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**FACTORS INFLUENCING ADOLESCENT SELF-IDENTITY  
DEVELOPMENT OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN  
EFFUTU MUNICIPALITY IN CENTRAL REGION, GHANA**



## **Factors influencing adolescent self-identity development of Senior High School Students in Effutu Municipality in Central Region. Ghana.**

<sup>1\*</sup>Athanasius Afful

(St Pauls Catholic Major Seminary Sowutuom-Accra)

**Corresponding Author's email:** [athanasiusa@gmail.com](mailto:athanasiusa@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Kojo Namale (PhD)

University of Education, Winneba

**Corresponding Author's email:** [mknamale@uew.edu](mailto:mknamale@uew.edu)

<sup>3</sup> Mark Gyapong

University of Education, Winneba

**Corresponding Author's email:** [mgyapong@uew.edu.gh](mailto:mgyapong@uew.edu.gh)

### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** *The study sought to explore the parental and peer factors that influence adolescent self-identity development of senior high school students in the Effutu Municipality.*

**Methodology:** *The descriptive survey design using the quantitative method was adopted for the study. A self-designed questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 310 students for the study. Frequencies, percentages were used to answer the research questions while Independent-Samples t-test was used to test the hypotheses.*

**Findings:** *The findings revealed that frequent parent-adolescent communication enhances adolescent self-identity development. It was also found that peer feedback was a source of adolescent self-identity development. The study also revealed that there was statistically significant gender difference with regard to peer factors contributing to adolescent self-identity development.*

**Unique contribution to theory and practice:** *It was recommended that during Parents Teachers Association meetings, parents should be educated by the schools on the need to create conducive environments at home to help their children build strong self-identities since parents make impact on their self-identity development.*

**Keywords:** *Adolescents, Self-identity, Parents, Peers*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Adolescence according to Bywater and Petterson (2003) is a period in the human life cycle during which the individual must establish a sense of self identity to avoid the dangers of role diffusion. This identity confusion ultimately manifests in various unacceptable adolescent behaviours including drug and alcohol abuse, premature sexual activity and suicide or suicide attempts. To

them, adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by rapid and extensive physical and psychosocial changes which often present developmental crises that challenge the adolescent's coping abilities. Successful coping culminates in the formation of a clear and positive identity that can facilitate future development and productive use of personal resources. Problematic coping might make the person vulnerable to emotional and behavioural problems. How adolescents address what they experience in adolescence to develop their identity has a pivotal impact on their subsequent life journeys.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2019) describe adolescence as a period to learn to manage emotions and relationships, and acquire attributes and abilities that will be important for enjoying the adolescent years and assuming adult roles subsequently.

Identity, according to Marcia (1980), is not static. To the author, construction of identity is not a one-time event; instead, it is a process that is as long as life itself. This was supported by Armstrong (2002) when he said the development of identity in adolescence sets the stage for continual changes in the content of identity through the adult years. According to Sharma and Sharma (2010), identity basically refers to how a person answers the question "Who am I?" They indicated further that identity is an umbrella term used throughout the social sciences to describe an individual's comprehension of him or herself as a discrete, separate entity.

Environmental factors influence self-identity development. Effective and supportive parenting that includes clear and consistent discipline helps children develop various competencies. Yablonska (2013) indicates that parents who form warm relationships with their children and provide adequate monitoring and supervision and do not provide models of drug use, can protect adolescents from developing substance use disorders. Lack of strong positive relationships with parents increases involvement with deviant peers, which in turn increases adolescents' risk for a variety of problems such as early pregnancy, premature independence from parents and dropping out of school.

