

# Parents can play an active role in the identity formation of their adolescent children

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Mainstream belief regarding identity theory tends to portray adolescents as the sole agents involved in their identity development. However, a new article in the *Journal of Research on Adolescence* reveals that parents are concerned, involved, and reflective participants in their children's identity formation.

Elli Schachter, PhD, of Bar Ilan University and Jonathan Ventura of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, studied parents, adolescents, and educators affiliated with the Orthodox Jewry in Israel. Researchers documented and described parents that invested a great amount of time and effort thinking about their children's identity, even fashioning their own lives with their children's future identities in mind.

The parents demonstrated the extent to which they saw themselves as active participants in their children's identity formation. They reflected on how best to form relationships with their children, what environments to choose for their children that would best serve some vision of what they hope their children will become, and how they hope their children will come to see themselves.

Such thinking and planning can be very complex, taking into account broad socio-cultural factors, personal psychological dynamics, and ethical concerns. However, parents did not act as mere socializing agents, blindly attempting to reproduce traditional values and roles within their children. Rather, they took a complex view, respecting their children's agency while also taking broader, social and cultural

perspectives into account.

"Research on identity within the field of psychology should broaden its focus to include a wider unit of analysis than the solitary individual," the authors conclude. "Such a focus will empower parents and educators to take a more conscious, positive, and active though careful role in the identity formation of youth while previously such a role may have been understood and portrayed as 'out-of-bounds.'"

Source: Wiley

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