

Title: “It’s a War on Love”: Intermarriage in Vancouver, British Columbia’s Jewish Community

Authors: Sara L. Jackson

WP Number: 07-09

Research Question: How does intermarriage shape the geographies of belonging in Vancouver’s Jewish community?

Importance: The challenges facing Jewish institutions are similar to those facing any ethnic and/or religious community that is for the most part well past the early stages of settlement. Individuals and families are migrating from core ethnic communities to peripheral regions, such as lower mainland British Columbia. Most immigrant groups whose tight-knit communities erode as members migrate from city centres into the suburbs and away from settled communities witness tensions, debates and even battles over individuality, family, community, and nation. How Jewish communities cope with these changes reflects how all immigrant groups (past and present) in Canada and elsewhere adapt to social boundaries within changing geographies and demographics.

Research Findings: The traditional taboo against intermarriage is a powerful institution shaping Jewish demographics and landscapes in Vancouver. It is a marker used for millennia to distinguish Jew from gentile, enshrining the preservation of Judaism in Jewish women’s bodies. Despite an ambiguous outlook on the future, leaders are cautiously optimistic as education, conversion and in some cases proselytizing create paths towards the reclamation of the Jewish family. In Vancouver most leaders want to include the intermarried. Even among some of the Orthodox leaders interviewed, the intermarried are not completely excluded. There is an expanding climate of acceptance among most leaders that recognizes the reality of contemporary Judaism, which must include intermarried couples.

Implications: This study exemplifies how integration, discrimination and cultural maintenance continue to struggle against each other within the milieu of Canadian multiculturalism. Further research on self-racialization is needed not only on Jews, but also on other ethnic and religious groups. The current anti-racism phase of multiculturalism policy demands increased attention and sensitivity to the racial identities of groups that are racialized from both inside and outside their communities. If groups rely on racial definitions to differentiate themselves from other groups, then policy makers must consider how this process may complicate or even interfere with policies designed to eradicate racism.