

# Culture clubs in Canadian higher education: Examining membership diversity

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*Résumé: Selon les sites-web d'associations étudiantes, jusqu'à 24% des clubs au sein de grandes universités canadiennes sont consacrés au moins en partie à la culture. Les clubs culturels sont des associations étudiantes qui ont pour thème l'identité culturelle ou linguistique. Dans cet article, à l'aide de données publiques et de la littérature académique nous traitons d'abord de l'étendue des clubs culturels aux universités canadiennes. Ensuite afin de remettre en question la vision populaire de ces associations comme enclaves ethniques auto-ségrégationnistes (Findley & Kohler, 2010), nous décrivons la diversité des membres d'un club culturel à une grande université Canadienne. Les données, qui ont été obtenues en entretiens individuels et de groupe avec six membres du club, ont été analysées selon une approche poststructuraliste qui voit l'identité des individus comme étant multiple, dynamique, et contingente (Block, 2007; 2010). L'analyse met en évidence des positions et tensions multiples, ce qui compliquent les idées préconçues sur les raisons pour lesquelles des étudiants s'engagent dans ces clubs et les identités diverses qu'ils mettent ou ne mettent pas en avant.*

*Abstract: Student association websites indicate that up to 24% of all student-run clubs at large Canadian universities are dedicated to some facet of culture. Culture clubs are student associations based around cultural or linguistic identities. This paper describes the scope and focus of culture clubs at postsecondary institutions in Canada with reference to publicly available data and relevant literature. It challenges the popular view of these organizations as self-segregated ethnic enclaves (Findley & Kohler, 2010) by describing the diverse membership within one culture club at a large Canadian university. Data were collected through individual and group interviews with six club members and were analyzed drawing on poststructuralist theory, which views individuals' identities as multiple, dynamic and contingent (Block, 2007, 2010). The data evidenced multiple positionings and tensions which complicate notions about why students join culture clubs and the various identities that may or may be foregrounded through membership.*

*Mots clés: clubs culturels; diversité; éducation supérieure; identité*  
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With the policy push to internationalize Canadian campuses, the number of international students has more than doubled since the year 2000 (Anderson, 2015). Linguistically and ethnically diverse groups are no longer isolated pockets but have reached a critical mass, leaving university administrations to find new ways to increase campus integration and avoid “ethnic cliquing” (Habacon, 2013, para. 5). Alongside this increase in diversity there has been an associated rise in the number of *culture clubs*, student associations based around cultural or linguistic identities (e.g., *Persian club* or *Chinese Varsity Club*).

Research has shown that culture clubs provide safe spaces for minority students and promote academic integration (Guiffrida, 2003; Museus, 2008; Ortiz & Santos, 2009; Silver, 2015); however, popular opinion tends to view these clubs as ethnic enclaves that limit contact with local students (e.g., Quinn, 2012). This paper aims to introduce the phenomenon of culture clubs in Canadian higher education and to complicate the notion of culture clubs as enclaves by highlighting the diversity within the clubs themselves. To this end, we first review the characteristics and aims of culture clubs in Canadian higher education. We then explore the case of one culture club called *Russian Circle* (RC, pseudonym) at a large Canadian institution. Drawing on poststructuralist notions of identity which views individuals' identities as multiple, dynamic, and contingent (Block, 2007, 2010), we focus on the identities as expressed by three RC members in bilingual semi-structured interviews.

## Culture Clubs in Canadian Higher Education

By culture clubs, we refer broadly to student associations that include some form of linguistic, national, or ethnic label. These labels can be broadly geographical or ethnic such as the *Afro Students' Association*; or more specific to one region, nationality, or linguistic group (e.g., the *Persian club*). They can also represent complex combinations of cultures and interests such as the *Canadianized Asian Club* or the *Bangladeshi Engineering Students' Association*. Across these associations, aims usually include creating connections between students who share similar cultural backgrounds, fostering a supportive atmosphere for communication, and promoting or educating the public about the characteristics, beliefs, traditions, history, or language of the group. However, explicitly “cultural” events (e.g., involving traditional food or music) need not always play a significant role in club activities. The *Chinese Varsity Club* at UBC, for example, has existed since 1930 and welcomes members of all backgrounds, not only Chinese, and sponsors events ranging from fundraisers to talent competitions.

