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# **Being A Jewish Teenager in America: Trying to Make It**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Jewish Adolescent Study (JAS) is a large-scale investigation designed to develop a comprehensive picture of the attitudes and behavior of contemporary young Jews – in particular, to understand how they view themselves both as Jews and as teenagers in the American environment. The study is a systematic inquiry into the contexts, Jewish and American alike, that shape Jewish identity and affiliation among contemporary Jewish teenagers.

### **Methods**

Nearly 1,300 *b'nei mitzvah* ages 13 to 17 from Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and independent congregations were surveyed. One parent of each child was also interviewed. The respondents came from three regions of Eastern Massachusetts selected to allow generalizability to regions of varying Jewish population density. For purposes of comparison, an over-sample of Jewish day-school students was included.

To provide an interpretive context for the teenagers' self-reports, both parental and peer influences were examined, as was the institutional impact of synagogues and day schools. To ensure the validity of findings encompassing such a wide range of variables, a high response rate from teenagers of diverse levels of Jewish commitment was sought and obtained.

### **Findings**

The findings of the JAS capture the transition from *bar/bat mitzvah* to the end of high school and show how embedded Jewish adolescents are in their American context. Young Jews lead complex lives as they navigate between childhood and adult life. Specific findings include the following:

#### **Overall Jewish Involvement**

The study documents a decline in participation in Jewish activities from the time of becoming a *bar* or *bat mitzvah* through the high-school years. Whereas nearly all adolescent respondents participated in some Jewish educational, volunteer, or recreational activity in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, just over half did so in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. An increase in participation in Israel experience programs and Jewish employment opportunities throughout the high school years fails to offset the broader pattern of decline, which is due primarily to cessation of formal Jewish education.

#### **School**

School dominates the daily lives of adolescents by monopolizing their time, concentrating numerous activities under one roof, and creating a community where it is critically important to succeed and gain recognition. For JAS respondents, academic demands

increased as they progressed toward graduation from high school. Although many felt stressed by academic demands, most were successful in meeting those demands. More than 70% planned to attend an elite university. Interestingly, those with the highest academic aspirations also tended to be those for whom being Jewish mattered a great deal.

In general, however, the respondents' positive attitudes toward their secular education did not carry over to their Jewish education. Thus, for the most part, these teenagers took their secular schoolwork seriously and enjoyed school. In contrast, their attitudes toward pre-*bar/bat mitzvah* Hebrew school were negative. Boys rejected their supplementary Jewish education - and, with it, continued involvement in Jewish life - more decisively than did girls. Actual participation in formal Jewish education showed a decline predictable from these attitudes, with the same gender differences persisting, though it may be surprising that so many students continued at all given the extent of the negative feelings. Overall, weekly participation declined steadily from 60% in 7<sup>th</sup> grade to 22% in 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **Extracurricular Activities**

The overwhelming majority of teenagers (86%) participated in school-based extracurricular activities – a level of participation that varied little by grade or gender. Sports, arts, and other clubs occupied a good deal of the teenagers' free time. Through 10<sup>th</sup> grade, those who were more involved in extracurricular activities were also more likely to participate in formal Jewish education. Both the rate and frequency of participation in Jewish youth groups were modest.

### **Paid Employment**

The percentage of adolescents engaged in paid employment during the school year doubled from 36% to 71% between 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In the early teens girls worked mainly in child care, boys in lawn and pet care, but both genders gravitated to well-paying sales jobs in high school. Job choices were driven more by rate of pay than by personal satisfaction. Teaching jobs, including those in the Jewish community, attracted some interest.

### **Summer Activities**

Summer offered an opportunity for Jewish involvements to claim time and attention otherwise preempted by school. Teenage summer activities mainly involved camp, work, and travel, with summer jobs (including camp jobs) replacing summer camping as the teens grew older. Jewish programs were among the five most popular summer activities for students in all grades, and the proportion of teenagers who participated in those programs increased throughout the high-school years. The vast majority of participants in Jewish summer programs came from households that made continued Jewish education a priority.



Participation reached a peak with the Israel experience programs offered after the sophomore and junior years, then declined sharply after graduation. The impact of the Israel experience on participants' religious opinions and on their connection to Judaism depended greatly on parental Jewish commitment. Girls were more interested in Israel experience programs than boys and were more likely to report that their connection to Judaism was enhanced by such educational trips.

### **Parental Influence**

Most of the teenagers came from intact, well-to-do families. As a rule, they enjoyed good relations with their parents and followed their example in living a moderate version of a Jewish life that did not include rigorous observance of rituals. Parental influence was felt especially strongly in the decision to continue formal Jewish education. Just over half of the parents either required or strongly encouraged post-*bar/bat mitzvah* Jewish education, and this parental mandate or support was the second strongest predictor of actual enrollment. (Age was the first.) Parental attitudes also strongly influenced exposure to and impact of Jewish summer camps and Israel experience programs.

### **Endogamy and Jewish Continuity**

Nearly two-thirds of the adolescents thought it was important to raise their own children as Jews, a value they shared with their parents. On the question of endogamy, however, there was a more complex interaction between parental and other social-environmental influences. Only one-third (32%) of the teenagers thought it "extremely" or "very" important to marry a Jew, as compared with 60% of their parents. In line with a general cultural drift away from in-marriage, the intergenerational value consensus was much stronger when parents thought Jewish endogamy was irrelevant than when they thought it essential.

### **Regional Variations and Peer Networks**

Parents living in areas of high Jewish population density were more likely to be endogamous and to have mostly Jewish friends than those in areas of low Jewish density. With the exception of Jewish day-school students, teenagers had more ethnically heterogeneous social networks than their parents.

Jewish population density significantly affected teenagers' friendship patterns. Again with the exception of Jewish day-school students (whose close friendships and romantic involvements were almost exclusively with other Jews), teenagers living in high-density areas had a higher proportion of Jewish friends – especially school friends -- and were more likely to date only Jews than those in the other regions. Teenagers in areas of low Jewish density relied more on Jewish organizations for out-of-school friendships than those in other areas. Jewish immersion programs (e.g., summer camps, trips to Israel) were also likely to nurture friendships with peers not known through school.

## **Risky Behaviors**

Rates of sexual activity and drug use (mainly alcohol and marijuana) were similar to those for comparable national samples of teenagers. Except for the youngest group, Jewish commitments appeared to have little influence on sexual activity and drug use.

## **The Search for Meaning and the Meaning of Being Jewish**

Three-quarters of the teenage respondents cared seriously about a search for meaning in life. Among these, only 40% sought to find that meaning through their Jewishness.

For many of these teenagers, being Jewish was about remembering the Holocaust, countering anti-Semitism, being ethical, making the world a better place, caring about Israel, or feeling a connection to other Jews. But they did not implement their commitment to peoplehood, survival, and ethics through Jewish philanthropy, volunteering for Jewish organizations, or observing Jewish law.

## **Conclusion**

Not surprisingly, the picture of today's Jewish adolescents that emerges from the JAS resembles that of two groups to whose influence Jewish adolescents are continually exposed – namely, their parents and their non-Jewish peers. The adolescents who responded to this survey care about being Jewish and about Jewish history and culture, but do not express this allegiance by engaging in practices that might set them apart from a largely secular, pluralistic culture in which they are trying to “make it.” Judaism is important to them, but only as it coheres or coexists with their aspirations for academic success, financial security, and social belonging.

## *Being A Jewish Teenager in America: Trying to Make It*

“[S]ociety has two responsibilities towards its adolescents. The first is to support [the] search for the pieces of the adolescence puzzle that are still unknown. The second is to use the knowledge and the more complete understanding of this period of life to better facilitate and nurture adolescents’ development.” -- Ayman-Nolley & Taira (2000), p. 46

### **INTRODUCTION**

Adolescence is a time of transition, experimentation, and change that often seems like a twisting highway driven on a rainy night. The teenage years are the path to adulthood and are filled with promise. Yet they are also replete with danger points as the child separates from parents and finds his or her way – indeed, as a whole generation finds its own way. Young people in the United States, living in an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity, have access to material and technological resources that enable them to expand their vistas in almost undreamable ways. Even so, adolescence is not a wholly safe or comfortable period of life, as shown by current rates of drug and alcohol abuse and other high-risk behaviors (Johnston et al., 2000; Kann et al., 1998).

To be sure, the preoccupation with the dark side of adolescence, epitomized by events such as the Columbine tragedy (see Aronson, 2000), highlights the half-empty as opposed to the half-full cup (Ayman-Nolley & Taira, 2000). Nevertheless, today’s teenagers show the strain of having to delay the beginning of their productive lives through an extended period of mandated schooling that, in many instances, may not meet their developmental needs (Hine, 1999). Added to this dilemma are others posed by their parents’ ever-increasing levels of prosperity and accomplishment. Finding one’s own path to a meaningful life, yet matching up to the success of the older generation, is no simple feat for teens whose daily pursuits and learning trajectories are often unsuited to their lofty ambitions (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

Jewish youth have a particular dilemma. They are two generations removed from World War II and the *Shoah*, perhaps the most difficult era in the history of the Jewish people. Young American Jews live in a society overfilled with material goods and devoid of the overt anti-Semitism that shaped their grandparents’ lives. The ways these young Jews define, or fail to define, their Jewish identity give us a glimpse into the future of the Jewish people. They also speak volumes about the future of our society and the place for spirituality in a sea of materialism.

Yet Jewish identity does not develop in isolation from other forms of identity. The Jews of the Diaspora have always had a dual identity, maintaining distinctive beliefs,

values, and traditions while taking on some of the coloration of their immediate cultural environments. By now relatively few Jewish-American adolescents live in communities with a majority of Jews. From the evidence of rates and intensity of participation in Jewish day schools, synagogue, and youth groups, most spend relatively little of their time in purely Jewish involvements. Instead, from hour to hour and from day to day they move back and forth between the Jewish and secular spheres, both of which contribute to shaping their identities. Therefore, the development of Jewish identity in the young must be understood in the context of the larger social and cultural environments in which young people live (Kress & Elias, in press), as part of the complex overall process of adolescent self-definition, which Erikson (1950, 1968) described (Kress & Elias, 1995, 1998).

To understand Jewish teenagers in the United States, it is necessary to understand some of the context of American teenage life. Undoubtedly, Jewish adolescents resemble their non-Jewish peers in some respects, even though their lives are conditioned by having Jewish ancestors and experiences. The present report is based on a large-scale study of Jewish adolescents designed to develop a comprehensive picture of the attitudes and behavior of contemporary young Jews. The goal is to understand how they view themselves both as teenagers and as Jews. This study was developed as a systematic inquiry into the contexts that shape Jewish identity and affiliation among contemporary Jewish teenagers. As part of the study, surveys were conducted with nearly 1,300 *b'nei mitzvah*<sup>1</sup> ages 13 to 17, from Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and independent congregations. One parent of each child was also interviewed. The respondents came from three regions of Eastern Massachusetts that were selected to allow generalizability to regions of varying Jewish population density. In addition, for purposes of comparison, the study includes an over-sample of Jewish day school students. The study was designed, in its content and sampling strategy, to understand teenagers' lives within the community contexts that shape Jewishness.

Young Jews, as the future of the Jewish community, have become an increasingly important focus of research and intervention efforts (see, e.g., Keysar et al., 2000; Sales, 1996). To anticipate what the future holds, and perhaps to intervene to alter its course, a number of efforts have been undertaken to understand how today's adolescents identify themselves in ethnic and religious terms. These efforts have focused on how young people are exposed to Jewish life and traditions, how they have been influenced by their involvement in Jewish life, and how likely they are to be involved in the Jewish community as adults. As secure, accepted members of a diverse, affluent society, are today's *b'nei mitzvah* setting aside their Judaism when they step off the *bimah*? Are the enticements of the dominant culture an alternative to Jewish identity, or do they provide new avenues through which this identity can be expressed? To what extent do the ties of tradition and community remain vital, and under what conditions can those ties be strengthened? Especially in the wake of the finding that Jewish identity typically is not fixed or linear in its development, but may fluctuate in intensity or change in emphasis

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<sup>1</sup> Becoming a *bar* (male) or *bat* (female) *mitzvah* (*b'nei mitzvah*) typically occurs at age 13. To mark the passage to adult responsibility, the young person is formally called to the Torah, a *mitzvah* not applicable to minors.

(Horowitz, 2000), empirically based answers to questions such as these can guide educators in designing effective programs to engage Jewish youth.

The present study (the Jewish Adolescent Study [JAS]) was designed to broaden the context of research on adolescent Jewish identity by focusing on both the generic and Jewish aspects of teenagers' everyday lives, as well as their attitudes and future plans. To provide an interpretive context for the teenagers' self-reports, both parental and peer influences were examined, as was the institutional impact of synagogues and day schools. To ensure the validity of findings encompassing such a wide range of variables, it was considered essential to obtain a high response rate from teenagers of diverse levels of Jewish commitment.

In an attempt to understand the contexts that influence Jewish affiliation in adolescence, this report considers how teenagers' lives are structured by their schools, families, peer groups, and neighborhoods. It examines how teenagers use their free time and their summers, what they care about, and how they feel about themselves and their experiences with institutions in the Jewish community. In so doing, it recognizes how the experiences of boys and girls can be sometimes similar and sometimes very different.

The JAS was not designed to test specific hypotheses. The effort is to take a snapshot of Jewish adolescents in different communities and try to understand how they experience their lives. This study should not be regarded as a report card on the Jewish community's efforts to engage teenagers, although the data have clear implications for policy. Rather, it is hoped that this report will inform efforts to engage adolescents in the Jewish community with an awareness of the impact of other relevant community affiliations.

## **Background**

### ***Jewish Identity in an Open, Evolving Society***

Concerns about Jewish identity and the continuity of the Jewish people were heightened when the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) of 1990 found a 52% rate of interfaith marriages among Jews by birth who married between 1985 and 1990, compared with 9% among those who married before 1965 (Kosmin et al., 1991). Although there has been ongoing debate (see, e.g., Cohen, 1998) about the validity of the estimate, there is no question that intermarriage rates have substantially increased compared to earlier eras. Even critics of the NJPS finding such as Cohen (1998) have developed estimates that indicate a 40-43% rate of intermarriage in the 1990s.

The data about intermarriage, in the context of the commonly observed diffusion of Jewish culture in the American Diaspora, have stimulated intense interest not only in the incidence and impact of intermarriage specifically (Phillips, 1997), but also in broader questions of the maintenance and transmission of Jewish identity and peoplehood. For example, in an investigation of "moderately affiliated" American Jews, Cohen and Eisen (2000) elicited personal narratives to study respondents' motivations and priorities. They found that, in keeping with the individualism of American society, moderately affiliated

Jews experience their Jewishness largely in private rather than communal contexts. Family, friendship, and personal reflection, not organizational and public activities, are the primary loci of meaning and expression for these contemporary Jews. For this group of Jews, spirituality is to be found in the home rather than in the synagogue. With respect to the socialization of the young, Cohen and Eisen found that the family is the center of Jewish observance and teaching and that parents play a critical role in shaping children's orientation to Judaism. External influences, in particular Hebrew school, are negative experiences and obstacles to involvement.

The NJPS has resulted in a series of studies about contemporary Jewish life in North America (cf. *American Jewish Society in the 1990s*, Goldstein & Kosmin, eds.), in which intermarriage is only one of the issues identified as threatening Jewish communal integrity. Thus, for example, Goldstein and Goldstein (1996) have analyzed the dispersion of Jews from traditional areas of residential clustering. Using NJPS data, they found that 62% of "core Jews" (i.e., those who were born Jewish and did not adopt another religion, as well as those who chose to become Jewish) lived in neighborhoods that they themselves described as not or only a little Jewish -- a finding with serious implications for Jewish identity and community. Nonmigrants and those who had migrated more than five years prior to the survey were more likely than recent migrants to live in neighborhoods with a strongly Jewish character. The migration of Jews has followed general patterns of migration in the United States -- namely, from cities to suburbs and from North and East to South and West. With the exception of the elderly, who often move from one Jewish enclave to another (e.g., from New York to Florida), migration is associated with settlement in areas of low Jewish density. Thus, the migration of young and middle-aged adults for personal and career reasons disrupts social networks, weakens communal bonds as well as organizational structures, and is likely to accelerate assimilation. Although there may be positive effects (e.g., bringing out leadership potential in individuals compelled to play an active part in creating local Jewish institutions), most commentators regard the dispersion of Jewish population as inimical to fostering community.

According to Goldstein and Goldstein (1996), children (especially teenagers) in migrant households were found to receive less Jewish education than those who had not migrated. Migration is associated with a greater likelihood of intermarriage, although this association is declining in strength among more recently married couples. Now that intermarriage is common and broadly accepted (see American Jewish Committee, 2000), intermarried couples no longer appear driven to move to escape the disapproval of their home community. Overall, the dispersion of Jews across the country, mainly to areas of lower Jewish density, has been associated with a decline in various measures of Jewish identity and an erosion of both personal and organized Jewish networks. At the individual level, the effects of migration on Jewish identity remain to be disentangled from those of the selective migration of less involved Jews. Nonetheless, neighborhood and regional variations in Jewish population density are a critical variable to be considered in studying the Jewish exposure, identification, and practice of the young.

In a fluid society characterized by constant change, it is not surprising that generational differences in outlook and behavior have emerged. Particularly on dimensions of religiousness, with changing opportunities to intermingle with others from different religious backgrounds, different patterns across generations can be expected to emerge. Cohen (1998), for example, tracked the evolution of key dimensions of Jewish identity in a national survey of American Jews participating in a consumer panel who were, in aggregate, slightly more Jewishly identified than a representative sample of the U.S. Jewish population. Cohen found that younger adults are just as religious as older adults, but are less ethnically identified. Whether trends such as these continue in the generation about to reach adulthood is an important question for research on Jewish adolescents.

### ***The Adolescent Generation: Studies of U.S. Adolescents***

American adolescents are among the most closely studied people in the world. Classic studies of adolescence include Conant's (1959) blueprint for large, bureaucratized high schools to accommodate the baby-boom generation, Coleman's (1961) report on the "adolescent society" of the 1950s, when teenagers valued organized social life more than academic performance, Havighurst et al.'s (1962) case studies of young people (in high school and five years later) growing up in "River City," Friedenberg's critiques of the assaults of advertising and the mass media (1959) and the high school (1965) on the process of identity formation in adolescence, and Goodman's (1960) depiction of American teenagers as "growing up absurd." Adult concern about teenagers (a word coined in 1941) and the conditions shaping them crystallized in the postwar era. It was then that what we now call the "teen years" – a lengthy period of unproductive, school-based preparation involving reduced contact with adults and a concentration of experience in a youthful peer culture – had been created by a Depression-era society intent on keeping teens out of the labor force (Hine, 1999). According to Hine, the age-based stratification of American society, increasing the gap between physical and social maturity and intensifying young people's dependence on their peer culture, has become even more rigid since mid-century. Thus isolated, teenagers have come under a microscope of societal and scholarly concern.

In terms of this focus, consider the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY). The NLSY interviewed more than 12,000 young people aged 14-22 beginning in 1979, and yearly follow-up surveys have explored numerous aspects of respondents' lives (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). Areas covered by the survey include demographic characteristics, family background, aptitude and intelligence scores, high-school experiences, health, alcohol and drug use, illegal activities, attitudes and aspirations, work history, and migration. The annual Monitoring the Future survey (e.g., Johnston et al., 2000) encompasses questions about drug use, delinquent behavior, victimization, educational experiences, health, personality variables, interpersonal relationships, religion, politics, work and leisure, concern for others, and attitudes and values about subjects such as conservation, materialism, race relations, and social change. In Csikszentmihalyi and Larson's (1986) *Being Adolescent* study, "experience sampling" was used to study the daily lives of adolescents. A recent follow-up, the Alfred P. Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development, was a five-year longitudinal study of a racially,

ethnically, socioeconomically, and geographically diverse sample of American teenagers (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Its conclusions parallel those of an adolescent health study (cited in Hine, 1999) that highlights parental engagement as a major factor determining young people's well-being. Finally, the Rand Youth Poll (also cited in Hine, 1999) is an annual marketing survey that attests to the economic power of teens.

Americans generally, not only Jews, are deeply concerned about the health and well-being of their children. In line with this concern, much of the research about adolescents in the U.S. is focused on the incidence and consequences of high-risk behaviors (drug use, sex, violence) – or, as in the case of the Monitoring the Future Survey, public attention is directed mainly to those areas. Some research is alarmist in tone; for example, a report by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1996) characterized half of all 10- to 14-year-olds as being “at risk” of ruining their lives and damaging society. Ayman-Nolley and Taira (2000) comment that adolescent risk-taking “may in fact be the other side of the very mechanism that brings about healthy and much needed change in our society: the change for which the `adults’ are not willing to take the risks” (pp. 45-46).

In a review of more than 2000 journal articles published between 1985 and 1995, Ayman-Nolley and Taira (2000) found that psychological research reflects a cultural bias to view adolescents as troubled, unstable, vulnerable, and often antisocial. Positive aspects of adolescent development (e.g., creativity) are underrepresented in this research, yet the literature does offer much evidence of normal teenage development. In research replicated internationally, Offer and his colleagues (Offer, 1969; Offer & Offer, 1975; Offer et al., 1981) have repeatedly found that about 15 percent of teenagers have serious psychological problems – the same percentage as adults – and that the “generation gap” has been exaggerated by the popular media. In a study of teenagers’ current difficulties in adjusting to the internalized pressures of an achievement-driven society, Schneider and Stevenson (1999) nonetheless reassure us that the “overwhelming majority of teenagers ... graduate from high school, do not use hard drugs, are not criminals, and do not father or have babies while still in their teens” (pp. 3-4). But we know less about this full range of normative teenage attitudes and behaviors than about the non-normative.

As background for understanding the issues investigated and the findings of the JAS about Jewish adolescents, several themes that emerge from research on U.S. adolescents should be noted:

- White American teenagers typically live in a suburban world of affluence and relative uniformity, a world created by their parents and grandparents (Gaines, 1998; Gans, 1967; Jackson, 1985). At the same time, along with their parents and grandparents, they have experienced a breakdown of communal life in favor of personalism and individualism (Bellah et al., 1985).
- Contrary to the popular image of adolescent rebellion and parental impotence, only 5-10% of families experience a significant deterioration in parent-child relations during adolescence (Steinberg, 1990). Moreover, contrary to Harris'



(1998) conclusions concerning the lack of parental influence on children, mothers and fathers exert a strong influence on adolescents' values, aspirations, and behavior (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

- In contrast to the predominantly secure, programmed lives of teenagers in the 1950s, when many high-school graduates moved immediately into clearly defined adult career and gender roles, adolescents in the 1990s and 2000s face a more complex, uncertain future, including the prospect of extended schooling after high school. More than 90% of high-school seniors expect to go to college, and more than 70% look forward to working in professional jobs. Many of them envision futures very different from their parents' model, but are unsure and anxious about how to negotiate what has become a difficult transition to adulthood (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). What they do know is that they must excel in the competitive school environment.
- With the possible exception of the family, no single institution does more to shape the lives of American adolescents than schools. Teenagers spend the majority of their waking hours inside a single institution, immersed in an age-stratified community of peers (cf. Eckert, 1989, who also notes exceptions to this pattern). Along with academic pressures, a variety of school-based extracurricular activities concentrates teens' social life within the institutional setting (Coleman, 1961; Hine, 1999). High schools constitute mini-communities with their own norms, sub-cultures and status hierarchies. Research has documented the power of schools to orient students positively toward the institution's goals (Eckert, 1989; Gaines, 1998). These include participation in extracurricular activities, which, as a demonstration of community spirit, confers status and popularity. In this regimented atmosphere, unstructured individual pastimes tend to be neglected. For example, fewer than 20% of tenth-grade students read for pleasure nearly every day (Zill et al., 1995).
- As they get older, adolescents spend more and more time in paid employment. More than 80% of U.S. adolescents work during their high-school years, typically 15 to 20 hours a week. They are more likely to work and they work longer hours than their counterparts 20 years ago or their counterparts in other industrialized countries. Although much of this work takes place in the summer, teenage employment during the school year has been increasing in recent years. This increase has been attributed to the greater availability of part-time jobs and an extension of business hours in the service sector, as well as school shift schedules that allow students more continuous working hours (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Teenagers have thus been swept up into the U.S. work ethic. However, their exclusion from the productive adult economy has largely consigned them to work that lacks intrinsic or educational value. Although teenagers value some jobs for practical experience or to enhance their college applications, their principal goal is to earn spending money (Hine, 1999; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Some research has found this teenage employment to have detrimental effects

academically and psychologically (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). However, this view is not universally held (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

- Religious beliefs and values, whether merely asserted or deeply felt, appear to have a significant place in the lives of adolescents. More than half (58%) of high-school seniors reported in a national survey that religion was important to them (Bachman et al., 1997). In another survey, 76% of 13- to 17-year-olds said that they believed in a personal God, 29% believed that they had experienced the presence of God, and 74% prayed at least occasionally (Gallup & Bezilla, 1992). Attendance at religious services and the belief that religion is important in one's life are correlated with altruistic behavior in teenagers (Donahue & Benson, 1995). At the same time there is a decline in religious beliefs and practices during adolescence, especially in the transition to high school (Donahue & Benson, 1995). Notwithstanding the importance of religion in teenagers' lives, two recent studies of teenage conflicts (Hine, 1999; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999) barely mention religion or spirituality in their emphasis on school, work, and family. (Hine does characterize left- and right-wing religious revivalism among teenagers since the 1960s as a rebellious, subversive tendency.) It may be that religion and spirituality, whatever pull they may exert on adolescents, are not well integrated with their day-to-day activities and concerns, except (given the centrality of school in adolescent life) for those who attend parochial schools.
- Teenagers commonly engage in behaviors that carry significant risks. For example, among unmarried, white, non-Hispanic females aged 15-17 in 1995, 34% reported having had sexual intercourse (Abma et al., 1997). Alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs (especially marijuana, which some teenagers associate with alcohol and tobacco as not really a drug) are also very much a part of the teenage landscape. Thus, for example, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1996) survey data indicate that 31% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported regular drinking, while 25% reported illicit drug use. Among a group of 12<sup>th</sup> graders demographically similar to Jewish adolescents in the 1998 Monitoring the Future survey, 76% reported having been drunk at some point in their lives. Two-thirds (66%) had smoked cigarettes, one-quarter (26%) regularly. In this sample 65% reported some lifetime marijuana use, and half of those reported current use.
- The pressures and conflicts of teenage life are further reflected in a suicide rate which, between 1980 and 1997, increased 109% for 10- to 14-year-olds and 11% for 15- to 19-year-olds (Centers for Disease Control, 2000). There are indications that these rates have leveled off (and even declined for older teens) since the early 1990s. Nonetheless, whereas suicide was the eighth leading cause of death nationally in 1998, it was the sixth leading cause in the 5-14 age group and third among those age 15-24. Only accidents and homicides kill more 15- to 24-year-olds than does suicide (National Center for Health Statistics, 2000).

These data, and the characterizations of adolescent life they project, can serve as benchmarks for interpreting the findings reported below.

### *The Adolescent Generation: Studies of Jewish Adolescents*

Only in the past decade has a substantial body of research begun to accumulate about Jewish-American adolescents, both in their uniqueness as Jews and in their typicality as Americans. From the data in the NJPS it is clear that Jewish families stand out from the general population in a number of ways (Keysar et al., 2000). A large majority live in intact two-parent families. These are small families, since few Jewish mothers have more than three children and most have fewer. When divorce occurs, fathers are much more likely to retain sole or joint custody than they are in the general population. Jewish adolescents grow up in relatively affluent households with well-educated parents. The combination of high incomes and small families enables parents to spend more on each child. For example, 38% of Jewish children attend private school, as compared with 11% of U.S. children overall. Stable families and high socioeconomic status together suggest well-being. As Kosmin and Keysar (2000) put it, "Jewish teens in the 1990s are a fortunate generation which has largely avoided the traumas associated with family breakup and residential dislocation..." (p. 5).

