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Using habitus and ethnic identity theory to investigate the decision-making of Canadian Modern Orthodox young people

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ABSTRACT

Students' access to higher education is significantly shaped by the cultural and social capital they hold and aspire to gain. This study examines Canadian Modern Orthodox high school graduates pursuing higher education, exploring the factors that influence their choices. By framing Canadian Modern Orthodox Judaism as an ethnic minority identity, the research reveals how this identity shapes the decision-making process of young adults. The study integrates Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Phinney's theory of ethnic identity to understand how students in a close-knit community plan their futures, balancing considerations of reputation, marriage, and career. Based on eight years of teaching at a Modern Orthodox high school in Southern Ontario, the study uses institutional ethnography to identify two key pathways: Pathway 1 involves students taking a gap year in Israel, postponing their minority status on North American campuses, while Pathway 2 sees students entering directly into secular universities, where they become ethnic minorities for the first time. The paper also explores how students manage their post-secondary experiences and the impact on their cultural and social capital. Those who choose a gap year in Israel often accumulate greater cultural and social capital within their community compared to those who enter university directly.

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Introduction

A significant amount of research has been conducted on the participation of minorities in higher education (Iloh 2018, 2019; Iloh and Tierney 2014; Litten 1982; Perna 2006; Perna and Thomas 2006; Perna and Titus 2005; Ross 2010), though gaps exist with respect to white minorities. We know very little about the white minority experience and the role of ethnic and cultural identifications in informing their decision-making. Jewish students are essentially classified as 'white ethnic' (McDermott and Samson 2005, 205), given their minority religious status at postsecondary and the potential of facing antisemitism on campus. The North American Jewish community, though vast and varied, is largely a unique example of a white minority community. The pursuit of post-compulsory

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education is a key cultural value where research suggests most members will graduate high school and pursue higher education (HE) (see Brym, Neuman, and Lenton 2019).

This paper addresses the post-compulsory experiences of young people in a cloistered Modern Orthodox (MO) Jewish community in Canada, a religious subgroup within the broader Jewish community, who often find themselves distinctively positioned on North American HE because of their visual identifiers. These identifiers include wearing *kippot* (Yarmelke) on their heads, or a *Magen David* (star of David) around their necks, making them a visible minority among their peers and colleagues. The cloistering of this community stems from a history of antisemitism, yet also due to a concerted attempt to maintain a community that upholds the traditions of Orthodoxy. Another unique aspect of the subgroup is that they often attend faith-based schools and many within the community may choose to spend a gap year in Israel before attending North American HE institutions. This postsecondary aspiration highlights the influence of culture.

Although a minority religion and culture in North America, Jews have established thriving, deep-rooted communities (Waterman and Kosmin 1986; Windmueller 2013). With this in mind, this paper focuses on the factors that inform how Canadian MO students make decisions regarding their HE pathways. I argue that their habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 1990, 1996; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) inculcated through primary and secondary socialisation in a close-knit religious community, as well as their sense of ethnic identity (Phinney 1993, 1996; Phinney and Ong 2007), informs their aspirations and how they come to understand their futures. Foundational in their post-compulsory decision-making is the accrual of community-specific cultural capital, where each choice sets them on a trajectory with further opportunities and/or consequences. This is an important time for all young people eager to set themselves on a trajectory towards maturity and, ultimately, gainful employment. The inspiration for this paper comes from working as an educator in a MO Canadian context over an eight-year period, where I draw on my dialogues with students who were often hyper-aware regarding how future pathways could influence their reputation in the community, with significant implications for their marital and professional prospects. Those who are more firmly rooted within the traditions of the community will likely seek to get married during or right after their postsecondary experiences (Gallagher 2014). The yearning for capital in all forms continues with respect to attending specific institutions of higher education that carry degrees of prestige. This is combined with grooming for specific, professional jobs such as in the fields of medicine, law, or finance so that younger generations will be able to support a large family and will be able to commit their offspring to Jewish education. And so, the cycle continues, and the rat race for capital accrual seemingly never ends.

The research presented in this paper aligns with other research documenting how minority ethnic students see HE pathways as integral to the accrual of cultural capital.Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus, capital and field inform the analysis, though the primary focus is how a MO Canadian habitus of students informs their aspirations. Bourdieu defines habitus as 'a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 18). In scrutinising the relationship between the accrual of cultural capital and HE, Bourdieu explains that academic qualifications act to verify 'cultural competence' (Bourdieu 1986, 20). *Where* someone studies and *what* someone studies often

carries significant symbolic capital with an exchange value within a specific religious subgroup. My analysis is also informed by Modood 2004 who builds on Bourdieu, positioning an argument for 'ethnic capital,' a culturally specific form of social capital within an ethnic community. Based on my research in a Canadian MO Jewish community, I contend that foundational to the post-secondary decision-making for young people is the interplay between their community habitus in terms of what they have grown up to believe is the best pathway for cultural capital accrual and their familial habitus with respect to what the family desires for the student.

