

In what ways does the education of Haredi Jewish girls in Britain differ from Haredi Jewish boys or non-Haredi Jews?

This guide is aimed at educators who are interested in gaining further knowledge about the way in which Haredi girls are being educated in modern-day Britain. By doing so, these educators may develop a better understanding of the outcomes, benefits, and possible disadvantages of the current Haredi education system for girls. Finally, this will permit educators to assess their own situations within Haredi education and consider alterations if considered necessary. This guide will be focusing on a case study related to Haredi girls' education, followed by other smaller focuses on Haredi boys' education and non-Haredi schools.

Case Study: Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls' School

The case study which will be used as an example is the Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls School in the Haredi borough of London - Stamford Hill. This case study was selected due to a news article that stated that this school was censoring images and passages related to homosexuality and mixed gender socialisation (Marsh, 2018).

The school's website (Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls' School, 2019) provides detailed information on the school's policies and curriculum. The school's ethos upholds Haredi values, encouraging students to develop spiritual, cultural, moral, mental and physical skills, while cultivating respect for other cultures. The school's curriculum provides both **Kodesh** and **Chol** teaching, especially designed for girls: emphasizing key values such as the ideal Jewish woman, **Tznius**, self-discipline, excellence and creativity. However, the school takes a strong stand when it comes to aspects of the National Curriculum that clash with Haredi values. For instance, the

school bans sexual education as they believe it goes against Torah core values. The school's behaviour policy states that pupils are not allowed to use the internet; discuss topics that contradict Haredi principles; breach the Tznius dress code; attend public spaces without parental accompaniment; or participate in certain physical activities. Students are held accountable for any and all conduct in their personal lives.

Ofsted's investigation (2018), has considered the school's standards to be inadequate. The report declares that the school curriculum is too narrow and that it is controlled by its leaders, confirming media reports about the redaction of textbooks: fiction revolves around one single faith perspective and biographies focus mainly on achievements of Jewish men. It is claimed that equality standards are not met due to insufficient teaching about different faiths and cultures. Ofsted considers that the school's safeguarding is ineffective as access to external, confidential help is restricted. Ofsted declares that the lack of sexual and online education makes students unprepared to deal with dangerous situations in modern Britain. Ofsted judges the student's career perspectives as insufficient, as most accept limited futures.

How does Haredi girls' and boys' education differ?

The concept of Haredi boys' schools in Britain is practically unheard of. This is due to Jewish tradition, which states that all boys at the age of thirteen or above must enter a Yeshiva in order to study **Talmud** and the **Torah**. The Department for Education's Notes on Jewish Independent Schools (2012) state that around 1000 boys between the ages of thirteen and sixteen in London, are not registered at any school. The Government believes that they are in fact attending

unregistered Yeshivas, with completely faith based curriculums, which do not undergo any kind of inspection. Therefore, most Haredi boys' experiences of education are very different from girls'. Most Yeshivas have been known to give little to no time to secular studies or even English language studies, causing a large part of these students not to speak English. In some situations, men take up work while studying simultaneously. However, due to their limited or non-existent secular studies, the job prospects are very limited within a British context.

How does Haredi girls' and non-Haredi Jewish education differ?

This guide will focus on Hasmonian High School for Girls in London, in order to make a comparison between Haredi school policies and Orthodox school policies. Both schools promote a similar ethos, such as encouraging respect for other cultures and religions and loving Judaism. The school also offers a curriculum that is both Kodesh and Chol (Hasmonian High School for Girls, 2019). However, many differences arise between the schools. Hasmonian does not ban the use of technology and it complies with its statutory responsibility to teach sexual education. Regarding this as a sensitive matter, the school offers different approaches for studying sexuality: one which is focused on biblical and Talmudic texts in association to sexual morality; another, which adapts the biology curriculum to Jewish studies and values, introducing reproduction in a respectful way; and finally, the National Biology Curriculum itself. The school offers a series of resources which students can turn to in need of guidance. Students are only accountable for their actions when wearing uniform or participating in any kind of school activity. Ofsted's latest investigation of the school in 2012, has recognised it as overall outstanding.

How does this case study fit into wider religious and cultural context?

The case study is situated within the biggest Haredi community in the UK. The larger British context is chief in understanding the ways in which Yesodey Hatorah operates. The Institute for Jewish Policy Research (2011) estimates that only 284,000 individuals in England and Wales are Jewish, a minority within the 67,686,528 population of the United Kingdom. There are many different denominations of Judaism. This guide focuses on Haredi and Orthodox Judaism. The former, is defined by the strict respect and adherence to the Torah and Talmudic law and the rejection of modern secular society. Orthodox Judaism is characterised by the belief that rabbinical law dictates the rules of Jewish life, but does not reject modern secular society. There has been a rise in the amount of children attending strictly orthodox schools, so that 57% are strictly orthodox (Staetsky and Boyd, 2016, p.21).

How can this case study be understood in light of academic theory?

