

Article

Spiritual Influences on Jewish Modern Orthodox Adolescents

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Abstract: Modern Orthodoxy is a sect of Judaism which aims to combine a high level of commitment to Jewish observance with immersion in modern society. Alumni of Modern Orthodox parochial high schools have varying degrees of commitment towards religion. This study was designed to better understand the factors that lead adolescents towards internalizing traditional Orthodox beliefs. Previous studies on religion in general are lacking in quality and depth, using superficial factors such as church attendance to attest to religious commitment. Studies on Modern Orthodox Jewish teens are limited in quantity, with very few studies published on this population. This study focused on 1341 students from 18 Modern Orthodox high schools in the United States using the JewBALE 2.0 to collect the data. The design evaluated the relationship between spirituality and self-esteem, spiritual struggle, religious homogeneity between parents and adolescents, and gender. Factors such as mental health, positive Judaic studies experience, and relationships with Judaic studies teachers were examined as potential mediators. The data indicated that students with high levels of spirituality would also have high levels of self-esteem and religious homogeneity with their parents, as well as high levels of agreement with the Orthodox communal norms. Positive relationships with teachers and experiences in Jewish studies classes mediated the otherwise negative relationship between spirituality and disagreement with communal norms. Females were more likely to have high levels of spirituality than males. This study is important for those who want to better understand the factors involved in helping students enrolled in Jewish Modern Orthodox high schools achieve high levels of spirituality.

Keywords: spirituality; adolescence; Jewish



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1. Introduction

Parochial schools exist not simply to convey knowledge to their students but also in order to impart a religious lifestyle to the next generation. While academic testing has always been an integral aspect of such schools, including assessments on one's understanding of religious texts, the notion of measuring students' personal achievements in the religious realm is a less developed concept. This paper aims to highlight the advantages of assessing students attending parochial schools in the religious realm, in order to better understand the students' religious beliefs and practices and more effectively meet the school's faith-based goals.

1.1. Definition of Terms

Religions can vary from one another in dramatic ways, but most, if not all, demand that their adherents both internalize certain dogmas as well as act in accordance with prescribed rituals, which are all derived from the core values of the religion. Research traditionally differentiated between these constructs by labeling personal feelings and beliefs as spirituality and referring to the practice of traditions and rituals as religiosity (Benson et al. 2003). More recent definitions are not as clearly distinguished, with religiosity occasionally including aspects of belief (Bjarnason 2007) and spirituality sometimes not including any religious elements at all (Chagas et al. 2023). There does not seem to be an

accepted consensus as to the definition of these terms in contemporary research (Zinnbauer and Pargament 2005). For the purposes of this article, the terms religiousness and religious commitment will refer to both religious beliefs and practices as part of one unified construct, whereas the individual terms spirituality and religiosity will follow the more traditional definitions referenced above (See Appendix C for a definition of terms). These distinct definitions align with Jewish Orthodox tradition, which encompasses and distinguishes between *emunah* (faith/spirituality) and *halakha* (practice/religiosity).

1.2. General Religious Scales Are Limited

Over the past two decades, more than 100 new measures of spirituality and religiosity were created, which allow for rich analyses of an individual's beliefs and actions as well as the impact which religion can have on one's life. Notwithstanding this remarkable contribution to the ongoing study of religion, these measures can be lacking in breadth and depth. Koenig et al. (2001) reviewed 101 studies on religion and mortality and found that 47% of the studies relied on religious affiliation only as a measure of religiosity and another 43% relied on broad measures such as church attendance or membership. The reliability of such measures is limited due to their determination of religiousness based on these broad categorizations (Hunter and Schmidt 1990).

The existing research that did delve into the complexities of religion is still limited due to the over-representation of Christians in the piloting and administering phases of these measures. While Judaism and Christianity do share a reverence of the Bible/Old Testament in common, the concept of religiosity for Christians is based more on thoughts and emotions, whereas for Jews there is a greater emphasis on the practice of laws derived from the Bible and Talmudic texts (Cohen and Rozin 2001; Prager and Telushkin 1981). Research has also specifically demonstrated that Jewish adolescents have a different level of religious values than religious youth of other faiths. For instance, Smith et al. (2003) found that Jewish youth have a lower appreciation of faith and frequency of prayer when compared to their peers from other religions. Thus, we cannot assume that existing research from the Christian community can apply equally to the Jewish community.

We also cannot rely on existing measures for Jewish individuals because, as in the Fiala et al. (2002) 21-item Religious Support Scale, the measure was piloted on American Protestant college students, and was therefore developed with a bias towards Christian beliefs and practices (Hood et al. 2009). When such measures are distributed among a diverse population, the findings may show a bias towards the Christian respondents. For instance, Sloane and Potvin's (1983) finding regarding the decline in religiousness by age was most apparent among religious Christian denominations. It is unclear whether this revealed a trend among Christians to the exclusion of adherents to other faiths, or whether the survey questions were irrelevant to non-Christian faiths and, therefore, the findings were not representative of the actual level of religiousness of the non-Christian participants.

1.3. Jewish Religious Scales Are Limited

After surveying many of the existing research measures on religiousness, as well as developing his own, Gorsuch (1990) recommended creating new scales for religiousness only if the existing measures were not psychometrically appropriate for addressing the research problem or if the constructs in the existing measures needed modification in order to be relevant to the sample population. Given the distinctive nature of Judaism, as well as the dearth of detailed measures on Judaism, it follows from Gorsuch's recommendations that new measures should be developed with a specific focus on Orthodox Jews, in order to properly study that population. Appropriately, over the past two decades, studies have been created and implemented with a specific focus on the Jewish community, such as the 2011 Jewish Community Study of NY and the 2013 Pew Research Portrait of American Jews. These studies allowed for an authentic assessment of general trends in the North American Jewish population, but they did not address the nuances of the different denominations. Of the thousands of respondents in these studies, about 8% of the NY study

