# Expectations of Family Life in a Multicultural Context: An Israeli Example

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*The study explores how young immigrants mold their perceptions of the family life they want to have and how they bridge their culture and history with that of their adoptive society. Two groups of recent immigrants in Israel-- from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, and two non-immigrant resident groups– Jewish and Arab, were interviewed. Respondents were given an identical master case stimulus: a short narrative vignette of a typical family setting at home. After reading it they were asked to describe how they expect their own future family to look. Four family domains emerged: (1) love and intimacy; (2) family and work; (3) parent/child relationships; and (4) divorce. The main conclusions were that a convergence process toward the veteran population family patterns occurred; the family of origin was often evaluated and sometimes criticized in relation to the newly acquired standards; and an overall trend toward compromise concerning gender equality was observable.*

## Abstract in Hebrew

מטרת המאמר היא לבחון את העמדות של צעירים ישראלים- יהודים וערבים, עולים חדשים (מברהיים לשעבר ומאתיופיה) ותיקים- כלפי סגנון המשפחה אותו הם חפצים לאמץ. לנחקרים ניתן סיפור קצר המתאר משפחה, זוג הורים וילדים, יושבים סביב שולחן האוכל. הילדים שואלים את ההורים האם המשפחה בה גדלו הייתה דומה לזו שלהם, וכאשר ההורים עונים הופך הסיפור להיות תלת-דורי. בהתייחס לספור נתבקשו המרואיינים לתאר את ציפיותיהם לגבי המשפחה שלהם בעתיד. ארבעה תחומים עלו מתוך התשובות : (1) אהבה ואינטימיות (2) משפחה ועבודה (3) יחסי הורים-בנים (4) גירושים. המסקנות העיקריות מצביעות על תהליך התכנסות של הקבוצות השונות לעבר דפוס המשפחה של הישראלי הוותיק, תוך שמירה על גוון אתני מסוים; על ההתייחסות הביקורתית בקורתית כלפי משפחת המוצא בהתייחס למאפייני המשפחה החדשים אשר נרכשו; ועל נטייה של כל המשיבים להתפשר לגבי האפשרות של שוויון מלא בין בני הזוג.

In its 52 years of existence, Israel has acquired more than half its population through immigration. Immigrants arrived from all over the world, bringing with them different cultures, life styles and family patterns. Like other immigrant societies, such as Australia, Canada and the United States, Israel has had to manage cultural diversity in the context of mutual stereotypical attitudes and perceptions by native and newcomer, and, in the process, forge a multicultural, pluralistic society. Although cultural diversity is a distinctive feature of Israeli society, and though the economic and educational gaps between Jews of European origin, on the one hand, and African or Asian background on the other, have never closed (Sharot & Ben-Raphael, 1991; Smooha, 1993), family structure among the Israeli-born offspring of various ethnic segments has converged toward a single pattern (Nahon, 1984; Peres & Katz, 1991).

Most recently, when glasnost opened the doors of the former Soviet Union, hundreds of thousands of Jews emigrated to Israel. Between 1989 and 1997, approximately 750,000 Russian immigrants, or about 230,000 families, arrived in Israel (Leshem & Sicron, 1998). These immigrants brought with them a culture strongly influenced by generations of Soviet rule. In Israel, the Russian immigrants encountered a society that differs both ideologically and economically from the one they left behind. Many perceive that their cultural background and educational level place them in a higher class than most Israelis, even though economically they are still disadvantaged (Lissak, 1995). This conflict situation increases the demands of these immigrants toward their host country both on the institutional and the informal levels.

A second group of recent immigrants is comprised of approximately 50,000 Ethiopian Jews who arrived in Israel mainly in two short clandestine airlifts in 1984 and 1991. Today, Ethiopians constitute a significant minority in the country (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 1997). They are inexperienced with modern ways of life and lack formal education. The Ethiopians arrived without any assets or financial resources. Residing in peripheral areas, and employed mainly in craft-work and manual labor, the Ethiopian community is marginalized in Israeli society.