The mission of these clubs ranges on a continuum from entirely focused on creating a social environment to promoting outreach and support (Baker, 2008). Socially-focused associations bring like-minded people closer in a

comfortable setting through activities such as bowling or karaoke, while outreach-focused associations promote discussions of political and ethical issues, volunteering, and educational events. The following summary of the *Russian Speaking Student Association* activities, taken from York University’s club directory, summarizes the aims of many of these clubs:

Our goal is to unite all Russian speaking students of York University, and provide support for new students as they begin their university studies. The Association focuses on organizing different events that allow its members to learn more about Russian traditions, language, and history. By participating in volunteering events, organizing social and cultural gatherings RSSA educates the public about the rich Russian culture. Moreover, as a nonprofit student organization we aim to accommodate tutoring to members who want some practice with their Russian speaking skills. (“Russian Speaking Student Organization,” n.d.)

Culture club participation rates can range from as few as ten to hundreds of members. For instance, the aforementioned Chinese Varsity Club reportedly serves over 500 members (Findlay & Köhler, 2010), while York University’s *Afghan Association* lists 161 members, its *Tamil Club*, 93 members, and the *Guyanese Social Club*, 96 members. Currently, culture clubs represent between 8%-24% of students clubs (excluding athletic teams) at some of Canada’s largest English-speaking institutions. Table 1 shows the number of culture clubs at ten large English-dominant universities in Canada. Frequencies are based on the number of clubs which include cultural labels (such as those presented above) as listed on each university’s public student association website (links provided in Table 1).

Table 1: Cultural Clubs in Canadian Universities as of May, 2015

University	Student association website	Culture clubs	Total clubs	Percentage (%)
UBC	<a href="http://www.ams.ubc.ca/clubs">http://www.ams.ubc.ca/clubs</a>	58	235	24.9
U. of Toronto	<a href="https://ulife.utoronto.ca">https://ulife.utoronto.ca</a>	235	1088	21.6
McGill	<a href="http://ssmu.mcgill.ca">http://ssmu.mcgill.ca</a>	49	227	21.6
Waterloo	<a href="http://www.feds.ca/">http://www.feds.ca/</a>	35	186	18.8
Queen’s	<a href="https://myams.org/clubs-directory/">https://myams.org/clubs-directory/</a>	49	271	18.1
SFU	<a href="http://go.sfss.ca/clubs/list">http://go.sfss.ca/clubs/list</a>	31	204	15.2
UVic	<a href="https://uvss.ca/">https://uvss.ca/</a>	16	130	12.3
U. of Alberta	<a href="https://alberta.collegiatelink.net">https://alberta.collegiatelink.net</a>	57	482	11.8
U. of Calgary	<a href="http://suclubs.orgsync.com/">http://suclubs.orgsync.com/</a>	31	308	10.1
York	<a href="https://yorku.collegiatelink.net/">https://yorku.collegiatelink.net/</a>	41	488	8.4

Note: Counts should be taken as approximate as many websites do not get updated regularly.

All ten institutions listed clubs for an array of cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds (although few had clubs explicitly dedicated to First Nations cultures). For example, at the University of Waterloo, the 35 culture clubs listed on the Student Federation website mention 30 distinct cultural labels, presented below in Table 2.

Table 2: List of Cultural Labels in Clubs at the University of Waterloo as of May, 2015

Afghan	Chinese*	Ismaili	Pakistani
African	Filipino	Japanese	Singaporean
Arab	Jewish	Korean*	Somali
Armenian	Hindu	Latin	Sri Lankan
Azerbaijani	Hong Kong	Mauritian	Taiwanese
Bengali	Indian	Malaysian	Thai
Black	Indonesian	Muslim	Vietnamese
Caribbean	Iranian		

Note. \* indicates than one club bearing that label. Muslim, Jewish and Hindu are included here as they were listed under the rubric “cultural” rather than religious.

The high number of culture clubs at Canada's largest institutions, as well as the fact that these clubs are student-created, indicate that these associations play an important role for thousands of students in Canadian higher education and merit further research to determine their role in campus life. This paper provides an introduction to previous research on culture clubs and a brief glimpse into the experiences of members in one club dedicated to Russian language and culture.

