

# Ethnicity and Identity: Language and Culture Among Greek-American Youths

Andrew G. Kourvetaris\*

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article étudie la question de l'éthnicité grecque selon les mesures traditionnelles de distinction et d'auto-identification. L'auteur teste différentes hypothèses véhiculées au passé et des théories sur l'éthnicité avec un échantillon restreint d'étudiants grecs-américains au sein de deux universités privées.

L'étude révèle, tout comme les études pre-existantes sur l'établissement des Grecs, que la transmission des valeurs et traditions "grecques" est particulièrement bien réussie parmi un groupe 'sélectif' d'étudiants grecs-américains. De plus, dans le cas présent, on voit que des générations successives d'origine grecque — en commençant avec la seconde génération de Grecs-Américains — se détachent progressivement de leurs liens linguistiques et d'une participation active au sein de la vie institutionnelle 'ethnique'. Et ceci, même si la majorité des étudiants sondés prétendent garder des liens très forts avec la famille, l'identité ethnique grecque, l'Orthodoxie, et le 'social hellénique', défini ici en opposition à la vie culturelle/sociale.

## ABSTRACT

This article explores Greek ethnicity through traditional measures of self-identification and distinction. The author attempts to confirm various hypotheses of previous researchers and theories of ethnicity by studying a select group of Greek-American students at two private universities.

The below study reveals that the transmission of "Greek" values, customs, and traditions is largely successful among a select group of Greek-American university students. Yet, as in the extant literature, successive generations of Greek extraction increasingly detach themselves from Hellenic linguistic ties and from active participation in substantive institutional life. Despite their strong attachments to family, Greek ethnic identity, Greek Orthodoxy, and Greek social life<sup>1</sup>, as opposed to cultural/social, life.

## Introduction

The immigrant Greek experience in the United States, like that of most European immigrant groups, has produced ongoing narratives of hardship and perseverance with resulting failure or success, particularly through the legacies adopted, revised, or rejected by the immigrants' children. A substantial literature documents the struggles and successes of first and second generation Greeks/Greek-Americans (Saloutos 1964,

\* Columbia University

1973; Kourvetaris 1971, 1988; Psomiades and Scourby 1982; Scourby 1984; Moskos 1989). As a contribution to this body of knowledge, the following paper provides a qualitative study of a small group of Greek-American students, the majority of whom are second generation. More specifically, it focuses on the extent to which "Greek" values, customs, and traditions have been transmitted to twenty-five students at Northwestern (Evanston, Illinois) and Loyola (Chicago, Illinois—Lakeshore Campus) Universities in the following five substantive areas:

- (1) Language and Participation in Greek Cultural/ Social Groups and Events;
- (2) Education and Career Choice;
- (3) Dating, (Inter)marriage, and Family;
- (4) Ethnic identity (Choosing to be Greek?) and
- (5) Greek Orthodoxy.

Of course, these themes, or "measures," of ethnicity are not comprehensive, nor shall this paper be. Instead, the above measures represent a more general and traditional framework of constructs of Greek ethnicity.

Data were collected by questionnaire. Of the questionnaires disseminated, twenty-five were returned.<sup>3</sup> The respondents' ages range from 17 to 24 years and the majority are undergraduates females.

Because this study involves a small group of students with a relatively affluent background, most of whom are members of Hellenic student associations and perhaps more ethnically conscious than other Greek American students in their respective private universities, this paper's limitations become self-evident. Of course, a more inter-ethnic, comparative analysis would have been ideal, so that "Greekness," if such a notion exists as distinguished from other characteristics or qualities and claimed to be an indelible part of one's ethnicity does indeed matter. Limited time and monetary resources prevented such a comparative perspectives. Nevertheless, although the findings are not more generalizable, the diverse attitudes and opinions expressed with respect to the conventional generational themes mentioned previously provide a wide range of valuable insight into these students' own lives and roles as Greek-Americans.

For Greek Americans or philhellenes, the importance of the Greek American identity and family goes without saying. For the non-Greek reader interested in issues of ethnic identity and assimilation, this study attempts to prove or disprove traditional variables of ethnicity, and, as such, can be considered an important, though limited, view of contemporary Greek ethnic identity.

According to Andrew Kopan (1989), one of the primary “missions” of the first generation, and indeed of the Greek American community at large, was to transmit their rich cultural heritage as intact as possible and to perpetuate the Greek language. Thus, for the first generation Greek immigrants in the United States, the Greek language was the very embodiment of cultural perpetuation. Over time, however, the Greek language began to be dissociated from Greek-American ethnicity. For example, of twenty-five respondents, twenty-three (92%) report that they can speak Greek. Seventeen of those twenty-three (73.9%) indicate that they can speak Greek fluently; six (26.1%) say they can speak fairly well and enough to carry on a conversation. However, of those twenty-three respondents who speak Greek, seventeen (not necessarily the same who speak Greek fluently) report that they speak both Greek and English with their immediate family at home; four (17.4%) say that they speak only Greek at home, while two (8.7%) say that they speak only English. Because of the fluidity of language, and the ever-changing nuances of meaning in words, when asked how they would reply if spoken to in Greek: Eleven Greek-speaking respondents (47.8%) would reply in a hybrid half-Greek, half-English language (or ‘Greenglish’ as many immigrant Greeks mockingly call it); two would reply only in English; and ten (43.5%) say that they would reply only in Greek. Interestingly, ‘Greenglish’ can be considered more a “first generation Greek-in-America dialect” than a second, third, or subsequent generation Greek-American development. Usually not able (or refusing) to speak more than a handful of words in English — perhaps because most of them did not attend American schools, lived exclusively in Greek immigrant neighborhoods, and/or had minimal contact with non-Greeks — many Greek immigrants ‘hellenized’ English words. For example, a savings bank became *banka* (which is really *trápeza* in Greek), grocery store became *grovaria* (which is really *magazí* in Greek, though this word refers more to a general products store than specifically to a food store), car became *caro* (which is really *aftokínito* or *amáksi*).

