

After 18, family influence still key to one's ethnic identity

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The formative years don't stop at 18 according to a new study that found the actions and lifestyle of the family continue to influence whether young adults embrace their ethnicity and take pride in their roots. Published in the *Journal of Adolescence*, the study of young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 found that those whose families continue to teach them about their ethnic background had a greater sense of ethnic identity.

Individuals whose families actively share cultural customs and traditions with them, celebrating Chinese New Year for example, reported feeling more attached to their ethnic group and spent more time exploring their heritage.

"These results highlight the fact that cultural education is an important aspect of parenting," said the study's author Linda Juang, associate professor of psychology at San Francisco State University. "The influence of the family continues to shape young people's ethnic identity beyond adolescence."

Juang surveyed more than 200 adults between the ages of 18 and 30, including Asian Americans, Latinos, white individuals and those of mixed ethnicity. Early adulthood is thought to be a critical time for identity development. Psychologists are interested in how ethnic identity is formed since research has associated a strong sense of ethnic identity with greater [life satisfaction](#) and decreased depression.

The study found that the family's role in communicating [cultural practices](#) and traditions had a greater influence on young adults' exploration of their ethnicity compared with whether they adopted values associated with their ethnic group. "Parents may be effective in prompting their children to find out more about their culture but they can't necessarily instill the values of their culture," Juang said.

The results also suggest that the relationship between the family's influence and ethnic identity is more pronounced for females than males. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that parents tend to focus on passing on cultural traditions to daughters more than sons.

More information: The study was recently published online in the Journal of Adolescence and will be published in the August 2010 print issue.

Provided by San Francisco State University

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