Regionally, young Jews are still clustered in the northeastern United States and, more generally, on the two coasts. Among the Core Jewish population in the NJPS, 41% live in the Northeast, 27% in the West, 20% in the South, and 13% in the Midwest. Migration, however, as described above, is altering these patterns. Whereas only 21% of the Core Jewish population of all ages lives in the western United States, 27% of those under 18 do (Keysar et al., 2000).

A major contribution to our understanding of Jewish youth is Keysar et al.'s (2000) extraction of demographic and sociological findings about children and adolescents from the 1990 NJPS data. Based on interviews of adult household members rather than the children themselves, this study examined how different environments and household structures affect long-term Jewish socialization, what institutional and community interventions are needed to supplement family socialization, and what ongoing trends in the demography and socialization of Jewish youth can be predicted. Jewish adolescents raised in traditional nuclear families are more likely to live Jewishly than those in single-parent households, and those raised in households observing traditional Jewish practices are more likely to socialize with Jewish peers and join Jewish activities. Parents mediate the relationship between children and the community. Because parental decision-making is the critical factor determining children's Jewish education, parents must be the primary targets of influence of community interventions. Yet even while the secularization of children's lives reflects the preferences of many younger Jewish parents, the parental monopoly of influence over children is eroding. Because the family alone cannot be relied on to transmit Jewish values in an era of dispersion and assimilation, the community can compensate through Jewish schools, camps, youth groups, community centers, and other institutions.

Citing Phillips (1997), Keysar et al. note that early socialization through informal Jewish education (specifically, two or more years of Jewish sleep-away camp or a Jewish youth group or an Israel trip during the teen years) can influence friendship and dating

patterns in a way that is associated with a marked reduction in intermarriage. The need for such socialization is intensified by Keysar et al.'s ten-year projections from the 1990 population data. NJPS 2000 may show, they predict, that as many as two-thirds of the children of Jewish parents are living in mixed families and that the number of "effectively" Jewish children has decreased by 25 percent. The numbers of children growing up in non-normative families and in areas of low Jewish population density are likely to increase as well. The researchers note that, given the growing size of the teenage population at the turn of the millennium, it is imperative that the organized Jewish community develops effective agents of socialization to reach teenagers when they are most likely to "drop out."

As distinct from this cross-sectional study based on adult interviews, Kosmin and Keysar's (2000) survey of Conservative Jewish teenagers and their parents in the U.S. and Canada have had a longitudinal dimension. As part of the North American Study of Conservative Synagogues and Their Members, the teenagers were first interviewed in 1995 during the year following their *bar/bat mitzvah*, at the age of 13 or 14. They were interviewed again in 1999-2000 at the age of 17-18. (A third wave of data collection is planned for their late college years.) In the first survey, Kosmin and Keysar's adolescents strongly resembled their parents in religious practices, attitudes toward Israel, and friendships with other Jews in their synagogue. On the other hand, they differed markedly from their parents in being less concerned about anti-Semitism, far more accepting of intermarriage, and much more likely to assert that belief in God was essential to being a Jew. As would be predicted from the convergence of gender roles both in the larger society and within the different streams of Judaism to varying degrees (including uniform training for girls and boys in Conservative synagogues), gender differences in the teenagers' religious attitudes were practically nonexistent (Keysar & Kosmin, 1997).

The follow-up survey confirmed and expanded upon these findings. This group of Conservative adolescents had an even higher level of family stability and family Jewish commitment than the national Jewish population sampled by the NJPS. Like that larger, more diverse sample, most of them saw Judaism as multi-dimensional, that is, as a religion, a peoplehood, and a culture. Confirming Cohen's (1998) finding about young adult Jews, these teenagers were more religiously and less ethnically oriented than the older Jewish generation. However, they were not very observant, and their level of religious practice fell off in their teenage years both from their parents' modest levels and from their own *bar/bat mitzvah*-age involvement. Moreover, their beliefs about religion (ostensibly formed by a Conservative background) changed, with fewer adopting the Orthodox position and more the Reform position (Kosmin & Keysar, 2000).

Still, they maintained strong personal Jewish involvements throughout their high-school years. Over 90% continued to go to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and/or Yom Kippur, three-quarters were involved in some organized Jewish activities, and half participated in an Israel experience. More than half (55-60%) had some Jewish involvement into their senior year of high school, and 55% regarded marrying a Jewish partner as very important for themselves personally. Kosmin and Keysar conclude that, for those educated in Conservative synagogues, the concern that the *bar/bat mitzvah* will

be an exit from Jewish life is largely unfounded. Yet, as Saxe (in press) has noted, the declining level of involvement means that fewer of this already self-selected group are on a path to intense involvement in the Jewish community.

Kosmin and Keysar tested three possible causal explanations for the different levels of Jewish identity and engagement shown by these teenagers. Gender and region (within the U.S., leaving aside Canada) had no explanatory power. What did explain the differences was an experiential model that scaled various identity-building experiences into a hierarchy of intensity. This scale of intensity of Jewish socialization produced highly robust, statistically significant differences in most measures of identity and engagement.

A study with important implications for the development of Jewish identity and for adolescent programming was not a study of adolescents at all, but of American-born Jews aged 22-52 in New York (Horowitz, 2000). It did, however, ask these (predominantly young) adults to report about some of their experiences in childhood and adolescence. This in-depth study of the “connections and journeys” of American Jews showed that Jewish identity is not a static, all-or-none trait. Rather, it is dynamic, waxing and waning and changing direction in response to various influences. In this study 60% of the subjects experienced an evolution in their relationship to being Jewish. Moreover, for those who did not have the intensive early exposure to Judaism characteristic of an Orthodox upbringing, later voluntary experiences such as Jewish youth groups, Jewish studies or Hillel-like activities in college, and trips to Israel had a significant relationship to the development of Jewish identity.

These findings can only intensify the revival of interest in informal programs to involve children and adolescents in Jewish life (see, e.g., Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach, 1990; JCC Association, 1998; JESNA, 1998; Klarfeld & Sales, 1996). Although such programs can be expected to play a critical role, the importance of sound evaluation studies is evident. Studies of participation in youth groups, Jewish summer camps, and Israel experiences have had promising results, but few have measured the affects of such participation on adult Jewish identity (Sales, 1996). A study of 15 programs with acknowledged histories of accomplishment identified seven common factors in their success: staff leadership, group process, peer influence, Judaic substance, the impact of the setting, the amount of time participants spend together, and lay support (Alexander & Russ, 1992).

### *Israel Experience Programs*

Israel experience programs have been a special focus of evaluation research – an emphasis likely to be heightened by the high-profile Birthright Israel initiative (cf. Post, 1999). These studies of a potentially transformative experience provide a window into the thoughts and feelings of Jewish teenagers, especially as to what can bring them into a closer relationship with the Jewish community. However, except for short- and long-term outcome comparisons, these studies are limited to participants; they do not constitute general-population data.

Research on Israel experience programs includes evaluation components built into the programs themselves (e.g., Cohen, 1994; 1995; Sales, 1998, 1999) and ethnographic studies of high-school trips that analyze the dynamics underlying successful experiences (e.g., Goldberg, 1995; Heilman, 1995). As summarized by Mittelberg (1999, p. xiv), this body of research indicates that the Israel trip “is a unique experience that connects American Jews to their past, to Israel’s present, and...to the future well-being of the Jewish people.” Nonetheless, as Mittelberg (1999) and Chazan (1997) note, much of this research only establishes an *association* between trips to Israel and an interest in Israel and the Jewish people. The effect of self-selection for the trips by those already more interested in Judaism must also be considered.

The encouraging findings of such research are part of the background and inspiration for the ambitious Birthright Israel program, designed to give many young Diaspora Jews an expenses-paid educational trip to Israel. An initial report on the experience of the first wave of participants (Saxe et al., 2000) indicates that the program had a very positive immediate impact, measured three months after the trip (it remains to track these findings longitudinally). By comparing participants’ attitudes before and after the trip and by comparing participants’ responses with those of non-participants, this study addressed the direction of causality in the association between visiting Israel and being engaged with Judaism and the Jewish people. It should be noted, however, that the Birthright Israel “gift” has been limited thus far to young people aged 18 to 26, somewhat older than the teenagers who are the focus of the present study.

### *Jewish Adolescents in the American Context*

What is lacking to date is an exploration of the relationship between the Jewish and American aspects of the lives of adolescents. Few surveys of U.S. teens, the Jewish samples are too small for reliable findings. Studies of Jewish teenagers specifically, on the other hand, have been concerned almost exclusively with Jewish questions and preoccupations. There is much to learn from research that treats Jewish-American teenagers as both Jews and Americans, comparing their responses on general, non-Jewish questions to those of their non-Jewish peers and examining how their Jewish concerns and self-identifications may shed light on their secular ones (and vice versa). An index of the paucity of such research is Sales’ (1996) catalogue of studies of U.S. teenagers generally and Jewish teenagers specifically along various dimensions (e.g., demographics, adolescent development, views and values, religion). Although much useful research in both realms is found, typically the questions investigated are different, so that little direct comparison of findings is possible.

The most comprehensive survey of Jewish-American adolescents undertaken to date was conducted in Minneapolis (Leffert, 1997). A low response rate of 37% limited the applicability of the findings by skewing the sample toward those with high levels of engagement in the Jewish community. Nonetheless, the Minneapolis findings were generally consistent with the emergent pattern seen in other adolescent and adult studies. The adolescents who responded to the survey reported that they cared deeply about being Jewish and about Jewish causes (including Israel and the Holocaust). However, their concern was expressed not in synagogue attendance or ritual observance, but by

enthusiastic participation in family celebrations and social activities. They claimed that they prayed regularly, although not in the traditional communal context. They were impatient with denominational differences, integrated non-Jewish friends comfortably into their lives, and were open to dating and marrying non-Jews. At the same time, a substantial majority considered it important to raise their children as Jews.

Herring and Leffert (1997), who designed the Minneapolis study, interpreted the findings as confirming Fishman's (1996) concept of "coalescence" as an evolving form of Jewish identity. According to Fishman, whereas previous generations of Jews struggled to harmonize two different cultural realms – the American and the Jewish – today's American Jews increasingly do not even perceive a boundary between the two. Rather, the two value systems have merged, or coalesced, into one. Herring and Leffert also anticipated Cohen and Eisen's (2000) findings about adults when they noted that the Jewish identity of the adolescents surveyed in Minneapolis was centered more on self and family than on the larger community. Herring and Leffert concluded that "the American values of autonomy and individualism have become merged with the Jewish values of community and collective responsibility to produce adolescents...who have strong, personal Jewish feelings but who choose to exercise their faith on their terms and in their own ways" (p. 10).

An important supplement to these findings is provided by the JCC Maccabi Teen Survey (Sales, 1994). The respondents did not constitute a representative sample of American Jewish youth, since all were participants in an event that was both Jewish and athletic. A large majority (82%) came from in-married Jewish families, many with multiple attachments to the Jewish community. Notwithstanding this skew, all levels of engagement with Judaism and a range of denominational affiliations (one-third Conservative, one-third Reform, 9% Orthodox, and 17% "just Jewish") were represented, and the on-site administration made possible a nearly 100% response rate. The survey placed Jewish issues in the context of overall life issues, with questions about how the teenagers spent their time, what was important to them personally, what thoughts and concerns preoccupied them, and what social problems they wanted to help solve. Being Jewish was highly important to a majority (62%) of these teens, with holiday observances the main focus of their Jewish identity. Although they were very busy with homework and (58%) paid employment during the school year, nearly half (44%) were involved in formal Jewish education (afternoon or Sunday school). Developing skills and abilities and spending time with friends were of near-universal importance to them, and they expressed greatest concern over their personal future (college and career) and school performance. Concern with personal attractiveness rose while concern with substance abuse declined from 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Students also wanted to make a difference by being involved in social action. Half indicated that they wanted to do something about HIV/AIDS, followed by anti-Semitism (40%) and crime and violence (37%). The threat of nuclear destruction, critical to the previous generation, barely registered. The Maccabi Teen Survey has gained in importance insofar as key findings have been replicated in community surveys (Jewish Community Centers of Greater Boston, 1996; Leinwand, 1996; Research and Planning Group, 1997). These studies present a remarkably consistent picture of young people who are very busy with academic and social activities

associated with school, stressed by issues of achievement and time allocation, and interested (although not always active) in community service and social change. They care about being Jewish, but often do not express that allegiance through ritual observance or organizational activity (JESNA, 1998).

### **Present Study**

Although researchers have learned a great deal about American adolescents, and about Jewish adolescents specifically, the foregoing discussion has identified significant gaps in this knowledge. We do not know enough about the positive activities and aspirations of teenagers, about how they see their lives and where their lives are going. In particular, we do not know enough about their potential for spirituality and for involvement in a community based on religious affiliation. There is also more to be learned about Jewish teenagers with respect to the variables considered in national surveys of teenagers. The present Jewish Adolescent Study (JAS) begins to fill these gaps in the existing knowledge base about Jewish adolescents by placing Jewish identity and involvement in the broader context of teenagers' lives. Specifically:

- The survey instrument focuses on issues such as school, extracurricular activities, popularity, and college plans. Questions about specific Jewish variants of general themes are embedded into each section.
- The context of teenagers' lives is assessed both in terms of parent and peer influences. To examine the influence of the family environment, teenagers' responses are matched with those of their parents. This allows a direct assessment of the relationship between parent and child. A sociometric questionnaire gathering data on each adolescent's closest friends allows for detailed description of the peer networks of respondents.
- A population of recent *b'nei mitzvah* from twenty synagogues and three Jewish day schools was surveyed, allowing the assessment of institutional impact on the lives of Jewish teenagers.
- The inclusion of a Jewish day school over-sample makes it possible to compare the social and academic contexts of these schools with those of the public schools.
- The successful effort to obtain a high response rate ensures participation by teenagers of diverse levels of Jewish commitment.

As described in detail below, the JAS surveyed teenagers who, by virtue of having been a *bar/bat mitzvah* in a Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist or unaffiliated synagogue, had some formal Jewish education and some involvement in a Jewish institutional context. From that baseline, the study explores the degree to which interest and engagement in both formal and informal Jewish education are maintained. In addition, the survey allows evaluation of the degree to which other activities (curricular and extracurricular, including paid employment) supplant or reinforce Jewish



involvements. Beginning with basic demographic information about who these teenagers are and the households they come from, the JAS compares their attitudes and practices with those of their parents in the areas of Jewish education, observance, and endogamy. It examines the Jewish and non-Jewish peer networks formed by teenagers in neighborhoods of different Jewish population density. It describes the dating patterns and prospective mating choices of respondents against the background of parental and other environmental pressures toward inmarriage or mixed marriage. It asks what being Jewish means to these young people and how that relates to their larger search for meaning in life. Finally, the survey examines teenagers' private behaviors, in particular, their involvement with alcohol and drugs, as well as their sexual activity. Gender differences are noted where they are significant. The findings provide a comprehensive account of the inner and outer experiences of high school-age Jewish-American teenagers.

## **STUDY METHODS**

### **Study Population**

The JAS attempted to survey a representative sample of adolescents, post-*b'nai mitzvah*, age 13-17. The sample focuses on households with teenagers who have become *b'nei mitzvah* in Boston-area (Eastern Massachusetts) synagogues over the past five years. The greater Boston area was chosen both for convenience and for the diversity of communities it contained. The sampling strategy was designed to develop research whose findings can guide policymaking in communities nationwide. Although a national sample of Jewish youth could have met the criterion of representativeness, it would have treated the teenagers in isolation from the community contexts that shape Jewishness. It was decided, instead, to focus on a limited geographic area that encompassed a diversity of Jewish communities.

Although often characterized as a community with a distinct character, Jewish life in the greater Boston area is notable for its internal diversity. The study capitalized on this diversity by selecting regions for analysis according to the density of the Jewish population. The goal was not to produce a sample that represented the Boston Jewish community, but to maximize the variance within a large metropolitan area and allow the data to suggest community-level effects that occur in communities of different sizes across the country.

The greater Boston area afforded a number of advantages, along with the wealth of local knowledge that could be drawn on at each phase of the study. Using data from the 1990 U.S. Census 5% PUMS and the 1995 Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) Demographic Study (Israel, 1997), towns and regions in the Eastern Massachusetts area were classified as having a high, moderate or low Jewish population density. Relying on these data, along with the advice of observers of Boston Jewish life, three areas were selected based on the density of the Jewish population. Within each region, lists of every boy and girl who had become a *bar* or *bat mitzvah* at local synagogues over the past five years were procured. Only synagogues with education programs were included in the study.<sup>2</sup> The regions were selected not only to maximize variation in the density of the Jewish population, but also to ensure that each would provide a sufficient number of Jewish adolescents for the study.

### **Sampling and Interview Procedures**

In an effort to obtain the number of respondents needed to achieve sufficient statistical power, in 18 of the 20 participating congregations the entire population of *b'nei mitzvah* over the past five years was contacted. In the two largest congregations this population was sampled. To ensure adequate representation of Jewish day school (JDS) students, an over-sample of students from Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and

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<sup>2</sup> The practical implication of this limitation was to eliminate several *minyanim* that do not have a paid Rabbi or formal education program.

community day schools was added. Because of insufficient participation (explained in the Methodological Appendix), respondents from Orthodox synagogues and day schools were excluded from the analysis.

During the Spring and Summer, 1999, telephone interviews were conducted with parents of the teenagers included in the sampling frame.<sup>3</sup> The calls had three purposes: first, to determine the eligibility of the teenagers in the sampling frame; second, to obtain parental consent to the teens' participation; third, to obtain interview data from the parents. The interview, which lasted about twenty minutes, gathered information on parental and household demographics, Jewish practice, and opinions related to items on the adolescent questionnaire.

After parental consent was obtained, a 12-page, machine-readable questionnaire was mailed to the teenagers. Included with the instrument and cover letter was a \$10 cash incentive ("honorarium"), "a token of our appreciation." The questionnaire (see Survey Appendix) was divided into the following sections:

- How you spend your time
- Being Jewish
- Values
- School, work and future plans
- How you spend your summers
- Opinions and feelings
- You and your family
- Your friends
- Private behaviors
- Teen Israel trip
- Comments and follow-up

Through the use of the cash incentive and follow-up mailings, extremely high response rates were obtained (87% of parents and 82% of adolescents contacted). The final data set consisted of 1,284 adolescent respondents from 1,118 households. (For further detail see Methodological Appendix.)

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<sup>3</sup> The interviews were conducted by a New York-based opinion research company (Schulman, Ronca, Bucavallas [SRBI]).

## **STUDY FINDINGS**

Our initial premise was that Jewish teenagers are, first of all, adolescents, trying to make it as American youth. The goal was to understand how they viewed their lives and to what extent their Jewish education and experiences affected their lives generally as well as their participation in the Jewish community. These data were collected in the wake of the Columbine High School tragedy, a dramatic manifestation of the difficulties of American adolescence that were in the forefront of the minds of teenagers and adults. How the context of American adolescence shapes the lives of young Jews is the focus of this report.

### **Understanding Jewish Lives in Context: An Example**

Consider the following statistics: As Jewish teenagers enter high school, the number who, over the course of a year, read even one Jewish book or story for pleasure drops from 62% to 49%. For those inclined to draw conclusions about the state of Jewish life among American Jewish youth, this might be taken as evidence of the proposition that *bar/bat mitzvah* marks a graduation from Jewish involvement rather than the start of Jewish adulthood. Such a conclusion would be misleading, however, because it ignores the broader context in which Jewish pleasure reading occurs. Many high school students, it turns out, stop reading anything for pleasure on a regular basis, Jewish or not. Weekly pleasure reading drops from 49% in junior high to 33% the first years of high school. In their Jewish lives as in their broader lives, teenagers are teenagers and will behave as such.

### **Domains of Achievement and Sociability: School, Extracurricular activities, Work**

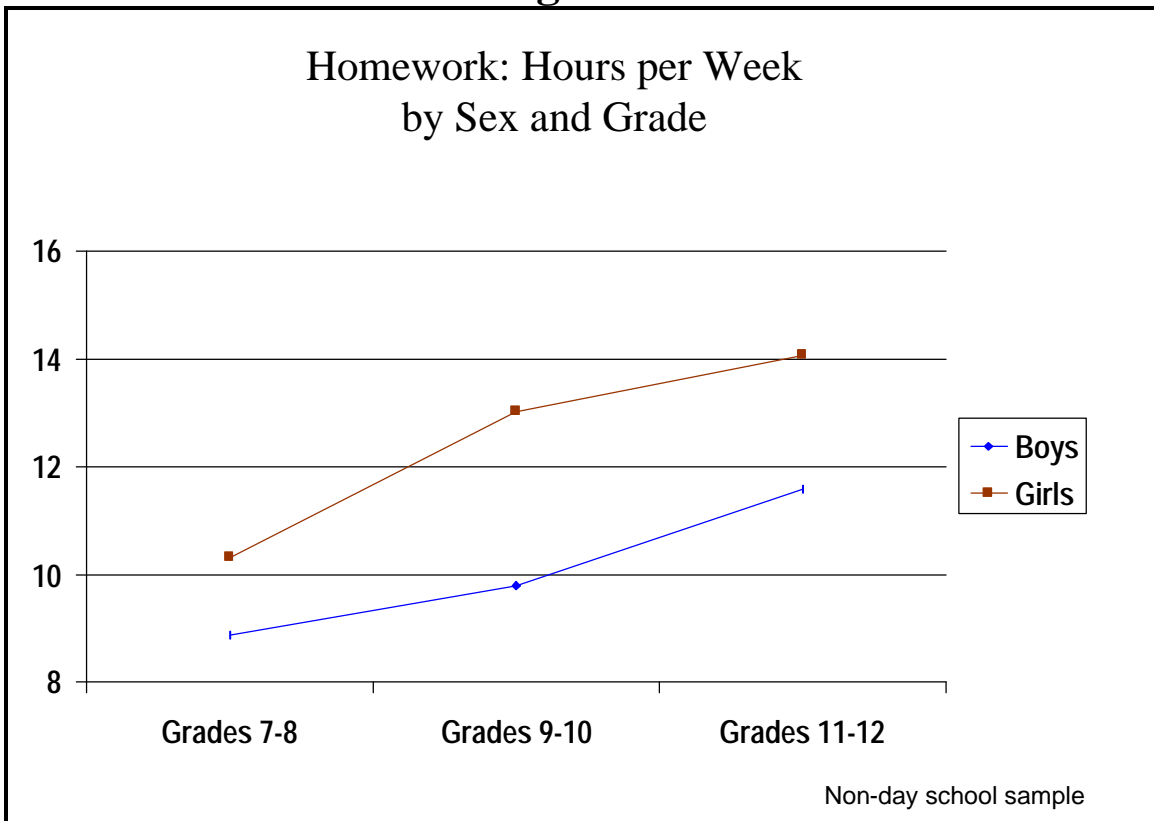
#### **Academics**

School exerts a powerful, even dominating influence on teenagers' lives. The students surveyed in the JAS are no exception to the general rule that teenagers' lives are centered around school. Success in school is important to Jewish teenagers. Most have had positive experiences with schooling: When asked how often they enjoyed the past year in school, 41% responded "Often" or "Always," compared to only 21% who responded "Seldom" or "Never." The remainder said they "Sometimes" enjoyed it. They also take their schoolwork seriously. Three out of four respondents reported that they never or seldom failed to turn in their assignments. A similar proportion (72%) said they never played hooky, although this varied greatly by age. Whereas only 9% of middle school students ever skipped a day of school without permission, 47% of high school juniors and seniors had. But even they reported engaging in such behavior only infrequently.

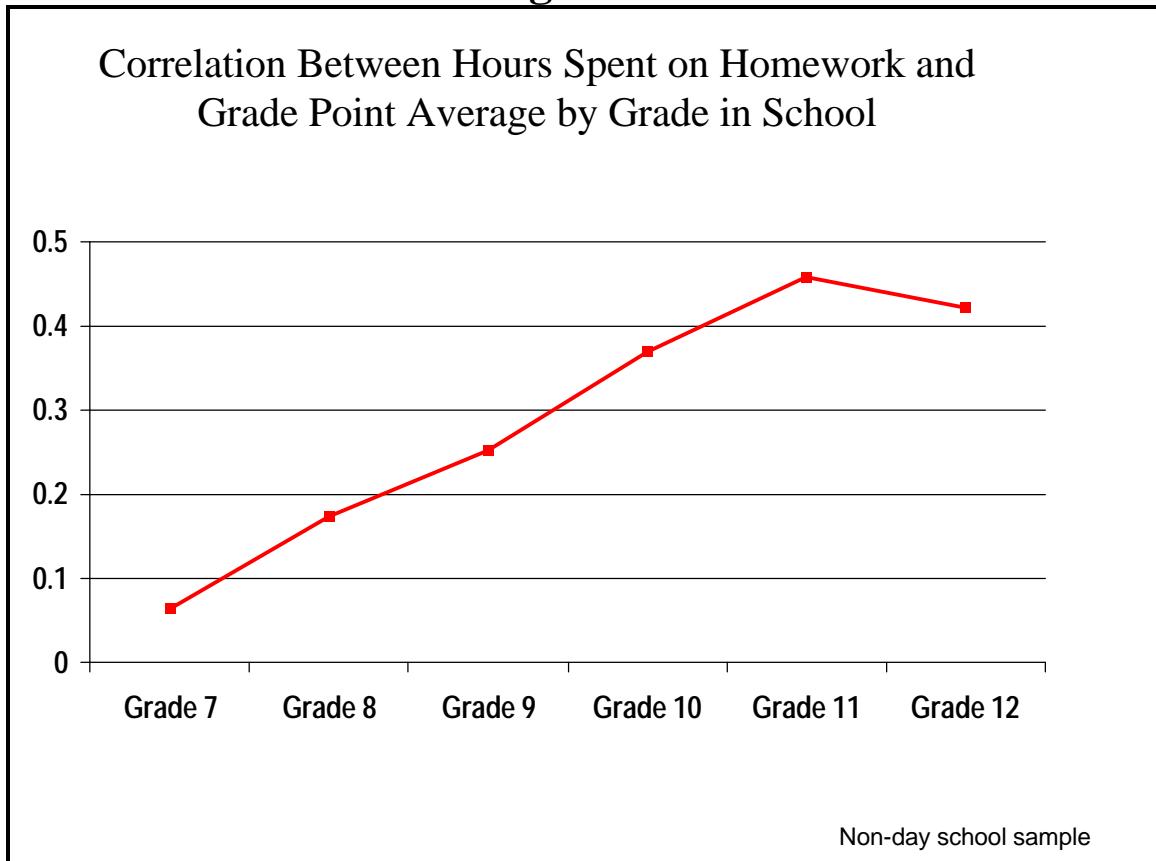
The occasional liberties taken by older students do not mean that school becomes less important as teenagers get older. On the contrary, the ability to judge which rules to adhere to and which to break is a mark of growing confidence in their own ability to make responsible decisions. This confidence is warranted, as the teenagers we surveyed

generally met growing pressures and increasing responsibilities with a seriousness of purpose that would make their parents proud. The average amount of time girls devoted to homework rose from 10.5 hours per week in grades seven and eight to 14 hours in grades eleven and twelve (see Figure 1). For boys, the comparable figures were 8.8 and 11.6. These students had good reason to study hard: the correlation between hours spent on homework and grade point average rose steadily from correlation that is not different from zero ( $r = .08$ ) to a peak in grade eleven ( $r = .46$ ; see Figure 2). Thus, the relationship between time invested and grades returned was negligible in middle school, but a major factor in academic success precisely at the time when college applications loomed largest.