Most studies cite that while the majority of second generation Greek Americans speak Greek, with each successive generation the Greek language fades from knowledge (Saloutos 1964; Kourvetaris 1971; Scourby 1984: 90-97). Of course theories of acculturation and assimilation provide ample reasons for this phenomenon, which will be discussed later. However, a distinction must be made between knowing Greek and passing it on to successive generations. More specific this study, twenty-three respondents who reported being able to speak Greek, the vast majority were second-generation Greek-Americans. (The seventeen respondents who reported they were fluent were all second-generation.) All of this confirms the existing literature. Attending a Greek

school in the United States, from 1 year to 12 years, was reported by twenty-one of the respondents. Twenty-one respondents (not necessarily the same ones who attended Greek schools) report that they want their children to learn Greek, either by sending them to Greek school only (19%), or by sending them to Greek school and teaching them at home (81%). The most common reasons why the twenty-one respondents would want their children to learn Greek are: "Important to maintaining a national [Greek] identity is the maintenance of the nation's language."; "So that they can have an easier time conversing with family in Greece."; "It's the best way to teach the roots. Being bilingual in the US has its difficulties, but later on you become more enriched."; "It's an amazing thing to speak two languages. By doing so, the Greek tradition will carry on. It will help the children maintain their ethnic identity." Two respondents would not teach their children Greek, because as they both mention, they do not speak it. Clearly, the Greek language is considered by the majority to be an important dimension of their ethnicity. Closely related to language is participation in Greek/Greek American associations.

The majority of respondents report that they belong to Greek-American organizations which do not emphasize speaking Greek. The most prevalent organizations are YAL (Youth Adult League, a Greek Orthodox organization), OCF (Orthodox Christian Fellowship), GOYA (Greek Orthodox Youth of America), and, predictably, Northwestern and Loyola Universities' Greek student associations. As becomes immediately evident from the organizations listed above, the vast majority are religious. Greek Orthodoxy, however, will be addressed later.

Perhaps serving as an example of successful generational transfer of Greek cultural traditions, of the twenty-three respondents who belong to Greek American organizations, twenty of them (87%) report that their immediate family belonged to several *topika somateia* (regional associations and local clubs), such as AHEPA (American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association), the Pan-Arcadians, Mani Society, and the Maids of Athena. The obvious problem is that membership in an organization does not necessarily translate into active participation in that organization.

According to Charles Moskos: "For the grandchildren of the immigrants, and even more so, the great-grandchildren, Greek ethnicity is not so much a matter of cultural transmission, but one of voluntary participation in Greek-American institutional life" (Moskos 1980: 148). This is perhaps evident when the respondents were asked if they attended any Greek *cultural* events, defined as lectures, documentary films, museum exhibits, and the like. Using George Kourvetaris's metaphor, Greek *cultural* events could be considered the "Apollonian" or "intellectual" aspects of ethnic group participation, while Greek *social*

(read sociable) events, such as dances, music concerts, night clubs, and the like, could be considered the "Dionysian," or more superficial aspects of ethnic identity (Kourvetaris 1990). In the last year, sixteen of the twenty-five respondents (64%) report that they have not attended any Greek cultural event. By contrast, twenty-three respondents (92%) say that they have attended Greek social events in the past year, especially annual Valentine's and Greek regional dinner-dances, Greektown-located bars and night clubs, and Greek picnics, which are held by area Greek churches—usually on their parking lots—throughout the summer, and which are open to anyone interested Greek music and dancing, food, and the like. This confirms the basis given by Herbert Gans (1979) in his conception of symbolic ethnicity; i.e., overt expressions of what ethnics display as their own ethnic group's unique attributes. For example, gyros and souvlaki can serve as Greek ethnic symbols.

Despite this apparent disparity between the students' participation in sociable versus cultural events, it is too speculative to suggest that for the second and third generation Greek Americans, cultural transmission is less important than voluntary participation in Greek institutional life. As was evident above, the vast majority of respondents want to teach their children Greek, often mentioning as a reason that a certain degree of Greek culture and heritage is preserved through language. Of course, it cannot be assumed that the respondents who say they want to teach their children Greek, either in the home, by sending them to Greek school, or both, will actually do so. That is an option for their children and themselves as parents. In this future-oriented sense, a concerted effort to transmit the Greek language can be considered voluntary (see Waters 1990). Yet regardless of this voluntariness, let us keep in mind the obvious, that is, the ethnic family unit in the United States is not immune to the outside society. Beyond the language issue, then, no ethnic American seems 'safe' from losing some of his/her ethnic heritage.

Related to this loss is the reality that an ethnic American cannot be considered a total embodiment of any ethnicity. What the individual ethnic American learns about his or her ethnicity is only a partial body of knowledge of the collective narrative. In brief, a relatively homogeneous collective narrative alters shape, becomes adapted over time, within the personal narrative, due to constant interaction with an outside heterogeneous society. This last point will be seen in the section entitled "Ethnic Identity (Choosing to be Greek?)" The ethnic American's adaptability to the structural demands of the larger society may partially explain the progressive losses of one's ethnic heritage, which, some argue, is reinforced by the dominant educational institutions in the host country (Konstantellou 1990). Of course others assert that Greek community survival depends on education (Konstantellou 1990; Orfanos, Psomiades, and Spiridakis 1987).