## Benefits and Challenges of Culture Clubs

Despite the large number of students served by culture clubs in Canada, we have been unable to find academic studies investigating these clubs in the Canadian context. However, a number of researchers have explored culture clubs in the US, particularly those for African American, Latino, and Asian students. Typical findings indicate that these associations serve purposes ranging from providing emotional and academic support to encouraging professional connections and opportunities for CV building (Museus, 2008; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). UBC diversity specialist, Alden Habacon ("Class Conscious: UBC's Alden Habacon on diversity by design," 2012), described the value of these clubs in the following way:

There's definitely a benefit for having clubs where you can be with a group of people and not have to translate what you want to say. It allows you to be yourself: you don't have to explain everything about you and your culture and what you're used to. (para. 12)

Guiffrida (2003) pointed to the benefits of membership in his qualitative study of the experience of 88 African American culture club members. In his interviews, students reported feeling less alienated when sheltered from negative stereotypes in the club environment. They were also able to share stories of discrimination and give back to the Black community by supporting incoming students. Researchers have also noted that these clubs offer avenues for taking up leadership roles to students who are unlikely to participate in other student organizations such as student government (Guiffrida, 2003; Museus, 2008; Ortiz & Santos, 2009) and that there are connections between membership in culture clubs and student activism. For instance, Ortiz and Santos (2009), who studied the experiences of 100 Asian, Black, and Latino students on two campuses in California, remarked that:

involvement in campus organizations not only provided places of support for students to integrate into the campus community, but they also often helped contextualize the political nature of ethnicity for students and challenged them to become more committed to the political aspects of their ethnic group membership through engaging in political activism. (pp. 303-304)

Other quantitative studies have provided evidence that membership is associated with better academic integration. For example, in a questionnaire-based study involving 93 ethnic minority students, Saylor and Aries (1999) found that those enrolled in ethnic organizations were also more likely to participate in other non-ethnic student clubs, attended more diversity-related workshops, and reported more encounters with diverse students. Similarly, in a study of over 500 students at UCLA, Sidanius and colleagues (2004) found that being enrolled in a culture club correlated to higher levels of affiliation to the university. In a large-scale study involving 3,924 students, Baker (2008) also found a correlation between grade point average and involvement in culture clubs for Latina students. In light of these benefits, many researchers have advocated for the promotion and support of cultural organizations as a way to provide additional support to ethnically and linguistically diverse students.

However, some research has also highlighted potential challenges to the ways culture clubs are perceived on campus. According to Ortiz and Santos (2009), culture clubs can "create a climate of competition for educational resources and the perception of ethnic separateness" (p. 304) on campus. Sidanius, Levin, Van Laar, and Sears (2008) found that while culture club members showed evidence of being more integrated into campus life, they also reported an increased sense of victimization and perceived that they were locked in a zero-sum conflict with other student groups. While, to our knowledge, there has been no published research on this in Canada, anecdotal evidence, supports the above findings. One recent incident at Ryerson University was reported in which organizers from the *Racialized Student Collective* requested that two White journalism students leave an event. According to reports (Ansari, 2015), the club organizers felt justified in asking the journalism students to leave, citing the importance of safe spaces for minority students; the journalism students felt their exclusion was counterproductive and encouraged racial tension. While this article seeks to point out the prevalence of culture clubs and highlight the diversity within them rather than focus on racialized tensions, we feel we must acknowledge their existence and

highlight the need for research into the connections between culture clubs and (perceived) segregation on Canadian campuses.

## Identity and Culture Clubs

According to Sidanius et al. (2004), the primary reason students seek membership in cultural organizations centres around “identity enhancement” (p. 96). Ortiz and Santos (2009) maintain that these organizations are critical to identity exploration, which they describe as a strong psychological need of college students. This assertion is supported by insights from Saylor and Aries (1999) and Sidanius et al. (2004), which found that culture club membership correlated strongly with the formation and strengthening of students’ identities.

While these studies provide valuable insights into the link between club membership and identity development, by implying a connection between the single abstracted identity of the culture club and the identities being cultivated by club members, the large scale studies reviewed in the previous section can sometimes project an image of sameness across the membership that does not reflect reality. For instance, in Guiffrida’s study of 88 students in the USA, he states that ethnic organizations “help expose and connect Black students from predominantly White home communities to *African American culture*” (2003, p. 307, our emphasis). By referring to “culture” in the singular, Guiffrida seems to imply that Black students need to be connected to a specific brand of culture and creates a static link between that singular culture and a particular type of student. In contrast, Ortiz and Santos (2009) found that although students participated in culture clubs labelled as Asian or African American, many of those same students identified not with this broader macro identity but with a more specific identity linked to their hometown, dialect, or country.

