

Table 2 Types of Heroes (Female Hero)

	day school now (43 responses)	past day school (157 responses)	syn. school only (259 responses)
Family	12 responses 6%	46 responses 7%	89 responses 8%
Bible	1 response --%	3 responses --%	8 responses --%
Arts/ Entertainment	-- responses --%	-- responses --%	1 response --%
Zionism	21 responses 11%	79 responses 12%	111 responses 10%
Holocaust	9 responses 5%	29 responses 4%	50 responses 5%

Table 2 Types of Heroes (Male Hero)

	day school now (156 responses)	past day school (512 responses)	syn. school only (869 responses)
Family	19 responses 10%	90 responses 14%	169 responses 15%
Bible	60 responses 30%	221 responses 33%	358 responses 32%
Arts & Entertainment	1 response --%	12 responses 2%	12 responses 1%
Zionism	60 responses 30%	133 responses 20%	196 responses 17%
Holocaust	1 response --%	5 responses 1%	7 responses --%
Science	7 responses 4%	8 responses 1%	31 responses 3%
Jewish History	2 responses 1%	2 responses --%	6 responses --%
Sports	3 responses 1%	15 responses 2%	31 responses 3%
Teacher	3 responses 1%	26 responses 4%	59 responses 5%

remarkable. The Holocaust as a primary Jewish experience is open to question on any number of grounds, but it is especially problematic when it reinforces the stereotype of Jewish women as victims.

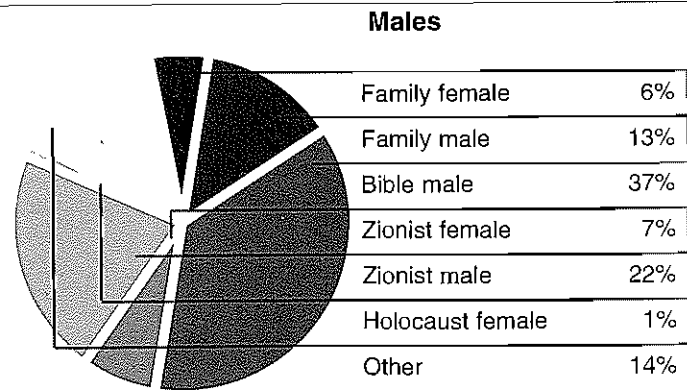
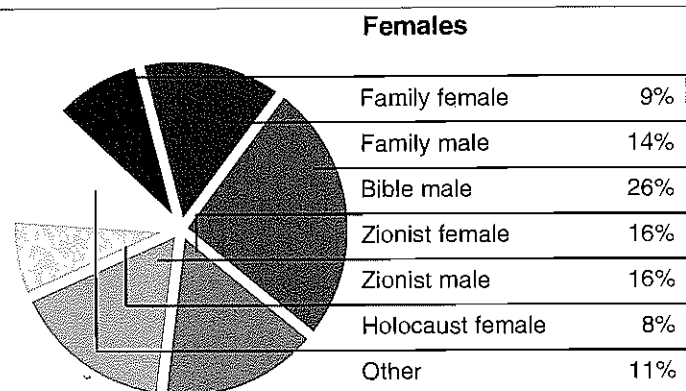
This survey raises an important educational question for the contemporary Conservative movement: How can Conservative educators overcome the present restricted notion of femininity in the educational material it presents to its young people while maintaining integrity to the tradition?

Conclusion

A number of useful general conclusions can be drawn from this exercise. First, during the course of the survey, we found that b'nai mitzvah students were articulate and enthusiastic respondents who appreciated the opportunity to air their opinions and knowledge. Second, their parents also welcomed the serious interest taken in their children's education. Obviously, educators need to engage students and parents in a dialogue if they are to succeed — and we have discovered a medium that accomplishes this goal. This finding in turn suggests that a longitudinal study involving further surveys of this teenage population would be a valuable investment for Jewish educational research.