### **Education and Career Choice**

Eva Konstantellou (1990) believes that education is the “ideal mechanism that points to a way out from the either/or dilemma, namely assimilation or separatism” (p. 9). Her analysis involves tailoring curricula to meet the needs of ethnic or “multicultural” students. Criticizing the dominant culture’s pressures for ethnic Americans to conform in American society and institutions, particular in the classroom, Konstantellou argues: the dominance of the majority culture rests on a sharp division between the realm of the private/primary relations (family relations, religious practices, cultural festivities) and the realm of the public/secondary relations (participation in educational, economic and political institutions). The private sphere is allowed to exist in so far as it does not interfere with the business-as-usual institutional world of Anglo-Saxon conformity...

If the dichotomy between the private world (where the majority culture exists) and the public world (dominated by the majority culture) is kept intact, then the individual is trapped between the Scylla and Charybdis, forced to give up one world for the sake of the other (1990: 9-10).

Yet if the values of the private world coincide with those of the public world, instead of a trap in which one is forced to give up one identity for another, perhaps choice is more central. Yet choices involve sacrifices. As Kourvetaris (1990) writes about the relationship between education and socioeconomic status: “Ethnicity is sacrificed at the alter of economic success” (p. 53). And economic success is highly correlated with education.

Education, as a category, is not intended to be a comprehensive measure of the respondents’ education, either past or present. Since all respondents are Greek-American college students, the value of education is not a central issue. As mentioned in Mary Waters’s *Ethnic Options* (1990), educational attainment—along with two other values, family and loyalty—is appropriated as a unique and defining characteristic of the white ethnic individuals she interviewed. As a defining characteristic, the value the respondents in this study and the respondents’ parents (as told by the respondents) place on education is no exception. What is more salient, however, is that the respondents’ motivation in receiving an education is not in education for its own sake, or in producing/ transmitting knowledge (only one of the twenty-five respondent said she is working towards a career as a professor of art history), but rather as a means toward financial security as professionals. When answering the question about what they consider the most important thing in receiving an education, most of the respondents mention their personal philosophies of education, interspersed with the practical applications and uses they see as inherent in education:

- “The most important thing [about receiving an education] is becoming more knowledgeable about the world around you, learning how to problem-solve, and above all discovering your own interests academically and how they can help you in the future. Getting a job is also a good thing.
- Being well rounded and getting a job that makes you happy.
- To apply the education throughout your life and use it to help people.
- Education is the foundation upon which a person’s life is built. It is the foundation, therefore, of his/her family and the foundation of the loves of his/her children.”

Despite the above variations in attitudes or personal philosophies on education, twenty-one of the twenty-five respondents (84%) mention that they will become lawyers or healthcare practitioners or technicians. This professional orientation can be partially explained by referring to the first-generation Greek immigrants who may have embraced, or brought with them, the dominant, economic ideology of entrepreneurship (Kourvetaris 1989: 111) and transmitted it to their children. Let us remember here that the majority of respondents’ parents are first-generation immigrants in the United States. In other words, the motivation, regardless of successive generations, may become to earning money, but to do so with increasingly higher socioeconomic status. Other partial explanations of why these respondents are overwhelmingly oriented toward a profession could be because of (a) the larger, American, and individual family values placed on students to become professionals (which is usually associated with higher income brackets) and (b) the type of student private universities such as Northwestern and Loyola attract or produce.

Employing Edna Bonacich’s ‘middleman minority theory,’ Kourvetaris relates: “Both early and late Greek immigrants engaged in middleman economic enterprises as restaurateurs, grocers, confectioners... The second generation did not, as a rule, follow the middleman minority enterprises. It entered white-collar professional and semi-professional, and managerial-type occupations” (Kourvetaris 1989: 109). Of course, although all the respondents are college students and not in the labor market yet, their occupational choices could all be considered white-collar.

The respondents’ parents’ educational attainment or occupations do not seem to match the aspirations of their children, except for the few respondents whose parents are physicians or professors. Here, the reader must keep in mind the early and later Greek immigrants’ overwhelming disadvantages when they arrived in the United States, in terms of language, education, and personal, accumulated financial assets, compared to those immigrants’ offspring who were born in the United States.

A total of eight of the twenty-five respondents mothers (32%) graduated from college (three of whom have post graduate degrees). By comparison, twelve of the respondents' fathers (48%) graduated from college (nine of whom have post graduate degrees). The clear majority of the respondents' parents have either a high school or elementary school education, which is quite high compared to the American population in general. The majority of the respondents' parents are immigrants, and, not surprisingly perhaps as all parents, they want to see their own children succeed. They thereby project their own unfulfilled aspirations onto them. In addition to educational attainment, the individual's choice of career paths also indicates this vicarious pressure. Though a clear majority of respondents hope to become professionals, the stereotype that 'all Greeks own restaurants' persists.

Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers (1988) write that most "Americans still connect the Greeks with restaurants, and for good reason. Almost every major American city boasts fine Greek eating establishments, a tradition that goes back more than half a century" (p. 50). To explore whether the respondents can boast of this legacy, eight report that their fathers are either restaurateurs or own stores in the food industry (two of the respondents' fathers are retired restaurant owners). Seven respondents report that their mothers are homemakers while the remaining eighteen respondents report that their mothers work either alongside their spouses or in professions as diverse as education, architecture, middle management, or real estate. Though a fair number of the respondents' parents have been at one time employed in the food industry, the association between restaurants and Greek owners for respondents and their parents cannot be conclusively shown. More noteworthy is the fact that the respondents whose parents did work in the food industry emphasized ownership.