The paper extends Bourdieu by deepening the analysis through drawing on Phinney 1993, 1996), who utilises a three-stage model of ethnic identity development that involves unexamined ethnic identity, a moratorium stage, and, finally, identity achievement. The three-stage model is important in the overall understanding of the Canadian MO Jewish community because HE's decisions pertain directly to one's understanding of one's ethnic self. Phinney explains ethnic identity formation as 'the way in which individuals come to understand the implications of their ethnicity and make decisions about its role in their lives' (Phinney 1993, 64). With respect to making HE decisions and accruing cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986), Phinney identifies that 'some people have a clear sense of commitment to their group . . . some have strong positive emotional ties to their group, whereas others wish they belonged to a different group' (Phinney 1996, 144). In the Canadian MO Jewish HE decision-making process, pathways often align with the student's connection to and their ethnic identity and their position in the community. Arguably, the degree of acceptability and understanding a young person has of their ethnic status, and their subsequent involvement within the community, will directly influence their HE decision-making process.

Drawing on sociological and psychosocial theories, this paper explores how Canadian MO high-school graduates aspire to HE and how they realise their aspirations in reference to the accrual of cultural capital. I conceptualise Judaism as an ethnic identity formed in a minority context (McDermott and Samson 2005; Schlosser et al. 2009) while highlighting the complex factors informing the decision-making of young adults within the community.

The paper is structured in five parts. First, I focus on the community pressures placed on Jewish young people to perform well academically, supplying a background to understand how cultural capital works in a MO community and the importance placed on education. Second, I provide background on Bourdieu's theory, foregrounding habitus, alongside Phinney's theory of ethnic identity as conceptual tools to decipher how we understand the postsecondary decision-making of MO high-school graduates. Third, I describe the methodology of institutional ethnographic observation where, over 8 years, I worked closely with graduating students within the community to figure out prospective opportunities after graduation. Fourth, the paper presents two key pathways that emerged in the data: The first pathway involves going to Israel after graduation, whereas the second pathway involves attending a North American postsecondary institution directly after graduation. The key difference is that going to Israel not only delays ethnic minority status by living in the only Jewish state globally but also has the potential to increase cultural capital accrual opportunities because of surrounding oneself with like-minded Jewish individuals from a variety of continents. The latter part of the paper considers the

implications of these two pathways as students navigate their post-compulsory education years. The paper concludes with suggestions for further investigation.

The field of Modern Orthodoxy

Students in MO schools get an education in general studies alongside the Judaic course load (Weinstein 2020). For the most part, MO Jews have been able to associate as Orthodox without worrying about other values of the modern world interfering with religious practice (Cashman 2015). Furthermore, MO Jews have found ways to blend their Torah observance with the modern world in a symbiotic way (Greenberg 2010). This has made it socially acceptable in the community for MO high-school graduates to attend either a religious or a secular HE institution after graduation (Zusis et al. 2019). Furthermore, it is common for students to take a gap year to study in Israel at either a Yeshiva (for boys) or a Seminary (for girls) (see Antflick 2007; Berger 1997; Cashman 2015; Eisenberg 2010; Gallagher 2014; Greenberg 2010; Halpern 2013; Hecht 2014; Krakowski 2008; Schiff 2003; Zusis et al. 2019). The Yeshivas and Seminaries are attended by students from across the globe (Schiff 2003) who wish to focus on spiritual and religious growth. By deciding to attend a Yeshiva or Seminary, graduates immerse themselves in Israeli culture and continue to enjoy the benefits of not being a religious minority. Though, it should be noted the Yeshiva route is not necessarily financially accessible for every member of the community. Often Orthodox high schools will help match the students with the right institutions (Halpern 2013).

For Canadian MO graduates who do not take a gap year in Israel, there is a strong likelihood of attending postsecondary institutions in Toronto, home to the largest population of Jews in Canada (Shahar 2018). According to Hillel International (2023), between the University of Toronto, York University and Toronto Metropolitan University, there are only about 6,500 Jews enrolled in undergraduate programmes amongst a total population of over 137,000 students. Students attending these institutions will experience life on campus as ethnic minorities, which could have significant implications for how they access and accrue cultural capital. Devoutly religious Jews are at a greater risk of experiencing antisemitism on campus (Wright et al. 2021), which is 'prejudice against or hatred of Jews' (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2023). What these post-compulsory schooling pathways highlight is how aspirations are informed by community tensions impacting HE decision-making, prospective cultural capital development but also their identification of ethnic identity (Phinney 1993, 1996; Phinney and Ong 2007). These are tensions that all Canadian MO graduates navigate to varying degrees.

Conceptualizing Judaism as an ethnic minority

Ethnic capital

'Ethnic capital' is a term coined by Tariq Modood 2004, who studied the high rates of HE participation by minorities, specifically the Pakistani community, in Britain. Based on prior literature, Modood synthesised three pillars within the community essential to ethnic capital development: 'familial adult – child relationships, transmission of aspirations and attitudes and norms enforcement (100). Modood portrays ethnic capital as

a culturally specific version of social capital (Bourdieu 1986) with the goal of cultural capital accrual for community members leading to long-term development of community habitus. Although Modood's study focused on the visible minority ethnic community in a predominantly Anglo country, the Canadian MO community has certain parallels because aspirations for HE decision-making are heavily influenced by ethnic capital development. Modood also highlights the concept of 'intergenerational closure' which is 'achieved where parents know the parents of their children's friends, so that the network of parents and the network of children involve many of the same families' (99). Intergenerational closure plays a notable role in the Canadian MO community, which places a high value on developing social capital and improving one's network to improve future job prospects.