and 4% of the American study identified as Modern Orthodox, and therefore the studies are of limited value to these communities. The 2017 Nishma study ([Nishma Research 2017](#)), which focused exclusively on profiling American Modern Orthodox Jewry, only interviewed adults over the age of 18, with the median age of respondents at 50 years old. Numerous survey questions were irrelevant to adolescents, asking about matters such as the upbringing of one's children. Other Jewish studies are limited due to their brevity, and thus do not address the nuances of an individual's beliefs and actions. For instance, The Student Religiosity Questionnaire ([Katz and Schmida 1992](#)) consisted of only 20 items, while the [Ben-Meir and Kedem \(1979\)](#) included a mere 13 items and did not offer an opportunity for respondents to expand beyond a simple yes or no response. Newer and more robust studies on religiousness in the Orthodox adolescent population in Israel ([Rich and Schachter 2012](#); [Cohen-Malayev et al. 2014](#)) provided important frameworks and findings; however, they were focused on the national-religious public school system in Israel, which is not synonymous with the private Modern Orthodox day school system in the Diaspora. In addition to the structural differences between the schools, there are also differences in the cultures and communities ([Don-Yehiya 2005](#)), necessitating the independent assessment of the Modern Orthodox community outside of Israel.

1.4. JewBALE Scale and Modern Orthodox Adolescents

In order to properly study the beliefs and actions of Modern Orthodox adolescents, in ([Goldberg 2006](#)), Dr. Scott Goldberg pioneered a measure known as the JewBALE, the Jewish Beliefs Actions and Living Evaluation. Our study is based on an updated version of the JewBALE, to be referred to as JewBALE 2.0. The JewBALE scales were intended for a Jewish, mostly Modern Orthodox, audience. Any conclusions derived from JewBALE studies regarding religiosity and spirituality might not be relevant to other streams or faiths that define these terms differently.

The belief section of the JewBALE 2.0 addresses core concepts in the Jewish religion, such as belief in God, God's authorship of the Bible, Rabbinic authority to interpret Jewish laws for modern times, the importance of Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people, and living a life of meaning. We expected Modern Orthodox adolescents to internalize a commitment to Zionism, as this is proudly projected by their institutions. Whether attending annual pro-Israel marches from an early age, interacting with Israeli relatives and friends, or speaking with Holocaust survivors about the importance of a safe haven for Jews, these adolescents had multiple avenues by which to connect to the importance of the modern State of Israel as a safe homeland for the Jewish people. A relationship with God and the subsequent belief in the Divinity of the Bible lies at the very core of Orthodoxy and penetrates nearly every aspect of adherents' religious lives. We therefore anticipated that adolescents studying at Modern Orthodox institutions would commit to these beliefs. While living a joyful life of meaning is integral to Judaism, it is also objectively valued in the secular culture as well, and it is therefore less likely for adolescents to rebel against this concept. In contrast, committing to the interpretation of religious texts as understood by rabbis over the years necessitates a larger leap of faith into an organized religion, and we therefore could expect more hesitancy from Modern Orthodox teens in committing to this aspect of their religious affiliation.

The scale asked the respondents to identify their gender in order to assess whether girls would have greater spirituality than boys, as is seen in the literature about non-Orthodox Jewish adolescents ([Kosmin and Keisar 2000](#)) as well as Christian youth ([Sullins 2006](#)). Since Orthodox Judaism makes a significantly greater distinction between the genders than non-Orthodox denominations, and allows only males to participate in certain rituals, it is conceivable that there would be an even starker difference in the way that Orthodox Jewish males and females relate to their religion than in the non-Orthodox denominations.

1.5. Current Study

The current study seeks to understand the profile of a student enrolled in a Modern Orthodox high school who has high levels of spirituality (Jewish beliefs). Data from the JewBALE 2.0 were explored in order to uncover correlations between spirituality and external factors, such as self-esteem, spiritual struggle, relationships with role models, and gender.

1.5.1. Gender

Consistent with the literature in the general field of religion ([Stark 2002](#)), we expected to see higher levels of spirituality in adolescent females.

1.5.2. Self-Esteem

We similarly anticipated that high levels of self-esteem would predict high levels of spirituality, since self-esteem may be a determining factor for the positive relationship between religiousness and mental health ([Ellison et al. 2001](#)). Additionally, data from the original JewBALE scale highlighted self-esteem as a positive correlate of religiousness ([Eisenberg 2010](#)). In prior studies which record a positive correlation between self-esteem and religiousness, the direction of the influence was typically assumed to stem from religiousness. For instance, [Sedikides and Gebauer \(2010\)](#) assumed that self-esteem was dependent on religiousness because they noticed that the observed positive correlation was found to be stronger in more religious areas. This assumption led to hypotheses regarding the power of a religious community, arguing that since religious communities value those who are more religious, religiousness can be a means to achieve positive self-esteem. However, there might have been other factors in these religious areas which contributed to the strength of the correlation.

In the studies which used regression analysis to statistically analyze the direction of the influence between the two variables, the research question typically focused on the impact of religion on self-esteem and not the reverse. When finding that religion does predict self-esteem, more expansive theories about the power of religion in general were posited. For example, since spirituality leads a person to believe that God loves them and that their creation was purposeful, this may lead to an increased level of self-esteem ([Ball et al. 2003](#)). Our analysis looked to add to the current literature by questioning whether the direction of influence in this correlation could also stem from self-esteem and, if so, to consider why self-esteem is a means to spirituality.

1.5.3. Religious Homogeny with Parents

We also hypothesized that religious homogeny between adolescents and their parents would predict high levels of spirituality in the adolescents. Based upon their analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health on approximately 20,000 adolescents in grades 7–12 from 1994 to 1996, [McKune and Hoffmann \(2009\)](#) found that religious homogeny between parents and children is the best predictor of high academic achievement, regardless of whether there was a high level of religiosity. Religious homogeny between parents and children proved to be more impactful on achievement than family capital or religiosity. McKune and Hoffmann concluded that further research was needed to understand the other implications of religious homogeny between parents and children, especially with regard to the religiosity and spirituality of adolescents. The JewBALE 2.0 allowed this exact question to be addressed since it asked the respondents to rate their level of belief and practice in relation to their mother and father's level of belief and practice. We did not anticipate any uniqueness in the impact of religious homogeny with parents on Modern Orthodox adolescents, as opposed to other faiths, since parental relationships and parental religious expectations in this community seem to be similar to those of other faiths.