Israel's largest non-Jewish minority group consists of the Arabs, who currently constitute about 18% of the population. Scholars who write about the Arab population in Israel tend to describe it as being in a state of transition from tradition to modernity. This process is reflected in various life domains such as economy, education, culture, family structure and women's status (Al-Haj, 1987, 1989; Haj-Yahia, 1995; Rosenfeld, 1968, 1978). Israeli Arabs are a unique minority, in that they are culturally linked to the peoples surrounding the Jewish state. Moreover, they are an indigenous population, a fact that legitimates their view that they are not obliged to adjust to the dominant

culture, which has only recently been created, or in their perception, is imported. This does not imply a lack of accommodation to the dominant culture life style. However, the collective rationalization of this process, which is derived in the case of the Jewish community from the idea of nation building, is absent in the Israeli Arab case.

Much of the current discourse over the concept of pluralism focuses on whether multicultural societies must choose between assimilation and separatism as primary modes of interethnic relations (Brewer, 1996). Israelis grasp this dilemma somewhat differently. On the one hand, there are growing reservations about the assimilationist melting pot model. Cultural diversity is not only recognized as a fact but it is also legitimized as an expression of human rights. On the other hand, social change that reduces economic, social and even cultural gaps is encouraged and welcomed. The recent large-scale waves of immigration from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia have reemphasized both issues: the right to be different and the need to bridge multi-dimensional gaps.

The aim of this study is to examine the reflection of these two divergent trends in the Israeli family context. More specifically, the encounter by young immigrant adults with the familial norms and life styles prevailing in Israeli society is explored, and their preferences regarding elements of the past that they wish to preserve and those they want to change are noted. The respondents belong to four distinct ethnic groups: veteran[1] Israeli Jewish residents, Israeli Arabs, recent immigrants from Ethiopia, and recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union. We begin with a short glance at each of these family types.

**The Veteran Israeli Jewish Family**
A description of patterns of behavior and major trends in family life in Israel requires two comparative perspectives: one that analyzes changes over time, and another that examines differences between Israel and other countries. Changes over the past five decades show that Israelis are marrying later, divorcing more, and on the average having a smaller number of children, although different groups have been experiencing these processes at different rates. A comparison between Israel and other countries reveals that the family in Israel is more stable and more central than in most industrialized societies, as reflected by rates of marriage, divorce, fertility, out-of-wedlock birth, and cohabitation (Katz, forthcoming; Peres & Katz, 1981, 1991). In a study of priority rankings of five life domains (work, religion, leisure, community and family) in eight industrial countries, Israeli respondents emphasized the family domain, ranking the family highest as compared to respondents in all other countries (Harpaz, 1990; MOW, 1987).

Research comparing family structure and patterns of family behavior between Israelis of European vis-a-vis African or Asian origin over time shows a process of convergence in birth rates, a trend due mainly to decreased fertility among women of Asian and African extraction (Nahon, 1984; Peres & Katz, 1991). The closing of the fertility gap has facilitated the convergence of life styles between the two ethnic groups, as marital relations and socialization are, to a degree, influenced by sib size.

Another phenomenon that links family with ethnicity is inter-ethnic marriage, which has increased threefold in Israel since the 1950s, although it remains at about half the expected rate (Nahon, 1984). A quarter of all Jewish marriages are inter-ethnic, meaning that one of the spouses is of European and the other is of African or Asian origin. In sum, although the process of bridging the ethnic gap in status attainment has been slow (Smooha & Kraus, 1985), there is an ongoing process of inter-ethnic integration in the family sphere.

**The Arab Family in Israel**
Prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, Arab society in the region was primarily a traditional peasant society. The family constituted the main economic unit, including all aspects of property ownership, as well as the basic social unit, through which participation in the community was determined. Traditionally, Arabs lived in extended families, which included the father, his wife (or wives), single daughters, single and married sons, and their wives and children. The family was patrilocal, patriarchal and patrilineal. Marriages were prearranged by the parents and were carried out at a young age, especially for females. New wives joined the husband's family (a virilocal arrangement) and assumed loyalty to them. A number of extended families formed the *hamula*, in which membership was determined by both real or assumed kinship (Al-Haj, 1989). The *hamula* constituted the center of social and political life in the village, and each new family that joined the village was eventually accepted into one of the *hamulas*. Within this structure, the nuclear family had almost no independent existence, functioning mainly as part of the extended family.