It is also indicated in literature that peers have strong influence on adolescent self-identity. In Rageliene's (2016) views, a good and supportive relationship with peers is positively related to adolescent identity development because it can help prevent stagnation in the process of identity exploration. Attachment to peers and belonging to peer groups, as well as the support one gets from good relationships with friends, are also positively related to adolescent self-identity development.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In Ghana, adolescent-based studies have principally examined risky sexual behaviours among youths (Sowah, 2016), the impact of the use of the internet and social media and adolescent sexual development (Markwei & Appiah, 2016) at the expense of the antecedents of the behaviours that some researchers are interested in. To the best of researchers' knowledge, no empirical studies have been conducted on factors influencing adolescent self-identity development in Effutu Municipality, even though self-identity is a basic psychological construct that determines the conduct of adolescents in their future lives (Becht, Nelemans, Branje, Vollebergh, Koot, Denissen, & Meeus, 2016). Negative adolescent self-identity breeds juvenile indiscipline in societies (Hasanah, Susanti, & Panjaitan, 2019). At a durbar that the researchers witnessed in the Effutu

Municipality, the Municipal Girls' Education Officer, Mrs Faustina Kwofie and the Municipal Director of Education, Dr Mrs Hilda Eghan, referencing data collected since 2010, collectively bemoaned the rising incidence of teenage pregnancy, the rise in school drop-out rates of adolescent, drug abuse and body-shaming in the municipality. It is heart breaking to see the youth in Effutu Municipality destroying their hay days. The question that comes to mind is who help the adolescents to identify who they are? This gap is disconcerting because the self represents a key intersection among social regulatory processes (Hasanah, Susanti, & Panjaitan, 2019). This research therefore, sought to examine how parents and peers influence adolescent self-identity development since it is an issue that is inseparable from these agents (Hasanah, Susanti, & Panjaitan, 2019). The findings of this study will enable policy makers of Ghana and Effutu Municipality in particular to have reliable information to develop programmes that will assist adolescents to develop appreciable self-identity.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study sought to explore parental and peer factors that influence adolescent self-identity development of senior high school students in the Effutu Municipality.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What parental factors influence adolescent self-identity development in Senior High Schools in the Effutu Municipality?
2. What peer factors influence adolescent self-identity development in Senior High Schools in the Effutu Municipality?

### **Hypotheses**

Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

**Null Hypothesis:** There is no statistically significant difference in parental factors contributing to adolescent self-identity development based on gender.

**Alternate Hypothesis:** There is a statistically significant difference in parental factors contributing to adolescent self-identity development based on gender.

**Null Hypothesis:** There is no statistically significant difference in peer factors contributing to adolescent self-identity development based on gender.

**Alternate Hypothesis:** There is a statistically significant difference in peer factors contributing to adolescent self-identity development based on gender.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Adolescent**

Adolescence is a developmental period in life and it is a transitional stage from childhood to adulthood. The WHO (2019) describe adolescence as a period to learn to manage emotions and relationships, and acquire attributes and abilities that will be important for enjoying the adolescent years and assuming adult roles subsequently. The completion of the transitional stage is not without difficulties. During adolescence, individuals are confronted with a challenge of developing

self-identities which includes social relations roles and social group membership that define who one is (Oyserman, 2007). Erikson 1968 cited in Bywater and Petterson (2003) conceptualize adolescence as a transitional period which individuals must overcome self-identity crisis which he termed as developmental tasks. Developmental task is a task that arises at a certain period in life, unsuccessful achievement of which leads to inability to perform tasks associated with the next period of stage in life. Those who are able to overcome the developmental tasks develop positive self-identities. On the other hand individuals who are not able to complete the developmental tasks would develop identity crisis.

### **Adolescent Self-identity**

It is observed that historically, concerns with questions of adolescent identity are relatively recent, as young as the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Erikson was the first professional to describe and use the concept of ego identity in his writings on what constitutes healthy personality development for every individual over the course of their life span (Kroger, 2017). Following Erikson's ground-breaking work on the concept of ego-identity and how individuals develop identities, Marcia (1980) laid different emphases on the roles of the individual and of the society in the identity development process (Kroger, 2017).

Identity is generally understood as referring to our sense of who we are as individuals and as members of social groups. It involves a sense of self-unity, accompanied by a feeling that the self has continuity over time (Armstrong, 2002). The American Psychological Association understands 'self-identity' as self-concept: the set of beliefs one has about oneself, including beliefs about one's attributes (tall, intelligent), roles and goals (occupation one wants to have in future), as well as interests and values (APA, 2002).