Having explored employment and education as two "measures of success," let us turn to views on dating and eventually marriage, which can be viewed as other forms of success.

### **Dating, (Inter)Marriage and Family**

Strikingly similar in their orientation toward becoming professionals, the students also show marked similarities in their attitudes toward dating and marrying Greeks/Greek-Americans. Yet many authors on the Greek American experience point to the Greek-American's tendency to *inter*-marry rather than *intra*marry, for intermarriage is considered by the assimilationist school as one of the structural forces that contributes to the dissolution of ethnic identity (Saloutos 1973; Psomiades 1982: 81-82; Moskos 1989: 93-94; Kourvetaris 1990: 59-61). Waters (1990) echoes other assimilationist writers when she observes that for white ethnic



Americans, “the longer a group has been in the United States and the greater percentage of its members in later generations, the lower the in-marriage ratios” (p. 104). Though all the students were single, data on their dating behavior and preferences, as well as their views on marriage, provide insight into their upholding of “Greek” values and traditions.

Twelve of the twenty-five respondents (48%) indicate that it is not important that they limit their dating to Greeks or Greek-Americans only. Two of these twelve add that it is not important, *until they get serious*. When asked whether they prefer to marry Greeks/Greek-Americans, six of the twelve respondents (or eighteen of all twenty-five respondents, i.e., 72%) mention that they prefer to marry someone from the same ethnic background; four of the twelve show no preference in their marriage partners—either a Greek/Greek American or a non-Greek would do; and two respondents prefer to marry non-Greeks only. Some reasons given to explain why dating though not necessarily marrying a Greek/Greek American is not that important include the following:

—“I’m open to anyone—If I’m attracted to a person and they’re Greek—may be a bonus [sic]; if not, I’m not devastated.

—At the time being, it’s not so important but it is something I am looking toward in the future.

—I’ve never dated a Greek man. This is not to say that I never will, but all the guys I’ve gone out with have been American.

—It is important to date a Greek American for marriage purposes. But I do date non-Greeks if not for marriage, but just for companionship. [sic]”

By comparison, the other thirteen respondents indicate that it is either somewhat important or very important that they date only Greeks/Greek-Americans. Quite predictably, all except one (who shows no preference) of these thirteen respondents prefer to marry Greeks/ Greek-Americans. Some of their explanations seem to make implicit or explicit reference to marriage; as seen in the following:

—“I was raised to respect three things. Straight out of my father’s mouth these, three things, in no particular order, are: *thriakia*, [religion] *patrida* [homeland] and *oikogenia* [family] The first and third I would have if I dated (and maybe eventually married) a Russian or Serbian Orthodox woman. But it is the «*patrida*» that only a Greek woman would be able to support.

—It’s important because of the sharing of culture, language, religion which can make future decisions, especially regarding children, a lot easier. Yet I don’t think it’s absolutely necessary.

—Now, [it’s] very important because I don’t want to be too attached to a non-Greek and then break up with her.

—Very important. The culture has been such a part of my life that I can’t see being with anyone else.”

Unlike the respondents who believe that it is not that important to date a Greek American, an overwhelming majority report that to their parents, dating and marrying Greek-Americans is very important. Only two of the twenty-five respondents (8%) believe that their parents show no preference. The more typical reasons for respondents' parents to want them to date and eventually marry a Greek/Greek-American include:

—“It is important to them to not lose my culture and heritage. Also makes dealing with in-laws, etc. a lot easier because [they] can relate to them. They're Greek and they want their grandchildren to be Greek.

—It's easier (especially if I'm going to have children). I want my children to have a *definite* identity.

—They don't speak English very well, and want grandchildren to have the same ethnicity and *religion*!

—For the same reasons I want to marry Greek—shared culture, being able to raise children with a heritage to be proud of, religious reasons. There is also an intangible factor involved that non-Greeks would lack.”

Aside from the apparent consensus expressed by the respondents' “speaking” for their parents, and the fact that the parents' views on marriage are considered by the respondents at all when considering their own marriage partners, only one respondent shows a lack of consensus between mother and father regarding dating and marrying a Greek/Greek-American:

—“My father (would prefer that I marry Greek)—to a certain extent. [sic] My mother would probably like me to marry an American. Either way my father's family is full of mixed European marriages. As long as I'm happy they won't mind.”

This response is similar to the two respondents mentioned above who reported that their parents would not necessarily prefer that they marry a Greek/Greek American:

“They want me to marry whomever I would be happy with, not who my *Yiayia* [Grandma] wants me to marry (she was very against my Mom marrying my Dad).

—“They don't care what ethnicity he is as long as I'm happy.”

It is clear, then, that for both respondents and the respondents' parents, marrying—though not necessarily dating someone—within the same ethnic group is preferred, because of either cultural, linguistic, or religious similarities. In addition, it is apparent that the majority of the respondents' parents have explicitly told them not to date individuals from certain ethnic groups. As Waters relates:

Religion was far more important to the parents of all of my respondents, although there were still some who reported that it made no difference. Race was universally an issue, and marriage across racial barriers was not the subject of subtle clues or indirect messages. Most

parents made it very clear to their children that they were not to marry a non-white (1990: 105).

The respondents' parents are no exception.

Sixteen of the twenty-five respondents (64%) reported that their parents have told them not to date individuals from certain ethnic groups (two of these respondents added that it was understood and not explicitly said to them). Corroborating Waters's observation above, in my study thirteen of the sixteen respondents (81.3%) were told either directly or indirectly not to date African-Americans, as well as Asians, Hispanics, or Jews. The other three respondents say that their parents told them not to date anyone who is non-Greek/Greek-American.