White and ethnic minority

Jews fall into a subcategory of 'whiteness' wherein they are simultaneously 'white' but also 'ethnic.' McDermott and Samson 2005 explain that there are essentially different classes of whites and different terms used by white communities to describe themselves, such as 'Caucasian, European American, and Anglo' (249). For North American Jews, being a part of the white majority discussion, is convoluted 'because many of those who are today considered white were once white ethnics' (251). McDermott and Samson explain that European Jews, who first made their way to North America, despite their white complexion, were not considered white.[1] Bari Weiss 2021 describes the current plight of American Jews:

> . . . if Jews in the United States are largely thought of as white, then the contemporary question about American Jews is: Where do they rank in the hierarchy of racial oppression . . . If anti-Semitism is simply a subcategory of racism, then, by American standards, it is, rightly, far less acute than racism against black people. And, therefore, it is a less urgent priority. (30)

This raises questions if Jews fall into their own classification altogether, or alongside other groups who fall in between being 'ethnic' and being 'white.' Though, Jewish people are also not entirely white. What is clear is that being Jewish includes both 'cultural' and 'racial' considerations (Schlosser et al. 2009, 50) and close attention to minority status. Furthermore, what is also clear is the prejudice many Jews contend with. In North America, we have seen a recent rise in anti-semitism since Trump's presidency (Boorstein and Arnsdorf 2022; Goldberg 2022; Moshin 2018). While this is disconcerting, it is important to recognise Weiss 2021) view which claims 'calling anti-Semitism a form of racism is problematic for a variety of reasons not least of which is that it whitewashes the Jewish people . . . 12–15% of American Jews are people of color' (30). In a survey of Jewish students across 220 hE institutions in the United States, '43% of Jewish college students experienced and/or witnessed antisemitic activity' (League 2021). According to the same study, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when most campus buildings were closed, there were 244 incidents of antisemitism across American college campuses. In a study at Brandeis University, a survey of over 12,000 respondents revealed that three-quarters of individuals experienced hearing 'claims that Jews have too much power and that Israelis behave "like Nazis" toward the Palestinians' (Saxe et al. 2015, 1).

Moreover, Wright et al. 2021 explain that antisemitism now has roots in both the far-left and the far-right. Antisemitism has long been a part of 'ethno-nationalist bigotry' (465) but adds that it has deep roots on college campuses due to condemnation of the State of Israel. Furthermore, research suggests that Canadian university students are particularly susceptible to becoming victims of antisemitism (Saxe et al. 2015). Currently, Jewish students on North American postsecondary campuses are increasingly likely to experience acts of antisemitism, particularly in the wake of the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. This is evidenced by the lack of university presidents denouncing anti-Jewish hate speech (Yousif 2023), as well the hundreds of encampments organised 'by anti-Israel groups with documented links to terrorist organizations and funding from overseas sources to infiltrate North American universities, in order to eradicate support for the State of Israel, the one Jewish homeland' (Newman 2024) leading to harassment and intimidation of Jewish students. In the North American context, although Jews tend to view 'themselves both as Jews and as members of a host country' (Schlosser et al. 2009, 55), the notion that Jews are not truly American, or Canadian, is often used as antisemitic rhetoric (Saxe et al. 2015).

Theorizing using Bourdieu's habitus and Phinney's theory of ethnic Identity

I recognise that Bourdieu's 1977, Bourdieu 1990, 1996; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) is mainly a sociological tool, whereas Phinney's 1993, 1996, 2007) is psychosocial in origin. Regardless, there is a clear connection between Phinney and Bourdieu in relation to both habitus and ethnic identity. Phinney and Ong (2007) explain that 'ethnicity cannot be chosen by the individual, but rather it is determined at birth or assigned to one by others on the basis of ethnic background or phenotype' (275). Phinney and Ong go a step further by explaining:

> Nevertheless, people have choices in the ways in which they deal with their assigned ethnic categories and in the meanings they hold regarding their group membership. The process of ethnic identity formation involves the construction over time of one's sense of self as a group member and of one's attitudes and understandings associated with group membership. (275)

One cannot recognise their ethnic identity without being formed and socialised by the very group from which they come, nor can one separate their habitus from their ethnic identity. Other notable work pertaining to the conversation of ethnic identity and habitus includes Ogbu's *cultural ecological theory* (Ogbu and Simons 1998) and Zhou's 2005 exploration of ethnicity and social capital. According to Ogbu and Simmons, 'a population is a minority if it occupies some form of subordinate power position in relation to another population in the same country or society' (162). Ogbu and Simmons further break down the notion of minority into *voluntary* – those who sought improved opportunities – and *involuntary* – those whose integration into a society was forced upon them, regardless of ethnicity. Jews are classified as 'autonomous minorities' because even though they are discriminated against, 'they are not totally dominated and oppressed' (p. 164). Jewish students have proven to be able to continue to accrue cultural capital by earning degrees, regardless of ethnic minority status on North American campuses. Whereas, in her breakdown regarding ethnicity as social capital, Zhou 2005

spotlights the relative success of the minority Jewish population in the United States, based on the intergenerational promotion of education and 'that they typically immigrated as families with the intention to settle, not to sojourn' (136). In the next two sections, I will unpack Bourdieu's habitus and Phinney's ethnic identity theory in detail, relating each theory to the Canadian MO context.

Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu's 1977, Bourdieu 1990, 1996; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) provides insights into the likelihood of potential trajectories of an individual based on their circumstances from birth. Bourdieu 1977 refers to habitus as the 'principles of generation and structuring of practices and representations' (p. 72) as well as the 'strategy-generating principle' (p. 72). Explained another way, habitus creates 'distinctions between what is good and what is bad, between what is right and what is wrong, between what is distinguished and what is vulgar' (Bourdieu 1996, 17). Habitus, therefore, structures one's identity while structuring one's perspectives and subsequent expectations and aspirations. The theory proposes that individuals are likely destined to be by-products of their environments based on interactions with their respective families, schools and communities. Through these interactions within a given homogenous socio-cultural context, habitus provides a sense of social structure and hierarchical class positions. Regarding career decision-making, the homogeneity of class habitus directly impacts community aspiration (Appadurai 2004; Gale and Parker 2015; Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997). For example, despite all students and young people aspiring to HE, individuals adjust career decisions based on what their habitus leads them to believe is possible. Thus, decision-making can never be seen in a vacuum because habitus is 'a product of history' (Bourdieu 1990, 54). Community and individual habitus create the context for decision-making based on acclimation to what is perceived as possible. Moreover, one cannot simply separate oneself from one's habitus because it is fortified at every life stage (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997; Reay 2004). However, one's habitus *can* change if an individual experiences a 'turning point' that puts them on a new trajectory career trajectory (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997; Skeggs 2002).

Importantly, Bourdieu 1977 identifies individuals may encounter a stark change to their environments and, in turn, experience a '*hysteresis effect*' (78), which 'explains the uncertainty, confusion and frustration that arise when social agents experience a change in a given field' (Yang 2014, 1531). This would be the case for individuals within the MO community who choose the pathway of direct-to-postsecondary, given that they are then no longer surrounded by the members of their close-knit community.

In the Canadian MO context, a mainly cloistered community, the habitus developed by the community and engrained into the students is a Zionist mission and, embedded within this, is an expectation of the accruement of cultural and social capital.

Ethnic identity theory

Phinney (1996) explains that 'ethnic identity is a dynamic construct that changes over time and context and varies across individuals' (145). There are folks who are very engaged with their ethnic identity and values, whereas other individuals may only be tangentially associated and/or wish to be a part of other groups. Phinney 1993 proposes a three-stage model of ethnic identity development in adolescence. The three stages

include Stage 1: Unexamined Ethnic Identity, Stage 2: Ethnic Identity Search/ Moratorium, and, and Stage 3: Ethnic Identity Achievement. Phinney's theory draws inspiration from Marcia's (1980) theory of four stages of identity which:

> individuals are expected to move from ethnic identity diffusion (lack of a clear identity) to either foreclosure (a commitment without exploration) or moratorium (a period of exploration) and to ethnic identity achievement, involving a firm commitment to one's ethnicity based on an exploration that has led to a clear understanding of ethnicity. (Phinney & Ong, 275)

In Stage 1, the adolescent accepts how they are viewed by the majority culture (Phinney 1993). They likely positively associate with the community based on their childhood upbringing and group socialisation (Phinney 1996). For Canadian MO adolescents, this entails going to Jewish day school, attending synagogue, and celebrating holidays with friends and family. Stage 2 occurs after the adolescent endures an experience of discrimination that acts as a catalyst to do an internal search for their ethnic selves (Phinney 1993, 1996) causing the individual to reflect and try to make sense of their ethnic minority status. Individuals begin to understand that discrimination towards their community can cause animosity between them and the majority group (Phinney 1996). Phinney explains that this crisis will lead these adolescents to 'immerse themselves in the history and culture of their group, to an achieved secure sense of their ethnicity' (145), perhaps propelling the individual to learn more about their culture and become more familiar with the difficulties faced by their ethnic community (Phinney 1993). In Stage 3, the individual comes to terms with their ethnicity and embraces minority identity and frustration with dominant groups will likely dissipate (Phinney 1996).

Clearly acceptance and understanding of ethnic identity are important elements of adolescents' sense of self. On a final point, Phinney identifies that the adaptability of a culture within the framework of society at large is of great importance for the community's success suggesting that 'attitudes and behaviors change over time and have important implications for the ways in which individuals live their lives, interact with people from other groups, and view society as a whole' (Phinney 1996, 144). Changing attitudes impact students from the perspective of HE decision-making. The prevailing ideas of a community will impact the ethnic minority adolescent in terms of finding a relative place of acceptance for their development and accrual of cultural and social capital.

Methodology

For this institutional ethnography (Dorothy 2005), I was a complete observer (Gold 1958) at the Canadian Modern Orthodox Hebrew Academy (pseudonym; CMOHA) school site in Southern Ontario, Canada over the course of eight years. Stahl (2020) explains the importance of ethnography for 'the identifying of cultural patterns, attempts to work positively with the subjectivity of the researcher, his or her knowledge of the field, and an empathetic rapport with the participants' (9). In my role within the Student Support department, I worked closely with individuals to facilitate successful graduation from secondary school and map out a meaningful trajectory for postsecondary. This often involved

working closely with young people and their families to not only ensure that academic requirements were met but also maintain open lines of communication to ensure that students were empowered to make the right postsecondary decisions for themselves and that they were maximising their prospective cultural capital accrual relative to the interests of the individual student. This study employs 'critical bifocality' (Weiss 2021) as a 'dedicated theoretical and methodological commitment to a bifocal design documenting at once the linkages and capillaries of structural arrangements and the discursive and lived-out practices by which privileged and marginalized youth and adults make sense of their circumstances' (176).