Chart 2 Type of Heroes of B'nai and B'not Mitzvah

Source: Bar/Bat Mitzvah Study



Religious Beliefs of Teenagers and Their Parents: God Is In, Gender Difference Is Out

Ariela Keysar and Barry A. Kosmin

The first generation of youngsters raised in gender-neutral secular and Jewish religious environments is coming of age. As one group became b'nai and b'not mitzvah, the North American Survey of Conservative Synagogues and their members of 1995-96 examined the religious attitudes of students and their parents. There is a strong consensus between teenagers and their parents on most religious issues. They share similar attitudes toward Israel, they have close friendships with other Jews in their synagogue, and they have similar religious practices, including attending synagogue and fasting on Yom Kippur. As might be expected, gender-based differences in religious attitudes have declined. More surprisingly, teenagers are far more likely than their parents to believe in God. In fact, there is a generation gap in three basic areas: group relations, expressed through fear of anti-Semitism; religious integrity, particularly in views on intermarriage; and belief in God.

The Data

This project, the first stage in a longitudinal study, explores the attitudes and beliefs of children of similar ages, religious backgrounds and socio-economic levels from different communities in the U.S. and Canada. The information on the bar and bat mitzvah youth was gathered from the youngsters themselves, rather than through parents' reports on their behalf. The data are based on telephone interviews with teenagers and their parents in 1,412 households. Forty-five percent of the teenagers interviewed were female and fifty-five percent were male, suggesting a slight residual bias against female participation in this rite of passage in Conservative Jewish congregations. Sixty percent of the parents surveyed were female and forty percent were male. The larger number of women in the survey is accounted for by the time of calls, which were made mainly in the early evening so that the children would be available; at the time of the calls, more mothers than fathers were at home. In 83 percent of the families both parents were born Jewish, in 12 percent one parent had converted to Judaism and in 5 percent one parent was a Gentile. The original survey was not conducted with the intention of comparing the attitudes of parents and children, but rather to examine each generation separately. Therefore, the questions asked were not always identical in wording, complicating the analysis. Follow-up surveys when students are in high school and college will rectify any discrepancies.

Table 1 Family Members Interviewed

	father-son	father-daughter	mother-son	mother-daughter
Number Interviewed	308	237	452	396
Percentage	22%	17%	32%	28%

Source: Bar/Bat Mitzvah Study

Table 1 provides the breakdown of respondents by the gender of the children and their parents. The most common child-parent type is the mother-son grouping, indicating a surplus of boys and mothers in our sample. The least common is the father-daughter grouping, revealing a relative shortage of girls and fathers.

Anti-Semitism/Group Relations

In the younger generation, boys and girls alike are less fearful of anti-Semitism than their parents. We asked parents, "Is anti-Semitism a serious problem in the US today?" and their children, "Do you think that anti-Semitism is a major problem for Jews today in the US?" While 88 percent of the parents agreed, only 68 percent of the students did. Within particular families, the gap was reproduced, particularly among father-daughter pairs. Only 63 percent of them held similar attitudes, compared with 71 percent of the other parent-child types (father or mother and son or daughter interviewed). For this analysis of parents and children, only the U.S. data were used.

Intermarriage: Liberal Children, Traditional Parents

The younger generation is far more liberal and accepting of interfaith marriages than are their parents. When asked, "Do you think it is okay for Jews to marry people of other religions?" 65 percent of teenagers responded positively. However, when their parents were presented with the proposition, "A Jew should marry someone who is also Jewish," 88 percent agreed or strongly agreed. Allowing for one percent of other answers, only about 11 percent of parents openly accept intermarriage.

The Significance of the Parent-Child Type

The large gap between parents and children on the issue of intermarriage is consistent on the aggregate level and within a particular family, revealing that the child-parent type is not an important factor in understanding the gap. Thirty-seven percent of father-daughter pairs were in complete agreement on intermarriage issues compared with 41 percent of mother-son pairs, 43 percent of mother-daughter pairs and 44 percent of father-son pairs.