1.5.4. Spiritual Struggle

In contrast to these positive correlations, we hypothesized that high levels of struggling with Jewish communal norms would predict low levels of spirituality. Beyerlein (2004) argued that negative correlations between religiousness and other variables may exist because of the tension that adolescents might feel between the religious values they were taught and their inner sense of belief. This source of tension, often referred to in the literature on religion as a spiritual struggle, is common (Hunsberger et al. 1993). It affects all types of people; however, the manner in which it affects them can vary dramatically. Some may choose to become more passionately committed to religion after encountering spiritual struggle; others might completely reject their religion, and many will fall somewhere on the spectrum in between these two extremes (Batson et al. 1993). We anticipated that among the Modern Orthodox adolescents we surveyed, high levels of struggling with Jewish communal norms would predict low levels of spirituality. Modern Orthodoxy allows for greater exposure to the world at large, whether during general studies classes or through internet access and social surroundings. The sophisticated level of nuance needed in order to synthesize some outside values with one's religious identity while rejecting others in order to maintain one's religious commitment may be too lofty a goal for adolescents, whose ability to process higher-order thinking is not yet fully developed due to the still-maturing frontal lobe portion of their brain (Fischer and Pruyn 2003). Perhaps, then, the cognitive dissonance which they endure due to their modern yet orthodox upbringing would lead to a rejection of traditional beliefs.

We also examined whether positive learning experiences and relationships with teachers would lessen the presumed negative correlation between spiritual struggle and spirituality. In a 2007 study of public school students, only 2.7% viewed their teachers as role models, due to the lack of trust and caring that they attributed to them (Bricheno and Thornton 2007). Research on Jewish students has shown a drastically different finding. Of the 355 alumni of Jewish day schools surveyed in Tannenbaum's (2009) study, 66% of them viewed their teachers as good role models and 59% believed that their positive interactions with their teachers positively impacted their religious growth. As a result of the high regard with which Orthodox students viewed their teachers, Charytan (1997) hypothesized that teachers in the Orthodox community have replaced the role that family used to play in religious development and that teachers have now become the main factor in determining the religiosity of their students. This is in part due to the efforts that teachers extend to the students, showing that they care about them as individuals and as part of the Jewish community, as well as the relationships which they form with them beyond the classroom. Eisenberg (2010) studied 424 Jewish adolescents studying in a gap year program in Israel and found that positive relationships with high school teachers and rabbis led to stronger religious beliefs and actions. The present study seeks to potentially expand these findings to a larger sample of Jewish Modern Orthodox students, as well as to understand the extent to which admiration for and relationships with teachers affected adolescents' spirituality and religiosity.

2. Results

The statistical analysis of the data allowed for a better understanding of the profile of a student enrolled in a Modern Orthodox high school who had high levels of spirituality.

2.1. Gender

An independent sample *t*-test was conducted to look at differences in spirituality between adolescent females and adolescent males. There were significant differences between males and females, $t(706) = -2.96, p < 0.01$. Females had higher levels of spirituality ($M = 5.48, SD = 0.99$) than males ($M = 5.26, SD = 1.26$). Figure 1 depicts the gender differences.

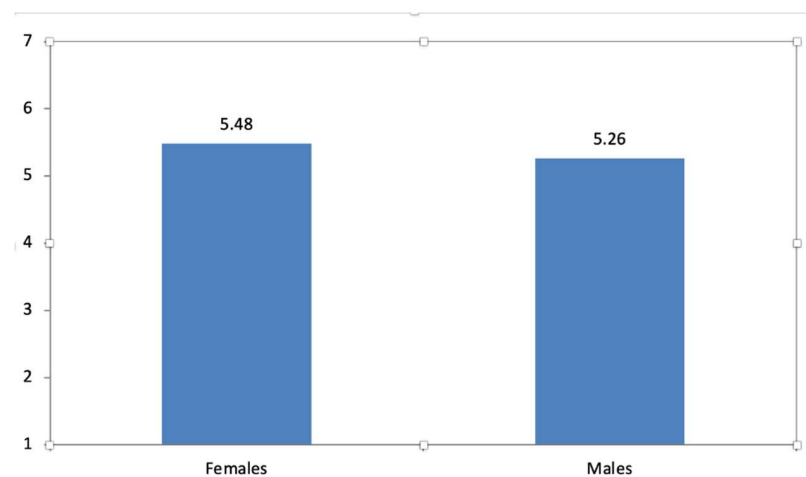


Figure 1. Gender differences in spirituality.

Individual *t*-tests were conducted to look at adolescent gender differences in each of the individual subscales of spirituality. The individual subscales that were compared were Divine Providence with relation to the world, Divine Providence with relation to the individual, Fear/Love/Awe of God, Joyful/Meaningful life, Rabbinic Authority, Divinity/Truth of Bible, and Relationship to Israel. There were significant gender differences for all of the subscales except for Rabbinic Authority and Divinity/Truth of Bible: for Divine Providence with relation to the world, $t(686) = -3.22, p < 0.001$; for Divine Providence with relation to the individual, $t(698) = -3.08, p < 0.01$; for Fear/Love/Awe of God, $t(726) = -2.63, p < 0.01$; for Joyful/Meaningful life, $t(756) = -3.82, p < 0.001$; and for Relationship to Israel, $t(732) = -3.68, p < 0.001$. In each of the significant spirituality subscales, females had higher levels of spirituality than males. Table 1 and Figure 2 display the mean differences.

Table 1. Mean gender differences in the spirituality subscales.