### **Parents as a factor of adolescents' self-identity development**

According to Frideres (2002), individuals, to some extent, chooses an identities that are formed by environmental forces outside their control. Studies indicate that during adolescence, parents tend to monitor their children, setting the rules of behaviour they are expected to follow, and subtly pass on their values and beliefs to their children which with time strongly influence who they should be (Mason & Windle, 2001; Berzonsky, Branje & Meeus, 2007; Kanius'onyte, 2015). Berzonsky, Branje and Meeus (2007) found in their study that parents influence their children during each stage in life. The constant interactions parents have with their children either face-to-face or through internet use has great impact on the personality on their children. They concluded that parent-children relations play important roles in determining the child's adult life.

From the views of Meeus, Iedema, Maassen, and Engels (2005) parents' feelings toward their children, overtime, become an important factor in shaping their children's sense of self-worth and self-acceptance to help themselves through difficult situations. A child's perception of parental support reflects an inferential process in which the child may or may not develop confidence in his or her abilities to deal with events. A study conducted by Shaw, Krause et al. (2004) found that a lack of parental support during childhood was associated with significantly increased levels of depressive symptoms in adolescence.

### **Peers as a factor of adolescent self-identity development**

In addition to parents as a factor for influencing adolescent self-identity development, peers influence the way adolescents dress, activities they get involved, and the attitude they show (Bywater & Petterson, 2003). Peer influence is present from childhood to adulthood of an individual but it has a greater influence during adolescence since that is the period they rely less upon their parents and become more dependent on peers because they spend most of their time with them and feel highly accepted if they conform to their demands and wishes (Ragelienė, 2016). It is also identified in literature that during adolescence, children seek autonomy, particularly from parents along with increased commitment to social aspects of identity and greater need for connections with peers (Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, Vollebergh, 1999). McCoy, Dimler, Samuels and Natsuaki, (2017) in their study revealed that there was a significant sex difference in peer influence as a factor for self-identity development (McCoy et al., (2017). Their studies showed that males differed significantly in how peer influenced adolescent self-identity than females. They also found that males agreed more than females to activities suggested by peers.

Ragelienė (2016), observed that in adolescence, a self-comparison with peers becomes more important when adolescents try to associate their identities with their peers. Pells, Portela and Revollo (2016) have the same views as Ragelienė and added that peers provide emotional support for adolescents and also provides a social status necessary for their self-identity development. Also, Ragelienė (2016) puts forward that a good and supportive relationship with peers is positively related to adolescent self-identity development because it can help prevent stagnation in the process of identity exploration.

## **METHODOLOGY**

For the purpose of this study the descriptive survey design using the quantitative approach was employed. According to Bryman (2012), the descriptive survey is an attempt to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of that population with respect to one or more variables. This approach was chosen because according to Leedy and Omrod (2010), the descriptive survey design is suitable for purposes of making generalisations from a sample to a population so that inferences could be made about the characteristics, opinions, attitudes and past experiences of the population.

The target population for this study was all students in Senior High Schools in the Effutu Municipality which include Uncle Rich Senior High School, Winneba School of Business, Zion Girls' Senior High School and Winneba Senior High School with a total population of 4937 students. Purposive sampling method was employed to select the senior high schools for the study because the students were all adolescents and had the characteristics the researchers were interested in with regard to the topic under study. In selecting the sample for the study, the simple proportion sampling method was used to select samples from each school. After that, the simple random sampling method was used to select a representative sample from each school. Students who were selected for the study were those whose parents consented to the forms to include their children in the study. A total of 310 students comprising 122 males and 188 females was used for the study.

The instrument used to collect the data was a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: A and B. Section A contained the gender of students. Section B of the questionnaire

contained parental and peer factors that influenced adolescent self-identity. The questionnaire had Agree (1) and Disagree (2) as responses for statements relating to the parents and peer factors that influence adolescents' self-identity development.