Canada is home to the 'fourth largest Jewish community in the world' (Government of Canada 2023) with more than half living in Ontario (Rom 2023). The community is comprised primarily of Ashkenazi Jews (European heritage), with a minority Sephardic population (predominantly North African and Middle Eastern descent). Rom explains that 'in Canada, approximately 12,000 Jews (3.6%) identify as a visible minority, including 2,615 Black Jews, 1,505 Latin American Jews, 1,270 South Asian Jews and 1,155 Chinese Jews.' Roughly 40% of this population is Orthodox (World Jewish Congress 2024). More specifically, the Canadian MO Jewish community comprises families from North America (Canada, Mexico, and the United States), Europe (England, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and Ukraine), Asia (Azerbaijan, India, Iraq, Iran, Israel, and Yemen), Africa (Ethiopia, Morocco, Sudan, and South Africa), South America (Argentina and Venezuela), and Australia. The diverse family groups are composed of a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. In Canada, one-quarter to one-third of the students in the private Jewish day school system receive subsidised tuition (Lungen 2014). Moreover, within this specific institution, roughly three-quarters of students are on a subsidy to some degree. CMOHA even has an endowment fund to help support families who would otherwise be unable to afford Jewish education.[2] Within the community, there is an integral focus on students getting a Jewish education, and the more well-off members of the community are there to support that initiative as best they can. Further, Canadian Jewish students have a remarkable 99% graduation rate (Brym, Neuman, and Lenton 2019).

Throughout my years working at CMOHA, I observed that making the right decisions within this tight-knit community was integral for successful cultural capital accrual. The 'right' decisions are in the canon of the Zionist mission of the institution, as is referenced in the CMOHA Student Handbook.[3] Furthermore, I was often aware that within the Canadian MO Jewish community, there is a cloistering where business, education and religion have significant overlaps. There are three distinct pathways that a student from the CMOHA will choose from with respect to HE decision-making: attending Yeshiva or Seminary (religious-Zionist), joining the IDF (Zionist), or going directly to postsecondary. Yeshiva/Seminary and the IDF are pathways that are elevated by receiving specific acknowledgement in the student handbook. That said, the handbook does not make equivalent reference to students who graduate and attend a secular postsecondary institution immediately after graduation, demonstrating how each option offers different cultural and social capital accrual opportunities, which I explore in more detail below. It is important to note that students decide these pathways often in relation to their respective family capital and habitus.

Possible pathways

Yeshiva/Seminary

For Canadian MO students, fulfilling the Zionist mission of the community, and furthering one's religious education by spending a gap year in Israel studying at a Yeshiva or Seminary institution is a highly touted decision for accruing cultural and social capital. Graduates of CMOHA are encouraged by the institution to further their religious growth by attending institutions in Israel that foster opportunities for higher Jewish learning.[4] The gap year in Israel is indeed often highly promoted by parents of graduating students (Gallagher 2014). It is through this pathway that students have a chance to spend some time in Israel and meet other Jewish students from around the world, opening the door to new connections. Additionally, these students delay the experience of ethnic minority status because, in Israel, the only Jewish state, they are a part of the ethnic majority. Echoing the strong Zionist mission, Antflick (2007) suggests that 'associating oneself with Israel fulfills a desire for belonging, but more than that, it allows these students to take ownership of their tenure in the Jewish community's global network of mutual support' (158). Other scholars, such as Cohen and Veinstein 2011, explain that the more Jewish friends one has, the more likely one will cultivate a Jewish identity moving forwards by marrying into the community, having a wider network of friends and acquaintances within the community, developing a Jewish home like the one they grew up in, and participating in institutions of the community such as synagogue. This is precisely the importance of establishing one's ethnic identity and delaying the ethnic minority complex that comes with being a minority member of a North American college campus. This is also precisely the ethnic capital that is outlined by Modood 2004. However, the aspiration to a Yeshiva or Seminary institution in Israel is a privileged pathway, requiring the right financial and cultural capital. Often, students can only pursue this pathway if their families have previously accrued the capital to make it possible. For MO young adult, attending a Yeshiva and Seminary institution is arguably a concerted gesture towards gaining cultural, social, and ethnic capital because they commit themselves to further religious education alongside like-minded Jewish individuals who have also made the concerted decision to study in Israel to best accrue their own capital.

Israel defense forces (IDF)

As an alternative way to fulfil the Zionist mission of the community, some Canadian MO high-school graduates will serve in the IDF for one to 3 years as a 'lone soldier' (Jewish soldier from the Diaspora; Yohanani 2022) before attending HE. This can be a meaningful experience for individuals to be closer to former classmates attending Yeshivas and Seminaries and remain a part of the MO community, while still having the opportunity to develop social capital through meeting other like-minded Jews from across the globe. By joining the IDF, graduates can develop as individuals before deciding on HE as mature students. Like their Yeshiva and Seminary counterparts, in Israel, students have access to monumental cultural institutions such as Yad Vashem (the Holocaust Museum) or the Kotel (the Western Wall). Further, as with attending a Yeshiva or Seminary, the Canadian MO Lone Soldier will not be an ethnic minority while living in Israel. Joining the IDF is a bridge option that offers individuals with less

family capital an opportunity to live in Israel. Notably, individuals who serve in the IDF are proudly welcomed back into any Jewish community in appreciation for their commitment to defending Zionism.

