural conceptualizations (Trostle, 2005; Dressler, 2004). This can be the case for individuals and groups in the role of patient, carer or even as members of the health care team. Each person has a particular set of experiences that color his or her beliefs, practices and expertise regarding appropriate methods of intervention. Cultural background even has the potential to affect risk of disease. Dressler (2004), for example, describes how individuals from more developed industrial societies have higher blood pressures on average than those from less developed traditional societies. He ascribes this to the stress that results from the differences in experience between the ideal and actual in terms of cultural expectations. This phenomenon is referred to as cultural consonance and provides an insight to the impact of cultural change on the health of individuals (see also Dressler et al., 2005). Cultural change is closely related to the transmission of traditional knowledge passed from one generation to another and often handed down by elders to the younger generations. Interestingly, this transfer of information is not necessarily a deliberate act or an uninterrupted process, instead it is something that occurs over time, that does not need to be forced and that eventually becomes part of an individual's thinking without the person even realizing it (Schonpflug, 2001). This transmission of knowledge occurs in domains such as values, skills, behavior and knowledge. Traditional information about health is an important aspect of such transmitted culture because of the central importance to most individuals of maintaining their ability to function, both as an individual as well as a member of society. Culture has a significant role at both a micro and macro level as this transfer can influence an individual's psychological state. Winkelman (2009) notes that, at a macro level, culture can affect society as a whole. This is of particular

significance in understanding societal approaches to health at both the folk level as well as in the professional health care sector. For example, beliefs about food choices might affect risk of disease, and how this knowledge is transferred could have a rippling effect. Berry, Poortinga, Segal and Desen, (1992) describe how behavior can be influenced by what is culturally acceptable. What is culturally acceptable derives from the shared perceptions of members and creates a range of behaviors that fit with prevailing norms. It may be difficult for individuals to act in ways that do not conform to their cultural norms, even if such behaviors are supported by medical or scientific evidence, because of incompatibility with their own views as well as the views of others around them. These views, and the ideas they contain about health and ways of addressing illness, may be part of culture transmitted from older to younger members of the same group. Trostle (2005) notes the importance of culture in influencing how people from a specific population perceive illness and, in turn, what and whether treatment will be seen as appropriate and acceptable. As is the case with other aspects of culture, this transmission tends to take place in the context of ordinary events and experiences and may not be consciously taught to younger individuals as cultural material. Instead, health beliefs and practices may be presented as simply 'the ways things are done'. In the case of the Greek population, for example, it is often the patient's family that makes decisions about provision of care and or information disclosure (Mystakidou et al., 2005). These decisions often reflect traditional views that are incompatible with the demands of modern medicine. Schonpflug (2001) describes the process of cultural transmission as a one-way path of communication from parent to child or grandparent to grandchild. In this model, the exchange of cultural information is viewed as inherently asymmetrical, with the child/grandchild being a recipient of knowledge possessed only by his or her elders. In Schonpflug's view, transmission between grandparent and grandchild is less important than between parent and child. This may be a reflection of modern, western living conditions where most children live in nuclear families and may also vary depending on the culture of origin and the nature of the community in which individuals live. Boyd and Richardson (1985) discuss comparative impact of vertical transmission (parent to child) and horizontal transmission (among peers) of cultural knowledge. Their findings indicate that vertical transmission is of greater importance in shaping the behavior and thinking of individuals than horizontal transmission, perhaps reflecting the continued significance of the family experience to young people in their formative years. Further, the effectiveness of cultural transmission from parent to child may be a reflection of the significance of culture-specific knowledge in forming personal identity and allowing young people to fit into their culture of origin. Cultural transmission, however, is not always easily achieved, particularly for migrant communities where individuals may feel a bi-cultural identity relating to the country of origin and the new country of residence. The Greek Diaspora, the focus of this study, have managed to maintain their culture and this dual identity to a greater extent compared with some other cultural groups (Ali,

2008). The usefulness of these transmissions can be very powerful at both a micro and macro level, for individuals, communities and society in general, particularly as cultural contexts can and do influence peoples' lives and their understanding of illness, including prevention and its outcome.

