

Bar-Ilan University

**Expectations, Sanctions and Incentives  
In the Existentiality of the Ideal Religious  
Figure as a Means for Understanding  
Gender-Religious Differences in Israel**

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the source of gendered religious differences which have been found in Israel. Those claim to a higher level of religiosity among men compared to women in the tested measures, and opposed to other countries, especially those with Christian majority (where women have found to be more religious). This research follows multiple researches in the field around the world in the attempt to understand those differences from several points of view. The idea behind this research was inspired from the article of Schnabel and colleagues (Schnabel, Hackett, & McClendon, 2017) who explored it among the population in Israel. They suggested that a gendered-religious system of expectations, sanctions and incentives could be a possible explanation for the religious-gendered gap. In those terms, our research constitutes an innovation in the field: it investigates gendered-religious expectations, sanctions and incentives that men and women face in order to be considered as "religious-ideal people". This approach comes from a social-subjective-constructivist plain, which has not yet been thoroughly researched.

### **Research questions**

- A. What are the expectations of religious men/ women to be considered ideal religious people?
- B. What are the sanctions of religious men/ women to be considered ideal religious people?
- C. What are the incentives of religious men/ women to be considered ideal religious people?

### **Research population**

The subjects of this study are pre-selected population which was selected in advance in accordance with participants' electoral belonging. 20 people participated in this study, including 10 men and 10 women. All are above the age of 18, graduates of the state-religious education in Israel.

## **Methods**

The data collecting tool in this research is a semi-structured in-depth interview, including questions dealing with religiosity participation, image of the ideal religious person and its characteristics, regarding the gender-religious differences that the participants identify in terms of the discussed issues. This tool enables a glimpse to their inner world and an understanding of the context of the subjective interpretation and living reality. Moreover, there was a use of the term "the ideal religious person" as a reference frame which helped the interviewees in relating the questions.

Content analysis has been made in two steps: First, we found Emic categories which were formed through repeated meaning units. For that, we used Gross's method to content analysis (1995). Second, we located Etic categories. Those were based on Seligman's well-being theory (2011) and formed the link between the gendered-religious expectations, sanctions and incentives.

## **Results and discussion**

The research's results raised a network of expectations, sanctions and incentives which the participants face. This is reflected in the various social frameworks, both formal and informal, embedded via social learning processes and the ideal religious model, as was characterized by the interviewees. We have found that this model has different and unique aspects for each gender.

In the level of expectations, it has been found that although both men and women mention the integration between tradition and modernity as a leading value, women are expected to act more in the domestic sphere and face a conflict between the domestic and social spheres. In the aspect of sanctions, men noted sanctions they were facing during their adolescence years mostly as a result of violating the appropriate religious conduct code, while women have been experiencing sanctions for improper dress. In terms of incentives, there wasn't a significant difference between the genders excluding

rewarding statements for modest clothing that women continue to get from their surroundings.

In the educational sphere, we found that the most important socialization agents for shaping the different set of expectations, sanctions and incentives are educational institutes, headed by schools and youth movements, together form gender perceptions since childhood. Those have led to different gendered religious ideals which emphasize mostly the higher expectation and difficulty level of men to be ideal religious people. Although, this difficulty isn't necessarily objective and was measured by several participants through the number of commandments religious men are committed to comply. These findings may explain why men are more religious than women in Israel as was detailed in previous studies.

Among the findings dealing with the gendered-religious differences in the norms system, we analyzed the religious ideal person's characterization, as was presented by the participants. This was enabled through Seligman's well-being theory (2011). The theory constituted the core measures for sense of well-being in life. We have noted that there weren't any significant gender differences in those core measures of the ideal-religious person. The only differences that has been found were those which are influenced by socialization processes and gender roles. That raised a question about the reliability of the findings about religious-gendered gap as a whole.

We claim that although expectations, sanctions and incentives explain why men are more religious than women, those findings are influenced by deep social perceptions that perhaps don't enable to see men and women religiousness correctly.

We believe that future studies should focus on the gendered-personal perception of the ideal religious person. That is along an understanding of the main role that social learning is playing in structuring a person's religious gendered identity and required set of norms.

### **Research's contribution and limitations**

Being the first study dealing with religious gender differences from a subjective-social viewpoint, it enriches the knowledge in the field. The research revealed the impact of expectations, sanctions and incentives that men and women, graduates of the religious educational system, feel committed to. In addition, the result established the effects of social agents on social learning processes, and the educational system (formal and informal) above all. Finally, the research opened a window to the relations between well-being theory and religious being for both genders.

Since it isn't possible to generalize this study's results on other populations, we suggest examining gendered religious expectations, sanctions and incentives among different societies around the world and validate the results through quantitative tools. This can also answer the possible unconscious resistance that some of the interviewees may have experienced during the qualitative interview. Moreover, researches that will examine the perceived difficulty of men and women to execute gendered-religious standards and investigate the effect of educational systems on learned gender-religious roles can expand the manifold in the discussed subject.