

Abstract

In this study, we examined the identity challenges among ultra-orthodox Jewish parents, that grew-up in classical ultra-orthodox homes and learned in academic institutes. We checked how the academic learning experience influenced their ultra-orthodox identity formation, and its corresponding effect on the way they raise their children. Moreover, we investigated the personal, family-related and communal identity processes that these academic ultra-orthodox parents had undergone towards and during their studies. Furthermore, we also checked the reflections of these processes on their thoughts about their children raising process and their education.

The literature shows that the ultra-orthodox community is a conservative society characterized by almost total obedience to its leadership. Thus, among academic ultra-orthodox people there is a challenge caused due to the ultra-orthodox leadership objection to these academic studies. In addition, according to Erickson's theory of development stages, during the generativity stage, an identity investigation takes place by cause of several identity-challenging events (Marcia, 2010). Therefore, we can deduce that many challenges included in the process of going to academic studies among these ultra-orthodox people may cause an identity investigation in both their personal/community and children-raising educational aspects.

In this study, we consider two research questions dealing with several identity aspects of the academic ultra-orthodox Jewish people. The first research question deals with the academic study experience and its influence on these ultra-orthodox people's identity in personal, family-related and communal aspects. The second research question deals with the educational and valuable aspects that these ultra-orthodox people give to their children.

In order to answer these research questions, we used qualitative research methods and performed thematic-focused in-depth interviews with ultra-orthodox men and women belonging to all main ultra-orthodox subgroups – Hassidi, Lithuanian and Sephardic. We located the interviewed people using social media advertisements, several shared colleagues and using other previously interviewed people. The interviews were analyzed using the guided multiple reading method.

Using the interviews, we examined that those academic studies led to relatively minor openness and identity investigation among part of the interviewed people in all the ultra-orthodox subgroups. In the personal and family-related aspects, it was mainly expressed by choosing a study subject that was less acceptable in the ultra-orthodox community, and by several thoughts and feels connected to the interviewed people themselves and to their children's future. Even though, in the communal aspect we

observed that the internal ultra-orthodox community institutes less helped the interviewed people than their personal aids.

There was also a gender difference in the results – the women, that mainly learned in institutes dedicated to ultra-orthodox people, remained with their opinions and perceptions that were in their childhood homes. The women mainly preferred sending their children to classical ultra-orthodox institutes, but also considered openness and expansion of their children's horizons using private English studies and afternoon activities. However, the interviewed men, that mainly learned with people coming from the general Israeli sector and invested a lot of time overcoming their educational gap, had more determined positions about combining secular studies among their children's education. Nevertheless, the men did not always succeed in fully controlling their children's education due to their partner's preference to send their children to more strict ultra-orthodox classical institutes.

This study sheds light on several minor societies that are interested to integrate among the major groups in western societies. We can expand the ideas and findings of this research to other immigrant religious conservative societies integrated in the western society to examine how to aid them to integrate in their major society and simultaneously conserve their traditional and religious identity.