The other nine of the twenty-five respondents (36%) indicate that they have not been told directly by their parents not to date individuals from certain ethnic groups (though one respondent added: "They haven't directly spoken the words 'do not date a . . .' but marrying someone Black, Hispanic, or Asian, or Arabic is indirectly known to be something I won't do."). Moreover, the explicit or implicit prejudices expressed above by the respondents' parents seem to be made regardless of their educational attainment. In fact, five of the sixteen respondents' fathers who were reported as telling the respondents not to date individuals from certain ethnic groups have post graduate degrees; one respondent's father and three of the respondents' mothers have college degrees; two respondents' fathers and two respondents' mothers have some college experience; four of the fathers and eight of the mothers are high school graduates; and four fathers as well as three mothers attended elementary school.

By comparison, four of the nine respondents' fathers, and three of the nine respondents' mothers, who were reported as not telling the respondents to avoid individuals from certain ethnic groups, have post graduate degrees; two respondents' fathers and two of the respondents' mothers completed college; four of the respondents' mothers attended college; and three of the nine respondents' fathers attended elementary school. Of course, the assumption is that with increasing education, racism wanes. Also, a confounding factor can be that only one parent may express disapproval to their children associating with individuals from specific ethnic groups, while the other parent may not. Nevertheless, among these respondents' parents, race is definitely an issue when it comes to dating and marriage.

A further measure of generational transmission (though not a "Greek value" *per se*) with respect to family is whether the respondents wish to have the same number of children as their parents. This is clearly not the case for my respondents. Eleven of the twenty-five respondents (44%) have one sibling. Of these eleven, the majority report wanting three or four children. Five of the twenty-five respondents (20%) have two

siblings. Of these five, one respondent wants four children, two want three children, one wants two children, and the final respondent who has two siblings does not want children. Regarding the four of the twenty-five respondents (16%) with three siblings, one plans to have five children, one wants four, one wants three children, and one does not want children. One of the twenty-five (4%) respondents has four other siblings, and wants three children. Finally, four of twenty-five respondents (16%) are only children. Three of the four respondents who are only children want two kids while the other respondent does not want to have children. Thus, contrary to the national average of a four-member family, respondents seem to prefer to have a medium-sized family, i.e., three or more children. Related to the preferences in wanting (or not wanting) children are preferences in wanting those children to be boys rather than girls or vice versa.

Twenty-one of the twenty-five respondents (84%) express no preference of having their children be girls rather than boys. Two of the twenty-five respondents (8%) want their children to be male only. (The remaining two of the twenty-five respondents do not want children, and thus left the question blank.) In sum, the majority of my respondents show no favoritism toward having boys rather than girls or vice versa. Thus, the traditional notion that boys are favored in the first generation Greek family does not seem to have been transmitted to the respondents. However, attitudes toward their ethnic identities in the larger society has. We will now turn our attention to this.

### **Ethnic Identity (Choosing to be Greek?)**

By ethnic identity, I am referring to a broad construct more or less composed of unified, though fluid, secular and religious narratives (see Cornell 1994; Gans 1979). According to Cornell (1994), in general an "ethnic identity, first of all, is a label. [...] The label is a referent, a symbol, in effect a condensation of a body of knowledge, facts, fictional accounts, assumptions, attitudes that describe what it means to be that particular person" (p. 5). According to Kourvetaris, what comprises Greek ethnic identity for the first generation seems to involve a convergence of some notion of Greekness (as measured by language, traditions, etc.) with Orthodox Christianity; the second generation Greek American identity involves the convergence of some notion of Greekness with Greek Orthodoxy, in addition to some notion of "Americanness"; finally, the third and subsequent generations of Greek Americans lose their "Greekness" and adopt Greek Orthodoxy and "Americanness" as their identity (Kourvetaris 1990: 3-4). By extension, Kourvetaris seems to suggest that this "domino effect" will inevitably lead to a completely "Americanized" Greek American.

Drawing on personal experience as a second generation Greek-American, as well as from discussions with other Greek-Americans, many first generation Greeks in America complain about the second, third, and subsequent generations' "Americanization," they seem to fail (or refuse) to understand that those successive generations are completely immersed, whether by choice or chance, in American social institutions. The ramifications of this situation are, of course, one of the central arguments in theories of acculturation, which refers to the eventual blending by immigrants and their descendants of the cultural behavior, such as language, customs, norms, of the new society; and assimilation, which implies the ingress of the ethnics into the social fabric, such as the business life, civic life, and eventually, the very families, of the host society (Gordon 1964: 60-83 cited in Moskos 1989: 147).

Along assimilationist and acculturationist lines, some authors also point to the endurance, even if reconstituted, of distinct ethnic subcultures in the United States (Glazer and Moynihan 1963; Novak 1971). More specific to Greek-Americans, Kourvetaris explains that the second generation Greek American emerges as a product of both a Greek subculture and an American culture and society; in other words, "a sociocultural hybrid with a dual identity" (Kourvetaris 1988: 170). By contrast, Kourvetaris asserts that the immigrant family was socially and culturally "insulated in the Greek colony and did not seriously feel the pressures of American society" (p. 171). This does not imply that Greek "old-country values" are any less important to these respondents; such values are perhaps subject to dilution in the United States. However, such dilution may not necessarily be an inevitable factor of assimilation/-acculturation, but perhaps, though rarely mentioned in the literature, a resignation by first, second, and subsequent generation Greek Americans that Greek ethnicity in the United States is doomed. However, the students in this survey do not find this to be the case for them, at least in terms of the importance of Greek ethnicity in their lives.

