**Abstract**

This study examines self-concept and life experience of school graduates in Nurture Index 10, These are third generation members of families from Arab countries (Mizrahim) living under social exclusion, in a major city in the north of the country, in a disadvantaged neighborhood. The graduates attended the school in classes in the *Shahar* )Education and Welfare Services( division, designated for students who have difficulty with regular attendance and self-learning. In other words, the graduates experience a multitude of social exclusions and structural vulnerabilities (Shoshana, 2018).

The research questions are: 1. How do the graduates - second and third generations of Jews from Arab countries, and living under socio-economic exclusion - define their self-concept? 2. How do the graduates - second and third generations of Jews from Arab countries living under socio-economic exclusion - describe their life experience at school?

The theoretical background is based on empirical and theoretical studies about the self-concept (Bakalian, 1992; Bendle, 2002; Cooley, 1902; Cousins, 1989; Field, 1994; Gergen, 1991; Hall, 1996; Mead, 1934; Rollock et al., 2014; Shoshana, 2016), as well as research about the concept of exclusion in general and social exclusion in particular (Berghman, 1997; Berthoud, 2003; Shoshana, 2016, 2018, 2020; Doron, 2008; Cromer-Nevo, 2006; Strier et al., 2011; Katan, 2000; Rom, 1998; Ratzon, 2015; Steyer 2005, 2008).

The key research findings, which were based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 12 school graduates, aged 18-22, reveal that the graduates explained their socio-economic situation by way of the government's policy towards citizens of Mizrahi ethnic origin, and through socio-ethnic hierarchies.

All the graduates are proud to be Mizrahim, although some described situations in which they hide it. The vast majority cited the prevailing stigma to describe “Mizrahi” persons as hot-headed and quarrelsome. These graduates strive for personal independence in that they are not interested in replicating the lives of their parents and wish to dissociate themselves from the stereotypical behavior they mentioned.

Their studies in the *Shahar* classes division made the graduates feel inferior, when the prevailing stigma is that those who study in these classes are “disturbed” or “retarded,” or have adjustment difficulties, etc. The feelings associated with this stigma are depressed cognition, and even exclusion (“I felt less”). The vast majority of the students did not attend trips and activities on behalf of the school or any other entity. The graduates described a process of change in their activity level (in the scholastic field) from middle school to high school. All the graduates described themselves as not functioning as students in middle school, which changed in high school. The fear of dropping out, conversations with the staff (requirements for inclusion), and success experiences contributed to active learning in high school. The life experience they presented was that their lives were “saved” in high school and if it weren't for the staff, they would not have obtained a matriculation certificate. In addition, they described the life experience in high school as changing the narrative and elements in the self-concept. The homeroom teacher was depicted as a significant figure.

One of the most prominent features was the type of discourse used by the graduates. War-related words were incorporated into their answers, as well as expressions that resonated with the research of Kusserow (1999), in which she found that a similar discourse characterized individuals from a low socio-economic class, and was defined as “hard individualism.” This is a discourse that is characterized by suspicion, promotes fighting, and values self-reliance. The graduates described themselves as “fighters” and “survivors” of the difficult life experiences they had. They emphasized the fact that they are independent, emotionally strong, and do not need anyone. The graduates experience continuous obstacles in their lives, which they are required to overcome while insisting on “getting by on their own.”

The graduates expressed a deep fear of replicating their parents' lives and the experience of the lack of resources for building a future, which could undermine their ability to build a “normal” life (start a family and not get divorced, attain housing, accumulate financial capital). The graduates expressed a dissociation from the characteristics of their lives, which in turn reinforced a unique self that is not portrayed, for example, in relation to high socio-economic class youth (Lareau, 2011). Against this background, my study seeks to emphasize that these experiences are characteristics of living under cross-generational social exclusion, which are not described in the research literature. The main ambition of these persons is to get married, start a family, and have children as a personal and family “life correction.”

It is imperative to note that the graduates did not describe conversations or practice of the future with their parents or teachers at school. This issue is critical to the maintenance of inequality in light of the descriptions of various researchers stating that practicing the ability to aspire (what Appadurai 2004 called “the capacity to aspire”) constitutes cultural capital that helps achieve positive life outcomes (Shoshana, 2020).

The discussion section deals with analysis of the findings and presents the impact that the life experiences of the graduates has on their self-perception with regard to the issues of multiple exclusions (ethnic, economic, social) and cross-generational exclusion. Also discussed is the effect of studies in the *Shahar* division and the educational staff on the feeling of exclusion and the school discourse. The reference to the stability of social exclusion over several family generations expands our understanding of the social exclusion concept and the self-concept. On a practical level, the findings of this study uncover the need to develop pedagogies and interactions for educational work with youth for whom social exclusion has been experienced in their family for generations.