The Religious Composition of the Family

The religious composition of the family, however, is a significant factor in achieving consensus between the generations. There is consensus on the question of intermarriage in only 32 percent of families in which one parent had converted to Judaism, but there is consensus in 41 percent of families in which both parents were born Jewish and in 51 percent of families in which one parent is not Jewish. The generation gap is the largest, then, on the question of intermarriage, when one of the parents is a convert — a newcomer to the Jewish culture — and smallest when the parents themselves are intermarried. Remarkably, all of the children of intermarried parents believe that it is okay for Jews to marry people of other religions, though their parents are evenly divided. The teenagers seem to justify the choices of their parents by opting for this liberal approach to intermarriage.

Belief in God

When they were asked, "How important is believing in God to your sense of Jewishness?" an overwhelming 78 percent of the b'nai and b'not mitzvah group responded that it is very important. Another 18 percent felt that it is somewhat important. Only a tiny 4 percent claimed it is not important at all. Boys and girls responded similarly.

Their parents responded differently. When asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement, "Belief in God is not central to being a good Jew," only 17 percent strongly disagreed, 37 percent disagreed and a striking 45 percent agreed or strongly agreed.

Mother-daughter pairs disagreed on this issue far more often than any other group, with only 20 percent in agreement. Mothers and sons also disagreed frequently with only 21 percent of them in agreement. Fathers and sons agreed 27 percent of the time, as did fathers and daughters. In the sample as a whole, only 23 percent of parent-child groups completely agreed on the importance of belief in God.

The large generation gap apparent in the responses to this initial question continues through every question in this category. The least religious responses received the smallest percentage of students' answers, but the same responses achieved the greatest level of consensus between the generations.

We asked the students to identify which statement best

described their own belief about the Torah: "The Torah is the actual word of God"; "The Torah is the inspired word of God but not everything should be taken literally, word for word"; or "The Torah is an ancient book of history and moral precepts recorded by man." (The three statements conform, respectively, to the theological positions of Orthodoxy, Conservative Judaism and Reform Judaism.) Twenty-eight percent of children who believe that the Torah is an ancient book of history recorded by man were in complete agreement with their parents, while only 22% who believe that the Torah is the actual word of God were in agreement with their parents.

Asked whether all, some or none of the miracles recorded in the Torah are true, almost a third of the children believe that all the miracles recorded in the Torah are true and only 3 percent believe that none is true. The children with the most traditional belief, that all the miracles are true, were far less likely to have complete consensus with their parents on belief in God. In fact only 22 percent of them were in agreement with their parents while 44 percent of those who believe that none of the miracles is true were in complete agreement with their parents on belief in God.

A majority of the children, 59 percent, believe that it is very important to participate in Jewish religious life at the synagogue — but only 21 percent of them were in complete agreement with their parents on belief in God, whereas 42 percent of children who said it is not at all important agreed with their parents.

Turning to the parents, we find that their religious upbringing is closely associated with their views on God. Contrary to what might be expected, the former Orthodox make up the most unbelieving set of parents. Fifty-six percent of parents who switched from Orthodoxy to Conservative Judaism, as compared with 42 percent of those raised in Conservative or Reform Judaism, agreed or strongly agreed that "belief in God is not central to being a good Jew." Having rebelled against their own traditional upbringing, it seems they have also distanced themselves from belief in God. "Immigrants" to the Conservative movement, they express a different religious outlook from that of the "natives" (those who were brought up Conservative), as well as from their own children, who are being socialized in Conservative synagogue settings. Only 15 percent of families with a formerly Orthodox parent had consensus on belief in God. Twenty-three percent of families with parents from the Conservative movement were in complete agreement, and twenty-four percent of families with parents from the Reform movement were in agreement.

What could create such a strong disagreement between the generations on this issue? We can only speculate that perhaps the recent bar and bat mitzvah training and involvement in religious learning has affected the youngsters' ideas about God and distanced them from their parents, or that they may be afraid to admit disbelief to an authority figure, such

as the interviewer.