**Figure 1**



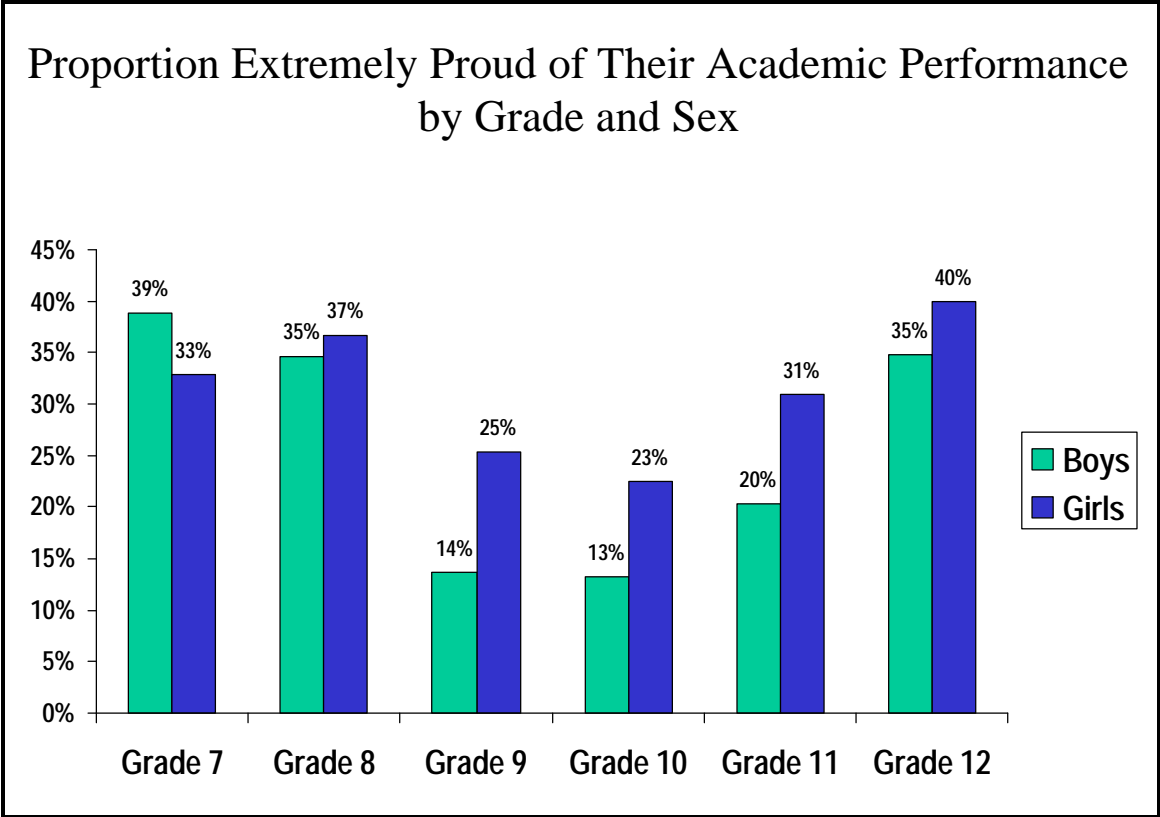
**Figure 2**



As the teenagers progressed through middle school and then high school, the objective increase in the institutions' academic demands was accompanied by a subjective perception of a much more competitive school environment. Whereas one out of four 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported "quite a bit" or "a great deal" of competition for grades in their school, that proportion was double (53%) for high school freshmen and sophomores, and almost triple (71%) for juniors and seniors. With the transition from a not-very-demanding middle school to a suddenly competitive high school environment where hard work would be rewarded and slackers left behind, academic self-esteem declined substantially.

Consistent with a series of important sex differences among adolescents, the shock of academic demands hit boys harder than girls (see Figure 3). The percentage of boys who said they were extremely proud of their academic performance plummeted from 35% in grade eight to only 14% in the freshman year of high school. For girls, the drop was still significant but less pronounced, from 37% to 25%. Only by the end of senior year, after colleges had sent out their acceptance letters, did the pride in achievement again reach its eighth-grade levels. This rebound is not surprising in view of the quality of respondents' college enrollments; more than 70% of graduating seniors reported that they would be attending an Ivy League or other elite university.

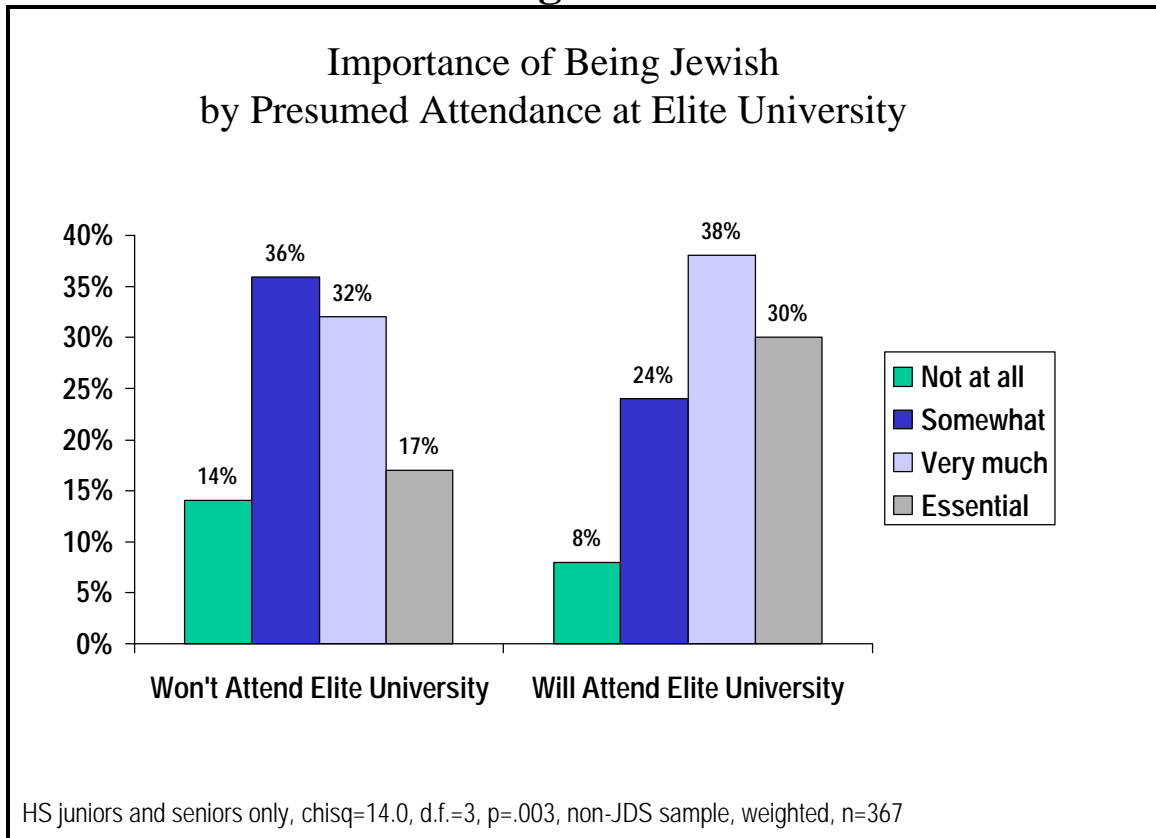
**Figure 3**



Among those who aspired to an elite university, those for whom being Jewish was “extremely” or “very” important were disproportionately represented (see Figure 4). A relationship between Jewish commitment and social class has been documented among adults. Intermarriage is more common among the less affluent (DellaPergola, 1991). The cost of Jewish living (which can include, for example, synagogue dues, Federation donations, day school and summer camp tuition, and a premium paid for kosher meat) may make moderate- and low-income households feel that the Jewish community is neither affordable nor welcoming (Woocher, 1997). The finding of higher Jewish commitment among teenagers with high secular ambitions suggests that reproduction of class bias within the Jewish community is already evident in the late high school years. Patterns of extracurricular activity reinforce this notion (see below, *Extracurricular Activities*). From the perspective of Jewish educators, the phenomenon is both encouraging and discouraging: Contrary to concerns about competition for Jewish teenagers’ attention, the best and the brightest are more likely, not less, to engage themselves Jewishly. On the other hand, these findings can be read as evidence of a failure to engage teenagers irrespective of their success in the secular world.



**Figure 4**



Both the academic demands and the peer culture of high school encouraged students to treat their schoolwork seriously. This was likely reinforced by the looming challenge of college applications. Although the pressures to succeed had deleterious consequences for self-esteem, the teenagers generally took their academic responsibilities seriously, reaped the benefits of their hard work in terms of acceptance to colleges they deemed prestigious, and still managed to enjoy themselves in the process. In short, these teenagers generally manifested a pro-scholastic attitude and were rewarded for it.

This positive orientation towards education is noted in order to make clear that the generally negative experience with Jewish supplementary schooling cannot be attributed to a fundamental antagonism towards things scholastic. As indicated by the survey findings, the Hebrew school experience typically was a discouraging one—a finding that showed little variation across the nineteen synagogues in the study.<sup>4</sup> Respondents were asked to compare their Hebrew school experience at age 11 or 12 with their public

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<sup>4</sup> Variance components tests revealed that the synagogues accounted for 10% of the variance in reported boredom in religious school, and 1% or less of the variance in enjoyment of religious school, failure to complete its assignments and frequency of skipping a day without permission.

school<sup>5</sup> experience at the same age. More than half of the adolescents surveyed reported that they seldom or never enjoyed Hebrew school. Two-thirds always or often felt bored, compared with one-third in public school. One-quarter said they regularly failed to turn in their Hebrew school assignments, three times the percentage in public schools and Jewish day schools. In short, supplementary schooling was neither fun, interesting, nor taken seriously by many of the children who ultimately became *b'nei mitzvah*.

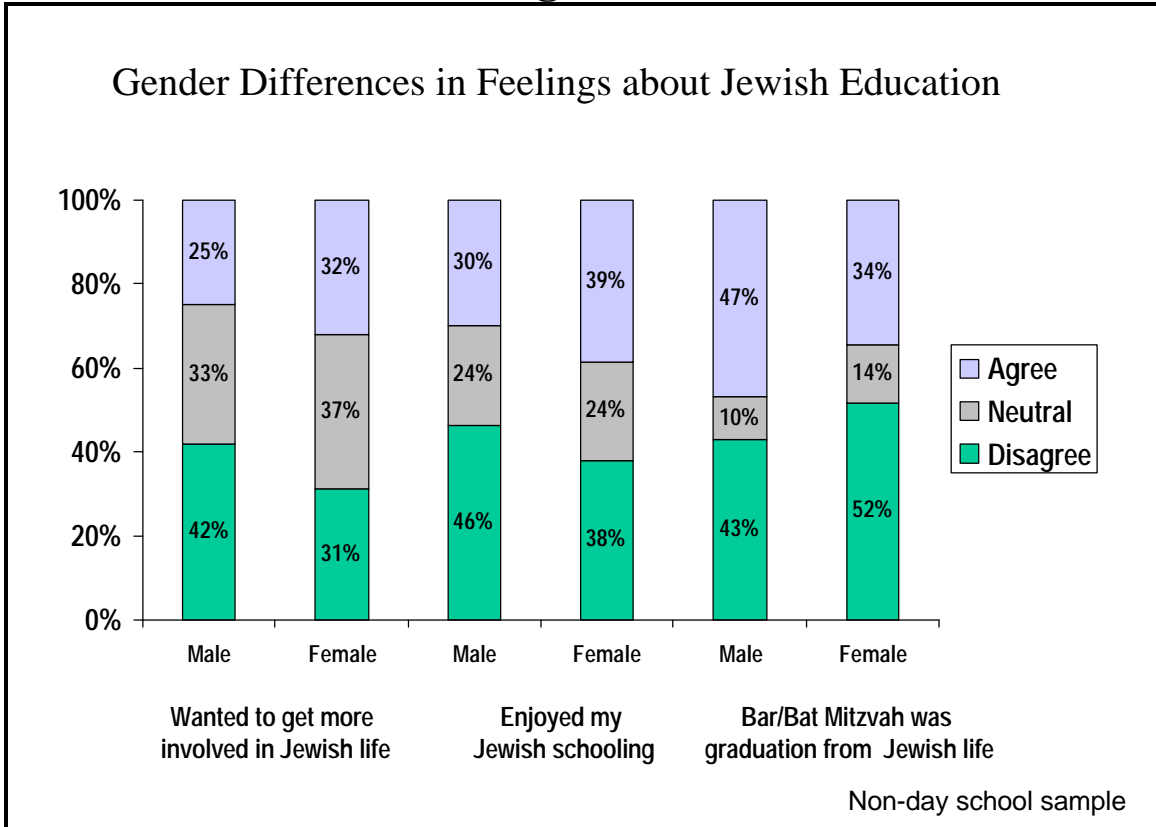
These negative attitudes were more pronounced among boys than girls (see Figure 5). Given the statement, "I have enjoyed my Jewish schooling," 46% of boys disagreed while only 30% agreed. The girls who took a position on the question split evenly between agreement and disagreement. With the statement, "My Bar Mitzvah was basically my graduation from Jewish school," 47% of boys agreed while 43% disagreed; among girls, 34% agreed while 52% disagreed. The statement, "After my Bar Mitzvah, I wanted to get more involved in Jewish life," yielded disagreement from 42% of boys, agreement from only 25%. Among girls, 37% were neutral while the remainder split evenly between agreement and disagreement.

Actual participation in formal Jewish education showed a decline consistent with these attitudes (although an even steeper decline might have been predicted), with the same gender differences persisting. Weekly participation declined steadily from 60% in 7<sup>th</sup> grade to 22% in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Girls participated in greater proportions than boys in every grade except 9<sup>th</sup> (see Figure 6).

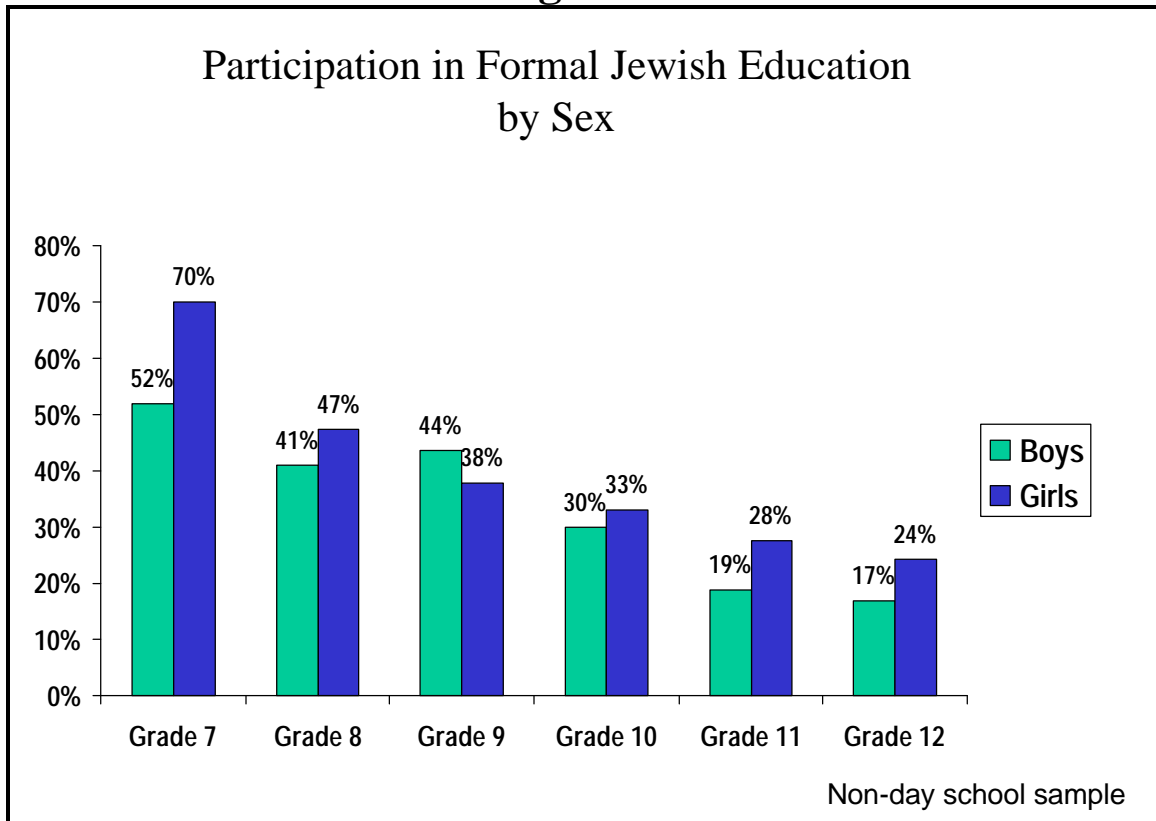
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<sup>5</sup> For stylistic purposes, we refer here to public schools. The reader, however, should be aware that these do include non-sectarian and Catholic private schools. Twelve percent of the respondents are currently enrolled in such schools.

**Figure 5**

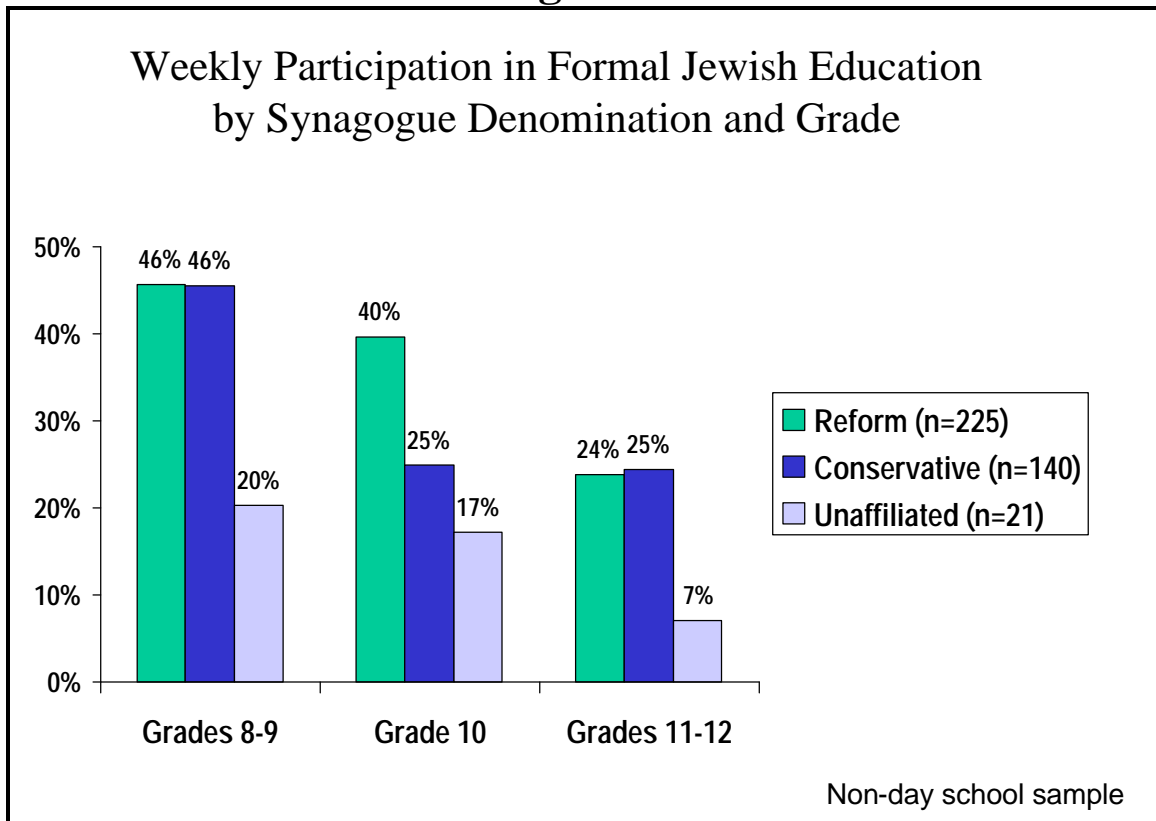


**Figure 6**



Enrollment in post-*bar/bat mitzvah* Jewish schooling can be viewed as a function of both supply (programs offered) and demand (teenagers' and parents' desires). Demand characteristics alone do not account for the decline in enrollment in formal Jewish education, as is evidenced by differential rates of enrollment among the denominations. From rates above 45% in grades 8 and 9, participation by Conservative youth dropped by about 20% in 10<sup>th</sup> grade (see Figure 7). The members of Reform congregations staved off a similar dip in participation for an additional year, probably because the normative status of Confirmation ceremonies in the Reform movement serves as an inducement to maintain enrollment until that point. This does not necessarily mean that the solution would be to postpone Confirmation (or better yet, *bar mitzvah*) until the end of twelfth grade. Decisions regarding the structuring of high school Jewish educational programs are not only the result of institutional history, but reflect an ongoing adaptation to what local policy-makers believe the market will bear. Postponing Confirmation may reduce its appeal as an achievable target for teenagers, and attrition may result in any case. Nevertheless, to the extent that the supply of formal Jewish education dries up following certain ceremonial attainments, it is worth exploring ways in which supply actually structures demand and helps cause the very problem educators would like to solve.

**Figure 7**



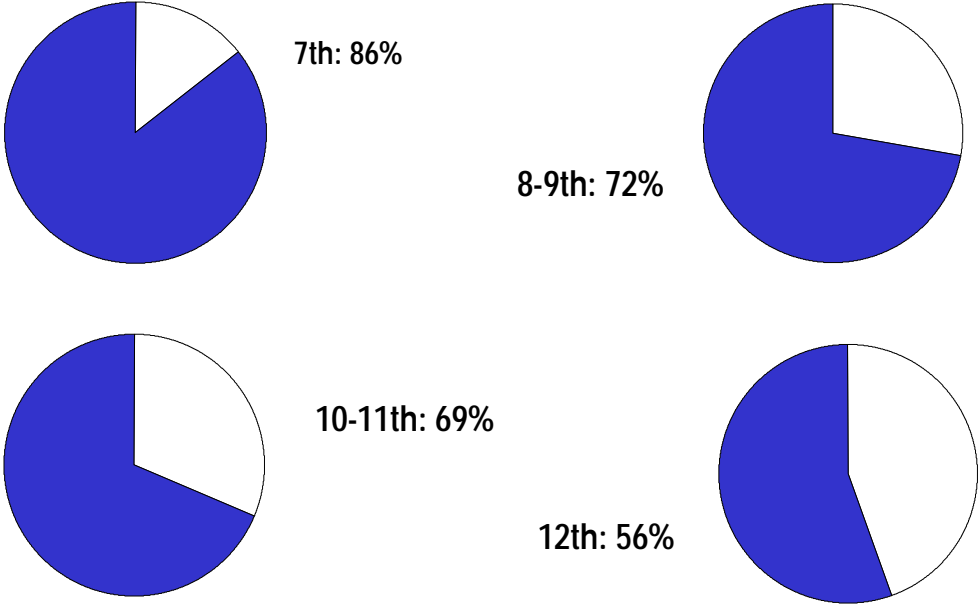
Other factors that influence enrollment in post-*bar/bat mitzvah* Jewish education will be discussed in the section on parental influence.

The drop in Jewish school enrollment is a primary factor accounting for what appears to be an overall trend of disengagement in Jewish life (see Figure 8). An index of Jewish involvement was created to measure participation in at least one of five Jewish educational, volunteer or recreational activities.<sup>6</sup> Whereas nearly all adolescent respondents participated in one or more such activities in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, just over half did so in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Such a rough measure, however, fails to capture the nuanced shift in patterns of participation away from the juvenile roles of student and camper, toward the more adult-like roles of tourist and worker, as will be described later (see *When Schoolwork Disappears*, below).

<sup>6</sup> The index consisted of the following activities: Formal Jewish education once a month or more; Volunteer work for a Jewish organization once every few months or more; Jewish youth group participation at least once during the year; Jewish summer camp, Israel experience, or work/study program during Summer 1999; or membership in and use of a JCC at least once during the year.

**Figure 8**

**Index of Jewish Participation  
by Grade**



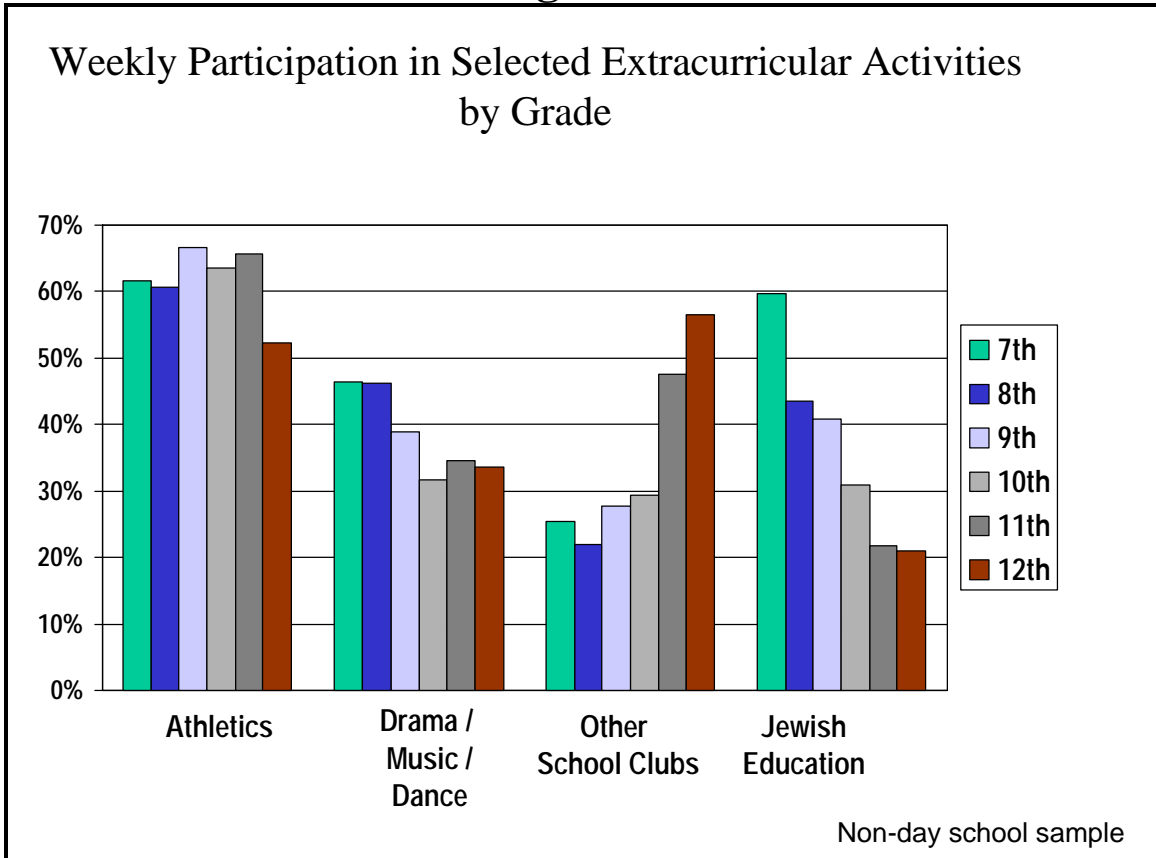
## **Extracurricular Activities: Formal and sanctioned**

The overwhelming majority of teenagers we studied (86%) participated in extracurricular activities commonly offered through schools.<sup>1</sup> This level of participation remained essentially the same regardless of grade, and differences in participation between boys and girls were small. Of the extracurricular pursuits, athletics were both the most common and the most demanding of teenagers' time. Over half of the students in all grades played on sports teams (see Figure 9). For middle school students, this typically entailed practice and games at least once a week during the season. For high school students, the commitment required was closer to every day. Involvement in drama, music and dance, which engaged just under half of kids in middle school, was a bit less popular among high school students, although a third of students still remained active. Like athletics, those participating in these cultural activities did so on at least a weekly basis, and often even more than that (see Figure 10).