Subscale	Gender	Mean	SD	N
Divine Providence with Relation to the World **	Male	5.58	1.57	394
Divine Providence with Relation to the World **	Female	5.88	1.19	586
Divine Providence with Relation to the Individual *	Male	5.44	1.66	394
Divine Providence with Relation to the Individual *	Female	5.75	1.28	583
Fear/Love/Awe of God *	Male	5.10	1.52	395
Fear/Love/Awe of God *	Female	5.34	1.24	584
Joyful/Meaningful Life **	Male	5.33	1.20	394
Joyful/Meaningful Life **	Female	5.62	1.03	583
Rabbinic Authority	Male	4.60	1.35	392
Rabbinic Authority	Female	4.62	1.24	584
Divinity/Truth of Torah	Male	5.47	1.59	392
Divinity/Truth of Torah	Female	5.60	1.29	583
Relationship to Israel **	Male	5.26	1.23	390
Relationship to Israel **	Female	5.54	1.03	582

* = $p < 0.01$ ** = $p < 0.001$; with ** representing a higher level of statistical significance.

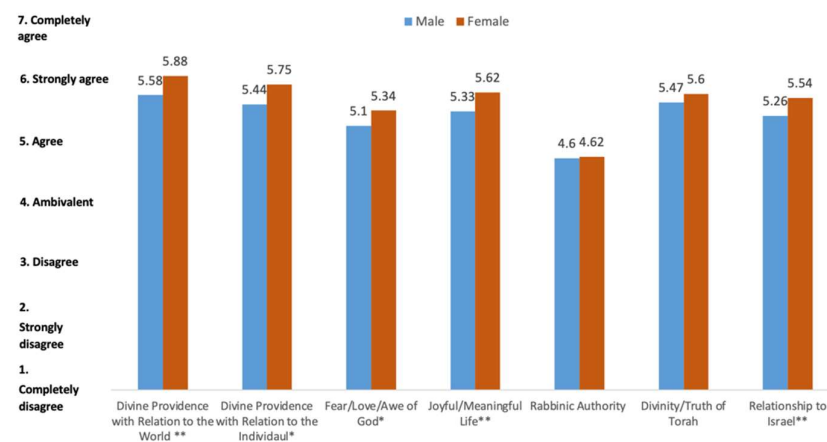


Figure 2. Mean gender differences in the spirituality subscales. * = $p < 0.01$ ** = $p < 0.001$; with ** representing a higher level of statistical significance.

2.2. Self-Esteem

A hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to determine whether high levels of self-esteem predict high levels of spirituality while controlling for mental health. The model was significant. Self-esteem significantly predicted spirituality while controlling for mental health, $R^2\Delta = 0.04$, $F(2882) = 36.17$, $p < 0.001$. Four percent of the variance in spirituality could be accounted for by self-esteem while controlling for mental health.

2.3. Homogeny with Parents

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were differences in the level of adolescent spirituality based on how the adolescents compare their beliefs with their parents' beliefs. There was a significant difference overall: $F(4944) = 104.74$, $p < 0.001$. Post-hoc tests were conducted to look at where the differences occurred. There were differences between the adolescents with weaker religious beliefs ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.28$) and the adolescents with stronger ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 0.74$) and similar beliefs ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 0.85$). The adolescents who said that their Jewish beliefs were weaker than their parent's beliefs had lower belief scores than those who said their beliefs were stronger or similar. Figure 3 depicts the group differences.

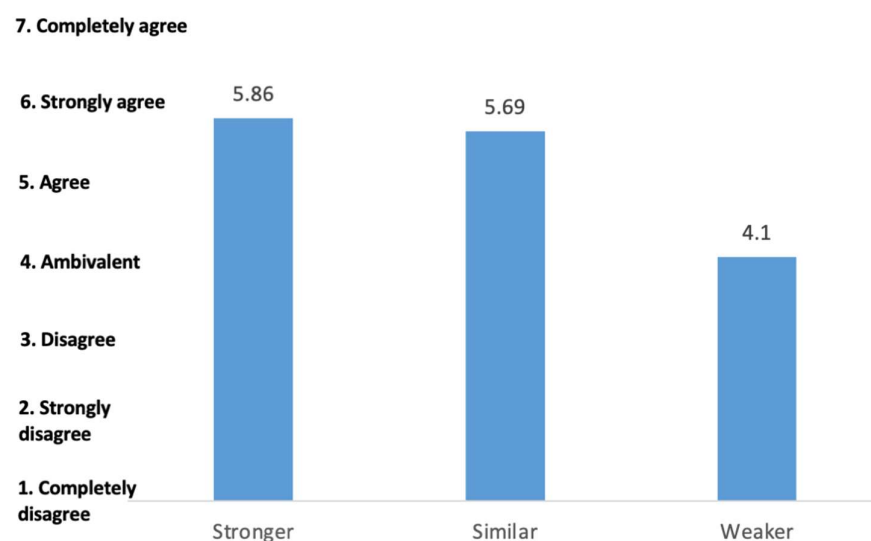


Figure 3. Differences between adolescent spirituality based on religious homogeny with parents.

In order to determine whether the differences between parent–child religious homogeny and spirituality were stronger when the adolescents talked about God with their

parents, a two-way ANOVA was conducted. The independent variables were adolescent beliefs in comparison to their parents' beliefs and whether or not they spoke to their parent(s) about God. The dependent variable was the total spirituality of the adolescents. The individual effects of adolescent beliefs in comparison to their parents' beliefs and whether or not they spoke to their parent(s) about God were significant: for adolescent beliefs in comparison to their parents, $F(4939) = 98.75$, $p < 0.001$, and for talking to their parent(s) about God, $F(1939) = 7.92$, $p < 0.01$. There was no significant interaction effect between adolescent beliefs in comparison to their parents and whether or not they spoke to their parent(s) about God on their level of spirituality. This implies that no matter whether the adolescents' beliefs were stronger than, similar to, or weaker than their parents' beliefs, those adolescents who talked with their parents about God had higher levels of spirituality across the board. Figure 4 depicts the total belief scores for the adolescents who did and did not speak to their parents about God.