North American university attendance pathway

In my experience as an educator in a Canadian MO high school, the other notable pathway after graduation is to go directly to a postsecondary institution in North America. Many factors influence this decision. For instance, attending a university or college in the United States is much more costly than in Canada and requires sufficient family capital to be a viable option. As well, the cost of Seminary and Yeshiva can be too great for families who do not possess sufficient economic capital. The cost of 1 year in a Yeshiva or Seminary, factoring in the cost of living in addition to tuition, is in the range of $40,000 USD (Scarr 2023). As a result, those who do not end up in Israel to study will likely stay close to their hometown and live off-campus while attaining a degree. In taking this route, a student does not get access to the same social capital development as those students who travel to Israel. That said, students can further immerse themselves directly within their home communities. As well, students who begin directly at postsecondary after graduation work directly towards improving their cultural capital by achieving a degree more quickly to enter into a respectable profession.

One appealing option for Canadian MO students is attending Yeshiva University in New York, which has a 100% Jewish population (Hillel International 2023). This offers an opportunity to simultaneously develop cultural and social capital and meet other Jewish students while studying at the HE institution comprised entirely of Jewish students. Yeshiva University is a popular option in this respect for those who can afford the $40,000 + USD/year tuition (Yeshiva University 2023). At any other institution in North America, students who go on to postsecondary, will, for the first time in their schooling careers, find themselves as ethnic minorities on campus. This presents situations where students will likely face antisemitism in earnest for the first time and must navigate this experience as minorities in the face of majority culture on campus (League 2021; Saxe et al. 2015). In the case of former students in my ethnographic observation, this has led to an opportunity to fortify their place within their home community and create empowerment out of remaining in their 'bubble'. Those who stay local and go directly to university, even though they will encounter prejudice via antisemitism on campus, are able to reaffirm their commitment to the very Canadian MO community they grew up in.

Findings

For the purposes of analysis, I draw on Bourdieu's 1977, Bourdieu 1990, 1996; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), Bourdieu (1986), along with Phinney's Theory of Ethnic Identity of adolescents (Phinney 1993, 1996; Phinney and Ong 2007) selectively to focus on how young people pursue different pathways. Phinney and Ong (2007) highlight that a 'sense of belonging is perhaps the most important component of ethnic identity' (272). In the context of the Canadian MO community, there is a safety and security of membership, and, thus, an obvious appeal to go to Israel for the best capital development opportunities.

Pathway 1 – going to seminary in Israel

To illustrate Pathway 1, I draw on my experience with a student who opted to attend a seminary institution in Jerusalem after high school because of the influence of friends and family. The student's older siblings had both graduated and taken a gap year in Israel, and her closest friends were all planning on attending seminary. This student took the time to apply and was accepted to a school in Israel that would put her within a reasonable distance from most of her friends. Fortunately for her, her family had the economic capital to be able to send her, so she was able to decide without consequence if she did not take to the experience. Importantly, it was the safety and security of being with her closest friends and being surrounded by Jewish people that led her to making this decision. Thereby, it was her ethnic capital (Modood 2004) and social capital (Bourdieu 1986) that informed her decision-making. Arguably, the accrual of cultural capital was merely a happy byproduct of this decision.

Modood 2004 acknowledges an interplay between children, parents, community and norms that impact decision-making. Phinney (1996) complements this by suggesting that adolescents develop their idea of their ethnicity based on 'attitudes of parents, communities, or society' (145). The influence of the community leads them to discover a historical understanding of their minority group as they come to understand their ethnic identity. Where better for the Canadian MO graduate to do this than in Israel, surrounded by those of your same ethnic make-up, to promote individual development, and to facilitate similar habitus for future generations? This high school even offers an Aliya Assistance Program to provide resources to alumni interested in moving to Israel. Therefore, ethnic identity informs the habitus. At CMOHA, this involves making Religious Zionism a passion for all.[5] Students are being encouraged at every turn to eat, sleep, and breathe a loving and devoted association with Israel. Growing up as a minority in Canada, there are clear signposts for students throughout their educational journeys that a unique homeland exists where they will not be minorities and can practice religion freely without fear of discrimination.

Phinney and Ong (2007), referencing a study done by Berry et al. (2006), contend that 'ethnic identity does not operate alone; rather, its implications vary, depending on individuals' identification with their country of residence' (274). From my own experiences, the Canadian MO community is unique because of a lack of identification, or a relative lack of satisfaction with being 'Canadian.' In large part, students will embark on any opportunity that connects them with Israeli, or even American culture. Students are *encouraged* to participate in such events as the March of the Living, the Shalva Jerusalem marathon, spend months at MO summer camps in the United States, multiple times a year attend Shabbatons (bus trips to join up with Jewish communities in the United States to observe the Sabbath), as well as celebrating and observing Israeli-specific holidays such as Yom Hazikaron (Israeli Memorial Day) and Yom Haatzmaut (Israeli Independence).

What we have is a community of, largely, Canadian students coming from families with worldwide roots, who are encouraged to experience life in Israel (or even in the United States) where there are more opportunities for capital development within the community and further develop habitus that puts community first. Regarding ethnic

identity (Phinney 1993, 1996; Phinney and Ong 2007), the big question is, how do Canadian MO students primarily view themselves? As Canadian? As Jewish? As North American? As Modern Orthodox? How the students view themselves, and how much they account for their minority ethnic status in understanding their identity will impact HE decision-making and subsequent cultural and social capital accruement. As per the above, in my experience, the majority of students identify more closely with Israeli life (both politically and socially) than they do as being Canadians, despite living in Canada. For these students, Israel is essentially an oasis where the weather is extraordinary, being Jewish is the norm and the breadth of kosher restaurants is greater than anywhere else in the world. Based on that portrait, why wouldn't students be encouraged to go to the Holy Land?