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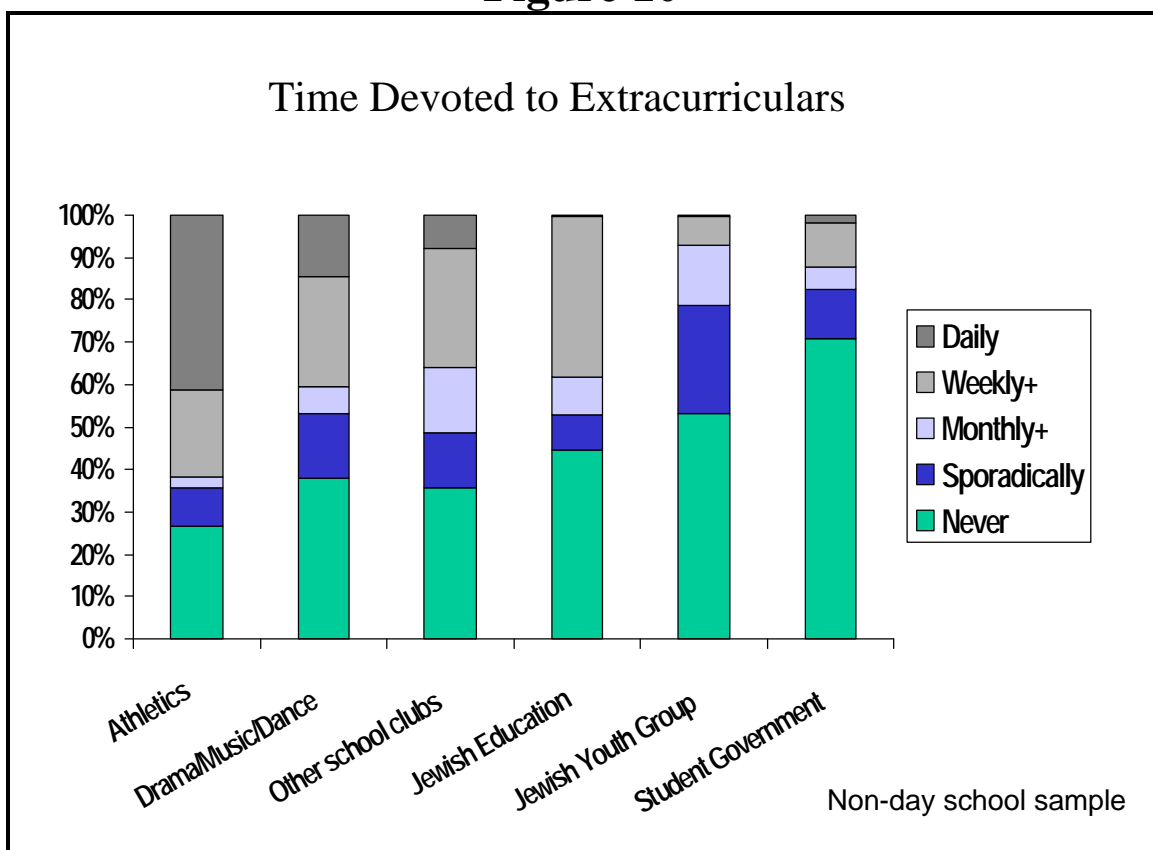
<sup>1</sup> Teenagers were asked about their participation in sports teams; drama, music and dance; student government; and other school clubs or activities which they specified. In addition to school-based activities, the first two probably also reflect participation in community sports leagues, theater companies, and private music and dance programs. The actual rates of school-based extracurricular involvement is likely to be lower than 86%, but still high.

**Figure 9**





**Figure 10**



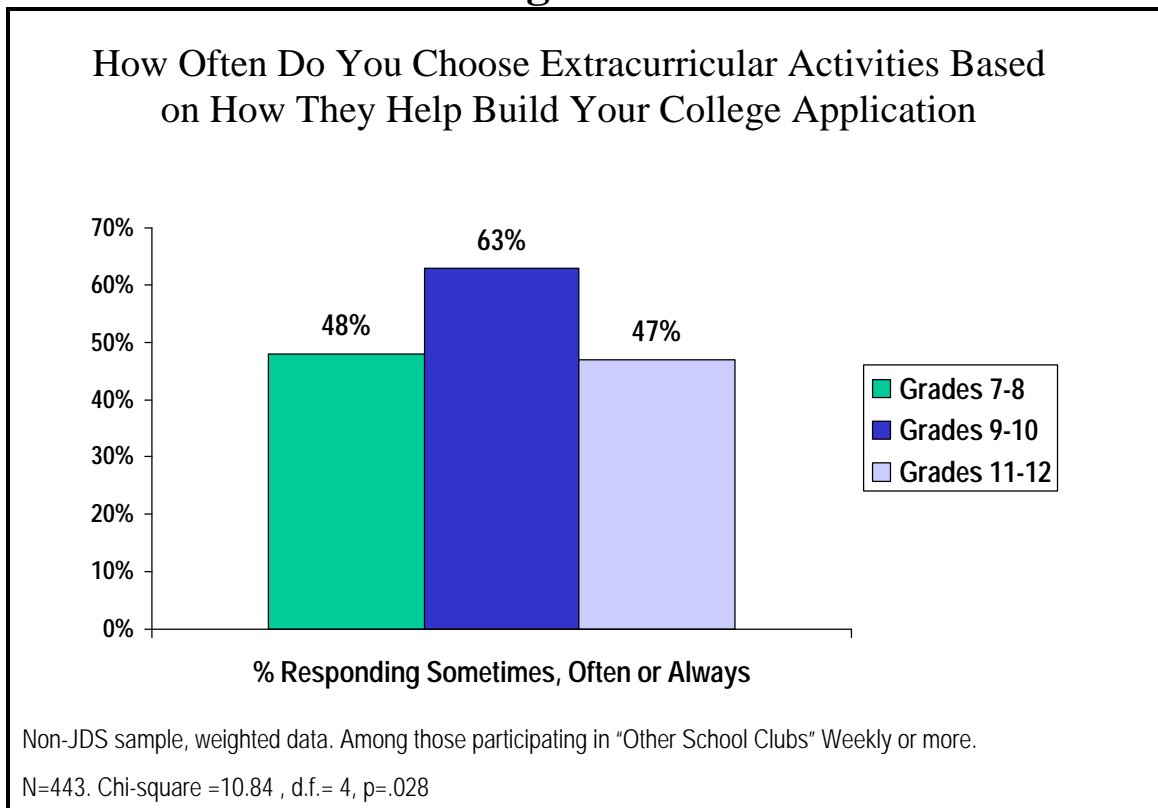
The striking finding about extracurricular involvement pertains to a leap in participation in a host of school clubs and activities during junior and senior years of high school. These include community service and peer mediation programs, issue advocacy groups such as Students Against Drunk Driving, and facsimiles of adult institutions like school newspapers and Model United Nations. Less than 30% of teenagers in tenth grade or below participated in such clubs, as against 48% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders and 57% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders (see Figure 9).

Several factors might account for the jump in participation: As they increasingly perceive themselves as young adults, older students may become more assertive in pursuing adult interests and addressing adult issues. Involvement in these clubs may also become more attractive as tenure in the institution gives older students a greater stake in the school and a greater ability to dominate leadership positions. Sixty percent of seniors and half of the juniors involved in the activities discussed above held official leadership roles, compared to only 21% of the freshmen.

There is another possibility. With college looming ahead, students may be padding their resumes to improve their chances of success. This implies either a measure of cynicism or strategic thinking, depending on one's point of view. Empirical tests of this hypothesis reveal mixed evidence (see Figure 11). About half of the people

participating in these types of activities at least once a week said they sometimes, often or always select extracurricular activities with their college applications in mind. Juniors and seniors, however, who actually participated in these clubs at much higher rates did not say this with greater frequency. In fact, they were significantly *less* likely than the ninth and tenth graders to affirm the statement. Similar findings were obtained when looking at those who hold leadership positions in these clubs. While a consciousness of the utilitarian value of their extracurricular pursuits hovers in the air, the burgeoning involvement in community- and issue-oriented groups among older adolescents cannot be written off as mere résumé padding. A genuine interest in serious matters is one more way in which teenagers assume the mantle of adulthood for themselves.

**Figure 11**



For purveyors of Jewish after-school programming, these patterns of general participation in extracurricular activities are important to understand. Sports, arts and other clubs occupy a great deal of free time for a large proportion of Jewish students. Moreover, the concentration of activities at school exacerbates the irrelevancy of what happens outside the school's walls. Students reap a number of advantages by focusing their extracurricular life on school-based programs. In the first place, school-based activities are simply convenient. The school clubs also help build meaningful community within the school and offer individuals an opportunity to demonstrate achievement outside of the academic realm, but still within the institution.

School programs clearly impact on the relative appeal and utility of extracurricular programming conducted by synagogues and other Jewish organizations. Such involvements, however, offer several things which schools cannot: first, a distinctly Jewish program; second, like community sports leagues, an expanded social network that includes teenagers from other schools. Around 60% of adolescents have close friends from schools other than the one they are attending. Nevertheless, most of their friendships were still formed in their own school. These close non-school friendships are formed, on average, with two or three others (see Table 1). Depending on the Jewish population density of the area, a substantial minority of these friendships is formed through Jewish organizations (32-33% in the regions of high and moderate Jewish density, and 44% in the region of low Jewish density)— mostly synagogues, Hebrew schools and youth groups.

**Table 1**

School and Non-School Ties By Region			
	<i>Average % of School Friends in Personal Networks</i>	<i>Proportion of Respondents with Non-School Friends</i>	<i>Mean Number of Non-School Friends (among those with such relationships)</i>
<b>High Density</b>	79%	58%	2.5
<b>Medium Density</b>	83%	54%	2.2
<b>Low Density</b>	75%	60%	2.9*
F>4.0 and p<.01 in all cases. *Differs significantly from at least one other group.			

The Jewish community’s ability to offer unique programming and expanded social networks does not, however, reduce the incentives to focus on school-based extracurricular activities. Coupled with the extensive demands such activities make on teenagers’ time, there may be a sense among Jewish educators that the relationship between Jewish and general extracurricular involvements is one of competition, and specifically, a competition in which the cards are stacked against the Jewish programs. The evidence from the teen survey paints a different picture, however— one that might be called “A Portrait of the Over-Achiever as a Tenth Grader.”

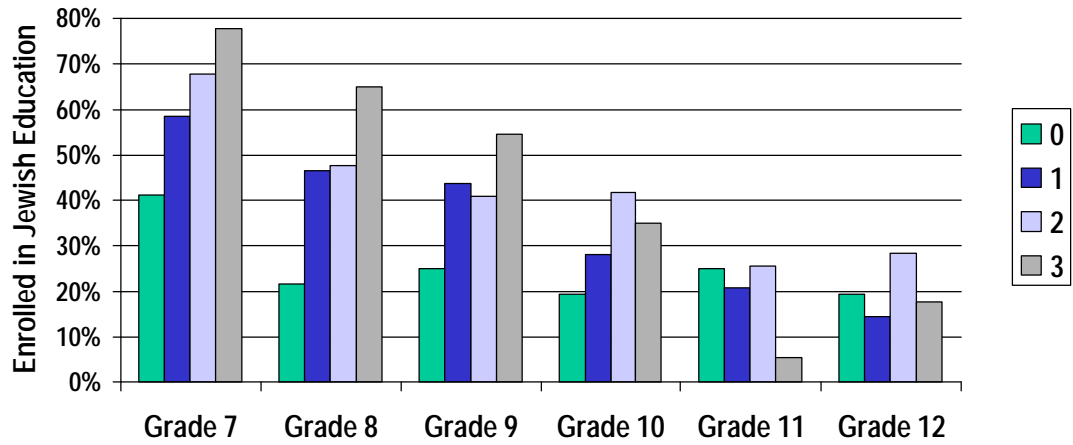
The most common Jewish extracurricular activity for *b’nei mitzvah* is formal Jewish education, in which 38% of students overall are involved on a weekly basis (see Figure 12). From 7<sup>th</sup> grade until the sophomore year in high school, those who are

involved in other activities are more likely to be enrolled in Jewish education, with the highest rates of enrollment among those participating in at least three other extracurricular activities weekly. What seems to apply is a “good-citizen model”: Teenagers who get involved in their schools and communities are more likely to become involved in their religious institutions. Jewish communal teen workers intuitively recognize this when they alternately express concern that their kids are overextended and praise them for all the wonderful things they do. By 11th and 12th grades, overall rates of Jewish school enrollment have dropped, and the relationship between enrollment and competing activities cannot be explained by either the time-competition or the good-citizen model. Although among 11<sup>th</sup> graders, those involved in three or more activities weekly are the least likely to enroll in Jewish schooling, people doing two activities are just as likely to do so as those involved in no extracurricular activities (26% vs. 25%).

It is possible that competition for the adolescents’ time is not played out in the decision over enrollment in Jewish schooling, but rather over specific Jewish educational programs. When different synagogues offer programs that make varying demands on students, some may choose among programs, weighing carefully the time commitment. If this does occur, it is not something that the present survey was able to measure.

**Figure 12**

Enrollment in Jewish Education by Number of Extracurricular Activities Involved in Weekly or More by Grade



Non-day school sample

Jewish youth groups have the potential to attract people who desire Jewish programming but do not want a formal educational setting. This potential, however, goes largely unrealized. The likelihood that a person not enrolled in Jewish schooling will participate even once a year in a youth group is small indeed (see Table 2). Only one out of five (21%) teenagers not enrolled in Jewish schooling participates in a youth group. In this case, it is most likely that the person has not made a commitment to regular monthly involvement, but attends only sporadically. In contrast, for every three teenagers enrolled in a weekly Jewish education program, one participates in youth group once a month, one participates a few times a year, and one does not participate at all.

**Table 2**

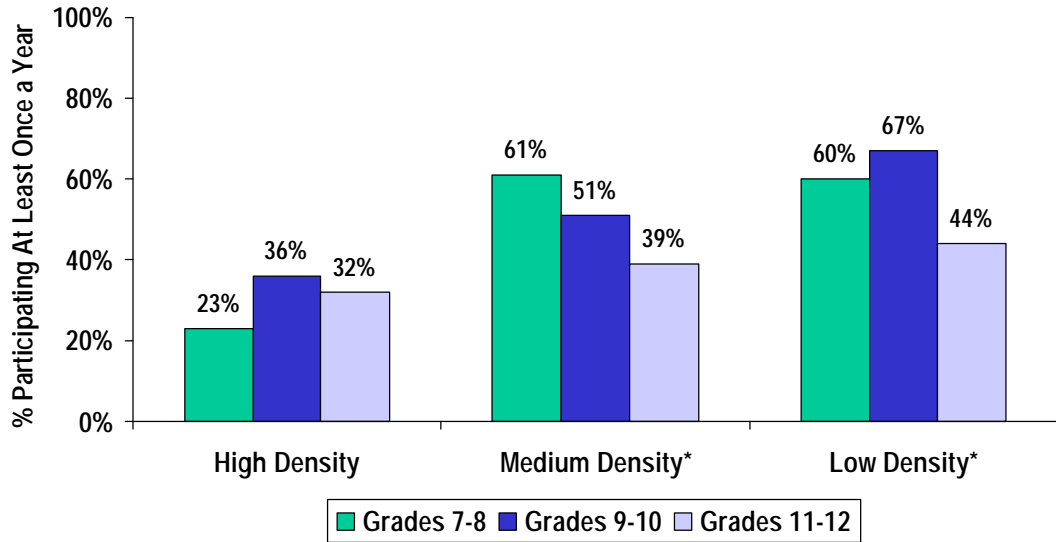
Rates of Youth Group Participation by Enrollment in Formal Jewish Education				
% within RD11E2 Jewish edu				
Formal Jewish Education	Jewish Youth Group			
	Never	Sporadic	Monthly or more	Total
Never	79%	13%	8%	100%
Less than weekly	36%	37%	27%	100%
Weekly or more	36%	32%	32%	100%
Total	56%	24%	20%	100%

N=1298. Chi-square=249.735, d.f.=4, P<.001

Unlike formal Jewish education, regular youth group participation does not decline sharply as one moves away from the *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony. Involvement at least once a month hovers around 20% throughout middle school and high school. Sporadic attendance does, however, decline, although this varies considerably by region. Those living in the most Jewish areas are the least likely to participate in Jewish youth groups. In middle school, which typically sees the highest rates of enrollment, only 23% of students in the area of high Jewish concentration participate, compared with about 60% in the two less Jewishly populated areas (see Figure 13). These findings suggest that Jewish youth groups fulfill a different function in less Jewish areas than in strongly ethnic Jewish enclaves. Jews in less dense areas seem to be more likely to participate in Jewish youth groups because it is their major chance to associate with other Jews. In the dense regions, there are numerous other opportunities available through normal school activities.

**Figure 13**

**Participation in Youth Groups  
by Region and Grade**



\* Chi-square tests are statistically significant only in the regions of medium and low population density.

In sum, youth group participation can be described as follows: It provides an additional Jewish arena for teenagers who also maintain their involvement in Jewish education past *bar/bat mitzvah*. Compared to other extracurricular activities, youth groups provide an opportunity to participate as frequently or as infrequently as the individual may choose. About half of those who participate attend programs only two or three times a year, with the remainder taking part on at least a monthly basis. Where participation rates are low to begin with, they remain low as the students grow older. Where they are higher, involvement erodes through the high school years.

Jewish community centers provide a variety of opportunities for extracurricular involvements, including sports teams, Jewish programs, and individualized use of athletic facilities. Use of the JCC for the latter activity varies across the regions of Jewish population, from 6% in the area of moderate density to 22% in the area of low density to 52% in the area of high density. Differences in usage rates across various geographic regions may reflect more about the accessibility of such facilities than any demand for these facilities, although in this case, an arrangement with the public schools in the most Jewishly populated areas allows students to receive physical education credit for athletics done through the JCC. Although this ability to partner with the school, the dominant institution in teenagers' lives, brings more people into the JCC, this does not necessarily translate into greater participation in other JCC programs like Jewish classes, social events and community service.

### **Extracurricular Activities: Informal and unsanctioned**

Two informal social activities also play a (sometimes overstated) role in American youth culture: Drugs and sex. In this regard, Jewish teenagers do not appear to differ substantially from their non-Jewish peers of similar socio-economic standing.

By 10th grade, more than 85% of respondents report having engaged in kissing and about 70% in sexual touching. These figures remain relatively constant through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In contrast, the percentage experiencing intercourse steadily increases prior to a more substantial increase in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, when it reaches 28% for boys and 30% for girls, which approaches the figure of 34% reported above for a comparable national sample of girls (Abma et al., 1997).

Given the choice to smoke or drink, most teenagers would probably choose alcohol. Among the smokers, the tobacco industry has no great hold on these young consumers, many of whom prefer marijuana to the now-embattled cigarette. Involvement with drugs, as with sex, rises markedly in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. By 12<sup>th</sup> grade, 71% of respondents report having been drunk at some point in their lives (compared to 76% of similar 12<sup>th</sup>



graders from a national sample<sup>2</sup>), 49% in the past 30 days. More than half (58%) had smoked cigarettes, but only 16% did so regularly. The comparable figures from the national sample of American high school seniors were 66% and 26%. Just over half of the twelfth-graders reporting in the JAS have ever used marijuana, and 36% of the respondents reported use in the past 30 days. Compared to American teenagers overall, this use is a bit lower, as nearly 65% of teenagers report ever having used marijuana (Johnston et al., 1999).

As noted above, older teenagers consistently demonstrate a readiness to take on the prerogatives of adulthood, both its responsibilities and its licit and illicit privileges. The increasing prevalence of sexual activity and use of alcohol and other drugs as teenagers mature are two more examples of this general feature of adolescent life. As noted below, we did not find that Jewish commitments had any substantial impact on teenage sexual activity and drug use.

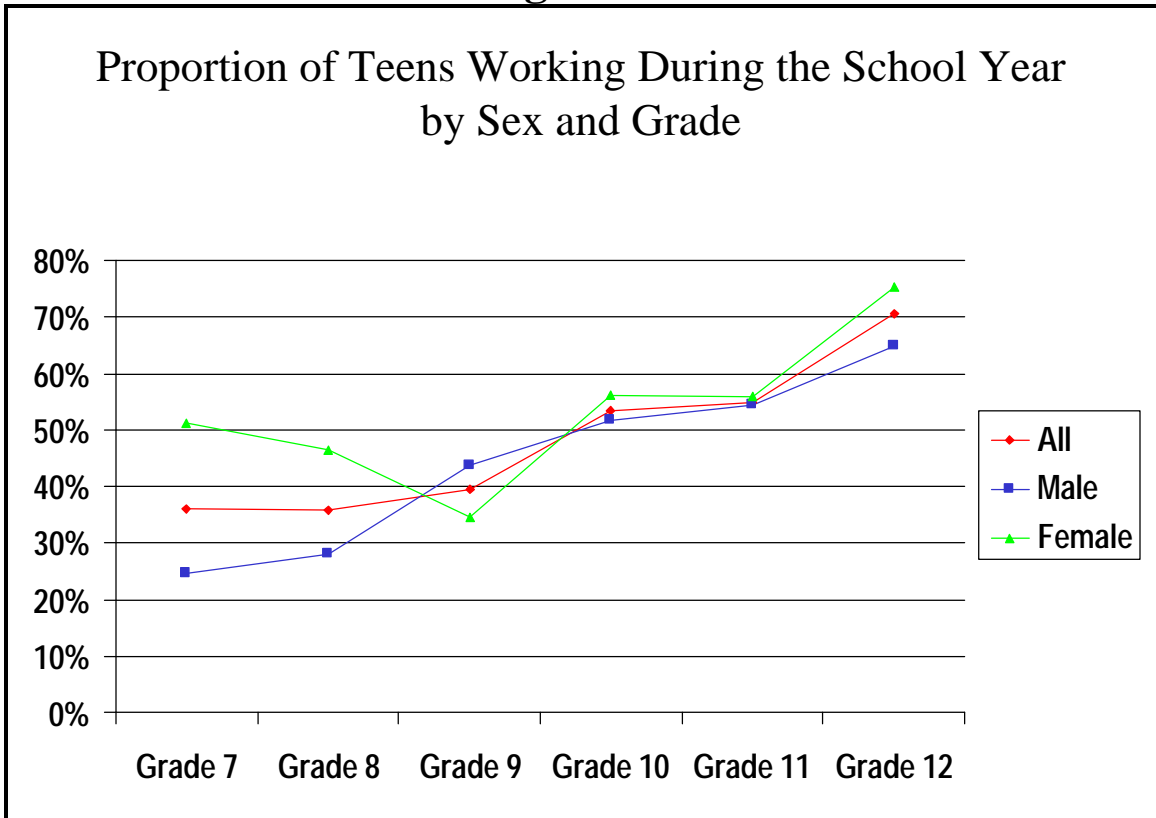
## **Work**

As teenagers mature, paid employment steadily becomes a dominating feature of their lives -- and this appears regardless of the socioeconomic situation of the family. In general, our respondents came from upper-middle-class families (see below). Whereas 36% of the 7<sup>th</sup> graders had some type of employment during the school year, by 12<sup>th</sup> grade the percentage had risen to 71%. As shown in Figure 14, girls initially were employed at twice as high a rate as boys (mainly in baby-sitting), but these rates converged in high school as both made the transition to sales work.

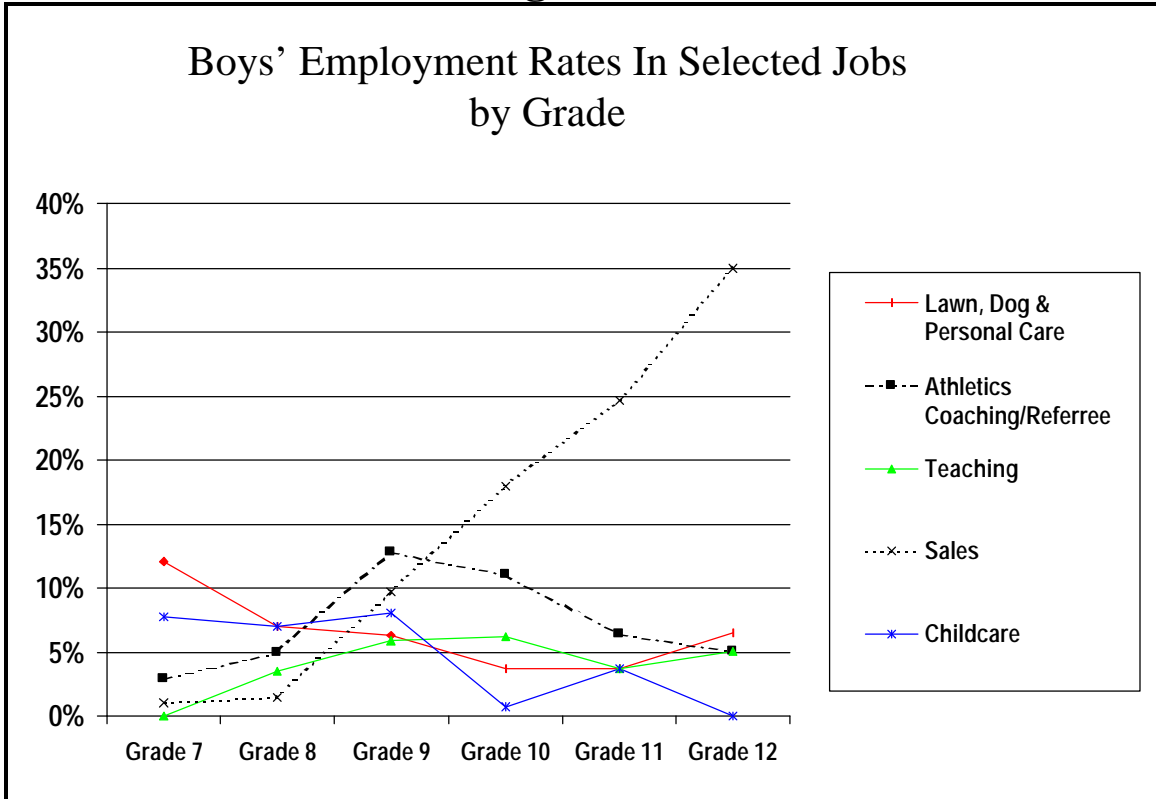
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<sup>2</sup> Alcohol and drug usage rates among the Jewish teenagers in the JAS were compared with those of a demographically similar group drawn from the Monitoring the Future 1998 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Survey. MTF rates are reported for white high school seniors living in non-rural areas of the Northeast, whose fathers graduated college and whose mothers worked at least half-time at some point during the child's upbringing. (Johnston et al., 1999).

