

Identity experiences among young adult Ethiopian immigrants in Israel

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Abundant theory and empirical research have examined identity processes following immigration; however, scarce literature has examined how immigrants themselves identify and experience issues related to their identity. Taking a phenomenological approach, we examined a unique group of young Israelis who immigrated from Ethiopia to understand how they themselves relate to their identity and what, for them, are the salient issues involved in their identity negotiations. Ethiopian immigrants are a black Jewish minority in a predominantly white Israeli society. Their immigration and absorption were characterized by a move from a mainly rural to an urban society, discrimination, low SES, weakening of traditional community and familial structures, and erosion of the Amharic language and Ethiopian culture. As such, the Ethiopian immigrants' story provides a unique opportunity to understand how individuals make sense of their own identities and identity processes, when bridging multiple cultural realities and minority status.

Nineteen (19) participants, who immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia as children and adolescents, were interviewed for this study. The findings point to a number of identity related issues, most of which highlight the interplay between society and personal identity negotiation: 1) the role of context/ society in making identity negotiation inherent (grappling with identity as an event necessitated for the individual); 2) the strive for a flexible, integrated identity in which different elements can take to the forefront in different contexts; 3) a narrative of "turning points" as a catalyst to identity negotiation; 4) society as prioritizing a collective identity over the personal and demanding from the individual to represent the collective. We suggest that these four elements may be characteristic of minority groups for whom stigma and discrimination, visibility, and minority status make identity negotiation a crucial part of the individuals experience.