All the respondents believe that having a Greek ethnic identity is important. In addition, all twenty-five respondents report that their being Greek is important to their parents. Typical responses of why being Greek is important to the students follow below:

— "It is important to be able to identify with a culture to give yourself a sort of self-concept and identity.

— Because I have a rich background that is a big part of my identity. Also all my family is Greek. A lot of what we do, eat, say, etc. is because we are Greek.

— Coming from such a rich tradition is simply beautiful. I have two of the best—Greek and American. I always felt that being Greek gave me something more than those around me—I was twice them!

—It is my country, my people. We have a language, a culture, a history, an identity in common that no one else has.

—I think the cultural strings and the strong traditions are very strong in the Greek community and I like being a part of it.”

When asked if their being Greek is important to their parents, the respondents gave similar responses but with more comparatives and superlatives in their explanations.

—“For much of the same reasons... but for my parents it’s a much much bigger part of their identity.

—My mom is involved in the Greek community... My dad is not involved in the Greek community, but I still think it’s somewhat important to him, mainly due to family loyalty.

—They’re also very proud of my, our heritage.

—For the same reasons it is important to me—and more. They can truly be attached to a motherland.

—Because they want me to pass on the culture to my children and in so doing propagate the Greek identity as much as possible.”

Analytically, the majority of these respondents’ perceptions of their being Greek seems to involve a conscious choice, which—in light of Waters’s and Gans’s concepts of voluntary ethnicity and symbolic ethnicity, respectively—involves a deliberate effort at internalizing and subsequently exhibiting (or expressing) their ideas of Greekness. However, it is interesting to note that despite the respondents’ consensus on the importance of being Greek, ten of the twenty-five respondents (40%) indicate that their parents have pressured them at some point in their lives to be Greek. The other fifteen respondents (60%) report that they have never felt such pressure by their parents. Although a majority of my respondents do not feel that their parents pressure them to be Greek, twenty-one respondents (84%) say that they have felt different from their non-Greek friends because they are ethnically Greek. The other four respondents (16%) do not feel any different from their non-Greek friends. A wide range of explanations, however stark or subtle, surfaces from the respondents who have felt differently than their friends because of their Greek ethnic identity:

—“Obviously, there are recognizable differences between the different nationalities of those whom I associate [with]. Being Greek is something special.

—I wasn’t allowed to do the things they could do. Things like sleeping over, going to the movies or football games, dating or even talking to or about boys.

—The last name does it. Growing up in a small town where there was

little diversity and names were short and Anglo-Saxonic,[sic] it was tough. Teachers butchered my name and so did kids.

—This is not a bad thing. I felt different, but *better*. I had “one-up” on my friends because I was Greek and had the culture to go along with it. I truly believe that individuals that do not have a strong sense of ethnic culture may envy the Greek culture.

—Because of Easter, Good Friday, fasting—Basically religious differences.

—Parents with accents, strange food, overprotective, stubborn parents.

—I know how to act and adjust to other groups because in grade school, I was the only Greek in my school so I had to make friends and learn the “American way.”

Nineteen of the twenty-five respondents (76%) have not felt that they have had to choose between identifying themselves solely as a Greek or solely as an American. As one of these nineteen says: “When in the US, I’m Greek American and when in Greece, I’m American Greek.”

Another relates: “My background has allowed me to fit into each culture equally well; however, if I had to choose, I would choose to be solely Greek.” Another respondent replies similarly but with different national loyalties: “I can be one or the other depending on the situation and people (but I prefer to be an American first because I was born/raised in this country).” Further yet, another respondent states: “If an American couple was to have a child in China, would that child be considered Chinese or American? I think that most would say ‘American.’ In the same way, my parents came to the US from Greece. Should I be considered Greek or American? I don’t care what others consider me, though. I think of myself as a Greek born with American citizenship due to my being born here.” Two more respondents who say that they have had to choose between identifying solely as Greek or solely as American respond in similar ways to the above respondents, except that choosing to be Greek or American, whether visiting Greece or living in the United States, represents to them a conflict of identities. As one respondent puts it: “When I’m in the US —I have to choose being Greek or American and the same conflict arises in Greece.” Finally, three of the twenty-five respondents (12%) felt that they have had to identify solely as a Greek primarily for the same reasons, namely “Because I don’t consider myself ‘American.’ I consider myself ‘Greek’ and I defend that.”

In sum, the majority feel different (primarily in cultural or nationalistic senses) from their non-Greek friends, but have not allowed these differences to alienate them or force them to choose between identifying solely as an American or solely as a Greek. This would seem to suggest

that Greek cultural transmission is evident but not overbearing in the case of these students. Perhaps the Greek identities of the majority of the respondents do not 'cost' them anything in American society, and in this sense only can be expressed as symbolic (Gans 1979). Yet six of the twenty-five respondents (24%) report that they have felt some form of personal discrimination and/or hostility aimed against them, because they are ethnically Greek (The remaining nineteen respondents (76%) felt no personal discrimination or hostility aimed against them.).

Three of the six respondents who felt some personal discrimination say that it occurred (or occurs) in school; one says that the last time occurred at work; one felt discriminated against by other Greeks; and one reported that when talking politics, hostility occurred as reported below:

—“Some kid in high school called me a “stupid Greek” and I kicked his ass.

—During high school, some people treated me different [sic] because I wasn't “blond-haired” or “blue-eyed.”