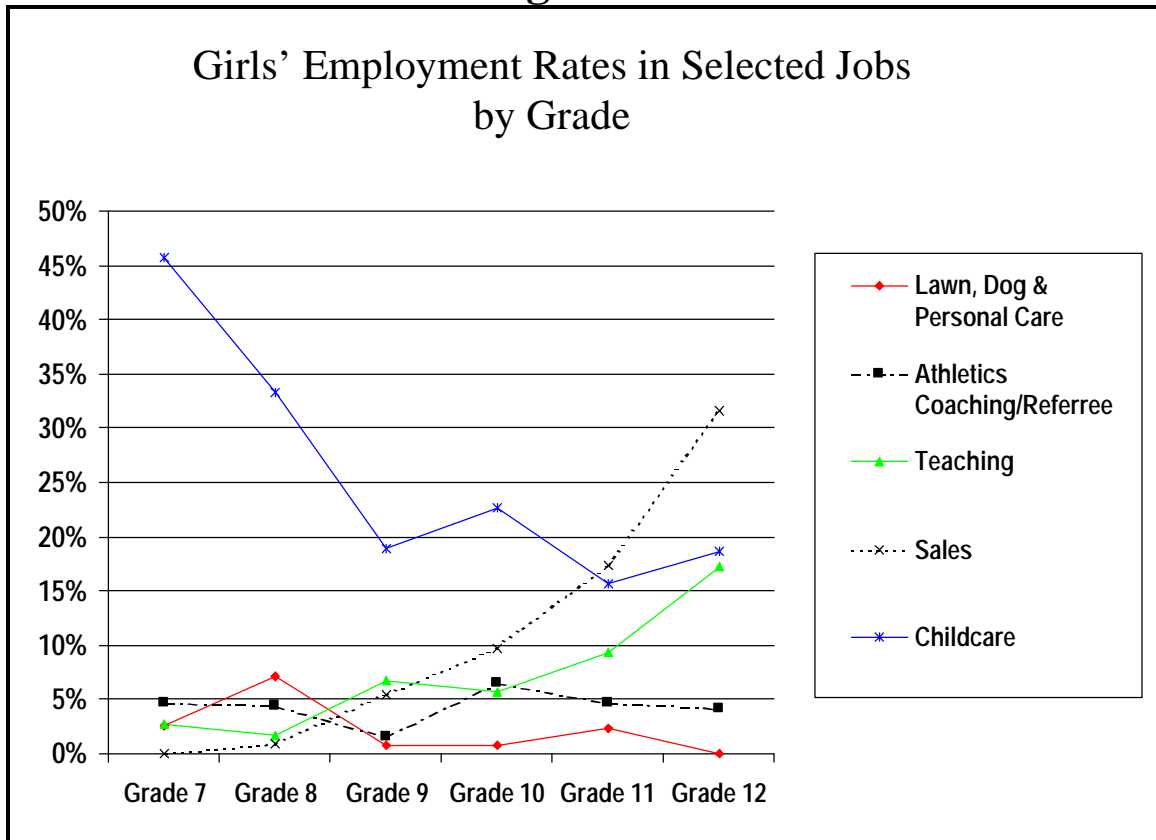
**Figure 14**



**Figure 15**



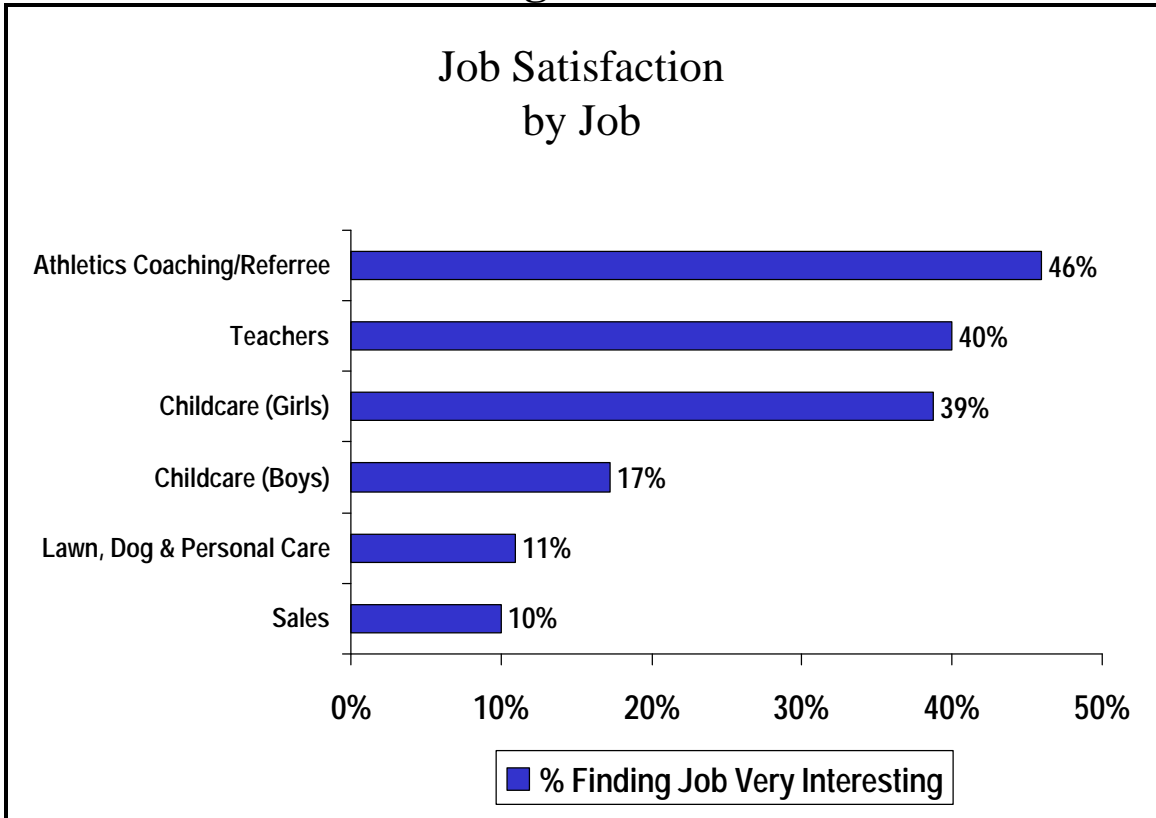
**Figure 16**



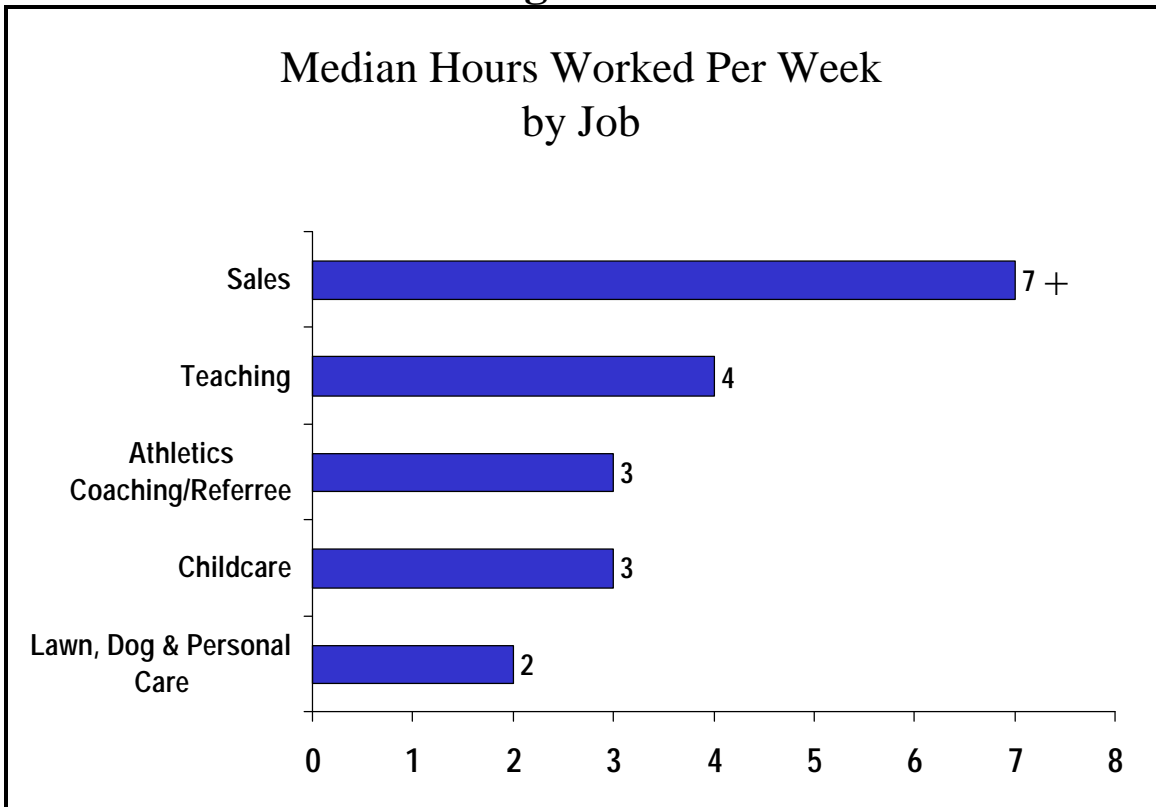
The jobs held by teenagers evolve as they mature. For boys, an initial concentration in lawn, dog, and personal care gave way to a preference for well-paying sales jobs (see Figure 15). For girls, childcare gave way to a progressively greater involvement in both sales and teaching (see Figure 16). The motivations that drove these choices were clear and consistent, especially for boys (see Figures 17-19). When boys outgrew “kids” jobs, they decisively chose sales (with low job satisfaction, high pay, and flexible if long hours) over athletic jobs (with high job satisfaction, low-to-moderate pay, and low hours). The job that boys liked least, they did the most, at increasing rates of pay, in preference to what they really enjoyed. Girls, who enjoyed childcare far more than boys did, did not give up this early-adolescent job as readily as boys did theirs. Yet they, too, gravitated toward sales jobs as well as teaching, which offered them high job satisfaction and high resume value, but low pay and low hours. Boys also showed some interest in teaching, which would count for more on a college or job application than any of the other youthful occupations.

The teaching positions are especially relevant to Jewish organizations, because they form the bulk of Jewish communal jobs available to teenagers. Overall, 12% of the working teenagers were employed in the Jewish community during the school year – 64% of these doing educational work in synagogue or other Jewish schools, with the remainder mostly employed as babysitters, secretaries or lifeguards at Jewish Community Centers.

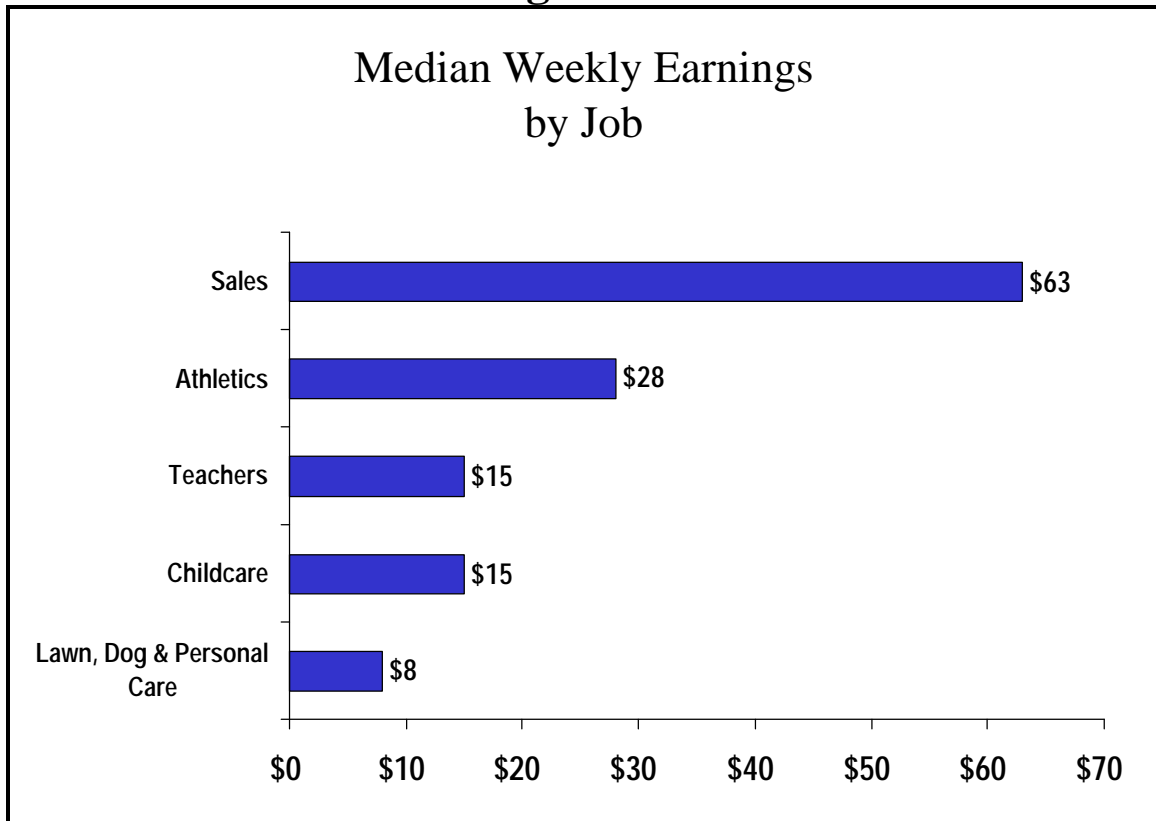
**Figure 17**



**Figure 18**



**Figure 19**



The ever-increasing willingness to sacrifice personally meaningful work for monetary gain suggests that obstacles to the inculcation of religious values are inherent in contemporary teen culture. However, it would be wrong to blame the teenagers. The labor market simply does not give adolescents a plethora of employment options that are both meaningful and well-paying. Instead, it forces them to choose between the two competing values. For the most part, these data indicate that money trumps meaning. As Jewish education comes to focus more and more on making Judaism meaningful, the casual willingness of teenagers to place meaning second in life, behind material values, bespeaks the difficulties that the purveyors of spirituality will face in shaping the next generation.

**Remarks**

Although the *bar/bat mitzvah* can be viewed as a threshold in the life-course of Jewish youth, it is perhaps better seen as one signpost among many that mark the passage into American adolescence. More important than the *rite de passage* in shaping the Jewish lives of adolescents are the basic forces that structure American adolescence as a whole. Primary among these are academics, extracurricular activities and work. In all these spheres, adolescence is marked by growing incentives to take on more adult-like responsibilities. Yet, the daily circumstances of teenagers' lives are remote from anything most adults encounter. Enmeshed, perhaps trapped, in the *gemeinschaft* of school,

teenagers find their lives dominated by the institution – its goals, hierarchies, subcultures and values. Institutions operating outside this framework can little influence this structure, and thus are forced to accept a curtailed role in the lives of teenagers.

### **When Schoolwork Disappears: Summers**

More than the rhythms of the Jewish holiday cycle, the annual division of time into the school year and the summer vacation defines the essence of the teen calendar. For two and a half months, the dominant institution in teen life withdraws entirely, leaving adolescents free for pursuits in other social settings, often of their own choosing. When considering the teens' choices for Summer 1999, the actual repertoire of activities was quite limited: most chose travel, camp, or work<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 20). The most popular choices shifted predictably from summer camps to summer jobs as the teenagers shed the trappings of youth for the responsibilities and prerogatives of adulthood. Jewish programs, in the form of camping and camp work, as well as Israel experience trips, placed among the top five most popular activities for students in all grades. The proportion of teenagers who participate in Jewish programs increases through the high school years (in part, because of the marketing focus of Israel experience programs to high school sophomores and juniors). It drops off sharply after graduation (see Figure 21).

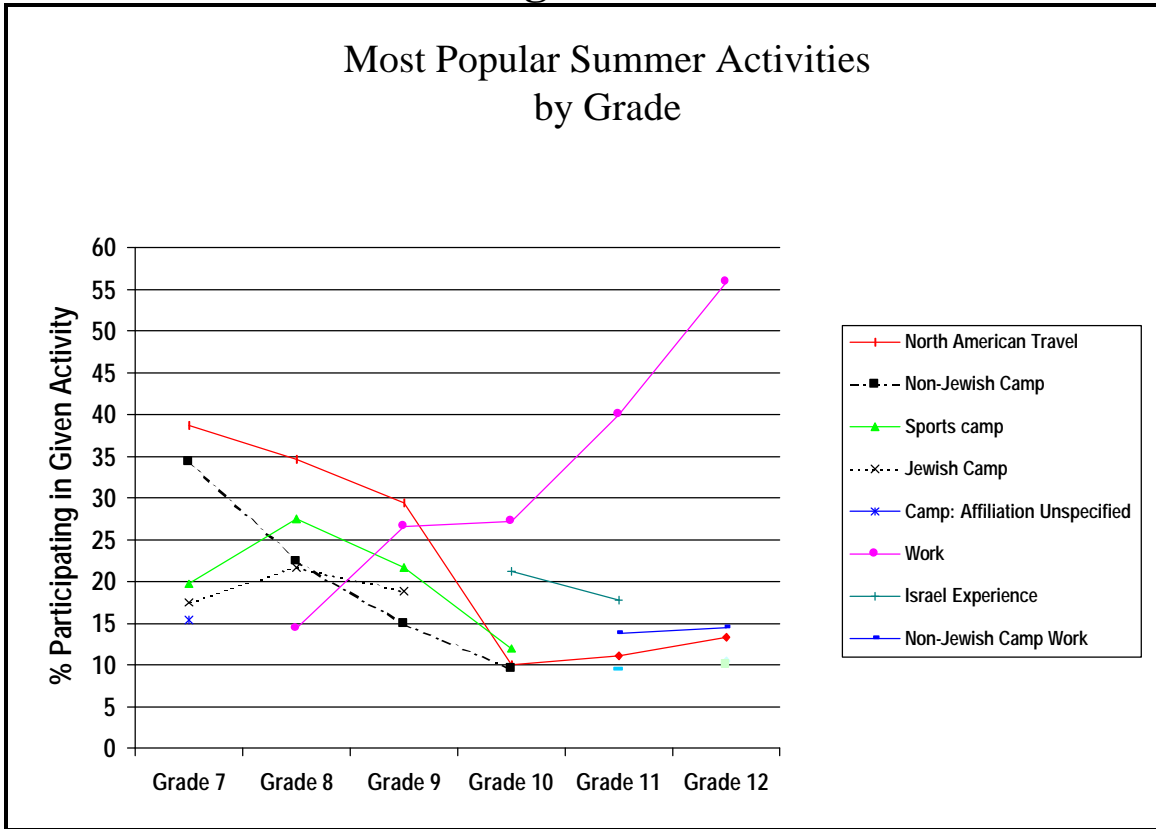
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<sup>3</sup> Respondents were asked the open-ended question, "What are your plans for this coming summer? (Please be specific)." Their written answers were then categorized by data analysts and coded for statistical analysis.

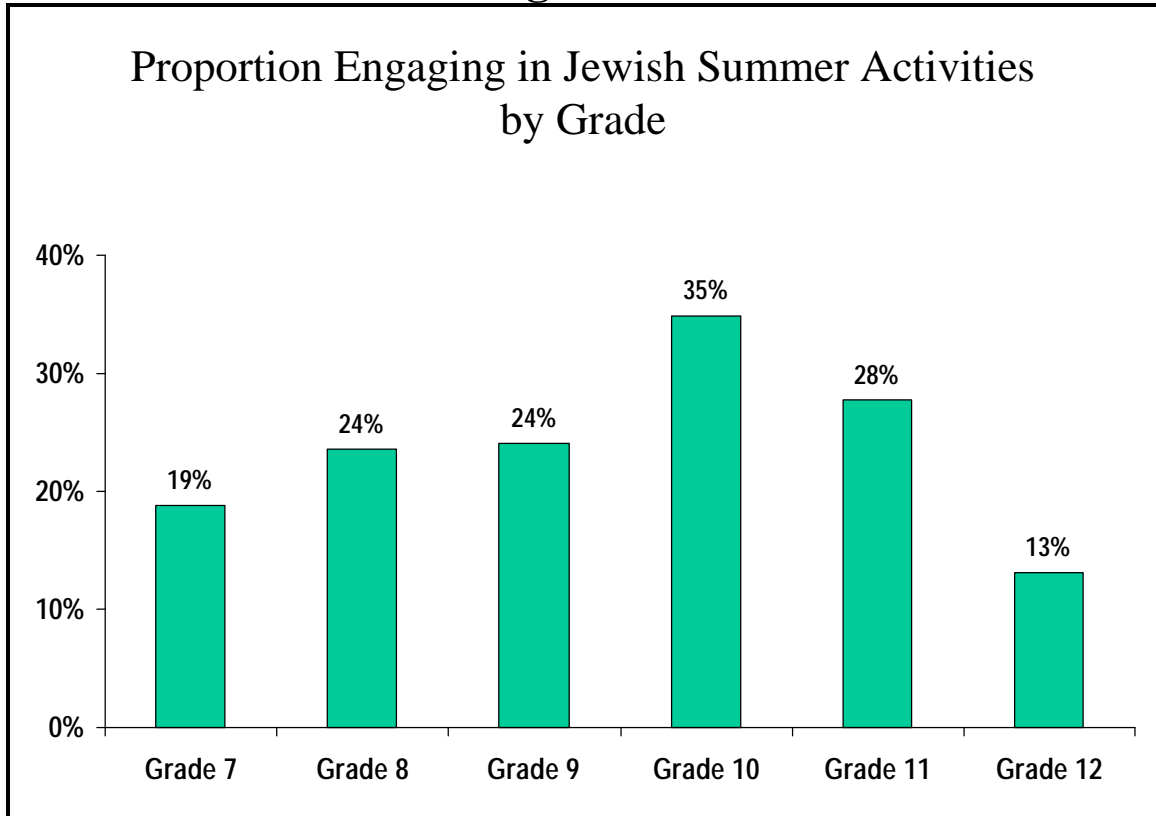


# Figure 20

## Most Popular Summer Activities by Grade



**Figure 21**



The popularity of Jewish programs suggests several things. First, the idea of devoting a block of time to Jewish life is not foreign to teenagers. Even those who do not take part in Jewish activities may be aware of friends who do, given the prevalence of such activities among youth. Second, in line with the general restriction of Jewish life during the academic year to the extra-curricular realm, the ability of religious socialization to thoroughly penetrate life is severely restricted by a more powerful social institution, namely the school. Jewishness for teenagers (as is likely the case for adults not working in Jewish organizations) is an interstitial, time-bound experience. Jewish institutions have adapted to make the most of this, but their very acceptance of this state of affairs communicates messages that undermine their very mission to make Judaism a priority in people's lives. As noted above, adolescents develop a clear sense that academic achievement, social success in the school community and gaining a measure of economic independence are the main priorities in their lives. Judaism, on the other hand, is something to be pursued in one's spare time, when these more pressing matters allow.

Having conceded the morning and afternoon to school (except in the case of Jewish day school), Jewish educators ask teenagers to devote a portion of their leisure time to Jewish organizational participation. They also ask families to structure the home environment in a manner conducive to this. When schoolwork disappears during the

summers, Jewish organizations step up their demands for a share of the scarce leisure time, encouraging participation in residential programs like sleepaway camps and teen tours that supplant both school and family as the primary socializing institution. The time commitment these programs demand is both intensive (24 hours a day) and extensive (taking up most of the summer). They meet with a degree of success. People who choose Jewish summer programs often make the choice to do this to the exclusion of other activities.

Some activities demand more of a time commitment than others do, entailing greater opportunity costs. Although it is difficult to generalize over the course of adolescence, our teenage respondents appear to divide into two groups: one group that engages in only one activity for the summer and another that engages in more (although an individual may belong to one group one summer, the other the next). Three of the four activities that demand the greatest time commitment are Jewish: employment at a Jewish camp (72% doing this to the exclusion of other activities), participation in an Israel experience (71%) and enrollment in Jewish camp (60%). The only other activity that demands the exclusive commitment of over half the people engaged in it is employment at non-Jewish camps (64%). Teenagers have a greater ability to structure work outside of the camp setting to allow for other involvements. Only 35% have made exclusive commitment to their non-camp jobs. Other popular ways of spending summer break, such as attendance of sports camps<sup>4</sup> and domestic travel, are easily combined with other summer activities.

### **Choosing to Make Summertime Jewish Time**

In spite of the trend towards personalism in American religious and ethnic life (Alba, 1990; Bellah et al., 1985; Cohen & Eisen, 2000; Gans, 1979/1998; Horowitz, 2000; Waters, 1990), American Judaism persists in exerting a normative influence upon the behavior of Jews. For over fifty years, surveys of Jewish life have consistently found “the more..., the more....” Findings from the present study are consistent with past work. In every grade except twelfth, those who attend Jewish schooling at least once a week are much more likely to enroll in Jewish summer programs than those who do not attend (see Figure 22). Summer participation is especially low among those who do not have any further formal Jewish education following *bar/bat mitzvah* in seventh grade. Still, from grades 8 to 11, between 17% and 24% of teenagers who do not attend Jewish classes attend or work in Jewish camps or travel on Israel programs.

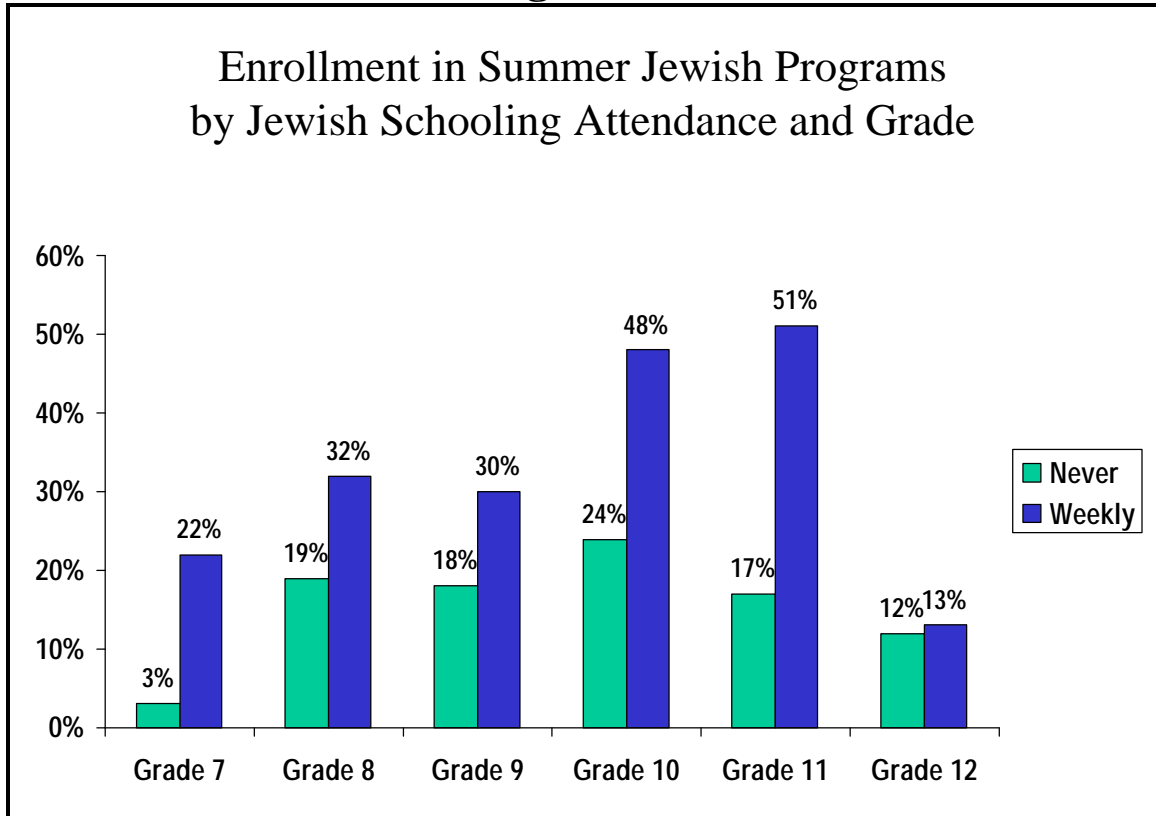
With the attrition in supplementary school enrollment rates, those who never attend Jewish school become a proportionately larger group in the older age groups. An indicator of Jewish upbringing that remains constant across the grades is the priority parents say they place on continuing their children’s Jewish education past *bar/bat*

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<sup>4</sup> Sports camps and other special interest camps are treated as conceptually distinct from what we are calling “Non-Jewish camps.” Non-Jewish camps are defined here as traditional summer camps that do not have Jewish content and are not run by Jewish organizations. The distinction is important because patterns of participation vary greatly between them. Special interest camps tend to run shorter sessions, allowing people to participate in a greater number of other summer activities.

*mitzvah*.<sup>5</sup> For children of all grades, just over half of all parents said they required or strongly encouraged continued Jewish education. With the exception of seventh and twelfth graders, teenagers whose parents placed a high priority on Jewish education were over twice as likely to enroll in Jewish summer programs (see Figure 23).