In addition, culture club studies (Guiffrida, 2003; Museus, 2008; Silver, 2015) often depict culture clubs as universally supportive environments where students can safely explore their stake in the cultural identity associated with the club, further contributing to an idealized vision in which members converge towards a common group identity. However, Ortiz and Santos (2009) also found that certain members can serve as gatekeepers to positive identity development by judging members as “not ‘ethnic enough’” (p. 326), particularly if they are not fluent speakers of the club’s language. This finding suggests that not all members have equal access to the benefits described in the literature, nor are the assumed identities of members necessarily the same. Thus, we argue that presenting culture clubs as homogenous likely does not reflect reality, and may contribute to reproducing the popular image of these groups as enclaves, as they have sometimes been presented in the media (Quinn, 2012; Findley & Kohler, 2010).

In order to challenge a uni-cultural vision of culture club members, we turn to a poststructuralist model of identity (Block, 2007) that shifts focus from the notion that students cultivate a single cultural identity to acknowledging the multiple and fluid nature of identity. According to Block (2007), a poststructuralist approach views an individual’s identity as multiple, contingent, and formed and reformed through constant negotiation of difference. In other words, this approach recognizes what Benessaieh (2010) calls a *plural sense of self*. Block (2010) maintains that group expectations and one’s desire to belong shape the identities of adults immersed in specific social contexts, such as students arriving at university. He asserts that the complex process of reconciling one’s worldview, identity, and societal expectations across contexts may result in *ambivalence* and inner conflict. Thus, individuals may both resist and reproduce conflicting understandings of their identity within a group. From a poststructuralist perspective, therefore, inconsistencies in the way an individual projects their identities are not viewed as anomalous or dishonest but as a natural product this ongoing negotiation process.

In adopting a poststructural approach to identity in culture clubs, we seek to acknowledge that diversity on Canadian campuses can be seen not only across clubs and individuals, but *within* individuals as well. In the following section, we describe one specific club at a Canadian university that we have named *Russian Circle* (RC). We selected RC because we wished to provide insight into a less well-known cultural group but one which is still relatively common across Canadian institutions. In addition, Russian is widely spoken in many countries throughout the world, including former Soviet Republics (e.g., Ukraine, Kazakhstan) thus a Russian speaking student organization naturally attracts a diverse membership. The description of the club comes from a larger study comprised of two sets of interviews, one in English and one in Russian, conducted with six members of the club as well as event descriptions and public Facebook posts, which were collected in Fall 2014 after obtaining an ethics approval. We focus on the club’s membership a whole as well as the complex identities expressed by three participants, all of whom are or were graduate students.

## Illustrative Case: Russian Circle (RC)

RC was founded in 2011 by two Russian international students and is now run by largely by students who immigrated to Canada from Russian-speaking countries at a young age. According to RC's Facebook group, the club has over 400 members and holds monthly events attended by between five and forty members. While the majority of club events are social (e.g., bowling, laser tag, hiking, cooking), RC organizes cultural events related to Russian holidays and participates in campus intercultural events. Outreach and activism are not RC's primary goal; however, the Facebook page extends to the wider Russian-speaking community.

In her interview, the club's president described RC as diverse, citing members of Russian, Ukrainian, Serbian, Kazakh, Chinese, Polish, and Mongolian heritage. Although the club is open to anyone as per university regulations, in practical terms the main criteria for membership revolves around Russian language proficiency. Some Russian language learners showed interest in joining; however, interviewees confirmed that few non-Russian speakers attended regularly. The participants were divided as to whether the club should accommodate learners of Russian: on the one hand, they were proud to share Russian language and traditions but on the other hand, speaking English with learners diminished the social nature of the events. One participant described this atmosphere of the club in this way: "Russians ... will be speaking Russian in between each other, so you know those people will feel different right away, you know they cannot understand, like they cannot take part" (Fall interview, 2014).

In interviews, members described the club as a space where they could share humour and pop culture without fear of being misunderstood. When characterizing the type of person who typically joins RC, the six members we interviewed believed that nationality was less important than age of arrival to Canada and ability to speak Russian fluently. Participants tended to classify the most active members in two main groups: Russian speakers who were born in Canada or arrived at a young age (heritage or generation 1.5) and newcomers (international students). One participant described the two groups as separate "bubbles," with generation 1.5 members using the club to maintain their Russian and explore their heritage, while the recent arrivals use it as a starting point to build their social networks. At the time of the interviews in the fall of 2014, club tensions were unusually high between members owing to recent conflict between Russia and the Ukraine: many Ukrainian members had recently left the club. In the following section, we present the stories of three graduate student members of the club to illustrate the diverse identities claimed by different club members in different contexts (all names are pseudonyms).