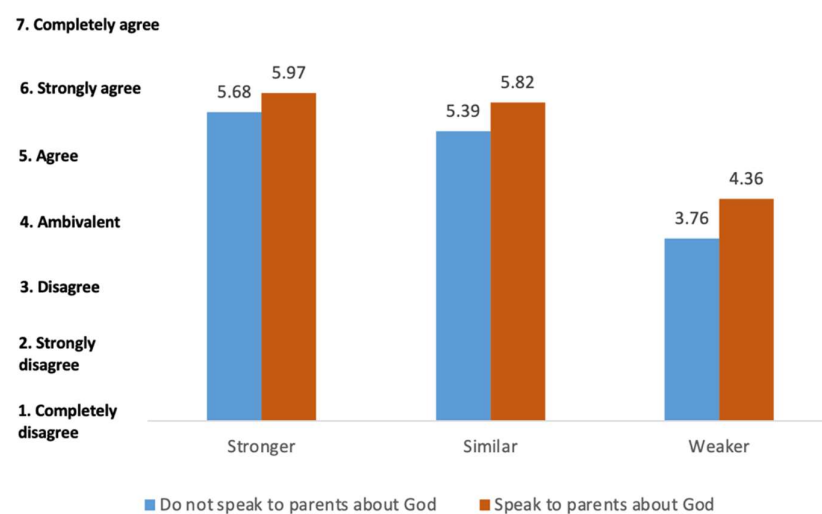


Figure 4. Differences between adolescents who do and do not speak with their parents about God, their level of religious homogeneity with their parents, and their overall spirituality.

2.4. Spiritual Struggle

In contrast to the positive associations between spirituality and the factors mentioned above, a negative association was found between spiritual struggle and spirituality. A multiple regression was conducted to determine whether women's participation, Jewish identity, moral relativism, drug use, homosexual couples, and premarital socialization predicted overall levels of spirituality. The overall model was significant: $R^2 = 0.40$, $F(6633) = 69.41$, $p < 0.001$. Forty percent of the variance of spirituality in adolescents could be accounted for by the combination of the socio-religious scales of women's participation, Jewish identity, moral relativism, drug use, homosexual couples, and premarital socialization. The significant predictors were women's participation ($p < 0.001$), premarital socialization ($p < 0.001$), Jewish identity ($p < 0.001$), and drug use ($p < 0.001$). Each of these were negative predictors such that the higher the levels of each of the socio-religious scales, the lower the levels of spirituality.

A hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to determine whether Jewish socio-religious scales predicted spirituality while controlling for positive Judaic studies learning experiences and relationships with Judaic studies teachers. Positive Judaic studies learning experiences and relationships with Judaic studies teachers were entered as the first step. The combination of socio-religious scales, including women's participation, moral relativism, Jewish identity, drug use, homosexuals, and premarital socialization, were entered as the second step, and the dependent variable was adolescent spirituality. Positive Judaic studies learning experiences and relationships with Judaic studies teachers significantly predicted overall spirituality: $R^2 = 0.40$, $F(8629) = 101.28$, $p < 0.001$. Forty percent of the variance of

adolescent spirituality could be explained by the combination of positive Jewish studies learning experiences and relationships with Judaic studies teachers. After adding the socio-religious scales, the model was still significant: $R^2 = 0.56$, $F(8629) = 101.28$, $p < 0.001$. An additional 16% of the variance of spirituality was explained by the addition of socio-religious scales to Judaic studies learning experiences and relationships with Judaic studies teachers. The strength of the relationship between socio-religious scales and spirituality was reduced after controlling for positive Judaic studies learning experiences and relationships with Judaic studies teachers.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Participants

Modern Orthodox high schools in the United States were recruited for this study via emails to principals at the various schools between December 2016 and January 2017. Students completed the measure anonymously online via Survey Monkey, so the data were obtained directly from the participants. Each school decided whether they preferred to send out the hyperlink to their students, who could complete the survey in their own time, or whether they would rather designate a class period for students to complete the measure in the presence of a teacher. Some schools offered the entire student body the opportunity to participate in the study, while others distributed it to certain classes at their discretion and convenience. In total, 18 schools participated, resulting in a robust sample of 1341 high school students. Of those who responded to the demographic questions, 39% were male and 58% were female, while 3% classified themselves as “other.” The participants were in grades 9–12 at the time of responding to the survey, with 26% in 9th grade, 15% in 10th grade, 24% in 11th grade, and 33% in 12th grade. Just under two-thirds (65%) of respondents came from an Ashkenazi (Eastern European) background, whereas 29% were Sephardic (non-Ashkenazi) background, and 7% classified themselves as “other.” Most (88%) of the respondents came from a home where the family usually prays in an Orthodox synagogue, 5% in a conservative synagogue, 2% in reform, and 5% in “another” type of synagogue. A total of 97% of the students came from homes which keep kosher and 88% came from homes which observe the Sabbath. Five percent stated that they live in multiple homes with different standards of observance. Most of the respondents (87%) came from homes where their parents are married to each other, 9% came from homes where the parents are divorced, 1% had separated parents, and 2% had one deceased parent.

3.2. Measures

The updated version of [Goldberg’s \(2018\)](#) Jewish Beliefs Actions and Living Evaluation scale, referred to here as the JewBALE 2.0, was used in coordination with the DUKE Health Profile and a Socio-Religious Scale of Personal Beliefs in order to collect the data (see Appendices A and B for an overview of the scales). JewBALE 2.0 sought to revise the original JewBALE in order to eliminate redundancies, clarify some ambiguous phrases, expand the demographic section, and explore the reasoning behind an adolescent’s action. The scale also aimed to uncover what the students who did not identify with mainstream Modern Orthodox Jewish beliefs or communal norms actually believe themselves. For instance, the survey contained questions that measure what the students believe regarding the role of women in Jewish leadership positions and the inclusion of homosexual couples in Orthodox institutions. The survey condensed the original version and included 167 total questions: 33 regarding belief, 50 regarding actions, 40 regarding demographics, 27 regarding personal beliefs, and the 17-item DUKE Health Profile. Wherever possible, questions were asked on a 7-point Likert scale, offering the student the chance to choose between 0 (completely disagree) and 6 (completely agree) regarding their commitment to a certain belief or practice.

