

Teens Tackle Feminism During Conference

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One of the topics that was prevalent in the teen sessions, and among the teens, at the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance conference, was the attitude displayed by teens and college campus students toward the concept of feminism. The view of many of the speakers on this topic, in both the teen and regular sessions, is that today's high school and college-age girls and women do not want to call themselves feminists, yet they are benefiting from the feminist movement.

The types of benefits discussed include an advanced level of Jewish learning for women, such as studying the Talmud, and increased participation of girls and women in leadership and ritual opportunities. On college and graduate levels, women are benefiting from equal job opportunities as well.

The message being sent at the conference in mid-February in New York City was that these women and girls should be showing their appreciation for, and acknowledging the efforts and achievements of, their predecessor feminists who paved the way for their success.

In response to the discussions, there was one teen camp that agreed with this view and another that did not. While the camp that disagreed did feel gratitude toward those who have been active in the feminist movement, these teens simply did not like the label of "feminism" because of the negative connotations that it has for some.

The essence of this disagreement lies in the relative view as to the implications of such a label. While the speakers at the conference viewed the label as positive, many teenagers view the label as negative, conjuring up images of radical women doing radical things for the sake of equality.

Instead, those with the second view see feminism as naturally providing the opportunity for equal participation of women without any extreme connotations.

As the debate raged on, I realized that everyone was saying the same thing and had the same goal in mind, the difference being the terminology used in describing the feminist phenomenon.

As a result of this discussion the teens collectively worked on developing a term that would replace feminism. This discussion is still in process but we hope to propose it at the next conference.

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