

SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLE:

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE AMONG GIRL PUPILS
IN RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS

by

Sam S. Rackover, Yoel Yanon and Rivka Arad*

This article describes a study of several factors connected with conformity or non-conformity to religious standards among religious girls. Our assumption was that the three main agents of socialization – the family, the school and the peer group – can explain religious conformity, and we therefore examined the relative influence of each of these. We also examined the influence of age and ethnic origin on the girl's religious conduct.

The main instrument used in the study was a comprehensive questionnaire. The questions asked of the girls fall into five categories,

1. Observance of *mitzvot* at present.

2. Observance of *mitzvot* in the future. Each girl was asked whether she intended to observe specific religious precepts when she was no longer subject to paternal authority.

3. Attitudes towards religious values.

4. Evaluation of the extent of religiosity. These questions aimed to discover how the girl evaluated the extent of the religiosity of individuals and institutions in her environment.

5. The relative influence of various socializing agents on the girl's religious behaviour.

In addition to the basic questionnaire answered by the girl, questionnaires were also answered by the girl's mother and home-room teacher.

The questionnaires were administered in June 1966 to 488 pupils in religious elementary and secondary schools in Jerusalem. Of this sample, a sub-sample of 165 girls was extracted, which constituted the basis for the analysis of the results.

Findings

With respect to age, we found that eighth-grade pupils observe *mitzvot* and intend to observe them in the future more intensively than eleventh-grade pupils. Ethnic origin makes a difference, too. Ashkenazi girls observe *mitzvot* (in present and future) more intensively than girls from the Oriental

* Megamot, Vol. 17, nr. 2 (1969/70), pp. 166-177; original Hebrew title:

קיום מצוות הדת אצל תלמידות דתיות.

communities. And the girls' subjective evaluation of the extent of the religiosity of their parents as compared with that of the school shows that those girls who consider their parents' level of religiosity as equal to that of their school are more observant. Next in order are those girls who think that their home is more religious than the school, while the girls who are poorest in religious observance are those who consider their school more religious than their home. The influence of the home, then, appears to be greater than that of the school.

As to attitudes towards the values of Judaism, there was no difference between elementary and secondary school pupils. But whereas age as such does not influence the attitude towards religious values, there is a significant interaction between age and ethnic origin: Ashkenazi girls have a more positive attitude towards religious values as they become older than do Oriental girls.

Similar to our finding about the connection between the girl's observance of religious precepts and her comparison of the extent of the religiosity of her home and school is our finding when a like comparison is extended to her peer group. Where the girl regards the religiosity of her peer group as identical with that of her home or school, her conformity to religious standards is greater than where she regards the extent of religiosity of these factors as differing from one another. Where the family's level of religiosity is rated as higher than that of the peer group, the girl tends to observe more precepts than where the opposite is the case. Similarly, where the school's level of religiosity is regarded as higher than that of the peer group, the girl is more observant than where the peer group is more religious than the school.

These generalizations as to the connection between age, ethnic origin and the girl's conception of the religiosity of her environment on the one hand, and her own religious behaviour on the other, are supported by the correlation we found between the religious behaviour of the daughter and that of her mother. The correlation was highest where the religious standard of the home was equivalent to that of the school, next highest where the religious standard of the home was more demanding than that of the school, and lowest where the religious standard of the home was less demanding than that of the school. These findings support the assertion that the girl's conception of the relation between the religiosity of home and school is a variable of utmost importance, and one likely to be an independent factor influencing her religiosity.

It was also found that the influence of the Ashkenazi mother on her daughter is greater than that of the Oriental mother, although no difference was discovered in the religiosity of the mothers of the two groups. A greater correlation was found between the religious behaviour of secondary school

pupils and their mothers than between elementary school pupils and their mothers.

Discussion

The findings show that the family exerts a greater influence on the religious behaviour of the girl than the school does. One reason for this is that the teachers demand more of their pupils in this respect. The mothers' demand are much closer to the girls' actual conduct. They do not seek perfection, but a standard of religious behaviour at least equal to their own. Another explanation is that the teachers tend to influence their pupils by explanation, whereas the mothers tend to serve mainly as examples. Although we examined this only partially, it is safe to assume that learning by example results in habits that are not broken down as easily as learning by explanation. It should also be remembered that the parents' influence is exerted from a very early age, which is another reason why the habits they instil are more resistant to destruction.

Our finding as to the importance of the family in education for religious conformity finds much support in the literature. G. Lensky, in *The Religious Factor* (Garden City, N.Y., 1963), reports on the religious behaviour of Christian girls, and there too the subjects felt that their family had exerted a greater influence than the other socializing agencies.

When a girl discovers different religious standards among the various socializing agencies, a conflict results, and one way of solving this is by religious non-conformity. These findings concerning the importance of harmony between the degree of religiosity of the various social agencies support that approach which stresses co-operation between parents and teacher, and the tendency to regard the family as one of the important factors influencing the education by the school.

Summary by Aryeh Rubinstein