The researchers pretested the questionnaire at Awutu Senya Senior High School in the Awutu Senya District using 30 students. This school was used because their students had characteristics similar to those used for the study. The pre-test provided an opportunity to enhance the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. To determine the reliability of the questionnaire the Cronbach's co-efficient alpha was 0.82, which was deemed useful to collect data for research purposes. All the 310 questionnaires that were administered to the respondents were retrieved, indicating a return rate of 100%. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyse research questions 1 and 2, while Independent-Samples t-test was used to test the two hypotheses.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Research Question 1: What parental factors influence adolescent self-identity development in Senior High Schools in the Effutu Municipality?

This question sought to find out the family factors that influenced adolescent self-identity. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Parental factors that influence adolescent self-identity development**

Statement	Agree		Disagree		Remarks
	F	(%)	F	(%)	
Parents shape the identities of their adolescent children	229	73.9	81	26.1	Agree
Adolescents who feel accepted by their parents develop a sense of self-worth and self-acceptance	241	77.7	69	22.3	Agree
Adolescents with controlling parents are likely to experience difficulties in establishing committed choices	206	66.5	104	33.5	Agree
Frequent parent-adolescent communication enhances positive self-identity of adolescents	272	87.7	38	12.3	Agree
Adolescents from parents with lower socioeconomic status tend to feel more like adults than their more advantaged peers.	243	78.7	66	21.3	Agree

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Parents who allow adolescents to make independent decisions enhance adolescent self-identity development.	244	78.4	67	21.6	Agree
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From Table 1, it was realized that students agreed to all the statement posed to find out how parents influence adolescent self-identity. It is observed from table 1 that 272 (87.7%) agreed with the statement that frequent parent-adolescent communication enhances positive self-identity development of adolescents, while 38 (12.3%) respondents disagreed. Responding to the statement ‘adolescents from parents with lower socioeconomic status tend to have low self-esteem’, 244 (78.7%) respondents agreed, while 66 (21.3%) disagreed. Two hundred and forty-three representing 78.4% agreed that parents who do not allow adolescents to make independent decisions can undermine the identity formation of adolescents; 67 (21.6%) disagreed with the statement.

It was realised from the data presented in Table 1 that parent-adolescent communication and parents who allow adolescents to make independent decision were the dominant family factors that influence adolescent self-identity development in Senior High Schools in the Effutu Municipality. The findings of the study support Berzonsky, Branje, and Meeus (2007) study which revealed that communication is very important in homes as it enables members especially adolescents to assert their views about issues affecting their identities. The findings of the study are also consistent with similar findings by Mason and Windle (2001) who found that parental parents who directed and encouraged their children to pursue their dreams enabled them to be independent and resilient in pursuing the social goals.

**Research Question 2: What peer factors influence adolescent self-identity development in Senior High Schools in the Effutu Municipality?**

This question sought to find out the peer factors that influence adolescent self-identity. The results are presented in Table 2.



**Table 2: Peer factors that influence adolescent self-identity development**

Statement	Agree		Disagree		Remarks
	F	(%)	F	(%)	
Peers provide adolescents with a sense of positive self-identity by serving as a basis of reference.	218	70.3	92	29.7	Agree
Peer feed-back helps me to know ‘who I am’	261	84.2	49	15.8	Agree
Self-comparison helps me to develop positive self-identity	205	66.1	105	33.9	Agree
Peers provide a social status necessary for their identity development	249	80.3	61	19.7	Agree
A supportive relationship with peers influence positive self-identity	260	83.9	50	16.1	Agree
Peers help to model my behaviour according to their expectations	285	91.9	25	8.1	Agree

Table 2 above shows that peer influence adolescent self-identity development because they agreed to all the statements in the table. The table reveals that 285 (91.9%) agreed to the statement that ‘Peers help to model my behaviour according to their expectations’. Twenty-five students disagreed to that statements. Responding to the statement ‘Peer group helps me to know who I am’, 261 (84.2%) participants agreed to it while 49(15.8%) disagreed to the statement. From the table, it was realised that peers help me to model my behaviour according to their expectations and peer feedback helps me to know who I am, were the principal peer factors that influenced adolescent self-identity development. These findings support Berger and Rodkin’s (2011) study which revealed that peers have norms expectations that mould the behaviour of group members. They also found that peers subscribe to feedback form members when they display bravery, intelligence, and smartness. It serves as a basis for reference in terms of conforming to societal ideals.