After the establishment of Israel, Arab villagers gradually underwent transformation from peasantry to commuting proletariat, although working outside the village did not fully release them from dependence on residual village economies (Rosenfeld, 1968, 1978). This and other changes impacted on the traditional Arab family structure. Studies indicate a decline in the importance and influence of the *hamula* as a result of a combination of political, social and economic factors alongside improved availability of and accessibility to formal support systems (Al-Haj, 1989; Smooha, 1989). These trends weakened the extended family both in its economic function and as a

unit of residence and consumption (Al-Haj, 1987), and, in consequence, the nuclear family became more independent and central.

Women in the Arab family, are dependent on their husbands and are expected to obey them as well as to maintain the household (Haj-Yahia, 1995). While the status of Arab women has risen somewhat over the years, with a growing proportion of girls receiving secondary education (18% in 1948, 44% in 1970, 48% in 1995) and women becoming economically active (15% of Arab women are part of the labor force, Israel Central Bureau of Statistics,2000), these changes have not altered women's basic status in the family. Their roles as wives and mothers continue to follow the traditional, non-egalitarian pattern (Haj-Yahia, 1995). Most research on the Israeli Arab family finds it to be in the midst of a process of transition involving conflicting pressures that push toward modernization and pull back to traditionalism. These countervailing vectors result in an enhancement of the status of the nuclear family, on the one hand, and an escalation of gender and intergenerational tensions on the other.

**The Immigrant Family from Ethiopia**
Most of the Jews in Ethiopia lived in rural communities. As a minority group concerned about preserving its religion and traditions, the Ethiopian Jewish community was a closed society, strictly adhering to religious precepts. Communities were centered around the extended family, which functioned as a highly cohesive unit. A large extended family was considered advantageous because of its ability to protect and support its members (Westheimer & Kaplan, 1992). The family was patriarchal and patrilocal, with marriages arranged by heads of families (Ben-David, 1996). The gender division of labor in Ethiopia was explicit: men were the undisputed heads of the family, they worked outside the home, and they represented the family to the elders and other authorities (Wagaw, 1993). Women were considered to be the property of their husbands, and their responsibilities consisted of working in the home and helping in the fields when necessary. Relationships were based on respect for the distinct roles of husband and wife (Barhani, 1990).

Many Ethiopian Jewish families were complex families composed of two or more one-parent families, which were likely to split up further into one-parent families because of their inherent instability (Weil, 1991). Upon immigration to Israel, the Ethiopian family began to undergo radical structural changes (Kaplan & Rosen, 1993). The disruptive nature of the emigration process from Ethiopia, during which marriage partners were sometimes separated from each other, and the effects of modernization on traditional Ethiopian Jewish family life resulted in intensifying this pattern. As a result,

one-third of all Ethiopian immigrant households in Israel are headed by single parents, mostly single mothers (Weil, 1991).

Another significant change upon arrival in Israel involved gender arrangements. New economic opportunities for women brought about a loss of power for men by diminishing their role as sole providers. Many Ethiopian women found employment in Israel and kept separate bank accounts. This change in women's status resulted in a virtual revolution in family norms, roles and rules (Ben-David, 1993). Inter-gender gaps in the adjustment to these developments are one of the prime reasons for conflict between spouses that sometimes ends in divorce (Weil, 1991).

**The Immigrant family from the Former Soviet Union**
Soviet ideology regarding the status of the family underwent change several times. In the early years of the regime, an anti-familistic ideology predominated (Lapidus, 1978). In its drive to minimize private pursuits and private life, the state encouraged a plethora of public activities and social duties that strengthened loyalty to the regime and minimized the time and energy available for family life (Shlapentokh, 1991). This ideology changed direction in the 1970s and early 1980s with the disappointment in socialism and the rise of a more individualistic perspective (Kharchev & Matskovskii, 1982; Lapidus, 1988; Shlapentokh, 1991), causing marital relations and family patterns to become "transitory, turbulent and in a state of flux" (Imbrogno & Imbrogno, 1989). Contemporary Russian family life is typified by a low birth rate; a high divorce rate; a decrease in number of marriages, leading to a rising percentage of cohabitation (Imbrogno & Imbrogno, 1986, 1989); and a high percentage of women in the labor force working full time (Lapidus, 1978, 1988).