The validity of the updated scale was supported by a review of 10 experts in Jewish law. These experts organized the questions into distinct subscales which represented a certain construct and also eliminated questions that were considered nonessential or

that did not clearly fit into one subscale. The demographic section consisted of a robust 40 questions in order to better understand which factors in an adolescent's home, school, and personal life play an interactive role in their religious and spiritual outcomes. A 27-item Socio-Religious Scale of Personal Beliefs was created in order to assess the impact that secular culture and social experience has on adolescents' religious beliefs. This scale was intended to uncover the extent to which there was a conflict between adolescents' personal and religious beliefs and what impact this has, if any, on their religious practices. Finally, the 17-item Duke Health Profile was included in order to uncover potential relationships between the mental, physical, and social health of an adolescent and his or her religious and spiritual outcomes. Using statistical and clinical rationale, this scale was derived from the 63-item Duke-UNC Health Profile (DUHP), resulting in a short survey which measured 10 valid scales. These revisions were grounded in the decades of experience we have teaching and leading schools/institutions in the Modern Orthodox community and the teachers and school leaders we have engaged at the university level and in professional development settings.

3.3. Data Analysis

Data from the scale were analyzed with SPSS Version 21. Reliability tests were run in order to assess the internal consistency of the subscales of JewBALE. Descriptive analyses were conducted to check for outliers and any other abnormalities in the dataset so that they could be removed as needed. Principal components' analysis with oblimin rotation was used in order to understand the factors that underlie the overall questionnaire. An independent sample *t*-test was conducted in order to determine significant gender differences. Hierarchical multiple regressions to control for certain variables were used in order to develop a model for predicting a particular variable. One- and two-way ANOVA were used to assess the impact that a particular variable has on the variance in adolescents' spirituality, as well as homogeneity between adolescents' beliefs and those of their parents.

The Duke Health Profile was used to measure general self-esteem. A religious or spiritual struggle refers to a feeling of tension between one's personal beliefs and what one's religious role models espouse as the true spiritual beliefs or religious actions. This source of tension is widespread among adolescents, but may lead to drastically opposing outcomes based on whether one's family, school, and community value religious questioning. Jewish struggle was measured using the socio-religious scale of personal beliefs.

Relationships with teachers and Judaic studies learning experiences were considered to be mediators of the relationship between Jewish struggle and spirituality. Relationships with teachers were measured based on whether the respondent admired his or her Judaic studies teachers, felt that teachers cared about them personally, and whether the respondent had a good relationship with their teachers. Learning experiences were assessed using the respondent's general feelings about their class and the relevance of classroom learning.

Religious homogeneity between parents and children was measured with questions that asked the students to rate the differences, if any, between the level of belief and practice that their parents had and their own level of beliefs and practices.

4. Discussion

4.1. Gender and Spirituality

Our findings with regard to the impact of gender on spirituality were similar to previous studies (Stark 2002), with female adolescents showing a higher level of spirituality than their male counterparts. In our study, adolescent females were found to have a higher level of belief than adolescent males in numerous subcategories within spirituality, such as Divine Providence with relation to the world, Divine Providence with relation to the individual, Fear/Love/Awe of God, Joyful/Meaningful Life and the religious significance of the State of Israel. These findings are helpful in increasing the validity of the limited research on the premise that women are more spiritually connected than men. Consistent with research on Protestant adolescents (Nelsen and Potvin 1981), these data highlight the

affinity that female adolescents have towards the private aspects of religion. Consistent with data on Jewish youth belonging to the Conservative denomination (Kosmin and Keisar 2000), the differences between the genders were statistically significant, but the actual gap between the scores of males and females was relatively narrow. These findings were also consistent with data from when the original JewBALE was distributed (Eisenberg 2010), indicating that even with the changing of the times, and perhaps a shift towards a more egalitarian approach to women's education, there is still a difference between the way adolescent females and males approach spirituality. The most significant contribution of this research was that, unlike other broad studies, these data addressed which aspects of religion, and even which subsets within spirituality, adolescent females embraced more than males.

The two subscales for which there was no statistical significance between the scores of female and male students were Rabbinic Authority and Divinity/Truth of Bible. The fact that Rabbinic Authority stood out as an exception was noteworthy but seems self-explanatory. Perhaps females felt less connected to the all-male rabbinic system inherent in Orthodoxy, and therefore were less committed to this subscale of spirituality than to most others. This is consistent with Charmé's (2006) finding that Conservative Jewish girls were more likely to be sensitive to issues of sexism than their male peers. Interestingly, in our study, males also scored much lower for their belief in Rabbinic Authority than they did in any other subset of spirituality. The notion of submitting one's autonomy to the judicial system of the rabbinate is more difficult for these adolescents to relate to, especially female adolescents. It is not clear why Divinity/Truth of Bible was the other area in which females did not score higher than males and whether or not this was connected to the same issue as Rabbinic Authority.

In Sullins' (2006) review of the 1995–1996 World Values Survey, which contained data from 51 nations, Jewish women did not score higher than their male counterparts in any area of religion, in contrast to the findings regarding Christian women. Sullins found this phenomenon to also hold true when he reviewed the findings of the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey (GSS) (1972–2002). Our study suggests that these trends are not applicable to all sects of Judaism, and that Orthodox Jewish women in particular have a higher level of spirituality than men, just like their Christian counterparts. Brand's (2012) survey of 1014 adolescents enrolled in Modern Orthodox schools similarly found that the girls had a stronger personal connection with God than the boys.

Various hypotheses exist as to why women may be more spiritual than men and specifically why this may be true for Orthodox adolescents. Goldmintz (2011) used the JewBALE to analyze 227 12th graders in a Modern Orthodox school and suggested that girls approach God as a more of a loving figure rather than an ultimate authoritarian, which allows them to develop a stronger connection to the spiritual aspects of religion. It can also be argued, almost counter-intuitively, that the differences in religious roles for males and females within the Orthodox system actually allows for women, who have fewer religious ritual obligations, to feel more inspired by their choice to opt-in where relevant, rather than feeling burdened by heavy daily obligations.