—Long ago, even in college—when kids and teachers butchered by name. I guess I have truly gotten used to it to the point where I pronounce my name outloud when I hear the teacher say my first name.

—A woman put Greeks that work in kitchens down because they are illiterate while I was waitressing.

—I do not hide that I'm Greek American and am very up-front about it. As such, I've had my loyalties questioned and have been attacked for my views. On one occasion on an issue completely irrelevant to my ethnicity, I was told to get the f \_ \_out of the US and go back to Greece, where my true loyalties supposedly are.”

Actually, I feel it often from Greeks, who prefer not to follow the -culture. They criticize me for being close-minded.

Despite the above localized examples of discrimination and/or hostility experienced by six of the twenty-five respondents, when asked if they think being ethnically Greek helps or hinders their goals in the United States, thirteen of the twenty-five respondents (52%) say that being ethnically Greek helps their goals, two (8%) report that it both helps and hinders, and nine (36%) indicate that being ethnically Greek neither helps nor hinders their goals.

Respondents mention that being ethnically Greek helps them to meet their goals because of the following: “I know my past. I know how hard my parents had to work to get where they are, so it gives me more incentive.”; “[W]e stick together and help each other out. We belong to a Greek community within the larger community of the US.”; “It doesn't help that much, but because the Greek community is so close being Greek can open doors with other Greeks (professionally, socially, etc.).” Tying



these themes of identity and utility together, one respondent writes that being ethnically Greek helps his goals in the United States because “[i]t gives you a sense of pride and belonging. This gives you a support group that makes it easier to succeed. You can always find other Greeks who are willing to help one of their own before someone else.”

The two respondents who feel being ethnically Greek helps and hinders their goals say: “It helps in the sense that it gives me the opportunity to show that I am unique and different, especially with [college] admissions. But having a last name that is long [it is] still not 100% acceptable—If you can’t pronounce it, then it’s a bad thing and it’ll make our company/department look bad.” The other respondent states: “It both helps and hinders—it helps because it is easy to make contacts with other Greek-Americans, but I think that at times it can be considered un-American. It hinders in the political and corporate areas.”

Of the nine respondents who believe that being ethnically Greek neither helps nor hinders their goals in the United States, one respondent says: “My goals in the United States are to get an education, and being Greek does not influence this at all.” Another respondent relates that “We’re [i.e., Greek Americans] not considered a minority. We blend into the sea of Caucasians.” Here, the facility by which my respondent can slip in and out of his ethnic roles (Waters 1990: 158) is made explicit. Another ethnic role involves a religious one. As mentioned before, part of the construct of an ethnic identity is religious. The last section deals with the Greek Orthodox Church in terms of the respondents’ identities..

### **Greek Orthodoxy**

All the respondents and their parents are Greek Orthodox. Nine of the twenty-five respondents (36%) regularly attend church (defined as about every week); five respondents (20%) report that they attend church somewhat regularly (defined as about once a month); and eleven respondents (44%) indicate that they attend church infrequently (defined as less than once a month) or during religious holidays only (which is two to three times a year), such as for Easter or Christmas. Only one respondent who used to attend church regularly but now attends rarely explains that college consumes her time. Interestingly, the nine respondents who attend church regularly also report that their parents attend as regularly, if not more often.

Two of the twenty-five respondents (8%) report that the Greek Orthodox church is not that important to them. The other twenty-three (92%) indicate that the church is important. One respondent who says that the Greek Orthodox is not that important states: “I am Christian and have found other services more meaningful and thought-provoking. Not speaking Greek is definitely a hindrance, since much of the service is in

Greek." By contrast, a clear majority of respondents who think the Greek Orthodox church is important to them can be represented by the following response: "I have positive feelings toward the Greek Orthodox church because it is not as suppressing as other faiths can be [...]. The church serves more as a uniting factor for all Greeks. It is at the basis of my culture and all its traditions." To most of the respondents, the Greek Orthodox church is an important religious, cultural, and social institution; it is something they were raised in and thus accept as an important part of their Greek American identity even if they cannot understand the Greek liturgy.

All but two of my respondents (92%) indicate that the Greek Orthodox church is very important to their parents. The one respondent who offers an explanation why the Greek Orthodox church is not at all important to her parents mentions: "I enjoy the cultural experience (almost as a show), but my parents don't find that aspect as interesting as I do. My mom doesn't like the Greek Orthodox church. She says she doesn't feel anything there. My dad doesn't attend church." By contrast, the responses that seem to most typify how important the church is to my respondents' parents are: "The Church is as important [to them] as it is to me; my parents are the ones who instilled my religious beliefs/faith"; "It's important because not only does it provide us with religious education and services but it's also a social gathering place for all Greek Orthodox." Thus, it can be argued that religious values have, for the most part, been successfully transmitted from their parents to my respondents.

### **Conclusion**

This endeavour to examine the extent to which Greek values, customs, and traditions have been transmitted to the respondents has revealed that forms of "Greekness" (given this term's limitations) have been successfully conveyed, and thereby have withstood the test of time. It is difficult in this analysis to conclude whether most of the customs and traditions have been "Americanized" or, rather, have become more diffused in the larger and more diverse American society. While an overwhelming majority of the students can speak Greek, the variability in their degree of fluency proves that knowledge and use of the Greek language is waning. It is open to question whether respondents will actually teach their children Greek. Thus, future prospects of preserving the Greek language appear grim but the values of success and achievement of the respondents' parents, as measured by my respondents' high educational and occupational aspirations, their high levels of self identification as Greek Americans and social consciousness with respect to their ethnic identity in the larger American society, their family attachment, views on marriage, and finally their strong religious beliefs—

all of these can be said to have been successfully passed on to my twenty-five respondents. Whether such values and traditions can be considered solely "Greek" remains an important comparative question which is beyond the scope of this study. Indeed, comparative research is necessary to explore, understand, and appreciate the diverse cultural traditions that are preserved, shared, altered, or forgotten among different ethnic populations living in a predominantly homogeneous-structured society. In this way, hellenism may itself be further preserved, transmitted, and celebrated by future Greek and philhellenic, non-Greek generations born and raised in a genuinely multicultural community.