Arriving in Israel, immigrants from the former Soviet Union were faced with a familistic society in which marriage is almost universal; divorce varies from infrequent to fairly frequent, depending on social group; and all matters of marriage and divorce are delegated to the religious courts. These norms make the immigrants' acculturation process in the family realm stressful, since cognitive restructuring becomes more difficult in direct proportion to the divergence between origin and host cultures (Shuval, 1993).

One of the effects of migration is an upset in the balance between family and social environment, which may result in marital conflict, crisis (Sluzki, 1979; Thomas, 1995) and even dissolution. This effect has been noticeably prevalent in the massive migration process from the former Soviet Union. The balance of power between spouses changed. Many marriages could not withstand the decline of the husband's sense of self-esteem. The acculturation process sometimes caused role reversal in regard to gender

relations. Immigrant women from the former Soviet Union often adapted better to Israeli labor market conditions (Ben-Barak, 1989) and were more willing than men to change their occupations to lower-status ones in order to increase family income. These new gender differences often heightened marital conflict, and as a consequence either wife or husband opted out of the marriage (Ben-David & Lavee, 1994).

A unique phenomenon of the immigration from the former Soviet Union is that the decision to immigrate created conflict between spouses, often resulting in divorce and the subsequent emigration of one spouse only-- usually the wife-- with minor-age children. These single-parent families were then compelled to undergo a parallel adjustment process to the new society in addition to a new familial life style (Katz, 2000). A common strategy for coping with these hardships, as well as with economic constraints, housing shortages, and the need for mutual help between generations, was the formation of multigenerational households. Studies assessing this kind of living arrangement show mixed results on the link between co-residence and the adjustment process. Some studies found that multigenerational living is likely to increase stress and cause dissatisfaction (Naon, King, & Habib, 1993). Other studies show that shared living arrangements enhance adjustment to the host country by providing family solidarity for the older generation and economic advantages for the younger generation (Katz & Lowenstein, 1999).

In light of the divergent cultural backgrounds of large segments of the Israeli population, the perceptions and expectations of young adults regarding their future family life merit comparative study. This article focuses on the extent to which the four groups examined seek to preserve their distinctive family traditions, adapt to the dominant culture, or merge traditional ethnic practices and identities with those of the dominant culture.

## METHOD

### Sample

Approximately 200 students enrolled in post-secondary educational institutions in the northern part of Israel were requested to participate in the study. They were recruited from the University of Haifa, the Islamic Seminary in Haifa, The Yad Nathan College near Haifa and the Technion in Haifa. The overall sample size was 149 (response rate of 75%). The mean age of the sample was 26; 65% were female and 35% male; 85% were single, 10% were married, and the remaining 5% were cohabiting.

Participants from four distinct backgrounds were approached. One group consisted of 36 Israeli Jewish students, all of whom were born in Israel, and most of whom were secular (i.e., not religiously observant). Twenty were

of European descent, 12 of African or Asian origin, and the rest from mixed marriages. The fathers of this group were mainly employed in administrative positions in human-service organizations, a few were in academia and several held high tech jobs. Seventy percent of the mothers were fully employed, 15% mothers were employed part time and another 15% were housewives.

A second group consisted of 46 young Israeli Arab students born in Israel, 28 of whom were Moslem and 18 Christian. Their fathers were mainly clerks and skilled workers. A few owned small businesses, such as garages or restaurants. All their mothers were described as housewives.

A third group consisted of 29 first-generation immigrants from Ethiopia studying in a preparatory program at the University of Haifa for admission in the regular undergraduate program the following year. Their mean tenure in Israel was 10 years. Their fathers were mostly blue-collar workers and their mothers were employed in low-income service jobs or were housewives.

The fourth group consisted of 38 first-generation immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Their mean tenure in Israel was eight years. The majority of their parents were academically trained, and most (both mothers and fathers) held jobs in their professions.

Participation rates in post-secondary education are rather different among the four groups; therefore, representativeness of the findings is also different for each group. For the total Jewish population, the post-secondary participation rate is 12.3% and the academic education participation rate is 25.6%; for Jews who were born in Europe or America the rates are 16% and 35% and for Jews who were born in Asia or Africa the rates are 7.4% and 9.3%, respectively; for Arabs the rates are 8% and 10.6%, respectively (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2000). However, one can assume that the student population plays an important role in shaping family norms and expectations.