4.2. Self-Esteem and Spirituality

In the analysis of the relationship between self-esteem and spirituality, mental health was controlled for in order to isolate the effect of self-esteem on spirituality from the potential effect of other mental health factors on spirituality. This was based on the literature, which suggested that the relationship between self-esteem and religiosity would no longer be significant once changes in mental health are controlled for (Heaven and Ciarrochi 2007). In our case, when controlling for mental health, self-esteem was found to be a significant predictor of spirituality. This finding enhances the current body of literature on self-esteem and religion in numerous ways. Firstly, it adds to the literature supporting a positive relationship between self-esteem and religiousness (Williams et al. 2006), as opposed to the minority of studies suggesting a negative relationship (Stern and Wright 2018) or

none at all (Francis and Jackson 2003). Furthermore, it shows that the findings uncovered among Christian adolescents are maintained for Jewish Modern Orthodox adolescents. Additionally, while Eisenberg's (2010) study demonstrated this positive correlation within the 424 Modern Orthodox adolescents that were studied, this larger-scale study enhances the statistical reliability of that finding. Eisenberg's study was in reference to religiousness, looking at the elements of religiosity and spirituality together. This study shows that the relationship is also true when isolating the construct of spirituality.

Many studies dealing with the correlation between spirituality and mental health did not explain the direction of the influence, so it was unclear whether religious values predicted better health or whether they were a consequence of better health. The studies that did focus on this question typically analyzed whether religiousness predicted mental health outcomes (Ball et al. 2003), which then led to theories about the power of religion (Hood et al. 2009). Our research adds to the current literature by showing that the direction of influence in this correlation could also stem from self-esteem. Through the use of the hierarchical multiple regression statistical tool, the analysis of these data shows that spirituality is dependent on self-esteem. Therefore, new theories stemming from the potency of self-esteem must be explored to understand why self-esteem is a means to spirituality. Perhaps self-esteem could enable a person to feel ready to meet high demands, and this could equip an adolescent with the confidence needed for them to feel prepared to take on the expectations that come along with religious and spiritual commitment. Interestingly, this logic was used to support the cases where an inverse relationship was found between self-esteem and religiosity. For instance, when Mormon adolescents were shown to have lower self-esteem than a national sample of adolescents, it was inferred that the high demands of their religion led to a decreased level of self-esteem, with the adolescents feeling inadequate when unable to meet the multitude of demands their religion placed upon them. This rationale was also used to explain the high rate of antidepressant medication prescribed in the predominantly Mormon state of Utah (Chadwick et al. 2010). However, this was not a statistically reliable method of determining which element in the correlation is dependent on the other. There could be a factor unrelated to religiousness, such as a drive for perfectionism, which could lead Mormon youth towards low self-esteem and, in turn, lead to a low level of religiousness or high levels of depression (Allen et al. 2015; Wang et al. 2018). Our analysis emphasizes the importance of not making assumptions regarding the direction of the correlation between self-esteem and religion, as well as highlighting the importance of self-esteem in the religious development of adolescents.

4.3. Religious Homogeneity with Parents and Spirituality

Myers's (1996) study of 2033 married individuals and 468 of their collective offspring aged 19 and above found that when consistent religious messages were transmitted from both parents in a family, the children were more likely to internalize those messages. Our study highlights how religious homogeneity with regard to beliefs will lead to a high internalization of Jewish beliefs even in the high school years. This means that when adolescents identified with their parents' approach to religion, they were more likely to internalize the beliefs their parents were trying to impart. Therefore, parents might want to choose their words carefully when discussing matters of religion, to ensure that their children can identify with what they are saying. Notably, the adolescents in this study who spoke about God with their parents had a higher level of spirituality, regardless of whether their parents had a strong internalization of Jewish beliefs or not. This could be a relevant finding for those parents with a lower level of belief who want their children to have a high level of belief. Instead of shying away from religious topics, as they might have been inclined to do, they may want to consider actively looking for opportunities to speak about God with their children. This also reminds all parents interested in their children's spiritual growth to be cognizant of speaking about spiritual matters and not simply assuming that implicit messages will be understood. Parents can convey their approach towards religious practice through their actions, whereas their approach to religious beliefs may only be

apparent to their children through explicit conversation. A study of 124 British non-Jewish children, ages 7 and 10, showed the children's belief in creationism versus evolution with regard to the origin of human, animal, and plant life to be closely related to their parent's views. Interestingly, however, the approach of the children was more closely related to the topic being brought up in conversation with their parents than the actual belief of the parent (Tenenbaum and Hohenstein 2016). Conversations with parents have also been shown to influence their child's conceptual development (Harris 2012) and epistemological stances, such as whether truth is absolute or subjective (Luce et al. 2013). These results, along with our findings, underscore the significant role that conversation with parents plays in the spiritual development of their children.

4.4. Jewish Struggle and Spirituality

Our study examined the struggle which Jewish Modern Orthodox adolescents felt between the religious norms accepted by the leadership of their community and the adolescents' own beliefs, as well as the impact this had on the students' commitment to religious beliefs. Similar to findings among Christian adolescents (Hunsberger et al. 2002), spirituality was negatively impacted by spiritual struggle among Modern Orthodox adolescents. The specific subscales of women's participation, premarital socialization, Jewish identity, and drug use were negatively associated with spirituality, such that a student's struggle in any of these areas led to a decreased level of spirituality. Interestingly, those who struggled with the lack of acceptance for homosexual couples in the Orthodox community did not have a decreased level of spirituality. Perhaps this is a newer issue that is only just beginning to concern the current generation, as opposed to the questions which Orthodox teens have struggled with for generations, such as the ban against premarital physical contact. We might then expect a struggle with the lack of acceptance for homosexual couples to affect a student's spirituality in the coming generations.

It is possible that the subset of women's participation should be looked at differently to the other subsets, which may be more anchored in terms of their place in Jewish tradition. The importance of being proud of one's Jewish identity and being committed to the guidelines in Jewish law against premarital physical contact and drug use are elements that may be less impacted by the changing times. However, the evolving role of women in general society, their increased attendance at synagogue services, and the amorphous status of positions such as synagogue president begs the question of whether there is room to adjust the current norms based on the feedback that adolescents were hindered in their spiritual beliefs because of frustrations they felt with the current status of women's participation in synagogue services and religious leadership.

