

Abstract

Research Objective

The objective of this research is to investigate the role of parents in molding the religious identity of the maturing youth in the Religious-Zionist community, along with their channels of influence on the formalization of this identity, as is perceived by the religious youth.

Theoretical Background

The term “Identity Crisis” was first coined by the psychologist Erik Erikson in 1950. The most significant theoretician to developed Erikson's theory and give it's research momentum was Marcia (1964, 1966, 1967) who defined “The Identity of I” as a core-structure or a dynamic and internal method built on the drives, talents, beliefs, and history of the individual. From the various identities that a man may have, In this research we chose to focus on one in particular – the religious identity.

The subject of religious identity has been evaluated from different angles in the past two decades. Like in other fields, the agents for religious socialization are all the elements that influence the individual: family, teachers, friends, youth movements and communication media. Whether through conscious intent or not, these factors have influence. Moreover, the stronger the connection with the agent of socialization grows, so too the influence. The two most important agents of socialization are family and the peer group. (Chalfant, Beckley & Palmar, 1994).

Numerous studies have been conducted in order to determine what are the most influential elements in the development of the religious identity, and in many of these the parents have been discovered as the most affecting agents on religious

socialization. (Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993; Francis. & Brown, 1991; Park and Ecklund, 2007).

For this reason, we have chosen to research, in a population where such a study has never been carried out before, the nature of the parent's influence in the Religious-Zionist sector on the designing of their children's religious identity. The Religious-Zionist youth are characterized in the social framework within which they live and are active. Such a framework may be defined as a sub-culture in and of itself: The Religious-Zionist Sub-Culture. Such a sub-culture, on one hand, unites within it a group comprised of conformists who ascribe to a value system and behavioral norms validated through religious belief and, on the other hand, refers to, in one way or another, to the broader society – one whose central value system is not religious. (Ben-Zvi, 1992). Consequently, the Religious-Zionist youth find themselves in a double, structural-cultural conflict: on one hand the youth experience the transition from childhood to adulthood and the crises of adolescence involved, and on the other hand, they find themselves exposed to the leisure of western culture which stands time and again in contrast to the goals and requirements which are set for them by the various agents of socialization. (Bar Lev, 1985). We wanted to examine how parents succeed in causing their children to continue on their religious educational path, and in doing so, influence their religious identity in opposition or together with the various agents of socialization. In addition, we wanted to inspect the different forms of influence, if such exist, of the different parental styles.

Research Questions

- 1) What degree of influence do religious youth attribute to their parents in regards to designing their religious identity?

- 2) How did the youth whose parents influenced more the designing of their religious identity feel?

Was the influence executed directly, as in the case of verbal education, or perhaps indirectly, as with choosing a place of residence, educational establishment, social framework etc. (Cornwall Ericson, 1992, 1988).

- 3) How do the religious youth perceive their parents influence throughout the years? As a weakening influence (Francis & Brown, 1991) or a continual one (Myers, 1996)?
- 4) To what degree did the maturing youth perceive the effect of their parents' parental style as influential to the designing of their religious identity?
- 5) Who is perceived by the youth as being more influential in the designing of their religious identity? The father or mother figure? Why?

Study Population

The study population included 20 subjects, 10 boys and 10 girls from the Religious-Zionist community, of ages 22-28. The subjects are graduates of high school *yeshivot* and *ulpanot*, which are both educational frameworks, belonging to the Religious-Zionist movement, separated for boys and girls respectively. The subjects were chosen at random – they reside in different cities and towns across the country.

Research Tools

The study was executed by a qualitative research technique. The research tool used was semi-structured interviews conducted with the study population. The interviews are story-oriented and descriptive by nature, the interview is guided and focused – conducted along written guidelines specifying predetermined subject matter, related to

the research objective – however, the order of the questions and their formulation were not predetermined and did not constrict the interviewer. The subjects had the ability to respond freely and to relate to new points. All the interviews were recorded in real-time and were transcribed word-for-word a short time after the conclusion of the interview.

Analysis

The analysis of the interviews was done according to Gross (1995). According to this approach, we first located words that were repeated several times. Next, we grouped these words into categories. Then we tried to find a connection between the categories so as to reach a certain theoretical conceptualization in line with the literature that deals with the subject matter.

That is to say, after conducting the interviews, we proceeded to the stage of the revealing reading, in which I read all the material that I gathered in the interviews and I compared between different interviews in order to find similar ideas and subjects that repeat themselves. In this manner I found the central themes and from them we built the categories that appear in the study.

In the third stage we conducted an inner-categorical examination, which brought about subcategories. Such that in every chapter that was created there are sub-chapters with specific statements and findings and with their own heading that correlates to those findings.

The Main Findings

- From the interviews that were conducted we can distinguish three parental styles: authoritative, controlling, and non-involved. It seems that the subjects

of all three parental styles perceive their home as the most influential element regarding religion. However it is important to note that this study is not meant to examine the different outcomes from the influence of each parental style on the subjects lifestyle because the subjects chosen are those that continued their parents' educational path and remained within the framework of a religious lifestyle. Rather, the study is meant to explore the manner in which the subjects perceive their parents' religious influence on them and the differences in various ways of influence.