**Null Hypothesis:** There is no statistically significant difference in parental factors contributing to adolescent self-identity development based on gender.

The Independent-Samples t-test was conducted to test the hypothesis. The results are showed in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Independent-Samples t-test for gender difference with regard parental factors that influence adolescent self-identity development**

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	sig (2-tailed)
Male	122	1.49	0.831	308	-.633	0.04
Female	188	2.41	1.452			

**Significant at 0.05**

Results from Table 3 showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the views of male and female students regarding parental influence in adolescent self-identity development ( $t = -.633$ ,  $df = 308$ ,  $0.04$ ).

Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that ‘There is no statistically significant difference in parental factors contributing to adolescent self-identity development based on gender’ was rejected, and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This finding suggests that parental factors contribute to self-identity of adolescent females than adolescent males. This finding is consistent with studies conducted by Berzonsky, Branje and Meeus (2007) who found that parents communicate with their adolescent girls most often at home and that enable them to explore issues relating to real-life concerns which helps them in their self-identity development than adolescent boys. They explain that girls are always at home with their parents than boys. This gives female adolescent more exposure and greater opportunity to acquire important information for self-identity development.

**Null Hypothesis:** There is no statistically significant difference in peer factors contributing to adolescent self-identity development based on gender.

The Independent-Samples t-test was conducted to test the hypothesis. The results are presented in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Independent-Samples t-test for gender difference with regard to peer factors that influence adolescent self-identity development**

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	sig (2-tailed)
Male	122	1.34	0.477	308	2.701	0.03
Female	188	1.21	0.407			

**Significant at 0.05**

It was observed from Table 4 that there was a statistically significant difference in the views between male and female students regarding peer influence in adolescent self-identity development ( $t = .2.701$ ,  $df = 308$ ,  $0.03$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that There is no statistically significant difference in peer factors contributing to adolescent self-identity development based on gender was rejected, and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This finding suggests that peer factors contribute to adolescent self-identity development of males than females. This finding is consistent with studies conducted by McCoy et al., (2017) who examined gender differences in adolescent susceptibility to deviant peer pressure. The study revealed that compared to adolescent females, adolescent males appear to be more susceptible to peer influences than females. This finding could also be explained using the findings of McCoy et al., (2017) study which revealed that adolescent boys conform to peer pressure than females and through that they develop and sustain their masculinity such as bravely, courage and agility which define their self-identities.

## CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were drawn from the study:

1. Parents have influence on adolescent self-identity development. Parents shape self-identities of their adolescent children principally through interactions, socialization, communication and feedback. Therefore, given required parental care that makes adolescents feel respected and acceptable is a hallmark for their self-identity development.
2. Adolescents learn a lot about themselves through the interactions with their peers. Approval from peers gives them a sense of who they should be and what they can do and not do.
3. The study revealed that there is a significant gender difference in parental factors that contribute to adolescent self-identity. The study therefore, concludes that parental factors contribute to self-identity of adolescent females, more than adolescent males.
4. The study revealed that there is a significant gender difference in peer factors that contribute to adolescent self-identity. The study therefore, concludes that peer factors influence the self-identities of adolescent males, more than adolescent females.

## RECOMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. In view of the vital role parents play in defining adolescent self-identity, this study recommends that at Parent Teachers Association meetings, parents should be educated by the schools on the need to create conducive environments at home to help their children build strong self-identities. Parents should also encourage their children to take some decisions on their own, however under some minimal supervision.
2. This study also recommends that the Ghana Education Service (GES) employ and assign more Counsellors to schools to assist students who face challenges in developing self-identity to come out from that situation.
3. The study also recommends that lessons that promote gender equity and respect for gender differences be introduced into the school curriculum

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