As predicted, positive Judaic studies learning experiences and relationships with teachers significantly lessened the impact that religious struggle had on one's beliefs. This suggests that the questions which students have about religion do not necessarily need to be answered directly or resolved in order for them to advance in their spiritual commitment. Rather, positive relationships with religious role models and enjoyable Judaic studies learning environments are enough to counter the otherwise harmful effects of spiritual struggles. This finding supports and extends Rich and Schachter's (2012) research on 2787 high school students enrolled in Israeli public religious schools, which showed that when students admire their teachers, they are more likely to take an interest in the class and discover personal meaning in the material and values that are being taught. This positive attitude towards the teachers and class material then positively impacts the student's religious identity (Cohen-Malayev et al. 2014). Teachers, then, do not necessarily need to provide answers to some of the most complex and sensitive questions, but should rather provide an inspirational framework for Judaism, which enables the students to feel comfortable within the system, notwithstanding their questions.

5. Conclusions and Future Study

The results showed general correlations which applied broadly to the 18 schools who participated in this study. The data indicated that a student with high levels of spirituality would also have high levels of self-esteem and religious homogeneity with their parents, as well as high grades in Judaic studies and a high level of agreement with the Orthodox communal norms. Positive relationships with teachers and positive experiences in Jewish studies classes mediated the otherwise negative relationship between spirituality and disagreement with communal norms. Females were more likely to have high levels of spirituality than males.

The extensive set of data from the JewBALE 2.0, neatly divided into subsets of Jewish practice and belief, with thorough demographic and personal information, are replete with opportunities for further study of subsets that are not analyzed here. We focused this study solely on religious belief, leaving the entire realm of religious practice ripe for future analysis. Additionally, with regard to religious homogeneity between parents and children, future studies could control for parental divorce. A notable 9% of the sample came from divorced homes. Comparing their levels of practice and belief to those of adolescents from non-divorced homes could add to the growing research on the impact of parental divorce on an adolescents' religiosity.

Within the realm of spirituality, there is also much to uncover about the correlations discovered in this study. For example, we found that adolescent females have a higher level of religious belief than males. A secondary analysis could further subdivide the data based on grade level to assess, for example, whether there are differences in the spirituality level of girls in grades 9–12. It could be hypothesized that, since the self-esteem levels of girls are known to decrease throughout high school at a faster rate than boys ([Baldwin and Hoffmann 2002](#)), spirituality would also decrease at a faster rate for girls as they advance to higher grade levels.

While the quantitative nature of the study allowed for extensive aspects of religiousness to be analyzed, some scholars highlighted the challenges of attempting to “operationalize the abstract” ([Zelkowitz 2013](#)) by treating religion as a static construct which can be imposed on an individual ([London and Chazan 1990](#); [Samson et al. 2018](#)). Future studies could include a qualitative aspect to the questionnaire in order to account for the nuances and fluidity of one's religious identity.

This study, and the JewBALE scale in general, provides Jewish Modern Orthodox educators with a helpful tool with which to understand the religious level of their student body. It also highlights which constructs correlate with religious outcomes, both within a particular school and on a national and international scale. We hope that this study encourages other Jewish schools, including ones outside of the U.S., to consider the JewBALE as a tool for the crafting of data-driven educational initiatives. We also hope to inspire parochial schools to create similar measures which cater to their specific faith community or religious stream to help them succeed in fulfilling the religious aspects of their mission. We recommend considering assessing the practice and belief of students repeatedly throughout their high school years to account for the waxing and waning of an adolescent's religious experience. Beyond highlighting the importance of assessing students in parochial schools in terms of the religious realm, this study intends to expand the available data on religious youth so that the academic field can benefit from a deeper understanding of the religiosity of adolescents.

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Appendix A

The Jewish Beliefs Actions and Living Evaluation

Beliefs—33 Total Questions

- Divine Providence with Relation to the World (5 items)
- Divine Providence with Relation to the Individual (4 items)
- Fear/Love/Awe of God (6 items)
- Joyful/Meaningful Life (4 items)
- Rabbinic Authority (4 items)
- Divinity/Truth of Torah (3 items)
- Relationship to Israel (4 items)
- Outlook on Secular Studies (3 items)

Demographics—40 items

- General: name, grade, age, school, location, camp
- Family: background, relationship with
- School: relationship with teachers, connection to learning, grades
- Self-concept
- Technology: use of, bullying
- Aspiration to be Jewish communal leader

Socio-Religious Scale of Personal Beliefs—27 items

- Future Plans (2 items)
- Women (5 items)
- Sexuality and Family Values (4 items)
- Western Values (3 items)
- Judgment (1 item)
- Social Media (2 items)
- Influences (6 items)
- Growth Mindset (4 items)

Appendix B

The Duke Health Profile—17 items

- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Social Health
- General Health
- Self-esteem

Appendix C

Appendix C.1. Sample Items of the Scales Referenced to in This Study

Rabbinic Authority

- It is important to find a rabbi (or group of rabbis) who will serve as my posek (a person who decides halakha for me).

- A rabbi should be consulted when you have important life decisions to make.
- I decide which religious practices to follow based on what makes sense to me.
- I respect the process that Rabbis engage in to decide halakha for their community.

Women

- Women may earn Orthodox rabbinic ordination.
- Women may serve as a president of a shul (synagogue)
- Women may serve as clergy of a shul. (Clergy refers to a member of the Professional leadership of a shul who performs religious duties.)
- Women may lead tefilla (communal prayers)
- Women may read Torah publicly for a tzibur (community prayer service).

Appendix C.2. Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this paper, the terms below refer to the following:

Spirituality—internalization of beliefs.

Religiosity—practice of religious actions.

Religiousness/Religious commitment—adherence to religion in general, referring to both religious beliefs and actions.

Socio-Religiousness/Jewish struggle—personal beliefs in contrast to conventional Norms in many Orthodox communities, such as the participation of women and homosexual couples in synagogues, acceptance of drug use, and acceptance of physical contact between sexes.

Religious Homogeny—having similar religious beliefs to another.

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