Phinney (1996) explains that upon entering Stage 3 of her model, minority individuals emerge as proud members of their communities. In Canadian MO HE decision-making, getting to this stage could be expedited by going to Israel because it bypasses Stage 2 altogether. By going to Israel, adolescents can develop a stronger sense of community and confidence being surrounded by others who share the same background and habitus as them; most graduating students know family, friends, and former teachers who live in Israel (all of whom are influential in the decision-making process). Going to Israel means there is no need for a moratorium or a moment of distress that causes these individuals to question their minority status because they have avoided being a minority altogether. This strengthening of confidence as a member of the larger Jewish community is integral when these individuals attend HE at secular institutions after the experience in Israel.

Pathway 2 – direct to postsecondary higher education

In my dialogues with students, I observed that the crux of HE decision-making for Canadian MO adolescents who do not go to Israel is that they need to decide how they will translate postsecondary experience into accrual of cultural and social capital, despite taking a pathway that will immediately spotlight their minority ethnic status. From my experience, this route is taken by less than half of the students. The most common reason for this is a lack of economic capital, given the high cost of going to Israel. Another reason for not choosing to go to Israel is the desire not to lose ground in terms of beginning a degree and competing for jobs. Many students were also quite eager to get working on their degree so that they could enter the workforce more quickly and begin a family. A third reason has to do with familial background. When students have parents who either became religious later in life, or whose parents were immigrants to Canada, they are consistently not as familiar with the process of attending Yeshiva or Seminary and had not planned for it from an economic standpoint.

For graduates of this community, entering postsecondary could be their first taste of minority status, having otherwise attended Jewish day school and participating in community-centred co-curricular activities throughout their childhoods. Once in a situation where they are minorities, these students may experience discrimination, which can lead to strong emotions towards the dominant group (Phinney 1996). This is the very hysteresis effect (Bourdieu 1977) referenced earlier in the paper. Students are forced to understand that they have grown up in a very specific bubble and that they are no longer

sheltered in the way they once were. In this case, it can come by way of witnessing antisemitic rhetoric on campus.

To illustrate this point, I had a student who graduated and decided they no longer wished to practice religious observance and therefore did not consider Yeshiva/Seminary in Israel as an option. Instead, the student in question decided to attend a well-respected, Toronto-based university, which was their first taste of being in an academic environment outside of Orthodox Jewish education. Although not interested in the religious aspects of being Jewish, their connections to their cultural habitus grew due to being a minority on campus. Witnessing open anti-Semitic rhetoric on campus encouraged this student to go out and find a like-minded Jewish community of students on campus, knowing that they were collectively 'othered.' In a sense, this student rediscovered her habitus by experiencing an ethnic identity crisis. Being an outsider at this university led her back to reconnecting with the community she was raised in. Phinney and Ong (2007) identify that ethnic identity is a matter of commitment from the community members. Such being the case, there is further importance for students in this situation to have a stable identity and draw strength from the home community to continue their journeys towards respective capital accrual.

Discussion

This paper has set out to explain Bourdieu's theory of habitus and Phinney's theory of ethnic identity in the Canadian MO HE decision-making context. I have made an effort to draw on Bourdieu to explain how habitus influences decision-making from the standpoint of cultural and social capital accrual. And I have used Phinney to show that Canadian MO students will find themselves as minorities for the first time in their educational experience when they enter secular postsecondary institutions, further impacting their decision-making regarding choosing a pathway to attend postsecondary directly or first choosing a pathway involving going to Israel.

I recognise neither Bourdieu's nor Phinney's theories are without criticism or self-critique. According to Yang (2014), Bourdieu's habitus has received criticism for 'the inability to anticipate change and the lack of rationality' (2). Reay (2004) complements this idea by highlighting a certain irony about habitus being deterministic in nature yet, identifying that Bourdieu uses habitus 'methodology of structuralist constructivism, in an attempt to transcend dualisms' (Reay 2004, 432). Logically, what could be constructed about habitus if it is rooted in predetermination? Similarly, Bathmaker (2015) identifies that Bourdieu's definition of habitus negates the idea that individuals have the freedom to choose their pathways and, in doing so, highlights the flaws of the determinist root of the theory. Modood 2004 criticises Bourdieu for assuming 'cultural homogeneity' (97) among classes. In most cultural communities, there exists a range of SES backgrounds and heterogeneity.

As a further point, Modood suggests that, although Bourdieu proposes that economic capital can ultimately be converted into cultural capital, the theory inadequately explains how communities with lesser financial opportunities can create upward mobility. Like Modood, Cicourel 1993 identifies the need for habitus to address differences within social and ethnic groups. Cicourel 1993 has called for habitus to be expanded to:

> include the everyday experiences within the family, the peer group, and the school as a way of understanding how the child acquires a sense of his or her own power and that of adults and peers, as he or she is assigned and assumes different relationships within and outside the family, peer, and school settings. (109)

Additionally, Phinney and Ong (2007) identify that ethnic identity supersedes habitus, suggesting that 'people have choices in the ways in which they deal with their assigned ethnic categories and in the meanings they hold regarding their group membership' (275). They are not simply determined to live a specific life because of their ethnic identity. Phinney (1996) acknowledges that students on postsecondary campuses will not all uniformly have the same awareness and self-concept of ethnic identity, meaning that coming to an understanding of ethnic identity is dependent on the individual. Moreover, Phinney and Ong (2007) refer to an 'achieved ethnic identity' (273), but that refers only to individuals who have successfully made their way through all three stages of ethnic identity development, which is not a given. Phinney (1996) concedes that individuals may also return to earlier stages.