Gender Difference

The elimination of specific gender roles and the abandonment of legal and social constraints on female participation in all aspects of public life has begun to affect gender roles within Judaism. The Conservative Movement has evolved from a traditional model with age-old Jewish gender norms to an egalitarian model of religious participation over the past few decades. This shift has involved both clergy and laity, the ordination of women rabbis and cantors and the full participation of women in synagogue services and religious life. Today, as other parts of the 1995-96 study of Conservative Synagogues and Their Members reveal, the vast majority (80 percent) of synagogues offer boys and girls the same training for their b'nai and b'not mitzvah. We therefore expect the religious attitudes of boys and girls today to be closer than those of their mothers and fathers.

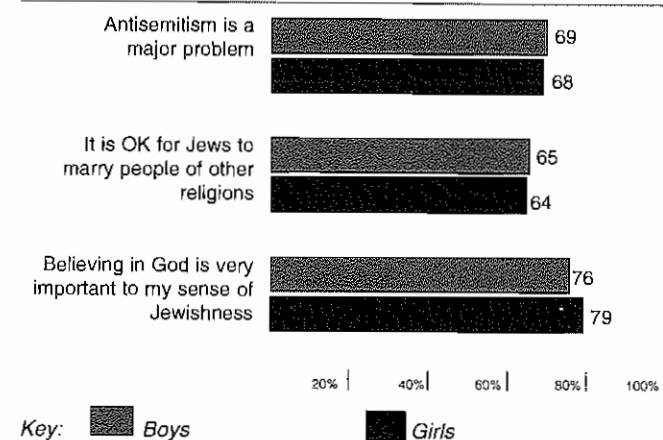
In fact, the consensus between boys and girls on the three issues focused on in this paper is prominent (see Chart 1 and 2). Among their parents, however, there is less agreement across gender, specifically with regard to belief in God. Our data show that mothers are not as likely as fathers to strongly disagree with the statement "Belief in God is not central to being a good Jew." Are mothers less believing than fathers? Or are they less judgmental regarding what it takes to be a good Jew? Further research will help our understanding of this issue. There was no significant difference between the mothers and fathers on the other two issues.

Conclusion: God Is In, Gender Difference Is Out

Clearly bar and bat mitzvah children and their parents are at different moral, intellectual and developmental stages of their lives. Children are generally more religious than adults, some of whom question the power and authority of God and may be doubtful of God's existence based on their memories of the Holocaust. These children in particular are still very close to their bar/bat mitzvah experiences. They are close enough to childhood to be enchanted by biblical stories, inspired by miracles and eager for *tikkun olam*; and too young to question the power and authority of God.

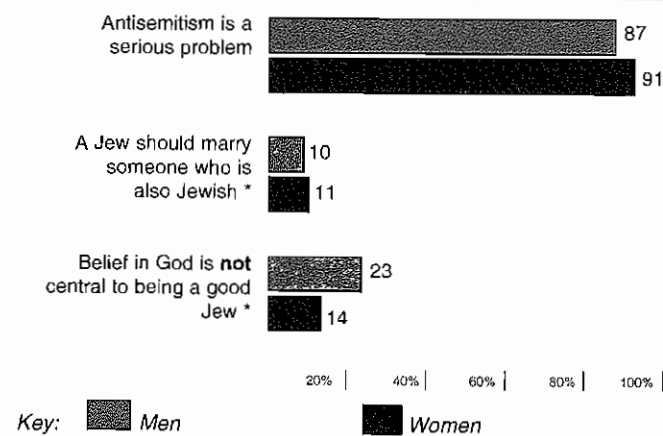
While this survey may indicate a religious revival among the younger generation, we may also find that young people's beliefs become more like their parents' as they grow up. The follow-up stages of our study will shed light on this question. If there is a religious revival, it remains to be seen how this generation's liberal views on intermarriage will affect their own relationships — will they inter-date? One thing, however, is apparent: gender is no longer an important operating principle in the views of our young people. Egalitarianism in the Conservative synagogue is triumphing.

Chart 1 Bar/Bat Mitzvah Children's Beliefs and Attitudes



Source: Bar/Bat Mitzvah Study, 1995

Chart 2 Parents' Beliefs and Attitudes



Source: Bar/Bat Mitzvah Study, 1995
* Disagree