#### NOTES

◊ The author would like to express his gratitude to Professors K. Neckerman and George Kourvetaris for their valuable comments on a previous draft of this paper. I am indebted especially to Nick Kourvetaris for his tireless assistance in serving as my proxy in Evanston and Chicago, IL. Finally, the author wanted to thank the twenty-five respondents for their time, candor, and interest in this study.

1. Where the author feels clarification is necessary, an effort will be made to distinguish between sociable and social. Sociable refers to specific events that demand, more or less, individuals in the company of others to be gregarious (such as at a party) while social implies a broader rubric and refers to a larger community or societal setting in which group and/or individual units interact.

2. Please note that twenty-two of my respondents are second generation Greek Americans; two are third generation; and one is fourth generation.

3. Though exact numbers are impossible to obtain (due to name changes, inter-ethnic parentage, etc.), it is estimated that at Loyola University, there are between 400 to 450 Greek/Greek American students; at Northwestern University, there are approximately 70 Greek/Greek American students (Correspondence, Nick Kourvetaris, 6 December 1996). These figures include both graduate and undergraduate students, not professional school students such as those in Medicine, Law, or Dentistry.

4. Today, the "Greek American community" is perhaps a misnomer, especially with the pervasive suburbanization of the United States. Yet as an ethnic consciousness, according to Kopan and others, Greek Americanness involves foremost some semblance of transmitting the demotic, rather than ancient or biblical, Greek language.

5. George A. Kourvetaris distinguishes between the more "intellectual" aspects of Greek ethnic life, which he refers to as Apollonian, i.e., after the mythological Greek god of music, intellect, and culture, and the more "social," culinary, or material aspects of ethnicity, which he considers Dionysian, i.e., after the mythological Greek god of merriment and wine.

6. According to the Digest of Education Statistics 1995, out of the total U.S. population (in thousands) of 189,986 who is 18 years of age or older, at the elementary school level 7,221 attained less than 7 years; 8,102 achieved 7 or 8 yrs.; at the high school level, 18,847 attained 1-3 yrs.; 2,779 4 yrs.; 64,320 graduated. The remainder of the US. population 18 yrs. and older (that is, 88,717) have had varying degrees of college experience.

## REFERENCES

- Constantinou, Stavros. 1989. "Dominant Themes and Intergenerational Differences in Ethnicity: The Greek Americans." In *Sociological Focus* 22(2):99-117.
- Cornell, Stephen. 1994. "Ethnicity as Narrative: Identity Construction, Pan-Ethnicity, and American Indian Supratribalism."
- Dinnerstein, Leonard and David M. Reimers. 1988. *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration*. Third Edition. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.
- Gans, Herbert. 1979. "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America." In Herbert Gans, et. al., *On the Making of Americans: Essays for David Riesman*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Glazer, Nathan and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. 1963. *Beyond the Melting Pot*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT and Harvard University Press.
- Gordon, Milton M. 1964. *Assimilation in American Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Konstantellou, Eva. 1990. "Education as a Means of Empowerment for Minority Cultures: Strategies for the Greek American Community." Paper presented at Hellenic College, Second annual conference, Brookline, MA, October 19-21.
- Kopan, Andrew T. 1989. *The Greeks in Chicago: A Study in Ethnic Achievement*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Kourvetaris, George A. 1971. "First and Second Generation Greeks in Chicago: An Inquiry into their Stratification and Mobility Patterns." Athens, Greece: National Center of Social Research.
- Kourvetaris, George A. 1988. "The Greek American Family." In: *Ethnic Families in America*. Charles H. Mindel and Robert W. Habenstein (eds.). New York: Elsevier, pp. 163-188.
- Kourvetaris, George A. 1989. "Greek American Professionals and Entrepreneurs." In *Journal of Hellenic Diaspora*, Vol. XVI.
- Kourvetaris, George A. 1990. "The Futuristics of Greek America." Reprint from *Modern Hellenism*, No. 7.

Kourvetaris, George A. 1990. "The Greek Orthodox and Greek American Ethnic Identity." Paper presented at Hellenic College, Second Annual Conference, Brookline, MA, October 19-21.

Moskos, Charles C. 1989. **Greek Americans: Struggle and Success**. Second edition (First edition in 1980). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Novak, Michael. 1971. **The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics**. New York: Macmillan Co.

Orfanos, Spyros D., Harry J. Psomiades, and John Spiridakis (eds.). 1987. **Education and Greek Americans: Process and Prospects**. New York: Pella Publishing Co., Inc.

Psomiades, Harry J. and Alice Scourby (eds.). 1982. **The Greek American Community in Transition**. New York: Pella Publishing Co., Inc.

Saloutos, Theodore. 1964. **The Greeks in the United States**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Saloutos, Theodore. 1973. "The Greek Orthodox Church in the United States and Assimilation." In **The International Migration Review**, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 395-408.

Scourby, Alice. 1984. **The Greek Americans**. Boston: Twayne Publishers.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. 1995. **Digest of Education Statistics 1995**. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.

Waters, Mary C. 1990. **Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America**. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.