There are many academic theories which can be used to consider Haredi girls' education in Britain. The first way in which this can be analysed is through Sandra Bem's lenses of gender (1995, p.8). Haredi education is divided by a binary system, having different expectations for each gender. Problems may arise from this gender polarization when pupils do not fit clearly into a gender category, for example, intersex individuals. Androcentrism is also identifiable in Ofsted's claims that at Yesodey Hatorah, books focus on male Jewish achievements. In an environment in which men are seen as more successful than women, girls may have difficulty in

developing ambition and self-respect. The Jewish concept of **Eshet Hayil** depicts the ideal Jewish woman which can be linked to Sered's theory of Woman as symbol and Women as agents (1999, p.193-221). In the case study presented and in accordance to Haredi tradition, a likely outcome for students is becoming the Eshet Hayil; therefore the idealised symbol of the Woman prescribes and limits women's agency. Another essential theory to consider when analysing this case study is Tova Hartman's three models of reconciling subjective experience and religious tradition (2007, p.21-44). When thinking of how Haredi girls' schools could improve their overall effectiveness, these three models become essential in order to consider which parts of Haredi tradition are imperative, which may be reimagined, and which may be rejected.

What could happen in the future?

This guide has drawn attention to Yesodey Hatorah's policies and ethos as well as the evaluation it received from Ofstead. The girls' education has been compared to Haredi boys' education in Yeshivas which promote very different outcomes, and to Hasmonian High School in order to better understand the ways in which Haredi education differs from Orthodox education and the reasons why the latter receives higher evaluations than the former. When educators are considering the ways in which Haredi girls' education can be improved, in order to meet national outstanding standards, it is paramount to adopt Hartman's three models, as mentioned above. With matters such as sexual and online safety, even when the pupils are not being exposed to or encouraged to participate, the government insists on the education of these subjects in order to protect students. By adopting the reinterpretation model, for example, Haredi educators may be

able to adapt the core information that must be transmitted to students in such a way that does not compromise core Haredi values or ethos. Furthermore, by introducing pupils to different cultures and religions through historical or cultural mediums, Haredi girls might develop a deeper appreciation for their communities' practices and simultaneously foster a deeper sense of respect and understanding for other cultures. In relation to career prospects, reinterpretation of the Eshet Hayil concept may permit girls to become more ambitious about their personal careers, without sacrificing ideals of modesty and family encouraged by Haredi tradition. This way, the community is maintained and Haredi girls will be better prepared to face modern, complex, and multicultural Britain.

Glossary

Chol - In this context, refers to secular education.

Eshet Hayil - Concept of the 'Woman of Valor' from a biblical acrostic poem, describing the ideal wife: one who cares for the household, provides for her family putting their needs above her own, supports the household economically and is also charitable towards others.

Haredi - Denomination of Judaism characterised by strict adherence to Jewish law and the rejection of modern secular society.

Kodesh - In this context, refers to Jewish religious education.

Non-haredi - In the context of this guide, it refers to non 'Ultra-Orthodox' Judaism.

Talmud - Jewish law and a set of its interpretations.

Yeshiva - Institute dedicated to the study of Torah and Talmud.

Torah - God's law from the first five books of Hebrew scriptures.

Tznius - Jewish ideal of modesty and discretion.

Annotated Bibliography

Bem, S. in Ursula King (1995) *Religion and Gender*, Wiley, p.1-38

Bem's concepts of Gender Polarization and Androcentrism are important lenses through which to analyse Haredi education.

Board of Deputies of British Jews, (2014). [online] Available at: <https://www.bod.org.uk/jewish-facts-info/jews-in-numbers/> [Accessed 7 Dec. 2019]

This website article provides census information from the Jewish Policy Research about the number of Jews in England and Wales.

Hartman, T. (2007) 'Feminism Encounters Traditional Judaism. Resistance and Accommodation', Brandeis University Press, pp.20-44

Hartman's models include: reaffirmation - in which the tradition is solidified; reinterpretation - in which the tradition is revisited and based on experience; and rejection - in which a certain traditional aspect is rejected completely.

Hasmonean High School for Girls, (2019). [online] Available at: <https://hasmoneangirls.org.uk/> [Accessed 8 Dec. 2019]

The website provides detailed information about the school's curriculum, policies and investigation reports.

Marsh, S. (2018) Jewish school removed 'homosexual' mentions from GCSE textbook. *The Guardian*, [online]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/mar/09/yesodey-hatorah-jewish-girls-school-north-london-homosexual-references-textbook> [Accessed 7 Dec. 2019]

This newspaper article was the starting point for selecting a case study as it stood out, demonstrating both the school's justifications for their actions as well as Ofsted's criticism.

Ofsted (2018). *Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls' School* [online] Manchester: Ofsted, p.1-13. Available at: <http://www.yesodeyhatorah.org/PDFs/Ofsted-2018.PDF> [Accessed 8 Dec. 2019]

Ofsted provides a detailed report of the school's investigation, drawing attention to strengths and weaknesses.

Sered, S. (1999) "'Woman as symbol and Women as Agents', *Revisioning Gender*, 28(6), pp.193-221.

Sered's theory explores the way in which the interpretation of an idealised and symbolic Woman prescribes behaviours and expectations towards women in real life.

Staetsky, D. and Boyd, J. (2016). [online] Available at: https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/The_rise_and_rise_of_Jewish_schools_in_the_United_Kingdom.pdf [Accessed 7 Dec. 2019]

This study demonstrates the importance of analysing Haredi and Orthodox education due to the rising numbers of strictly orthodox students.

The Department for Education (2012) *Notes on Jewish Independent Schools*

These notes provide the government's acknowledgment to the male students missing in the British education system.

Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls' School, (2019). [online] Available at: <http://www.yesodeyhatorah.org/index.htm> [Accessed 8 Dec. 2019]

The school's website plays a key role in understanding this case study. It provides detailed and revised policies, curriculum and investigation reports.

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