Cultural identity and Memory Culture

The area of cross-cultural psychology has shown that there is a vital link between culture and the development of behavior (Berry, 1997). This has created a research interest into what happens to individuals with dual and or bi-cultural identities. For example, the Greek Diaspora that has been a part of the Australian community for over three generations and where each generation has a perceived experience of racism in association to their bi-cultural identity on different levels has not impacted upon their ability and drive to maintain their cultural values. This has not been the case for other ethnic or cultural groups (see, for example, Vasquez, 2011). The literature indicates that there are certain variables that can influence and or hinder the maintenance of an ethnic language which is an integral part of culture. These variables include: social status, demography and institutional support (see for example, Giles, Rosenthal and Young, 2010). In relation to Greek communities specifically, these findings suggest, firstly, that the historical status of Greece, a country with a very rich history and contribution to knowledge in areas such as medicine, mathematics and much more, is high and may confer a kind of prestige on individuals with this heritage. Secondly, in terms of demographics, the Australian Diaspora is well established in particular geographical areas, such as Melbourne. Thirdly, institutional support from within the Greek community itself is strong, with well-established social forums and strong community networks through the church and various social, cultural and sporting groups. Networks such as these have played a vital role in both maintaining and transmitting traditional views, perceptions and behaviors. The existence of these social networks has created a supportive environment for the Greek Diaspora in Australia and also serves to reinforce cultural patterns (such as maintenance of the Mediterranean diet that has been associated with lowered risks of heart disease). This is a particularly important aspect of cultural maintenance among this group with wider health impacts because it has been shown that mortality from cancer and cardiovascular disease is lower among Greek Australians than other ethnic groups in this country (Anikeeva et al., 2010). Another method suggested by Arvaniti (2006) that has been used by this group to maintain their culture and the Greek language is through the education system. The migrant generation often chose to send their children to Greek schools. These schools, however, charged fees and often these migrants made significant sacrifices, including giving up trips to their homeland, to ensure that their children learned Greek culture, the Greek language and maintained their ethnicity and Hellenic heritage. Language is a key marker and a crucial component in maintaining community identity and the family is a key

component to this. Older relatives, (grandparents, aunts and uncles) often play a major role in this. This is of particular importance for the 2nd generation when their parents (1st generation) may not use the community language at home or use a mix of both the Greek and English language with their children. It is often the grandmother who provides childcare and has a crucial role in exposing children to Greek. In recent times, however, the media has provided another avenue for both the 1st and 2nd generation to maintain the language, through Greek newspapers, pay television channels broadcasting direct from Greece and the Greek Facebook world that has become viral connecting Greek young people all around the world. This exposure to their community language is important in the Australian context in that it has been found to enhance the likelihood for people to use it, understand it and maintain it (See for example, Pauwels, 2005; Cavallaro, 1997; Katsikis, 1997 & Murray, 1995). For the 1st and 2nd generation Greek Australians, this bi-cultural identity has meant that they may be bi-lingual and, at the same time, may feel they belong to both cultures, represented by celebrating their birthday and name day, for example. Like the original migrant generation, many younger members of the Greek community seem to accept the importance of maintaining their cultural heritage and do not pursue complete assimilation into the larger Australia mainstream. The close relationship between many younger members of the Greek community in Australia and their grandparents, who represent the first wave of migrants to this country, has meant that this immigrant generation has had the opportunity to create a memory culture for the transmission of cultural information to their descendants. This conceptualization of the Greece of their childhood likely embodies the aspects of culture and lifestyle most prominent in the community's experience and that are most important for membership in this community, even for younger individuals who may never have visited Greece themselves. Traditional information of all kinds, including health information, is likely to be expressed as part of cultural memory that contributes in the younger generation to forming an identity consistent with the social and cultural networks of the diaspora community of which they are part and represents important social capital for full participation in the group (Giorgas, 2000a, Giorgas, 2000b).

