

New Moving Traditions Report on Keeping Jewish Boys Involved

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(Cross posted to the [Lilith Blog](#), which is also sharing a [section](#) of their Fall 2009 issue, [Boys are the New Girls](#), for free).

The role of men and boys in American Jewish life is a topic of growing concern - current [research on boys](#) available on BJPA ranges from Wishing For More: [Jewish Boyhood, Identity and Community](#) to ["Bros" and "Ho's" in Jewish Life Today](#).

Monday night, [Moving Traditions](#), the organization that gave us the "Rosh Hodesh - It's a Girl Thing" program, [unveiled](#) a new program geared at teenage Jewish boys - along with a substantive [report](#) on Jewish American boys' participation in American Judaism.

We are living in exciting times. There is no historical precedent for the problem of the disenfranchisement of boys in the religion of "Shelo asani isha" (the blessing traditionally recited by Jewish men, thanking God for not making them women). Certainly there is no shortage of men at the tops of Jewish structures, as the ongoing work of organizations like [Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community](#) continues to [document](#). But what does that avail us if we are bleeding boys from the bottom?

Moving Traditions found that at every year of post bnai mitzvah Jewish involvement, boys' participation lags behind that of girls. Through focus groups and pilot testing, they came up with a program that has proven, in their experience so far, successful at engaging Jewish boys and keeping them engaged. Somewhat like the Rosh Hodesh program, it reaches back to an area of Jewish life that was traditionally the province of its target audience: the boys participating in the pilot testing named themselves "The Brotherhood."

Single sex programming is meant to invite Jewish boys to integrate core pieces of their identity - masculinity and Judaism, precisely at the time in their lives that they are most actively involved with figuring out who they are, and can and want to be. The idea is not to perpetuate any ways in which Jewish communities have defined and nurtured male identities in opposition to and over female identities. The hope is that by involving boys in an active process of engagement with their Jewish gender identities, they will become a generation of men that can join Jewish women in the shared project of building thriving Jewish communities that can affirm individual identities and honor difference.

The report includes sample activities as well as a marketing guide, and Moving Tradition's commitment to help organizations bring the program to Jewish teenage boys in their communities. One major challenge is the stark shortage of male Jewish educators and role models.

Participants in the unveiling program also asked questions about the distinctiveness of American, as opposed to Israeli, male Jewish identity, and the challenge of nurturing masculinity without perpetuating things like heteronormativity - one sample activity asks boys to arrange themselves on an agree/disagree spectrum to statements that "It's a "guy" thing to..." for example, "pay for a date."