## Identities of Three RC Members

**Kate.** Born in Russia, Kate immigrated to the United States at a young age. An active member of the Russian speaking diaspora, Kate had previously helped create a Russian culture club during her undergraduate degree in the USA as a way to maintain her language skills. At that time, Kate participated in a range of clubs and organizations on campus, including a sorority and an international students' organization. However, in contrast to these organizations where Kate felt like she did not belong, or as she puts like a "cut-off slice of bread," Russian club allowed Kate to be "really involved not just as a member but as a leader." For Kate, her Russian identity and club leadership experience are a point of pride and allow her to initiate contact with other Russian speakers and learners.

When Kate moved to a Canadian campus with her husband, she immediately sought out a Russian-speaking association "to make more friends," "to practice speaking the language," and "keep in touch with the culture." On numerous occasions Kate expressed her excitement about meeting other speakers of Russian in RC. Kate also makes a point of being inclusive of all students, regardless of their language proficiency and notes how this is not the case of all members:

I haven't seen like so many ah active members of the club kind of reaching out to to non-Russian speakers. Like I always do that when I, I see like people come who are, who don't speak, like I will just walk up, introduce myself you know, you know just start talking to people. (Kate, fall interview, 2014)

She continues to be a regular attendee of RC events as well as of many campus-wide international events but wishes the club met more often and was more inclusive of learners.

**Dianne.** Also born and raised in Russia, Dianne came to Canada in 2013 to complete her Master's degree. Initially, she wanted to meet other international students and Canadians and chose not to seek out fellow Russians. However, after a family member expressed a concern that she was studying too hard, Dianne sought out a Russian meet-up group where she met Kate, and who encouraged her to join RC. In contrast to Kate, Dianne does not see RC

as a place to practice Russian, saying “I already speak Russian” and “I do not need to maintain the language.” She joined RC simply “to have fun.” Dianne also attends events at other culture clubs and the International Student Association. Thus, RC is not a primary source of social interaction for Dianne, who considers herself a casual member.

In the Russian interview which she attended with Kate, Dianne criticized RC for not focusing enough on Russian culture in their events, making it clear that a *Russian* organization should promote culture, language, and history of Russia. In this first interview, she strongly identified with ethnic Russians and distanced herself from other “internationals” in RC, referring to them as “they” despite her official status as an international student. However, in her second interview conducted in English, Dianne was quick to point out that she is “not quite Russian” but in fact ethnically Tatar and a Muslim: “we tend to differentiate ourselves from Russians like, we like to emphasize that, that we are not Russians. We are not Slavic” (Dianne, fall interview, 2014).

She also discussed the importance of her international peer-network and described how her closest friends were from Iran and Brazil. She noted that she had difficulty connecting with local Canadian students and was now more focused on fostering multicultural connections.

**Sasha.** Born in Mongolia, Sasha also came to Canada to complete her Master’s degree in 2013. Like Kate, she immediately sought out a Russian community because of previous close friendships with Russians during an academic exchange in the USA. Sasha grew up reading Russian books and attended a Russian-Mongolian high school. As a result, she described herself as a “mixed thing” with a deep connection to both Mongolian and Russian culture. However, this vision of herself often led her to feel “different”:

you kind you want to be a Mongolian because you was born there raised there whatever, but then whenever, kind of like Mongolians think you are different, and the Russians think you are Russian, that’s kind of, I don’t know a strange feeling because you are not what you think. (Sasha, fall interview, 2014)

She explained that her Russian friends mostly saw her as being one of them because of her language ability; however, Sasha also identified strongly as being “an Asian” and perceived a number of instances in which others were insensitive to her Asian identity. In both interviews, she told the story of her first meeting at RC at which a “Russian girl like almost closed the door in front of my face because I was Asian.” It was not until she spoke Russian aloud that she was welcomed into the group. Thus her Asian and Russian identities sometimes created conflicting feelings in her interactions with other RC members.

Like Dianne, outside the club, Sasha valued interacting with an international and cosmopolitan community, and actively avoided Mongolian friendships. She was often conflicted between the desire to make English-speaking friends with whom she could practice and the need for a community with whom she could communicate more easily. She especially sought out people who had been abroad and “know the struggles with a foreign language” and who she perceived to be more sympathetic.