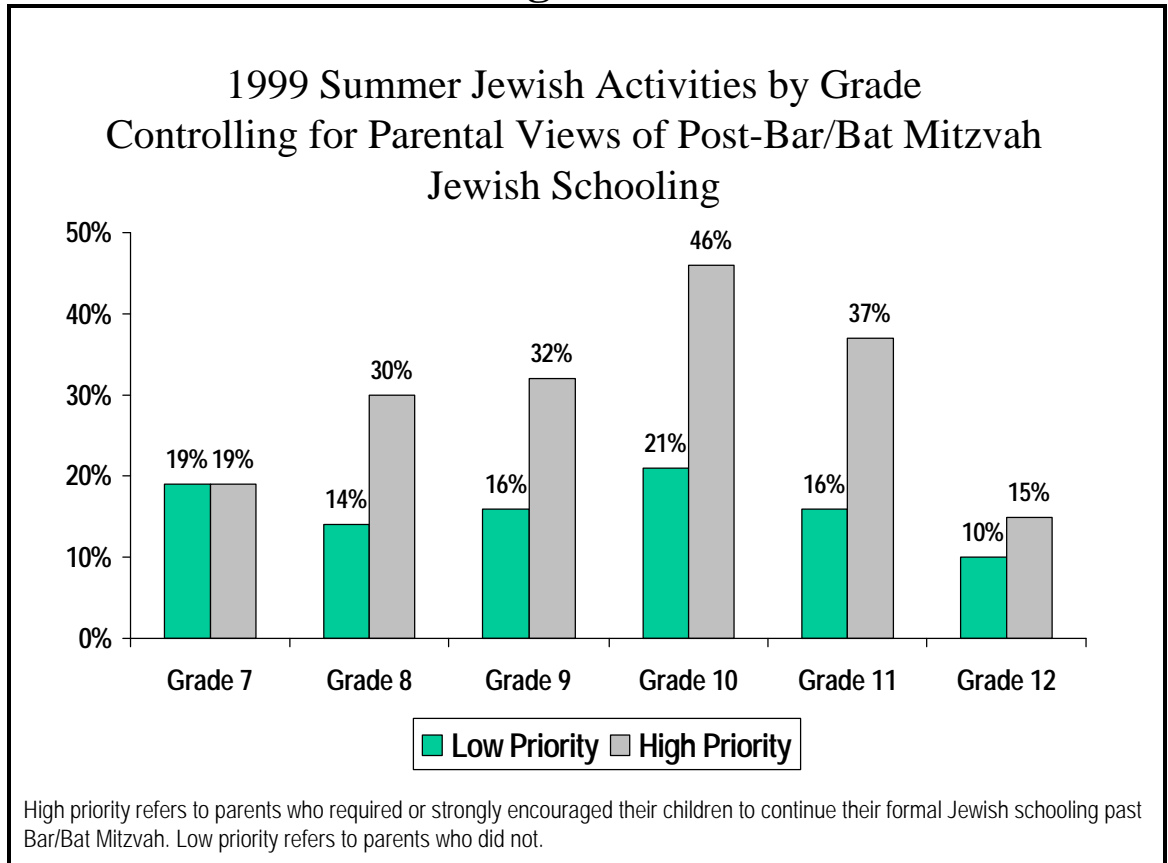
**Figure 22**



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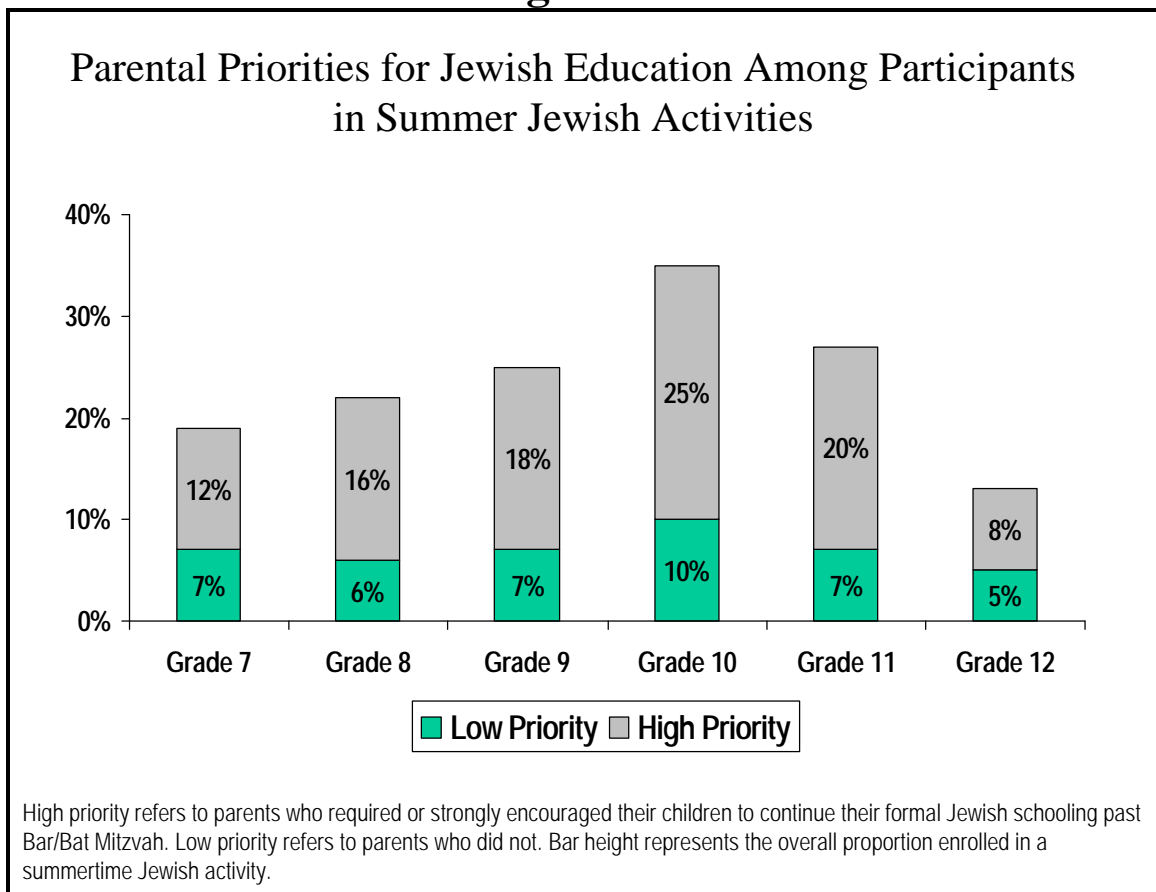
<sup>5</sup> In the telephone survey of parents, the following question was asked: “Some parents require or encourage their children to continue formal Jewish education past Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Others do not. What, if anything, did you tell your child about continuing formal Jewish education past Bar/Bat Mitzvah?”

**Figure 23**



Both measures of Jewish upbringing suggest that informal summertime education complements rather than supplements Jewish involvements at home and in the local community. Further evidence of this relationship is found in the overall composition of participants in the summer programs (see Figure 24). In all grades, the vast majority come from households that have made continued Jewish education a priority.

**Figure 24**

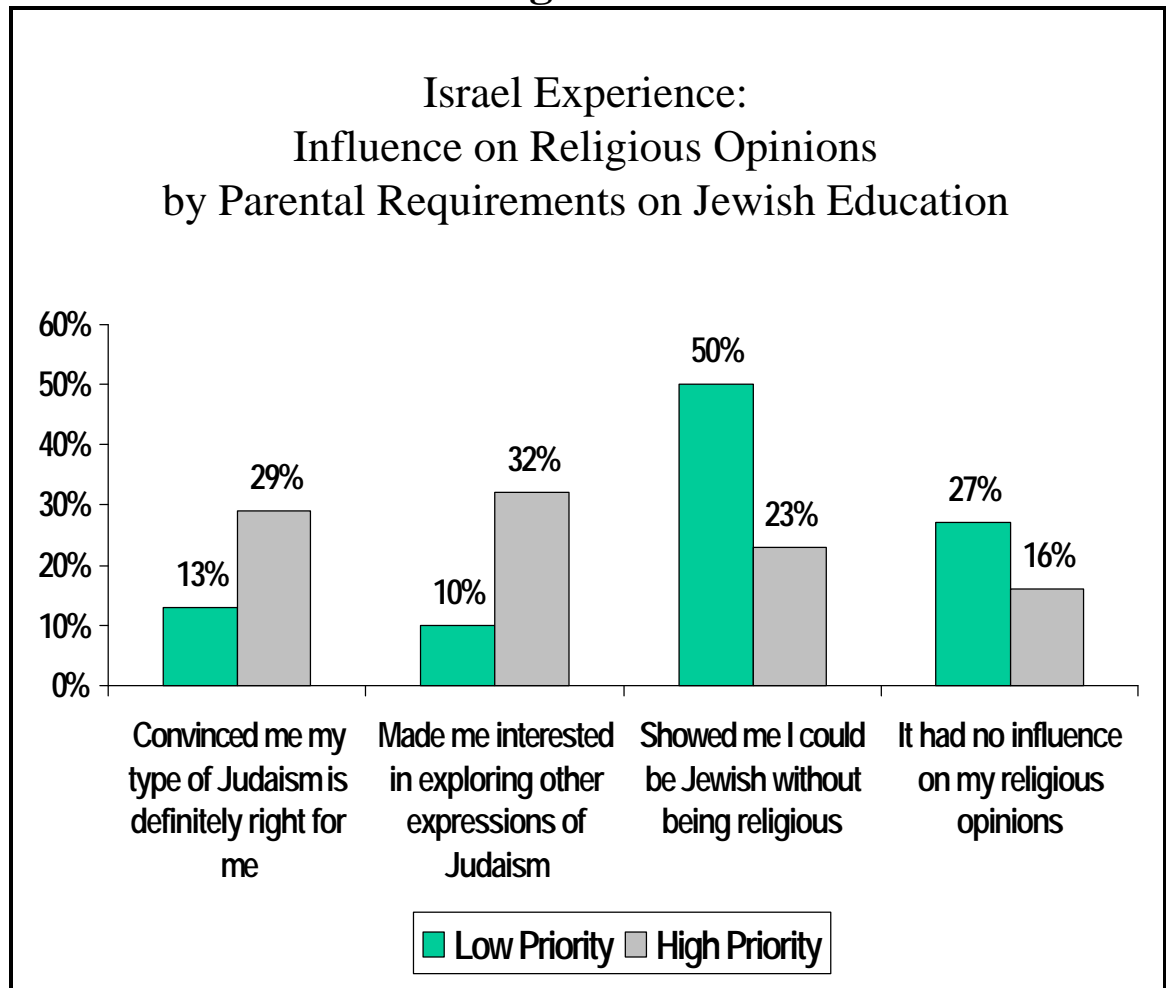


Jewish upbringing has an influence not only on the propensity to participate, but also on specific program outcomes. A case in point is Israel experience programs, which have constituted a major effort to engage young people in Judaism and the Jewish community (cf. Mittelberg, 1999). Of the youths surveyed in the present study, 120 (about 10% of the total, but nearly 25% of the 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders) have been on an organized trip to Israel. Typically, teenagers take the trip after the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

Teenagers had varying reactions to their trips. With respect to the impact of the Israel experience on participants' religious opinions, parental Jewish commitment makes an important difference (see Figure 25). Those teenagers whose parents did not strongly

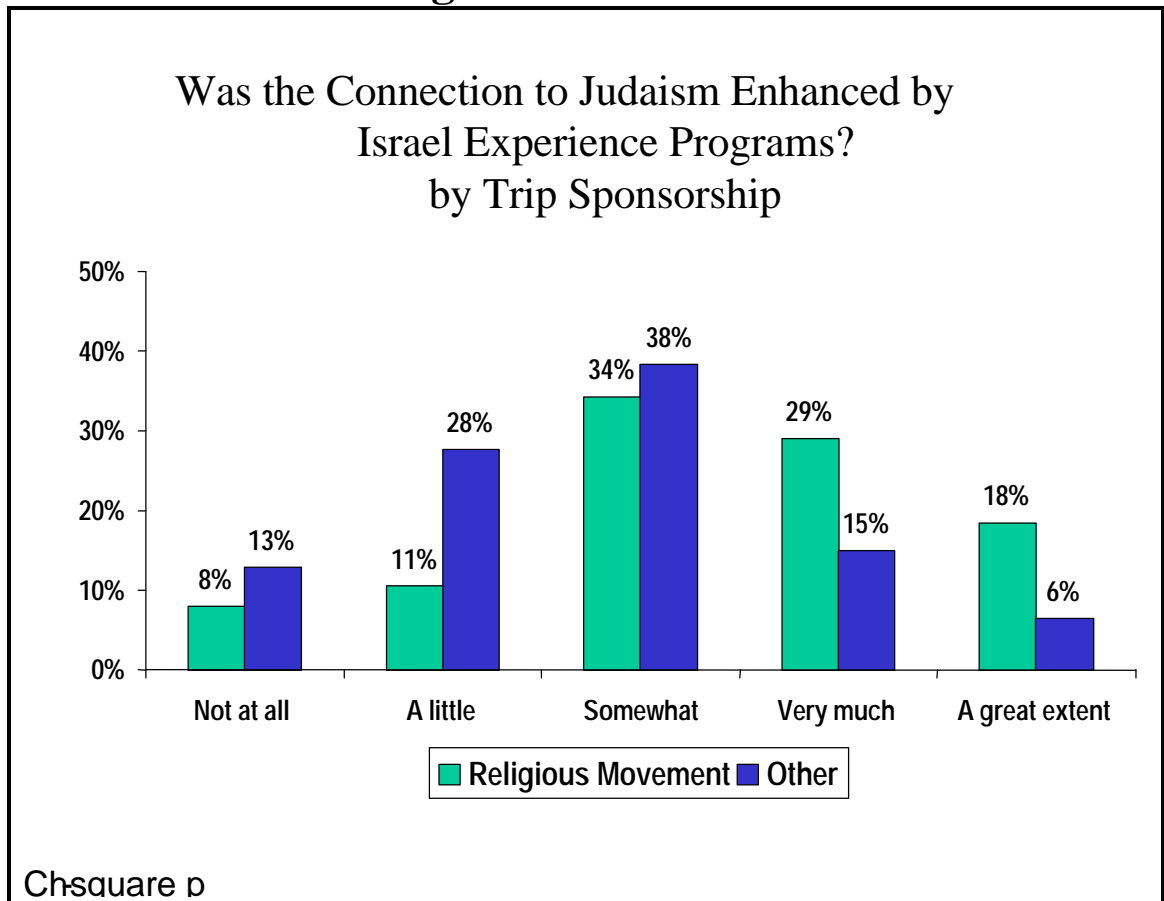
advocate continued Jewish education were more likely to report that the trip showed them that secular Jewishness was a legitimate option (or was irrelevant to their religious opinions). In contrast, whether or not the trip was sponsored by a religious organization resulted in no statistically significant difference in religious opinions.

**Figure 25**



The reported effect of the trips on respondents' connections to Judaism took the form of a bell curve, as shown in Figure 26. On the basis of the data represented in Figure 26, it might be inferred that trips sponsored by religious organizations resulted in a greater enhancement of adolescents' connection to Judaism than trips with other sponsorship. However, this proved to be a selection effect. Teenagers whose parents made post-*bar/bat mitzvah* Jewish education a priority made up 87% of participants in trips sponsored by religious movements, as against only 49% in trips with other sponsors. When household background was controlled for, the effect of trip sponsorship disappeared. Moreover, those with a strong desire to experience life in a Jewish country were much more likely to report having had their connection to Judaism strongly enhanced by the Israel experience than were those who did not share that desire (46% to 10%). The same was true for those with a strong desire to be immersed in the Jewish religion (53% to 7%). It seems that the power of an Israel experience to enhance participants' connection to Judaism is, in part, a self-fulfilling prophecy, or a reinforcing effect on well-prepared ground.

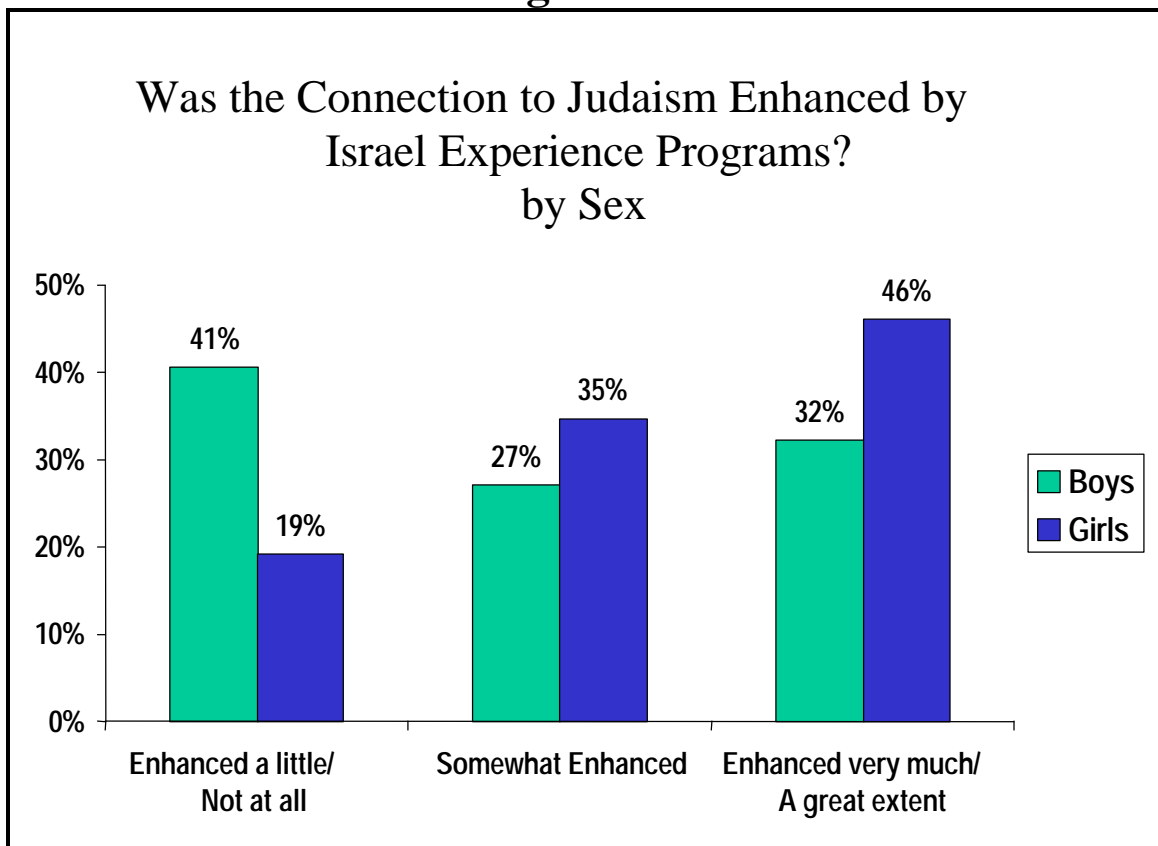
**Figure 26**





Also clear was that there were important sex differences both in the predisposition towards Israel experience programs and in their outcomes. While about one quarter of both sexes claimed to be somewhat interested in Israel experience programs, 40% of girls said they were very interested, compared to 28% of boys. The pattern was reversed among those claiming no interest: A plurality of boys (47%) gave such a response, as against 30% of girls. The greater interest among girls was matched by a greater likelihood of deriving religious meaning from the trip (see Figure 27). Asked how much their connection to Judaism was enhanced as a result of the experience in Israel, two of every five boys said “A little” or “Not at all,” compared to one out of five girls. For their part, the girls were most likely to claim their connection to Judaism had been enhanced “Very much” or “To a great extent” (46%). Similar responses were offered by 32% of boys.

**Figure 27**



The data in this section show consistently that the effects of Israel experience programs depend heavily on the teens’ prior experiences and predispositions. For those with less Jewishly committed households, the Israel experience tends to be irrelevant to religious opinions or to strengthen secular (ethnic) Jewishness. For those from

households committed to Jewish education, the trips are more likely to have some impact on religious opinions as well as to strengthen the teens' connection to Judaism. Girls, who evince a greater interest in Jewish involvements in general, do so in this regard as well.

## Remarks

Involvement in Jewish summer activities persists through high school, in different forms. Enrollment in Jewish camps (like non-Jewish camps) drops after 9<sup>th</sup> grade as teenagers outgrow the camper role. Many of these former campers move on to participation in Israel experience programs during 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. As an indicator of this shift, 52% of those who attended an Israel experience program in the summer of 1999 had attended or worked at a Jewish camp at some point in the previous three years. The addition of the other 48% represents an infusion of new blood into the Jewish summer network and is responsible for a spike in Jewish activity in these grades. Paralleling a general upsurge in camp counseling work, in grades 10 and 11 there is also a transition to the role of counselor at Jewish camps, the latter becoming virtually the sole remaining form of Jewish summer education available to 12<sup>th</sup> graders.

Adolescence is characterized by such rigorous age stratification that the broad shifts in Jewish involvements associated with passage through the life-course (e.g., marriage, child-rearing, retirement) (cf. Cohen, 1983; Sklare & Greenbaum, 1979) are concentrated into a brief six-year period, where each year or two brings about an age-appropriate adaptation in participation. Part of this phenomenon is dictated by developmental changes: older teenagers reject the infantilizing roles that younger teenagers may be comfortable with. But part of what appears to be occurring is dictated by the supply of summer activities made available to teenagers. Junior high school students, largely, do not have the option of participating in Israel experience programs. The limited number of senior staff positions in camps reduces the attractiveness of camp counseling as an option. This is especially important for informal Jewish education, because by the end of high school, camp counseling is essentially the only Jewish opportunity available to pursue.

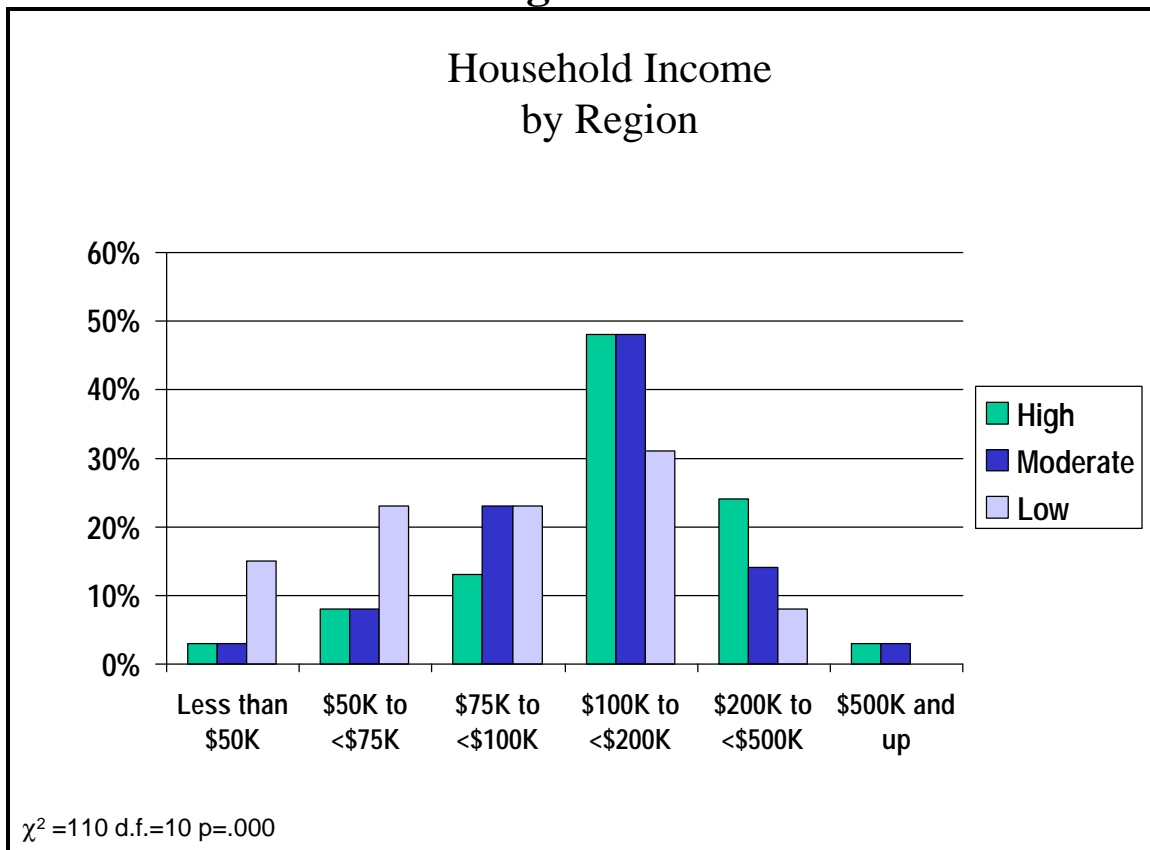
As long as summertime remains leisure time, a Judaism that presents itself as something to be done on the side will continue to find a ready market among those inclined to be involved in Jewish activities. The limited repertoire of Jewish summer activities has both advantages and disadvantages. Its options are known and consistent with the summer offerings of non-Jewish institutions. It has probably already attained a "critical mass" of participants, ensuring that the Jewish options are made known through the peer culture. Nevertheless, it has limited the popular choice of summer employment to camp work, and has only just begun to provide academic options for those teenagers who choose not to use their summers for rest and relaxation, but for college preparation.

### **Jewish Continuity Observed: Parental Influence Over Adolescent “Choices”**

Contrary to a popular conception of widespread adolescent rebellion that persists despite much scholarly refutation (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; Steinberg, 1990), relations between the teenagers and parents surveyed in the present study were generally good. Furthermore, mothers and fathers had an enormous influence on their children's attitudes and behavior. Drawing on data gathered directly from the parents themselves, we examine parental influence on the Jewish lives of teenagers, after first presenting some background information on the household environments in which the teenagers grow up.

## Household Environment

### Figure 28



Overall, respondents come from fairly well-to-do families. In Figure 28 the largest number of respondents in all regions fall into the \$100,000-200,000 income category. However, family incomes in the low-density sample are skewed to the lower end, with a median income of \$87,500 compared to \$150,000 in the regions of high and moderate density.

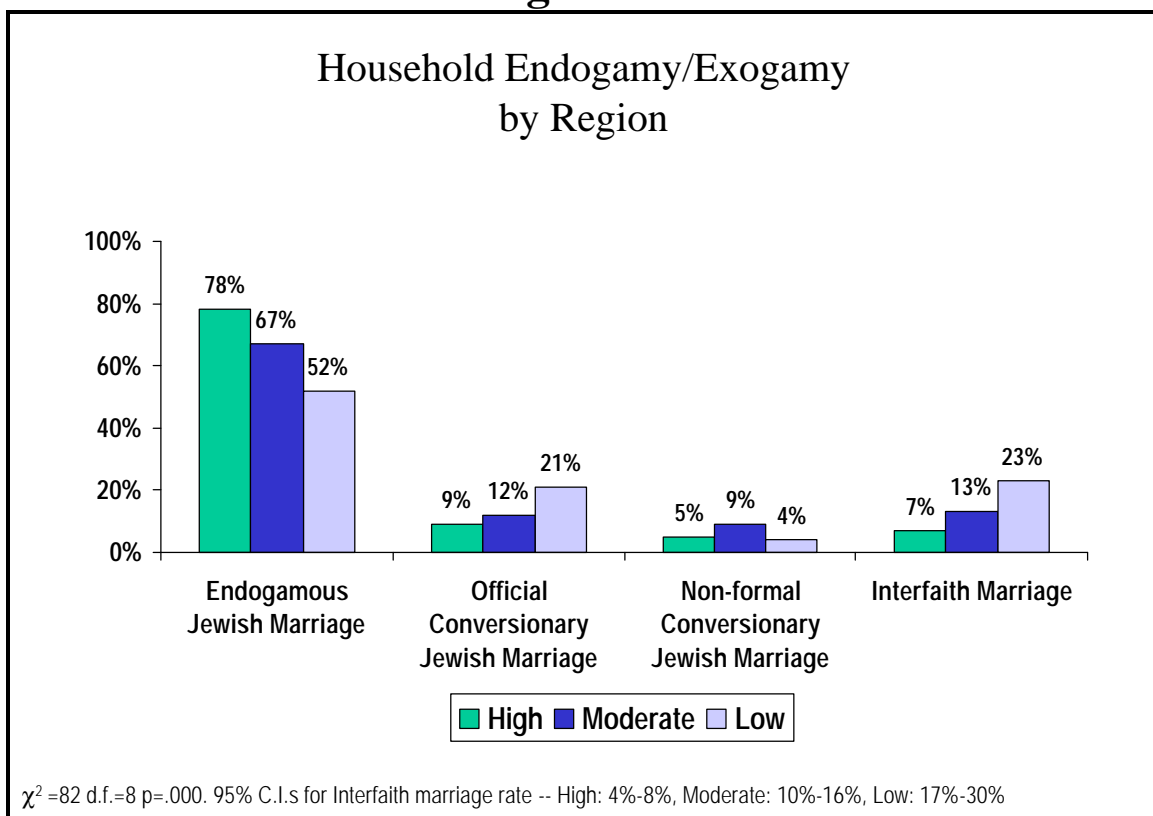
Consistent with their financial status, almost all of the parents have earned at least a bachelor's degree, 67% a master's degree or higher. A majority (59%) of mothers work full-time; like the fathers, they are concentrated in high-status occupations. Out of 11 occupational categories into which parents were grouped, employed mothers are found most frequently in education (24%), business administration (21%), medicine (15%), and social work and psychology (11%). Working fathers cluster in business administration (32%), science and engineering (16%), medicine (16%), and law (10%).