**Design and Analysis**

The survey instrument constructed for this study consisted of a one-page narrative vignette of a typical end-of-the-day family scene in which father and mother are preparing dinner after returning home from work in their respective jobs. When the food is ready, the parents and their two children are sitting at the table having dinner. The children ask their parents to tell about their own families, thus placing the narrative in a three-generational perspective. The mother tells the children that she was brought up in another family style in which her father was the only provider and her mother assumed full responsibility for the household and children. The children discuss among themselves the pros and cons of their parents' and grandparents' family relationships. In this way, the respondents were confronted with two different family models. The aim was to analyze the respondents' perceptions of an

identical master case stimulus. After reading the narrative, the respondents were asked to write their own story about how their family of procreation will look in the future. A one-page space was provided for this narrative. Lastly, a short demographic questionnaire was distributed. Participants were interviewed in Hebrew. Given that the participants were raised in Israel and enrolled in post-secondary and academic institutions, no lingual problems were encountered.

The data were analyzed qualitatively, using two methods: analytic induction and constant comparison analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Strauss, 1987). Analytic induction involves scanning the data for categories of phenomena and for relationships among these categories. Recurring themes and patterns in the narratives were listed, and key linkages of similar instances of the same phenomenon in the data were identified. This was followed by constant comparison analysis, which combines inductive behavior-category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all incidents observed for all the subjects. The narratives were compared with each another in their entirety, and hypotheses were developed about similarities/differences between the respondents (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To ensure inter-rater reliability for the categorical definitions, an independent rater was trained and his coding was compared with that of the authors.

## RESULTS

The analysis showed that the respondents referred to four main dimensions in their expected family life: 1) love and intimacy; 2) family and work; 3) parent/child relationships; and 4) divorce. Each group, however, focused on different aspects of these dimensions.

**Love and intimacy**
This aspect of marriage and family was referred to by all respondents, possibly because of their age, and possibly because these attributes are still perceived as important to marriage, even though they have been called "forgotten variables" (Willi, 1997). However, the various cultural groups referred to love and intimacy in disparate ways. Second- and third- generation Israeli respondents appeared to emphasize marital cooperation rather than romantic love. Such cooperation depends on mutual concessions: "I take the model of the family in which I grew up as an example of what my life can look like. It's clear to me that cooperation entails making concessions for the other while recognizing each other's needs."

The Arab respondents projected a romantic idealization of love in both their given and future family: "My future family will be very good. There will be

a lot of love between husband and wife. There will also be deep understanding between the two." Practically, every Arab respondent referred to love between the spouses as the basis of marriage.

The Ethiopian students did not refer to love and intimacy as an independent familial dimension but rather focused on economic well-being as a vital prerequisite for a satisfying relationship: "What will make our married life good is the ability to provide better for our children." Or: "If the economic situation will improve, then we will be able to relax and spend our leisure time together and live a beautiful married life."

The Russian respondents expressed the wish that conjugal relations in their future families will be very different from their perception of their parents' relations. In their view, their parents had invested most of their time and energy in work, both outside and inside the home: "They were workaholics." By contrast, predictions for their own future were "a sense of warm family," an "expectation of love in my family," and "happiness, joy and love" in their family. Such projections, however, were combined with a recognition of the need for both spouses to work outside the home and to cooperate in house chores: " I wish to combine work and romance in our future family." "We will come home after a long day of work and cooperate in housework, and then we will play with our children…. I hope there will also be time left over for our privacy."

**Family and work**
The respondents focused on two of the main issues of concern for modern and post-modern families: the division of labor between spouses, and the employment of the woman. As in the other domains, views differed according to culture of origin. Significantly, none of the groups anticipated perfect egalitarianism without ambivalence in this area of the marital partnership.

1. Division of labor between spouses. The veteran Israelis most clearly expressed the difference between their ideal in the conjugal division of labor and their expectation based on the experience of their families of orientation. They expressed reservations about the so-called egalitarian marriage. A female respondent stated: "I suppose that my husband and I will both work full-time, and my ambition is that there should be an egalitarian division of household chores between the two of us. However, I know that in reality, this will not be the case. I know that I will be responsible for cooking, cleaning, laundry and taking care of the kids, and he will take care of the technical aspects of the household. I also think that whoever works less hours outside the home will put in more hours at home tasks." A similar view was expressed by a male student: "Career and self-realization should not be in conflict in my future family. Nevertheless, I think that my wife will be responsible for household

chores and child care, and therefore will work at a part-time job as long as the children are small."