Implications

Pathway 1: greater accrual of cultural and social capital bypassing ethnic minority status

The Canadian MO community is a minority, ethnic community in the North American context, but by going to Israel, privileged students from this community can best accrue cultural and social capital. Widely speaking, individuals who go to Israel come from families who possess a high degree of capital. Further, with respect to ethnic capital (Modood 2004), these are often leaders and influencing members within the community. For graduates, being able to begin young adult life studying at a religious institution with other young MO Jews from around the world is of tremendous, capital-generating opportunity. The student is living up to the expectations of their Canadian MO community and is simultaneously strengthening the bonds of their religious obligations by fulfilling the Zionist mission. Further, ethnic minority status is not an issue for these students. While studying at a Yeshiva, these students can practice their religion without fear of antisemitism. That said, according to the Jewish Virtual Library (2024), Israel has a population just shy of 10 million people. As of May 2024, 73.2% of the population is Jewish, while 21.1% is Arab, and the remaining 5.7% is comprised of a variety of Christian and non-traditional Jewish sects. By religion, 'the population . . . was roughly 18% Muslim (1,728,000), 2% (184,400) Christian, and 2% Druze (149,400).' Although still majority Jewish, Israel, like many other countries, has a relative degree of diversity, which adds yet another layer of complexity to the decision-making process.

Attending Yeshiva and Seminary allows students to shed their minority status and enables them to focus entirely on the positives of religious education and networking before returning home. Furthermore, some North American postsecondary schools will accept transfer credits from the Yeshivas and Seminaries, which means that students will not be sacrificing any time in attaining a degree by first going to Israel. Truly, this is the penultimate capital development route for students.

The individuals within the Canadian MO community who decided to join the Israeli army after graduating from high school stand to gain social capital by living in Israel and

serving in the IDF. These students choose a cost-effective pathway (as they are not paying for tuition), which still allows them to experience Israeli culture as MO Jews. As a result, individuals serving in the IDF also shed their minority and ethnic status. This opportunity also allows individuals to take time before deciding on HE as mature students, impacting their future cultural capital development. Furthermore, individuals who serve in the IDF develop ethnic capital because of the appreciation by the MO community of lone soldiers and their commitment to the state of Israel.

Pathway 2: lesser accrual of cultural and social capital and greater ethnic minority development

The students who decide to attend HE institutions directly are in a scenario where they will potentially experience have ethnic minority status for the first time in their lives on a North American postsecondary campus; including institutions consistently ranked in the top 20 globally (Dubey 2023). This will occur simultaneously as they pursue cultural capital accrual through HE. For those who remain in the same hometown for postsecondary, there is an opportunity to develop further cultural and social capital within the local community through continuing ritual attendance at community functions and services. Although Canadian MO students attending HE at almost every institution in Canada or the United States will be doing so as an ethnic minority (regardless of first having gone to Israel), the students who attend HE directly after graduating will much more quickly find themselves in the potentially precarious situation of being minorities on campus. Given the recent statistics, they will be susceptible to antisemitism throughout their studies and find themselves as 'others' while pursuing a degree. Of course, not every student has the privilege to go to Israel after graduating, and there are opportunities for capital development by attending a postsecondary institution directly after graduating, but this pathway will not have the same amount of networking opportunities as there would be by being in Israel, the only place in the world they would not be a minority.

Conclusions

Canadian MO high-school graduates can decide between pathways of differentiating cultural capital accruement unique to the community. The first pathway, for those who are privileged to have the opportunity to do so, involves a gap year in Israel either to study at Yeshiva or Seminary institutions or to join the Israeli army. These pathways supersede ethnic identity development because, in Israel, students avoid the ethnic minority status they would otherwise have at North American postsecondary campuses. This pathway will simultaneously present opportunities for cultural capital development, social capital development, and ethnic capital development, and facilitate similar habitus for future generations. Whereas, in the second pathway, Canadian MO high-school graduates will attend a secular postsecondary institution, likely in their hometown, and, for the first time in their lives, they will be ethnic minorities on campus and will be susceptible to experiencing antisemitism and have a smaller community to draw strength from. Although this pathway does allow students to remain a part of their home community, their pathway towards developing cultural, social and ethnic capital is different from their Israel-bound counterparts. The findings are anecdotal based on my experience teaching at one MO high school in Ontario from 2016 to the present. Given

the diversity of the Canadian MO community, there is certainly potential for further pathways for high-school graduates, given the nuanced differences in habitus between communities in various cities across the country, which merits further research. Additionally, research following students from pathways highlighted in this piece will be important to determine winners and losers from this community with respect to HE decision-making and subsequent cultural capital accrual.

Notes

1. Ashkenazi Jews – of European descent – make up 80% of the Jewish population worldwide (Encyclopaedia Britannica, inc 2023), yet Jews are widely still considered ethnic minorities. Jews are widely considered to be both 'white' and 'ethnic,' but there are some Jewish families who are not only 'ethnic' but also 'not white.' All Jews, whether white or otherwise, are ethnic minorities because Judaism is a minority religion.
2. I am required to keep the source anonymous for confidentiality reasons.
3. I am required to keep the document anonymous for confidentiality reasons.
4. I am required to keep the source anonymous for confidentiality reasons.
5. I am required to keep the source anonymous for confidentiality reasons.

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