In addition to high incomes and prestigious jobs, most of the parents have roots in America stretching back a century. Indeed, 93% of the parents were born in the U.S. or Canada, and 77% were third- or fourth-generation Americans. Nonetheless, 70% of

parents said that all or most of their close friends are Jewish. Included in this group are 85% of parents living in areas most populated by Jews, as opposed to only half (51%) of those living in areas with the smallest Jewish populations. Parents in endogamous or conversionary marriages have more close Jewish friends than parents in interfaith relationships. Likewise, parents who have higher household incomes have more close friends who are Jewish than those with lower incomes, but this relationship disappears when Jewish population density is controlled for.

As shown in Figure 29, marriage between two people born Jewish is the most common. Here, too, the Jewish population density of the region is a critical factor. The higher the density, the higher the percentage of endogamous Jewish marriages, and the lower the percentage of conversionary and interfaith marriages.

**Figure 29**



### Parental Influence on Children's Jewish Lives

Much of the influence of parents results from the example they set. One of the strongest findings about the Jewish priorities of teenagers is how closely they resemble those of their parents. In this regard it is crucial to emphasize that the parents of *b'nei mitzvah* themselves are by no means uniformly committed to the Judaic norms prescribed

by their rabbis. Half of the parents report attending synagogue once a month or more, and half report attending less than once a month. Table 3 presents an Index of Religious Observance,<sup>1</sup> where adherence to the stricter norms implies adherence to the less rigorous ones as well. A majority of parents (60%) falls into the two least restrictive categories: either observing none of the indexed behaviors or attending synagogue at least a few times a year. They do not light *Shabbat* candles or engage in the even less common practices of separating dishes for *kashrut* and avoiding money on *Shabbat*. Parents who live in the low-density regions are less likely to participate in Jewish rituals even when synagogue denomination is controlled for.

**Table 3**

Guttman Scale for Index of Religious Observance Frequency Distribution							
Level of Observance	Synagogue Denomination				Jewish Density		
	Total*	Conservative	Reform	Unaffiliated	High	Med	Low
Minimum Observance	16%	11%	18%	20%	13%	17%	19%
Attend synagogue a few times a year	44%	33%	49%	54%	37%	45%	57%
Light candles most Shabbat evenings and go to shul	28%	25%	29%	23%	29%	30%	18%
Use separate dishes, light candles and go to shul	8%	20%	3%	2%	13%	5%	4%
Avoid handling money on Shabbat and all others	4%	12%	<1%	1%	7%	2%	1%

Total N=1206; Synagogue Denomination N=1056.  
\*Total includes Reconstructionist denomination, which was not reported with synagogue denominations because the N=22.

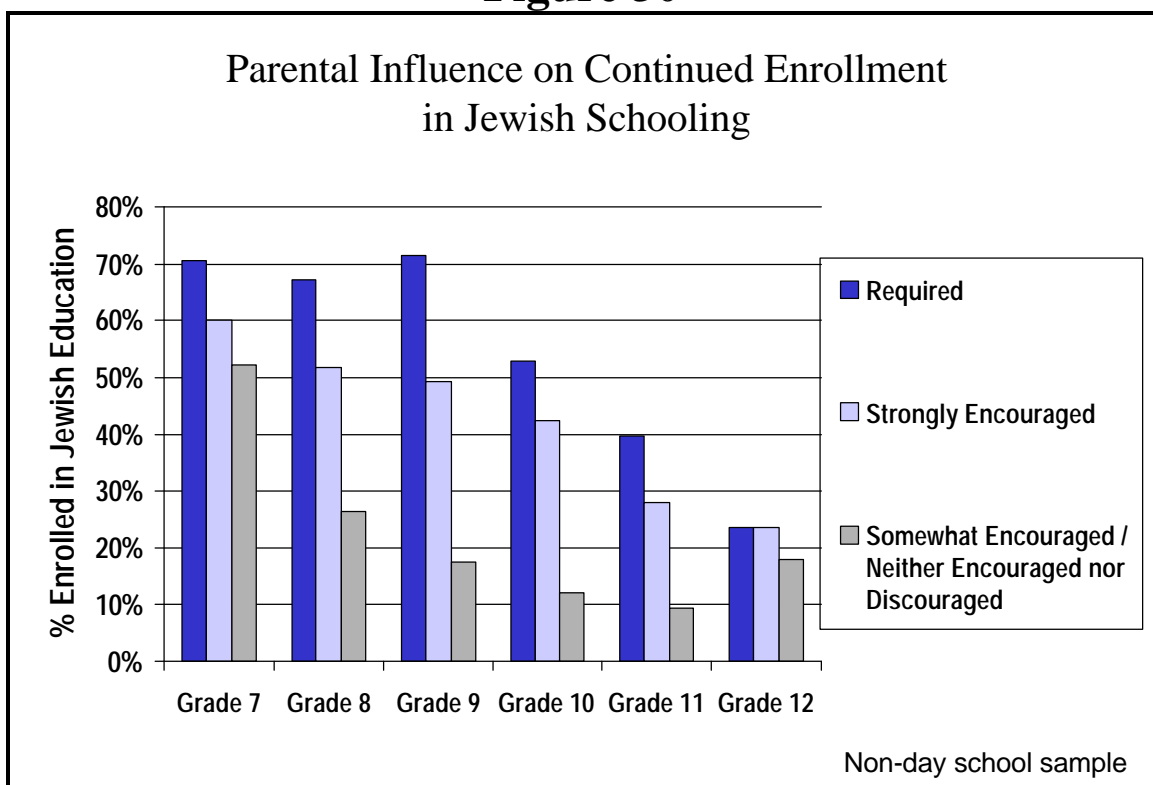
In light of the common decision to eschew Jewish rituals, many parents are reluctant to hold up ritual observance as an ideal for their children: 28% say that they would be somewhat or very upset if their children became very religiously observant, and another 45% say that they would be neither happy nor upset. There are, of course, other ways of expressing Jewish identity than observing a ritual system whose normative status is a point of disagreement and differentiation among the major American Jewish

<sup>1</sup> The Guttman scale “Index of Religious Observance” was composed of questions that asked how often do you attend synagogue, how often does someone in your household light candles on Fridays, does your household use separate dishes for meat and dairy, and do you personally avoid handling money on Shabbat?

denominations. There is, therefore, no contradiction between these findings and the facts that parents overwhelmingly (90%) feel that their child's *bar* or *bat mitzvah* was very or extremely meaningful for themselves, and that 60% of parents strongly encouraged or required their children to attend formal Jewish education past *bar* and *bat mitzvah*.

The priority parents place on continuing their children's' Jewish education past *bar/bat mitzvah* has a direct, tangible impact on the Jewish lives teenagers lead, as has already been alluded to above. It is a major factor in participation in Jewish summer camps and Israel experience programs, as well as in the effects of these educational settings on the religious attitudes of teenagers. In addition to this, parental encouragement or insistence on continued Jewish education emerges as one of the strongest predictors (after grade in school) of subsequent enrollment in Jewish schooling (see Figure 30). Although the teenagers perceive greater parental pressure than their parents see themselves imposing, just over half of the parents did either require or strongly encourage post-*bar/bat mitzvah* Jewish education. As shown in Figure 30, in every grade through 11<sup>th</sup>, teenagers' enrollment in Jewish schooling varies directly with the strength of parental encouragement to enroll.

**Figure 30**

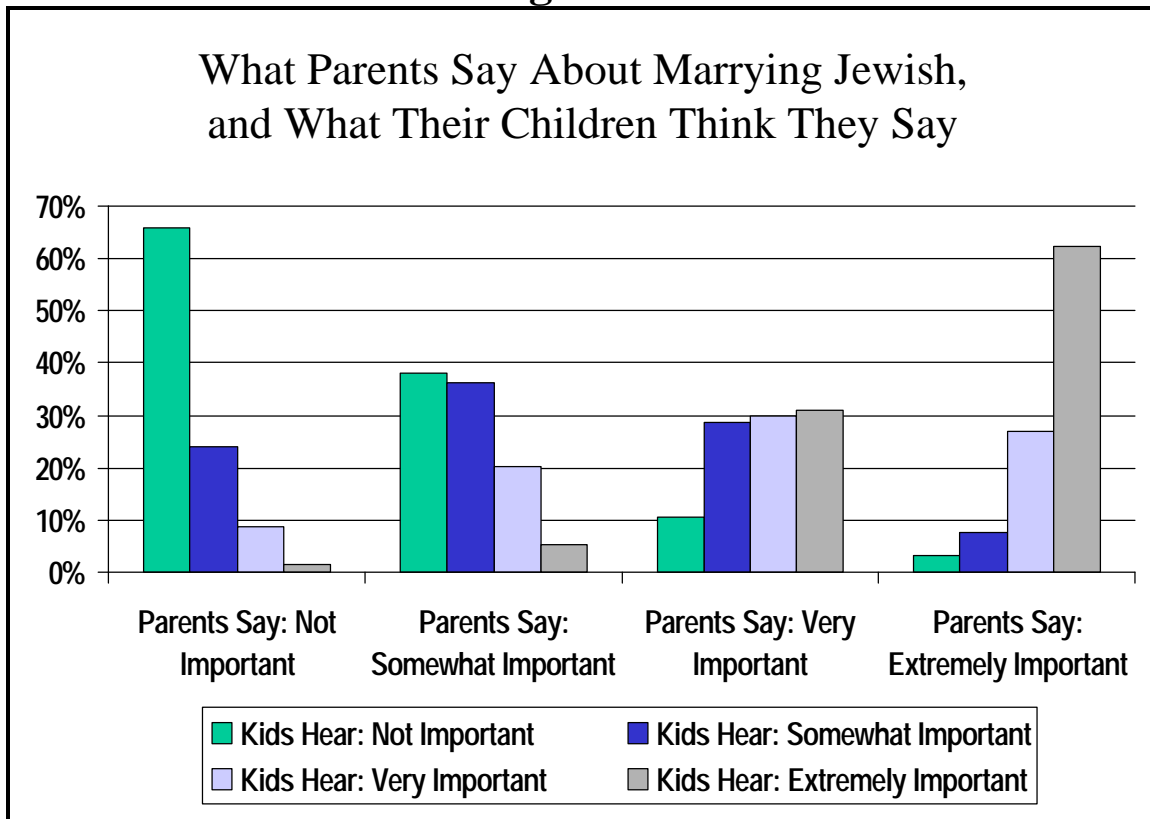


Attrition in Hebrew school enrollments persists in spite of the parental mandate – a fact that offers insight into the nature of the parental attitudes toward Jewish education and the negotiation of religious issues between parent and child. Parents, it appears, view a certain amount of post-*bar/bat mitzvah* Jewish schooling as reasonable. For some, that amount is one or two years; for others, it likely extends until Confirmation. At some point, however, parents apparently make the decision that their children have fulfilled the

requirement, or that their maturing children are capable of making the decision on their own. Moreover, the nature of the “requirement” is ambiguous. As with Hebrew school, the teenagers enjoy post-*bar/bat mitzvah* Jewish education less when it is required of them. But, it is unclear whether this means that iron-fisted parents engender opposition, or that parents of reluctant children impose rules rather than make suggestions. It is likely that both are true, depending on the case. One conclusion that can be drawn is that value consensus among parents and their children is an important factor related to encouraging continued participation in Jewish education.

In other areas, there is less consensus. The question of endogamy reveals a significant generation gap, but not because the parents have failed to communicate their preferences to their children. As shown in Figure 31, the children generally perceive their parents’ views quite accurately, especially when the latter are at either extreme (“not important” or “extremely important”).<sup>2</sup> One-third (32%) of teenagers think it “extremely” or “very” important to marry a Jew. By contrast, 60% of the parents gave this response.

**Figure 31**



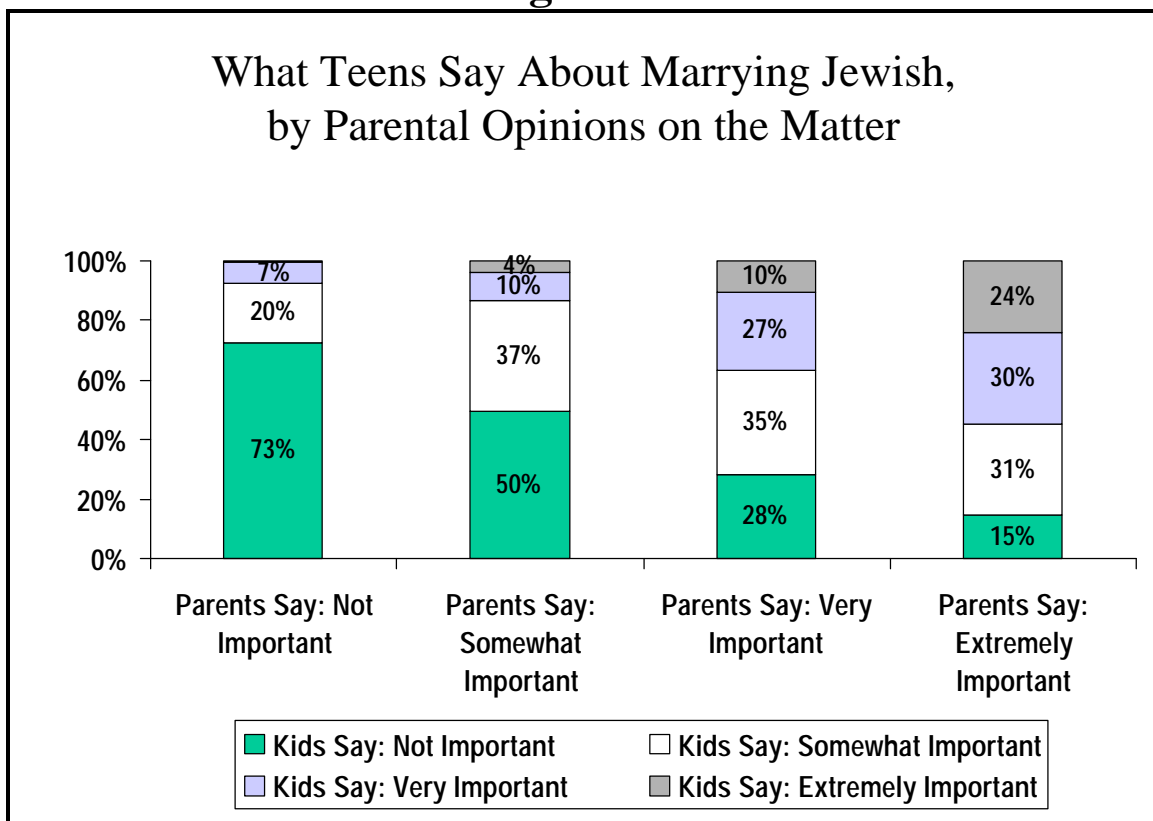
Given the general defection of the adolescent generation from the belief that it is essential to marry a Jew, it is understandable that the value consensus between parents and children is much stronger on the irrelevance of Jewish endogamy than on its importance. Among teenagers whose parents think marrying Jewish is not important,

<sup>2</sup> The accuracy of the children’s perceptions may even be understated here, since only one parent was interviewed whereas the children were asked how their parents (plural) felt.



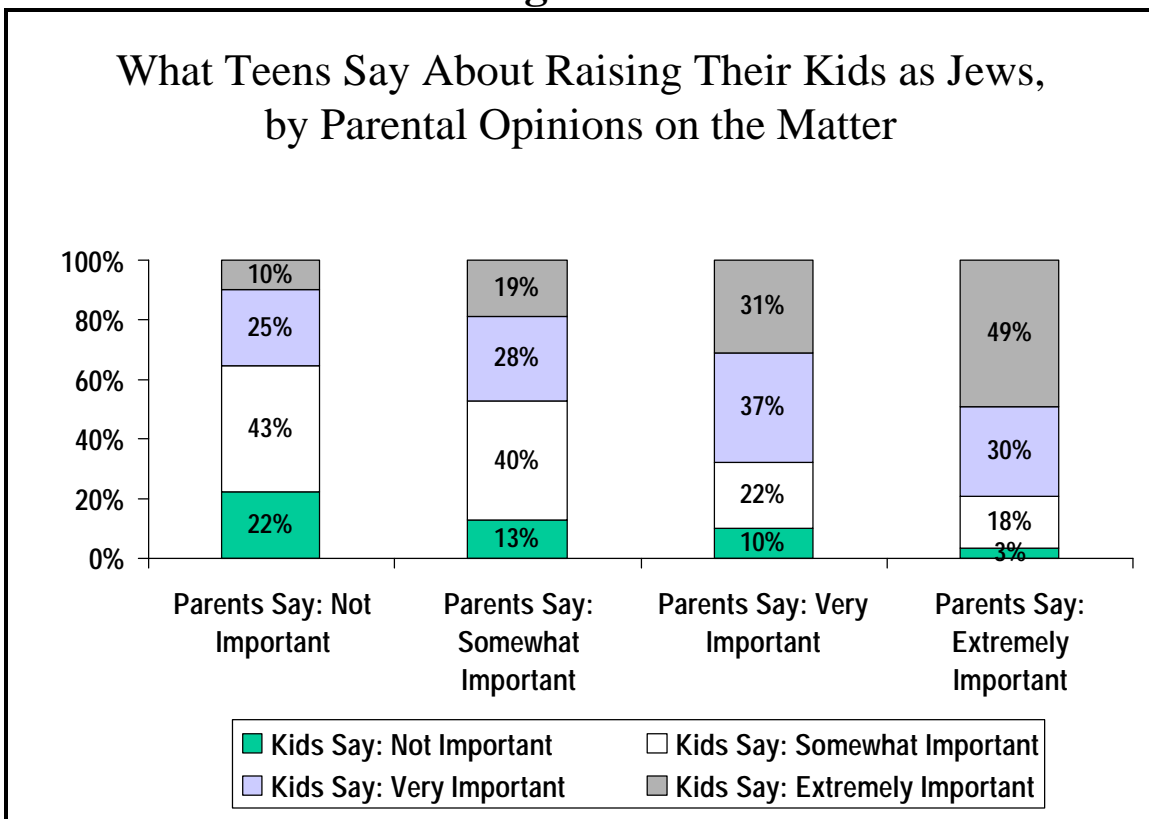
73% expressed the same view (see Figure 32). At the other end of the scale, only 24% of those whose parents think marrying a Jew is extremely important share this belief. The fact that only one-quarter of the most committed parents have children who feel equally committed on this question shows the limits of parental influence toward endogamy in the face of other cultural pressures on young people. However, if the responses “very important” and “extremely important” on the teenagers’ side are combined, then the generation gap does not seem so drastic. In that case (again in Figure 32), more than half of those whose parents think maintaining endogamy is extremely important believe that it is at least very important.

**Figure 32**



Where there is substantial agreement between the generations is on the importance of raising children as Jews. Whereas only 32% of teenagers overall think it “extremely” or “very” important that they marry a Jew, twice that proportion (62%) feel it is “extremely” or “very” important that they raise their children as Jews. Here, as shown in Figure 33, the consensus between generations is on the positive side of the scale. When parents say raising children as Jews is extremely important, half of their teenage children agree and another 30% say it is very important. When parents say it is unimportant, their children’s responses are mixed. Jewish continuity is important to both generations; they simply define it differently. Unlike many of their parents, the teenagers apparently do not see intermarriage as an impediment to raising children as Jews.

**Figure 33**



In some cases, evidence to support this belief presents itself directly to teenagers. Some are themselves the *b'nei mitzvah* children of interfaith marriages, while many others encounter such people in their synagogues and Jewish schools. Of course, this is more common in settings with a higher prevalence of interfaith marriages – namely the region of low Jewish population density and the synagogues affiliated with the Reform movement, which has historically adopted a relatively more welcoming policy toward interfaith couples than Conservative and Orthodox synagogues. Here, the Jewish communal context influences parents' ability to transmit values to their children. *Controlling for parental attitude toward intermarriage*, teenagers from Reform synagogues are about twice as likely as those from Conservative synagogues to say that marrying Jewish is not important and about half as likely to say that it is very important. Reform parents opposed to interfaith marriage, lacking the communal support that Conservative parents enjoy, have greater difficulty passing this value on to their children. There are, in contrast, no denominational differences in children's opinions when parents say that in-marriage is

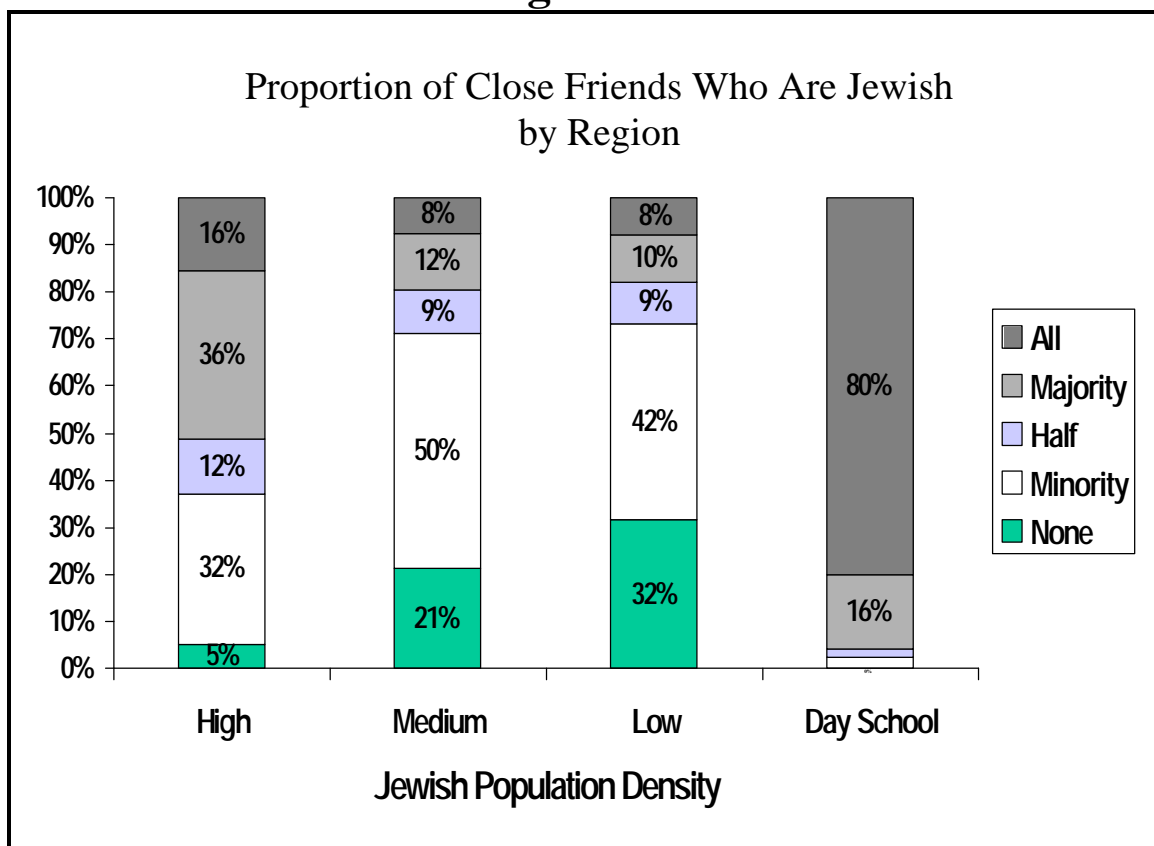
not important. No comparable divergences in teenagers' attitudes are found with respect to raising children Jewish, a principle on which the two denominations do not differ.

### Population and Peers

Because the Jews are not just a religious group, but also an ethnic group, the presence of an ethnic community is an important aspect of Jewish socialization. The relative presence or absence of fellow Jews has predictable, but substantive, implications for the nature of Jewish life and the ability of organizations to affect it.

Overall, the teenagers have ethnically heterogeneous social networks (see Figure 34). Most have both Jewish and non-Jewish friends, but few are immersed in entirely Jewish social networks. Still, in the region of high Jewish concentration, approximately half of the teenagers (52%) report the majority of their close friendships are with other Jews, although this is lower than would be expected by chance. Only about 20% of the teenagers in the other two areas reported similarly. For most adolescents living there, Jews are a minority of the network or are not present at all.

**Figure 34**



The proportion of teenagers with any Jewish friends declines in tandem with the population density, from 95% to 79% to 68%. Dating behavior, like friendship formation,

follows a similar pattern. In all three regions it is common for teenagers to date both Jews and non-Jews (among those who have begun dating the proportion ranges from 45% in the low-density region to 54% in the high-density region), but the likelihood of having dated non-Jews exclusively is just under 50% in the less Jewishly populated regions, compared to just under 25% in the region of high Jewish concentration. An equivalent proportion in the most Jewish area has dated only Jews. Such behavior is exceedingly rare in the less populated regions (less than 10%).

Students in Jewish day schools are an important exception to these patterns. Not only were romantic relationships limited almost exclusively to Jews, but virtually all close friendships were with fellow Jews. Because most friendships are formed in school, these students must look beyond the school walls to form friendships across ethnic lines. In this survey, only 20% of the day-school students had non-Jewish friends at all, as against about 90% of the non-day-school students. For Jewish day-school students, the vast majority of their non-school friendships reinforce the bonds of Jewish community so powerfully generated by the schools. Desirable as that may be, the degree of segregation from non-Jewish peers found in this non-Orthodox sample validates a commonly voiced parental concern about sending their children to Jewish day schools (Kadushin, 1999).

Like the day-school students, those in other educational settings also find most of their closest friends in school. In contrast to the work life of adults, whose jobs may entail long commutes and may limit their contacts to specialized populations, public schools keep teenagers immersed in their local communities. This means that the composition of the local population is reflected in the local student bodies from which most friendships are drawn. Where there are fewer Jews, there will be fewer Jewish friendships, unless factors within the local community and the school cause Jews to band together. There is little evidence of self-segregation, however. Of all the friends known through school, the proportion who were Jewish declined from 51% to 26% to 17% as the overall proportion of Jews in the local population declined.

School-based friendships, however, do not comprise the entirety of adolescent social networks. If friendships based in settings other than school are considered, the power of choice to overcome demography can be seen. Jewish population density has no impact on the proportion of teenagers who make Jewish friends outside of school (about 40% in the regions of highest and lowest Jewish density). Underlying this finding is the fact that teenagers in towns with small Jewish populations disproportionately rely on Jewish organizations to provide them with a Jewish social group. For these youths, 44% percent of their friendships formed outside of school are the product of Jewish organizations, as compared to one-third in the other regions.