The Arab respondents were more cautious about potential spousal cooperation, making it clear that there was no expectation of anything beyond "help" on the husband's part. An egalitarian relationship was clearly not expected: "I think he will help me a little bit, because he is understanding, considerate and educated. He loves children, loves helping them, and enjoys a quiet and nice family." A male Arab respondent phrased his opinion in the context of his family of origin: "Even if my wife went to work, the major provider is the husband. My mother stayed at home all the time, and in light of this background it is almost impossible to change."

The two immigrant groups-- Ethiopian and Russian -- while differing in many aspects of their lives, both referred to cooperation in the household as a desired goal, but were not sure whether it will materialized. In the Ethiopian family of origin, gender arrangements were absolutely clear, yet they were envisioned differently in the desired future family: "My family will be very different from my family of origin, where my father was a farmer and took care of the money, and my mother took care of the children and the house. In my future family, both of us will work so that we will be able to provide better economic conditions for our children, and my husband will help in the house."

The Russian-immigrant participants, by contrast, grew up in families where both parents worked: "My parents were professionals, a doctor and an engineer. But at home my grandmother took care of me, and when my parents came home my mother took over all the household chores. My wish is to have more equal relations with my husband than my parents. But I am not sure whether this will work out, first, because I was raised in the belief that the father is the strong figure, he solves all the problems, and is considered the most intelligent person in the family, and second, because there is a difference between a dream and reality, so, I will be ready to accept the female role in the family."

2. Female employment. All the respondents envisioned women being employed in order to contribute to the family income, regardless of whether or not their own mothers had worked outside the home. However, it was clear to both genders (except for the Ethiopians) that the wife's work would be restricted to bringing home a second income, at least while the children are small. An Israeli female student explained: "I'll work, but I don't think I'll develop a career. A career is important to me, but a good family life is even more important, and I know that I'll have to give up a career for a good family life. Unfortunately, statistics show that women are the ones to give up their professional self-fulfillment, and as hard as it is to admit it, I know that I will be the one to give up my career. That's why I try to accomplish as much as I

can now, before I have a family." Male respondents projected a similar picture, explaining that "there are some tasks at home that a man cannot perform, so probably my wife will work part time only."

Typically, an Arab female respondent stated: "I'll work outside the home, but only as long as my husband agrees and it doesn't affect my children." Only the Ethiopians viewed the situation differently, convinced that they will be dependent on every possible source of income: "My wife will work, because we will need the money. It will help us get ahead and forge a better future for the children." Finally, the immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who were raised in families where both parents were employed, expressed the wish to return to a more traditional arrangement, or at least to one in which there is the possibility of choice. One female respondent explained: "My mother and father both worked. They had to. I'll work as well, because one paycheck will not be enough, despite the fact that I would rather stay at home to take care of my children." The Russian male respondents, too, expressed the wish that their wives take care of the children, at least when they are small, while they assume the role of the main breadwinner.

**Parent-child relationships**
All respondents viewed the place of children in their future families as having the highest importance. They referred to three aspects of the parent-child relationship: the ideal number of children, the nature of the parent-child relationship, and the children's future achievements.

1. Ideal number of children. Each cultural group viewed this aspect as related to the number of children in their family of origin and the cultural norms of their group. Veteran Israeli respondents expressed satisfaction with the number of children in their families of origin (2-3) and stated that they would like to have between two and three children of their own. Arab and Ethiopian respondents, who came from very large families, hoped to have fewer children themselves, although they would not mention a specific number. Immigrant respondents from the former Soviet Union generally came from families with one child, and they wished to increase that number in their own future families, usually to two. While still influenced by their family of origin in determining the desired number of children, the respondents also cited as a factor the extent of investment that they could make in order to better the lives of their children. The responses tended to approximate the current Israeli norm, namely three children per family.