- It was discovered that subjects of parents with authoritative parental styles presented their parents in a more positive fashion – as a style that is autonomous and constructive, it gives space and freedom together with clear transference of messages so that the subjects noted that they knew exactly what was expected of them even when it was not explicitly voiced.
- The subjects of the authoritative parental style give great importance to their parents personal example, the non-verbal way in which religious ideas, habits, texts, and rituals were transferred. Meanwhile, subjects of the controlling parental style emphasize the parents influence as direct and verbal, sometimes forceful, and they find it less preferable. As such, in the experience of the subjects of authoritative parent style their memories of Sabbaths and Holidays are positive whereas in the experience of the subjects of the controlling parental style these days are remembered as times of strictness and punishment. Also, the nature of the connection with the parents during adolescence differs between the two parental styles – the optimal connection being between subjects and parents possessing the authoritative parental style.
- The most prominent manner of influence that was repeated throughout the

interviews was modeling through which the youth learn by imitation.

(Bandura, 1969). That is to say, through observing the parents and perceiving them as a role model the subjects learned how they are expected to act and thus, indirectly, the parents influenced the designing of the youths religious identity.

- Another means of influence that was prevalent in the interviews was the religious rituals and habits incorporated into the family lifestyle by the parents, such as: the washing of hands before a meal, blessing before and after eating, walking to the synagogue to pray on the Sabbath and Holidays, and sitting around the Sabbath table. From the findings that arose from this study, it seems that the subjects received in their homes the practical habits necessary for living a religious lifestyle, and from those same practical habits they learned the standards for religious behavior.
- It was discovered that the manners of influence that the subjects noted from all parental styles are indirect manners of influence by choosing a place of residence, social framework, educational establishment, youth movement etc.
- There was almost no mention for influence through explanation or learning with the parents. It seems from the subjects accounts that the mental development that gave awareness and understanding of those practical habits that the youth inherited at home was acquired at a later stage, outside the home, at the Torah institutions at which they studied in their high school years (*yeshivot* and *ulpanot*) and later (Seminaries for girls, colleges, Hesder yeshivas, High yeshivas and military prep-schools).
- A finding that surprised us greatly in that it repeated itself with almost all of the subjects in contrast to our expectations was the fact that the majority of the

parents avoided conflict with their adolescent children, even when the subjects did not act religiously as the parents wished, and in so doing, according to the subjects, they were given more freedom of choice. Likewise, the subjects explained that they did not feel the necessity to rebel against their parents with a “Youth Revolt” regarding religion.

- In the study it arose that it is not possible to point out clearly one parental figure that is perceived as more influential regarding religion. However, we did see a difference in the in perception of each parent as a religious agent. Usually the father figure is perceived as more strict with observing the *Halachic* commandments, while the mother figure is perceived to be more connected to the realm of belief and religious outlook.
- From the study it arose that in the beginning stages of young adulthood there still exist changes in the religious identity of the subjects, thus the stage of constructing the religious identity does not conclude with the end of adolescence.
- We found that according to the subjects, the influence of the parents changes overtime and weakens with the subjects departure from the parents home, yet there are still aspects that continue to influence the subjects even after they leave their parents home, such as: acceptance of religious foundations, love of the Torah, attitude towards rabbis and belief in the sages, rigor in observing the commandments and religious considerations when choosing a profession for life.
- Differences found between boys and girls: the conflicts between the parents and adolescents regarding religion that were mentioned by the boys – waking up for morning prayer, and for the girls the issues of modest dressing and

mingling with the opposite sex in public were more prevalent. It is interesting to point out that, perhaps counter intuitively, with the girls there was more mention of the topic of asking questions of belief and introspection during high school – at the height of adolescence and with some of the girls this search continued after high school in other institutions. With the boys there was almost no mention at all of introspection during high school rather only after, in the first years of young adulthood, in the Hesder yeshivas, military prep-school etc.

Research Conclusions

From studying young adults that constructed their religious identity in accordance with the way in which they were educated by their parents it is possible to learn about the importance of the two main manners of influence: modeling – the imitation and the building of religious rituals. In the material gathered from the subjects there is the recurring statement that in their home they inherited the base and foundations for religious identity, by means of these two manners of influence, and this base they developed after through other agents of socialization such as: high school educational establishments (*yeshivot* and *ulpanot*), higher education establishments (high institutions, religious colleges), or seminaries for girls and Hesder yeshivas/military prep-schools for boys. An additional main mean of influence is through indirect influence by choice of residence and educational establishments. It seems that the subjects positively perceived the fact that the parents gave them freedom and avoided conflict in certain religious domains, and this cause them as adolescents to feel that there is no need for a “Youth Revolt” in religious matters. In this present study it was found that the authoritative parental style is perceived by the subjects as the best for

transference of the religious message from the parent to the child because it provides the the child with boundaries and supervision together with reasoning, space, and respect, while the controlling parental style is perceived by the subjects as disrupting the transference of the religious message – if by the parents' lack of consistency or by their over-strictness. It seems that most of the parents in the study, that exercised the authoritative parental style acted according to the three components of the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 1985) and gave their children a feeling of autonomy, a feeling of ability, and a feeling of belonging and it seems that this contributed to the fact that the children adopted for themselves the lifestyle with which their parents wanted to bestow them.