## Discussion

These members’ accounts support a poststructuralist understanding of identity by demonstrating how shifting desires and expectations lead members to claim different identities across contexts. For Kate, who arrived in North America at a young age, being an RC member allowed her to explore and maintain her claim to Russian identity. Her experience as a club founder in the USA also allowed her to position herself as someone who reaches out to others who are interested in Russian culture and thus to engage with students of diverse backgrounds. For Dianne, while she did not join to enhance her identity, her Russian identity took on more importance within the context of the club where she advocated for Russian cultural activities. However, when discussing her identity outside the club, Dianne vocally differentiated herself from Russians by highlighting her identity as Tatar and a non-orthodox Muslim and also professed her strong desire to be part of an international community. Thus, these members’ narratives support the notion put forward in the research reviewed earlier that club membership appears to enhance identity (Saylor & Aries, 1999; Sidanius et al., 2004) and to foster leadership opportunities for some students (e.g., Guiffrida, 2003). However, the findings also show that members’ club identities, such as Kate’s identity as a leader, do not always extend beyond the confines of the club where students may prioritize different identity positions, such as Dianne’s emphasis on her Tatar identity.

Sasha’s case is perhaps the best reflection of the fluid and multiple nature of identity. Her desire to claim identities as an Asian, Mongolian, and Russian was often at odds with her desire to belong to the group. Sasha’s story about not being “what you think” reflects the ambivalence, or inner conflict (Block, 2007) described when

individuals must reconcile their own worldviews with the need to belong. In Sasha's case, this ambivalence is produced when the mixed identity she wishes to project is not easily reconciled with popular notions of stereotypical Russian, Asian, or Mongolian identities. This is well illustrated by the incident when she was discouraged from entering an RC club event until she demonstrated her Russian language abilities. Sasha's experience supports the notion that an individual's identity is constantly negotiated and constrained by contextual factors and societal expectations. It also echoes Ortiz and Santos (2009) finding that some students can act as gatekeepers who determine what is "ethnic enough" to qualify for group belonging and challenges the notion of these groups as universally supportive.

While cultural identities were often salient in these narratives in the labels and characteristics that students assigned to themselves and others (e.g., Russian, Asian, Tatar), embedded in these members' stories, we also find evidence of other important identity positions, such as their identities as international students who are open to new cultures. Both Kate and Dianne were members of or attended the events of other culture clubs. They also believed in the importance of reaching out to Russian learners and other communities. As recently-arrived international students, Sasha and Dianne also expressed identities as language learners by indicating their need to balance their desire for like-minded friends and their responsibility to immerse themselves in local culture and to practice English. To this end, both explicitly took steps to avoid excessive contact with co-nationals, particularly in their residences. This would seem to contradict popular understandings of ethnic clubs as "segregated, self-selecting, discrete communities" as they were branded in the controversial McCleans article (Findley & Kohler, 2010). Instead it supports the findings of Sidanius et al. (2004) and Sidanius et al. (2008) that ethnic minority students who take part in culture clubs tend to be more integrated in campus life than those who do not. These narratives help us to see that students who belong to such organizations also belong to other communities, such as international student organizations, where they cultivate different but no less important alternative identities.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has provided a brief glimpse into the culture-club phenomenon in Canada and offered an example of diversity in the membership of one club in particular. Our review of the information available on student association websites indicates that cultural organizations constitute a substantial portion of the clubs in Canada's post-secondary institutions. The extant literature suggests that these clubs provide students with safe spaces in which they can communicate and take on leadership roles. This paper also challenges the common view depicted in the media that culture clubs are monolithic ethnically-bound groups that hamper cross-cultural contact. Our interviews with three RC members revealed that these clubs serve multiple purposes. For some, such as Kate, they allow an exploration of heritage culture. For international students such as Dianne, membership is a means to establish a network of students who understand them. For Russophiles, such as Sasha, the club can allow for an exploration of alternative identities. Most importantly, our data show that culture clubs are not necessarily ethnically or linguistically homogenous and that the role of members depends on factors such as language proficiency and time of arrival in Canada. In addition, by highlighting students' commitment to English-learning and engagement (e.g., Sasha and Dianne) with other student associations beyond RC, we hope to have challenged the ideological link between membership in culture clubs and self-segregation and to acknowledge that these clubs are but one of the many important social spaces these students inhabit. More research is needed to understand precisely how such organizations contribute to campus life and what steps Canadian institutions can take to ensure these clubs are better understood by students and the wider public.

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