2. Relationships between parents and children. This area, too, was viewed by the respondents in reference to their childhood experiences as children in their own families and to their cultural background. Three of the four groups aspired to change some aspect of their lives in this area-- the

aspect that seemed most divergent from current Israeli norms. Veteran Israeli respondents grew up in child-oriented families and expressed their wish for this kind of relationship to persist in their own families. They saw their future families as centered in an egalitarian way around the children: "In my family we will do things together. I'll be there when my wife isn't, and she'll be there when I'm not. When we are all there, we will do things together." Female Arab respondents emphasized their wish for the father to be more involved in the children's lives: "My husband and I grew up in very traditional families. My mother took care of the house and the children, and my father worked outside. My husband will work outside, but when he comes home he will give the children his attention, although I know that other men don't do this. I think it is very important for the father to be involved in taking care of the children, and I believe that I will be able to convince him to be different." Ethiopian respondents emphasized the lack of adequate economic resources while they were growing up. In their view, providing for their children financially is the key to ensuring a more promising future for them: "My father worked very hard outside the home, and my mother took care of us. But they couldn't give us much, because they didn't have anything. So, I, with God's help, want my wife as well to work outside the home, and I'll help her with the household chores, and we will work hard, but we will be able to give them what we didn't get." Many of the Russian immigrants respondents (22 out of 38) described their upbringing as only children in a multi-generational household, with grandparents who took care of them while their parents worked: "We always lived with my grandparents. When my grandfather died, my grandmother continued living with us, in Russia and later in Israel. I would want my life to be different. I would like my spouse and I to live alone with our children and take care of them."

     3. Children's future achievements. Three of the four cultural groups were highly focused on this issue, while the forth-- the veteran Israelis, did not relate to this concern at all. All the Arab respondents emphasized their children's success. "I grew up in a family of ten. In my future family there will be fewer children, so that I can give each of them more education and a good life." The Ethiopian respondents expected their main achievement in life to be to see their children succeed. "I want most of all to see my children have a good life, a better life than I had." The Russian respondents were also very committed to the education and well-being of their children. "I want to fulfill two main goals in my family life: high standard of living and the best education for my children. This is the only way to succeed in the future."

**Divorce**

The idea of marriage ending in divorce if the relationship does not work out elicited two distinctly different reactions from the respondents. The immigrants from the former Soviet Union and the veteran Israelis viewed divorce as a possibility that can happen in any family. The immigrant respondents viewed it as a temporary stage that would eventually lead to remarriage, with the child or children remaining close with both parents: "I think that if two people cannot live with each other anymore, they should not force themselves to do so. The children will probably live with the mother, but there will be joint custody and both parents can find a way to lead a life that will be good for them and their children." The veteran Israeli respondents described both father and mother in a divorce situation as very much attached to their children and sharing responsibilities: "Both father and mother are involved with the children, and it is not obvious a priori whether the children will remain with the father or the mother."

By contrast, both the Arab and the Ethiopian respondents viewed divorce as tragic. The Arab students grew up in highly traditional families where divorce is almost nonexistent. They envisioned the future for divorced families as gloomy, especially for the children: "When there is divorce in the family, there is chaos. Each partner goes in a different direction, they are confused, and they don't know what to do with their lives. But it is especially hard on the children, who need a father and mother at home." The Ethiopians, whose community contains some 30 % single-parent families generally living in poverty, perceive divorce as a situation of severe distress verging on catastrophic. They expressed the hope that divorced couples be reunited after some mediation and assistance from the family: "When parents divorce it is terrible for the children, who are used to living in their family environment. There may even be suicide as a result. Hopefully, the couple will find a way to get back together, but this will have to happen soon, because a great love may be transformed after separation, into fierce hatred."

## DISCUSSION

The present study compares four Israeli subcultures, in the context of young adults' aspirations for their future families: two groups of recent immigrants -- from Ethiopia and from Russia, and two non-immigrant, long-term resident groups-- Jewish and Arab. Each group has distinctive characteristics in terms of length of time of residence in the country, socioeconomic status, and distance from its historical roots. A relevant question is whether these different cultures construct differing expectations of family life in terms of

gender relations, marital life style, number of children and rules of conduct concerning family formation and dissolution.