Discussion

The aspect of cultural maintenance was of great significance for the Australian Greek migrants who left their homeland over 60 years ago. They invested very heavily in maintaining the Greek culture and the Greek way of life by transferring the Greek way of life that they knew before migrating to their children and grandchildren. This transfer of Greek culture and traditions is generally a vertical downward transfer of information that occurs in Greek families via grandmothers to their children and grandchildren, with this transfer often starting at a very young age for both the 1st and 2nd generation. Grandmothers in particular play a very significant role in maintaining the

Greek language and as they are often the ones that care for their grandchildren and expose them to the Greek language in contrast to their parents (1st generation) who may code switch between the Greek and English language. Grandmothers are also the ones who tend to take their grandchildren, particularly at a young age, to church and explain rituals such as Holy Communion and the significance of receiving Holy Communion, particularly on Holy Thursday or Holy Saturday around Easter. The significance of this Holy ritual is something that has been maintained in the Greek community of Melbourne, Australia. Members of both the 1st and 2nd generation may not attend church regularly however they remember the words of their mother and/or grandmothers and often say around Easter, *"It's Holy Thursday and/or Saturday so we have to go to church to receive Holy Communion as this is very important"*. When either of the two generations are asked why this is important, they don't always know what to answer and often just say *"This is something Greek Orthodox people have to do"*. These words themselves are a form of cultural maintenance as Greek people have been raised not to question their faith, religion and God's will and this is what the offspring of the migrant generation are expressing with these words. Greek families are very traditional particularly in maintaining the traditional family roles (see for example Pauwels, 2005 and Georgas et al., 2006). For example, when a family member is unwell it is generally the grandmother and/or mother that care for her kin. As previously noted grandmothers tend provide childcare and often expose their grandchildren to traditional health beliefs that they know from Greece and have maintained in Australian rituals such as the evil eye, or having some chicken soup which tends to be the cure of most illness' in the eyes of Greek grandmothers. When 2nd generation Greek Australians (the grandchildren of an immigrant) are asked about any Greek traditional health beliefs they are aware of, they often chuckle and say *"My grandmother and even at times my mum spits on me when I have a headache and tells me that I have the evil eye"* or others have added to this by saying *"My grandmother drops oil in water and says some magic words when I have a headache and almost instantly I feel better"*. The use of and trust in these Greek health beliefs are common among both the 1st and 2nd generation Greek Australians. One teenage member of the 2nd generation was asked about her knowledge on health beliefs and shared a story of when she was a young child and her grandmother was caring for her, she had fallen and sprained their ankle and instead of the grandmother using modern techniques, she wrapped the ankle with onions. As this young person was reminiscing about this story, she raised her tone of voice and emphasized with confidence that *"it worked!"* What occurred here was a vertical transmission downward from the grandmother to her grandchild. However the transmission of this health belief continued for a second time as a vertical transmission upwards, this time between the grandchild and her mother. It was a number of years later that the sibling of this young person sprained his ankle in the presence of their mother and the advice that the child gave their mother was *"All you need is some onions that's what yiayia [grannie] did for me and it worked"*. Increasingly as the years have passed, it is the 1st and 2nd Greek

Australians that are connecting with their Hellenic heritage and maintaining the Greek way of life. Often the aspect of cultural maintenance has become easier with the passing of the years. Racism was experienced quite intensely by both the migrant and first generation Greek Australians. Growing up in Melbourne in the 1970's or 1980's as a child of migrant was often confusing and many 1st generation Greek Australians felt a sense of not belonging or where often Greek at home and Australian at school (see for example Tsolidis and Polland, 2010). However in the year 2013 in the multicultural society of Melbourne, Australia it is acceptable to be ethnic and often 2nd generation Greek Australians speak with pride to their friends about being Greek and joining Greek social media has become something of significance for these young people. It remains however to be seen how far into the future set of generations will the Greek culture and way of life be maintained in Melbourne, Australia.

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