The findings of the study must be viewed with caution in light of the limitations of the sample studied. The research population consisted of 149 male and female post-secondary school students from a single city. These facts-- small sample, above-average educational level, and narrow geographical base-- may distract from the study's generalizability. Another limitation stems from the secular background of most of the Jewish respondents. It is well established that Orthodox Jews hold a divergent conception of ideal and actual family life from that of their secular counterparts (Deshen, Liebman, & Shokeid, 1995). Additionally, the qualitative nature of the analysis precluded substantive control for familial and socioeconomic background characteristics. In terms of class, most of the participants belong to lower-middle or middle class. This fact has a different meaning for each group. For the Ethiopians and Arabs, the selectivity introduced by sampling only post-secondary students is by far more severe than for Israeli-born and Russian immigrants. Intergroup diversities might stem from these factors as well.

Despite the limitations of the data, three conclusions may be drawn. The expectations of the respondents concerning their future families reflect a process of convergence towards the mainstream Israeli patterns. This set of norms derives its influence and centrality not only from its dominant status in a society of immigrants, but also from its relative resemblance to the familial model that emerged in the second half of the 20th century in the affluent West. The number of offspring perceived as ideal, gender division of labor, female employment, and family formation all lean toward the veteran Israeli model. The dynamic expectations of the Arab respondents demonstrate this trend especially. Mate selection directed by personal feelings rather than familial decree, love as the guiding principle in conjugal relations, birth control, and an appreciable improvement in women's status, are tendencies emphasized by the Arab students in describing their future families.

A closely related conclusion is that the family of origin is often evaluated and even criticized relative to the newly acquired Israeli standards. The differences between memories of family of origin and current Israeli norms were found to coincide with points of criticism toward the family of origin. Conversely, native-born Israeli respondents viewed their family of origin as a model. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the differences between the respondents' given and the desired families lies in their perception of what was missing in their family of origin. The Russian immigrants missed having the closeness and exclusivity of a relationship with their parents. They repeatedly stressed their wish to be present for their children, because when they were growing up their parents were busy working and their grandmothers took care

of them. The Arab respondents stated that they hope to have smaller and more child-oriented families and to have a more cohesive relationship between spouses and with children. The Ethiopian respondents, still coping with the sting of poverty, repeatedly expressed their determination to achieve affluence for the sake of their children. The only group to cite only minor differences between given and desired families consisted of the native-born Jewish respondents. Generally, however, they aspired to have families similar in size and life style to their families of origin.

A trend toward compromise concerning gender arrangements is evident. On the one hand, all the respondents aspired to more egalitarian and cooperative gender relationships. There was also a general demand for a more active and participatory pattern of fatherhood. On the other hand, the respondents expressed reservations about the ideal of total gender equality. The major, though not exclusive, responsibility for providing income was envisioned as lying with the husband, just as responsibility for household and children was still assigned to the wife. With this, maternal employment was foreseen and legitimated by most respondents. The presence of traditional gender concepts in the familial expectations of young Israelis may be attributed to the influence of the family of origin (particularly in the case of Arab respondents) as well as to the absence of a model of complete gender equality in Israeli society (Azmon & Izraeli, 1993; Katz, 1997; Swirski & Safir, 1991). Young Israeli women from various cultural backgrounds expect a fairly egalitarian partnership in which the husband maintains close and loving contact with the wife and children and will cooperate in facilitating the wife's occupational activity. Women (as well as men) are aware of the necessity of two salaries to sustain a family, yet they wish to stay home while parenting young children and view their occupation as secondary to their maternal functioning.

Summing up, in three of the four family styles under study, the balance of conjugal power, division of family tasks, gender roles and rules of conduct appear to be in a process of transition, as manifested by the perceptions of young adults of their family of origin and anticipated future family. The family of those born in Israel, which appears to be the model toward which the other familial styles may be expected to converge, is under the least pressure to change. This conclusion, however, may be valid mainly in the short run, as the long-term dynamics are unclear at present. Macro-level events such as progress toward Arab-Israeli peace, or, conversely, a regression to war; economic prosperity or depression; and massive immigration or emigration are some of the developments that could change the way young people evaluate their families of origin and construct the familial model to which they aspire.

## NOTES

1. The term veteran is used to describe people born and/or raised in Israel and the term veteran family is used to describe their family life-style.

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