Some friends are seen in both school and synagogue (or other Jewish settings). This is, of course, more common for teenagers in heavily populated Jewish areas, where one in five friends are seen both in school and in Jewish organizations. In the areas with few Jews, only one friend in ten is seen in both settings. Thus, in an area with a large Jewish population, adolescent friendships fostered by Jewish institutions tend to reinforce relationships also developed in school. In an area with a small Jewish population, Jewish community among teenagers is maintained primarily through relationships supported by Jewish institutions but not by school. Not surprisingly, a further breakdown of the data reveals that friendships fostered by local Jewish organizations (e.g., synagogue, religious

school, youth group) are more likely to reinforce school-based friendships, whereas Jewish immersion programs (e.g., summer camps, trips to Israel) are more likely to nurture friendships with people not known through school. Nonetheless, both types of involvements are more likely to provide non-school friendships in the low-density region than in the other regions.

The findings about peer networks presented here raise critical questions for further investigation, especially about the role of peer networks in Jewish identity formation. For example, does seeing one's Jewish friends primarily outside of school lead to a different conception of, or commitment to, Jewish identity than seeing the same friends in school and in synagogue? It is also worth looking closely at the way organized Jewish settings function in regions of low Jewish population density, as these settings appear to be a critical infrastructure for Jewish identity in places in which there is not an overwhelming Jewish presence. The programs run in these communities which, by necessity, may involve peers who do not have opportunities to interact at school, may need to be different.

### **Judaism and the Meaning of Life<sup>3</sup>**

Erikson (1968) conceptualized adolescence as a time of identity formation, when a person attempts to draw some conclusions about his/her place in the world. Questions of ultimate significance can often play a role in this search for personal meaning. Jewish institutions and religious authorities have long claimed that in this search for meaning, Judaism can provide, if not answers, then at least questions, and should inform the search. For the teenagers surveyed here, however, a personalized Judaism of the spirit and soul was not much in evidence. Instead, the Jewish civil religion of "Sacred Survival" (cf. Wocher, 1986) – too early laid to rest by contemporary observers of American Jewry – remained salient in some of its symbolic components, although without the attendant behavioral responsibilities that once were part and parcel of it. Why the teenagers buck the conventional wisdom about the direction of American Jewry is unclear. Perhaps the conventional wisdom is based on an adult experience, which as already noted, is radically different from that of teenagers. Alternatively, perhaps the conventional wisdom is wrong, the product of normative claims and wishful thinking rather than empirical observation. Either way, the values espoused by the teenagers stand as a challenge to assumptions common among the Jewish organizational elite.

A search for meaning is important to adolescents; nevertheless, Judaism is often seen as irrelevant to this search (see Figure 35). 39% of respondents said that finding meaning in life was essential to them, over six times the mere 7% who said that finding meaning through their Jewishness was. The picture changes slightly if one also considers those who said the search for meaning was very important, but not essential. Here, 34% affirmed this position generally, compared to 24% who similarly characterized the search

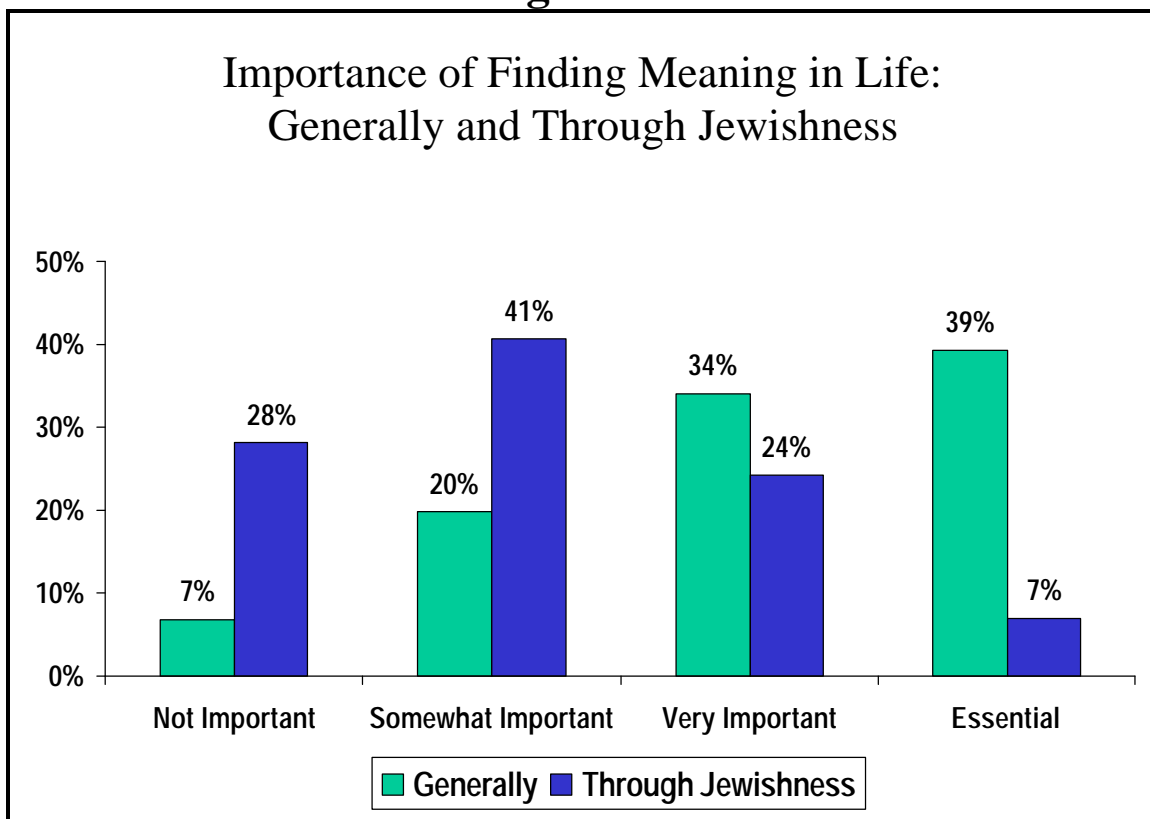
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<sup>3</sup> A more extensive examination of the consequences of feelings of spirituality among these Jewish adolescents is found in Amy Adamczyk's working paper. Preliminary findings suggest that rather than marching to a different drummer, those teenagers high on the spirituality index are those who are successful academically and intend to go to Ivy League schools. Spirituality seems to aid in reaching conventional "success" goals.

for meaning through Jewishness. Over one-quarter (28%) said that this Jewish search was not at all important to them, quadruple the percentage who claimed this generally.

There is no reason to expect that people who care little about existential matters will exhibit great passion for them in a narrowly Jewish context. In fact, 95% of those teenagers who said the general quest for meaning was not at all or only somewhat important said the same of the Jewish quest. We might reasonably focus, therefore, on the three-quarters of respondents who considered the search for meaning essential or very important. These teenagers split 60-40 in favor of saying the search for meaning through Jewishness was not at all or only somewhat important versus saying that it was very important or essential.

**Figure 35**



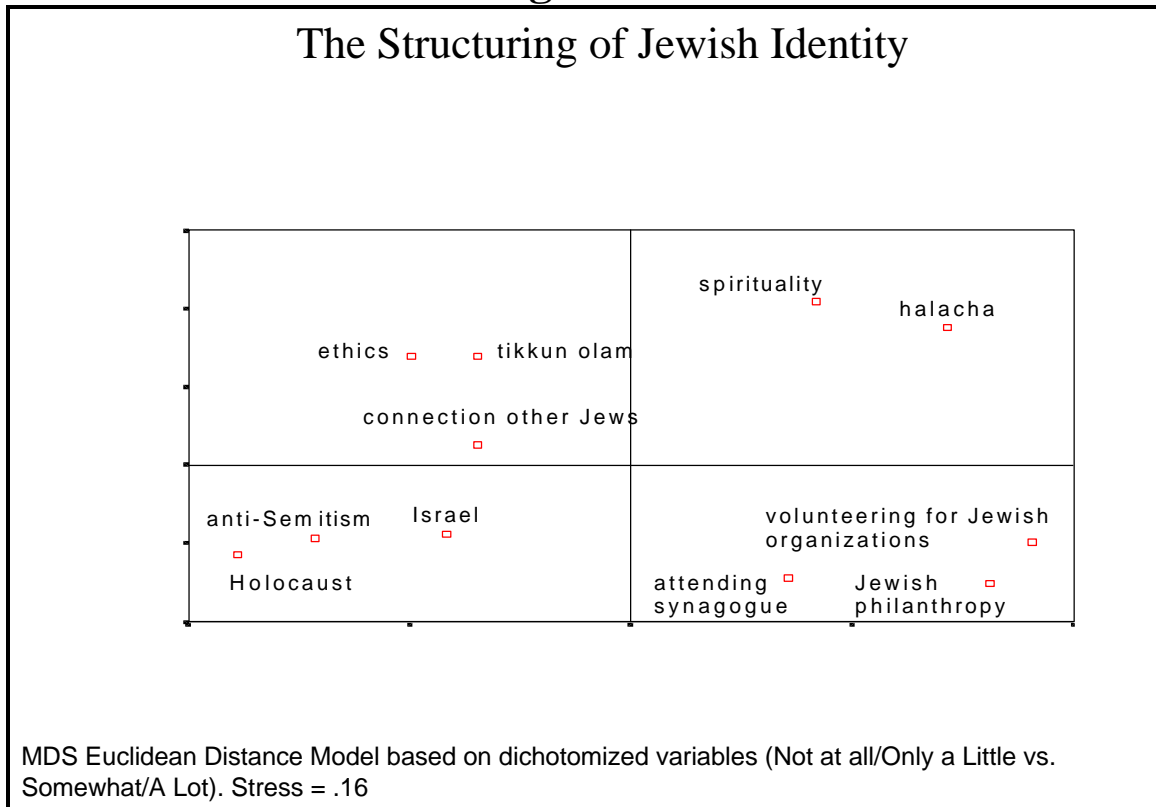
If most of our respondents did not see Judaism as relevant to personal meaning, how, then did they understand it? To find out, respondents were asked, “There are many different ways of being Jewish. For you personally, how much, if at all, does being Jewish involve...?” What follows are those choices for which the extreme responses (“a lot” and “not at all”) were given by at least 25% of respondents. Significant numbers of teenagers said that being Jewish was very much about remembering the Holocaust (53%), countering anti-Semitism (43%), being ethical (39%), making the world a better place (31%), caring about Israel (31%), or feeling a connection to other Jews (30%). But although peoplehood, survival and ethics were important values to them, sizable numbers rejected the practical, day-to-day activities that have been the traditional instrumentalities for translating these ideals into reality – such as Jewish philanthropy (30% responded

“Not at all”), volunteering for Jewish organizations (28%), and observing Jewish law (27%). These patterns were consistent for boys and girls. The only non-behavioral choice that made this “least popular” list was “Having a rich spiritual life,” rejected by 27% of respondents.

Judaism’s ethical imperatives, while affirmed in principle, also appear to exert little influence on the important decisions teenagers have to make regarding sexual activity and drug use. The likely interpretation is that teenagers see these less as moral decisions than as matters of personal fulfillment. Whatever the reason, religious denomination, parental religious observance, and participation in formal Jewish education had no significant impact on sexual activity, controlling for age and gender. Parental observance and denomination also made little difference to the teens’ use of alcohol or drugs. The only area where Jewish behavior appeared to be related to drug use was among those who rushed to cease Jewish education immediately after *bar/bat mitzvah*. The teenagers who dropped out of formal Jewish education in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade were much more likely to use marijuana than those who continued (10% vs. 3% lifetime use; 10% vs. 1% use in the previous 12 months; and 4% vs. 1% use in the previous 30 days). By 9<sup>th</sup> grade, this difference disappeared. It is likely that causality does not derive from Jewish identity, but rather that the same influences propelling these youngest adolescents to experiment early with drugs also contribute to their distaste for Jewish education.

As noted above, many teenagers explicitly said that for them personally, being Jewish had nothing whatsoever to do with spirituality. At the other end of the spectrum, the percentage who said it was very much about spirituality more than doubled from 8% in grades 7-8 to 19% in grades 11-12. Simultaneously, however, the institution poised to benefit most from such a shift—the synagogue—declined in ratings over the same cohorts, from 22% to 13%. For this generation of young Jews, the synagogue does not appear to stand for spirituality, and their ethnic feelings are not necessarily expressed through organizational affiliations.

These conclusions are supported by a multidimensional scaling map (Figure 36), designed to illustrate the way in which various attitudes clustered together. As shown in the figure, synagogue involvement does not cluster closely with spirituality. Rather, it is part of a cluster of Jewish organizational activity that also includes philanthropy and volunteering for Jewish organizations. There is also a “Jewish nationalism” cluster that includes Israel, Holocaust, and anti-Semitism. Connection with other Jews, which is in the same region with Israel, also forms a cluster with ethics and improving the world. *Halacha* and spirituality occupy positions quite remote from those clusters, especially the one that pertains to nationalism.

**Figure 36**

Jewish communal efforts to memorialize the Holocaust, vigorously counter manifestations of anti-Semitism large and small, and rally support for Israel have made an impression on the Jewish youth of today. In the realm of peoplehood, lessons taught have been lessons learned. But as for religion, today's teenagers resemble less the rabbis of today than those who ratified the historic "Pittsburgh Platform" adopted by a conference of Reform rabbis in 1885, parts of which now read as a reasonable sociological description of the approach to religion taken by today's adolescents, who "accept as binding only... moral laws" because ritual practice is "entirely foreign to our present mental and spiritual state" (Declaration of Principles, 1885). Bridging the gap between attitudes and behavior is a primary challenge to Jewish educators.



## SUMMARY: WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

There are very little systematic data on the lives of contemporary Jewish adolescents. The present study was designed to fill this gap. Nearly 1,300 *b'nei mitzvah* ages 13 to 17 from Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and independent congregations were surveyed, along with parents. The study was designed to develop a comprehensive picture of the attitudes and behavior of contemporary young Jews, as shaped by both the Jewish and American contexts of their lives. Not surprisingly, our findings are very consistent with previous surveys of both Jewish and American adolescents, and capture the complex lives of adolescents who are navigating between childhood and adult life.

From a parochial perspective, the study documents a decline in participation in Jewish activities as teenagers move from the high point of their Jewish education -- becoming a *bar* or *bat mitzvah* -- through the high-school years. There is a steady move away from the Jewish community as *b'nei mitzvah* enter the demanding world inhabited by other American teenagers. Whereas nearly all adolescent respondents participated in some Jewish educational, volunteer, or recreational activity in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, just over half did so in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. School dominated their daily lives, and school became more demanding as they progressed toward graduation. These students were trying to “make it” academically, socially, and financially. As they went through middle school and high school, they made a heavy investment in three pursuits that limited the time available for involvement in the Jewish community: homework, school-based extracurricular activities, and paid employment.

These teenagers not only took their secular schoolwork seriously, but valued and enjoyed it more than the supplementary Jewish education that led to their *bar/bat mitzvah*. This negative attitude toward Hebrew school, and toward continuing with Jewish education, was one of several findings that made clear the extent to which adolescence is different for boys than girls. Boys were more negative than girls, an almost universal finding across domains of engagement with Jewish life. Actual participation in formal Jewish education showed a decline predictable from these attitudes, with the same gender differences persisting. Overall, weekly participation declined steadily from 60% in 7<sup>th</sup> grade to 22% in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Meanwhile, sports, arts, and other clubs occupied a good deal of the teenagers' free time, showing the potent centripetal force of the school-based community. In contrast, the potential for informal Jewish extracurricular activities such as youth groups to attract those not involved in formal Jewish education remained largely unfulfilled, in terms of both rates and frequency of participation.

Our American teenagers were preoccupied not only with school and school-related activities, but also with jobs. Demonstrating financial independence seemed critical for our respondents. The percentage of adolescents engaged in paid employment doubled (from 36% to 71%) between 7<sup>th</sup> grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. With child-care jobs plentiful, girls worked more than boys in the early teens, but boys caught up as well-paying sales jobs became available to both genders. A small percentage found education-related jobs (e.g., teaching), and some of these jobs were in the Jewish community.

Typically, however, teenagers chose jobs that paid well over those that were more personally meaningful.

Since the teenagers were severely overscheduled during the school year, summer offered the best opportunity for Jewish involvements to claim their time and attention. Teenage summer activities clustered in the areas of camp, work, and travel, with summer jobs (including camp jobs) replacing summer camping as the teens grew into greater responsibility and earning power. Jewish programs placed among the five most popular summer activities for students in all grades, and the proportion of teenagers who participated in those programs increased throughout the high-school years. Participation reached a peak with the Israel experience programs commonly offered to sophomores and juniors, then declined sharply after graduation. Although informal summer Jewish education might be thought to compensate for a lack of Jewish involvement during the school year, more often it complements Jewish activities at home and in the local community. The vast majority of participants in Jewish summer programs came from households that made continued Jewish education a priority. Moreover, the impact of the Israel experience on participants' religious opinions and their connection to Judaism depended greatly on parental Jewish commitment. It also varied with gender. Girls were more interested in Israel experience programs than boys and were more likely to report that their connection to Judaism was enhanced by such educational trips.

The teenagers, who for the most part came from intact, fairly well-to-do families, generally enjoyed good relations with their parents and were strongly influenced by them. With respect to living Jewishly, the example set by the parents and followed by the children was usually a moderate one that did not include rigorous observance of rituals, but did include valuing the *bar/bat mitzvah* as a meaningful occasion. Parental influence was felt especially strongly in the decision to continue formal Jewish education beyond this ceremonial passage. Just over half of the parents either required or strongly encouraged post-*bar/bat mitzvah* Jewish education, and this parental mandate or support was the strongest predictor of actual enrollment. It was also a major factor influencing exposure to and impact of Jewish summer camps and Israel experience programs.

Despite the lack of substantial involvement in the Jewish community, the majority of our teenage respondents thought that being Jewish was important to them. Nearly two-thirds of the adolescents thought it was important to raise their own children as Jews, a value they shared with their parents. The question of endogamy, on the other hand, reveals a significant generation gap. Only one-third (32%) of the teenagers thought it "extremely" or "very" important to marry a Jew, as compared with 60% of their parents. In line with the general cultural defection from this traditional belief, the value consensus between parents and children was much stronger when parents thought Jewish endogamy was irrelevant than when they thought it essential. The Jewish communal context also influences parents' ability to transmit values to their children. Teenagers from Reform synagogues were only about half as likely as those from Conservative synagogues to say that marrying Jewish is very important even when that was what their parents believed. Jewish continuity seems important to both generations, although they define it differently.

Regional variations were associated with different ways of living as Jews. For example, parents living in areas of high Jewish population density were more likely to be

endogamous and to have mostly Jewish friends than those in areas of low Jewish density. The teenagers, who had more ethnically heterogeneous social networks than their parents, had a higher proportion of Jewish friends and were more likely to date only Jews when they lived in a high-density area. School was the primary source of close friendships. With the exception of Jewish day-school students, whose close friendships and romantic involvements were almost always with other Jews, the proportion of school friends who were Jewish declined as the Jewish population of the region declined. In what appears to have been a deliberate effort to counter the effects of geography, teenagers in areas of low Jewish density relied more on Jewish organizations for out-of-school friendships than those in other areas. In an area with a large Jewish population, adolescent friendships fostered by Jewish institutions tended to reinforce relationships also developed in school. In an area with a small Jewish population, Jewish community among teenagers was maintained primarily through relationships supported by Jewish institutions as distinct from school. Jewish immersion programs (e.g., summer camps, trips to Israel) were also likely to nurture friendships with peers not known through school.

However Jewish or non-Jewish their peer network, these teenagers participated in the peer-group culture of our time, with its attendant risks and dangers. Rates of sexual activity and drug use (mainly alcohol and marijuana) were not much lower than those for comparable national samples of teenagers of the same age. Jewish commitments appeared to have little influence on sexual activity and drug use, although those respondents who discontinued formal Jewish education immediately after their *bar/bat mitzvah* were more likely to use marijuana at the same time.

As expected at this developmental stage, three-quarters of the teenage respondents were preoccupied with a search for meaning in life. Among these, only 40% thought it important to find that meaning through their Jewishness. For these teenagers, being Jewish was about remembering the Holocaust, countering anti-Semitism, being ethical, making the world a better place, caring about Israel, or feeling a connection to other Jews. But they did not think it necessary to implement their commitment to peoplehood, survival, and ethics through Jewish philanthropy, volunteering for Jewish organizations, or observing Jewish law. These patterns were consistent for boys and girls.

The picture of today's Jewish adolescents that emerges from this survey is a familiar one – indeed, one that is not so different from their parents. These adolescents care about being Jewish and about aspects of Jewish history and culture, but do not express this allegiance by engaging in practices that might separate them not only from their non-Jewish peers, but also (in denominational terms) from one another. Judaism is important to them, but only as it fits into their lives and their goals in a secular, pluralistic society. Like their non-Jewish peers, whom they greatly resemble, they are creatures of their time and place.

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## METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

### The Jewish Population of Greater Boston

The 1995 CJP Boston Demographic Study (Israel, 1997) recorded 15,095 teenagers aged 13-17 living in 11,281 households in the greater Boston area at the time. 71% of these teenagers had become *b'nei mitzvah*. In 1995, the cohort of adolescents surveyed four years later by CMJS would have been between the ages of 9 and 13.<sup>4</sup> These numbered 15,760 individuals, living in 12,418 households.

In 1995, rates of becoming *bar/bat mitzvah* varied by region, with the highest rates found in the areas of highest Jewish population density (83%). This was followed closely by the area of moderate population density (73%), with a significant drop-off observed in the area of lowest density (46%).

### **Regional Samples**

The selected region of high Jewish density encompassed one half of a town whose c. 28,000 Jewish residents represented approximately 34% of the town's population. The area of moderate Jewish population density was composed of six geographically contiguous towns whose combined Jewish population of c. 26,500 made up 26% of the overall population. Patterns of synagogue enrollment and familiarity with the area suggested that the towns constituted a region that could be treated as a unit. The selected region of low Jewish population density was composed of 14 contiguous towns with a total of approximately 11,000 Jews. The Jewish population in this area comprised 3% of the overall population. (See Table A-1.)

### **Synagogue Lists**

Following selection of the regions for inclusion in the study, all synagogues within these regions were identified. A Jewish-education professional with experience working in the Boston area was hired to manage contacts with the synagogues, to secure their cooperation and their lists. Thirty-three synagogues with educational programs were identified as potential participants in the study. Of these, 20 provided contact information for all adolescents who had become *b'nei mitzvah* over the previous five years. The participating congregations included six from the region of high Jewish density, six from the moderate-density region, and eight from the low-density region. Eight were Reform, seven were Conservative, two Reconstructionist, one Orthodox and two were unaffiliated (see Table A-2).

Included in the 13 congregations that did not participate in the study are three older synagogues that did not have any *b'nei mitzvah* over the past five years, two with whom no contact could be established, one that refused, and seven that did not provide contact information in time to be included in the study. Ten of the 13 non-participating congregations came from the region of lowest Jewish population density. These tended to

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<sup>4</sup> Actually, the JAS surveyed a number of high school seniors age 18, who would have been 14 back in 1995. However, because the CJP demographic study asked for information about children under age 18, the analysis here is limited to the 13-17 year-old cohort for ease of comparison.

be smaller synagogues; the four largest synagogues from this region all participated in the study.

### **Jewish Day School Over-sample**

To ensure adequate representation of Jewish day school (JDS) students, we added an over-sample of these adolescents, derived from the enrollment lists of four schools: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and community. The Conservative and community schools included, respectively, 48 and 101 students. The Orthodox and Reform school lists were much smaller, with only 13 and 10 students, respectively. A large Orthodox school agreed to participate in the study, but had a policy of not sharing its mailing list. It therefore sent a postcard to 275 families asking them to provide us with their contact information should they wish to participate in the study. Only 39 families responded.<sup>5</sup> A third Orthodox day school refused to participate. The difficulty in garnering sufficient participation from Orthodox day schools and congregations (only one of each participated in the study) raises concerns about the representativeness of the Orthodox sample and the difficulties in ensuring the institutions' and individuals' confidentiality when breaking out data by denomination. For purposes of the present analyses, these institutions have been excluded.

Considering only the non-Orthodox institutions, 87 respondents' names were obtained both through day school lists and synagogue lists. Excluding these individuals, the day school over-sample includes 95 parents and 91 teenagers.

### **Sampling Frame**

The synagogue lists varied in the amount of information provided. At a minimum, however, each list included the teenager's name and address or phone number. Most included age or grade in school, parents' and siblings' names, and sex. Some included secondary contact information (possibly for teens whose parents were divorced, or who had more than one residence). The information provided by each synagogue was cross-checked with the information provided by the others to eliminate duplicate entries. Seventeen teenagers were listed by more than one synagogue. These cases were flagged in the sampling frame, and a column listing the second source was added.

### **Ineligible Children**

Some synagogue lists also included teenagers who were ineligible for the survey either because they had not become *bar* or *bat mitzvah* or because they had already graduated high school. We screened out such individuals when phoning parents to obtain their consent for including their children in the study. This process screened out 239 teenagers, 189 of whom had not become *bar* or *bat mitzvah*, 47 *b'nei mitzvah* who had graduated high school, and 3 who were deemed ineligible for both reasons. In 174 cases, the elimination of the ineligible teenagers left no eligible teenagers in the household, and the parents were dropped from the parental survey. Because these figures were derived from only the households we succeeded in contacting, they understate the full extent to

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<sup>5</sup> The practice of requiring "positive consent" for participation in school studies is known to produce biased results.

which the lists provided included people who did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the sampling frame. The response rates reported below are therefore artificially lowered because they include in the denominator adolescents and households that were actually ineligible and mistakenly included in the sampling frame.

### **Sampling in Selected Congregations**

For 18 of the 20 participating congregations, the entire population of teenagers who had become *b'nei mitzvah* over the past five years was contacted. That is, contact was attempted with every eligible teenager in the lists provided by the synagogues. A population survey was attempted because (excluding the two largest synagogues) there were a total of only 1437 presumably eligible<sup>6</sup> teenagers from each synagogue. Based on our analysis of statistical power, the goal was to survey 1,300 adolescent respondents.<sup>7</sup> The number of teenagers per synagogue ranged from 6 to 272 and averaged 65. The two largest congregations provided the names of 561 and 373 eligible adolescents, respectively. It was decided to sample 300 teenagers from each of these congregations, taking only one person from each family in order to maximize variance. Household and individual-level sampling weights have been computed to take this procedure into account.

### **Response Rates**

Achieving a high response rate was a priority, and significant resources were devoted to that end, including follow-up mailings and a \$10 cash incentive. The incentive was paid "up front" to all teenagers who received the JAS questionnaire, regardless of whether or not they actually completed it. Parents were informed of this incentive when we called them to request their consent.

The rates of parental and adolescent participation were extremely high (see Table A-3), exceeding our initial goal of 80%. Eighty-nine percent of eligible parents with valid contact information gave consent to allow their children to participate in the study. Eighty-seven percent of all such parents participated in the telephone survey. In other words, almost all who consented agreed to be interviewed themselves. These high rates showed little variation by region, the exception being the near universal participation of parents in the day school over-sample (96% consented, 94% interviewed). In most cases, lack of consent signified a failure to establish contact with a family. Of 1,607 eligible families from Orthodox and non-Orthodox institutions, only 40, or 2.5%, refused to grant consent.

In seven cases, families were interviewed twice, due to multiple listings in the sampling frame that went undetected. Eliminating the duplicate responses, the final parental data set includes 1,318 teenage respondents.

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<sup>6</sup> That is, those we knew for certain were not ineligible.

<sup>7</sup> The large number was necessary because it was planned to examine the responses of sub-groups (e.g., males/females, participants in formal/informal Jewish education).

Of the 1,573 teenagers who received questionnaires, 1,297, or 82%, responded. Like the parental rates, the rates for teenagers also showed little variation by region, with the exception of a higher response (90%) from the region of high Jewish population density. Two teenagers responded twice, and one ineligible college freshman responded for her eligible sibling. After eliminating these and other such cases, the final data set includes 1,284 adolescent respondents from 1,118 households.

### **Call-backs**

The JAS was administered to students toward the end of the 1998-1999 school year. A number of students who did not immediately return the pencil-and-paper instrument ended up completing it during the summer months. In addition, a number of students in the day school over-sample were administered the survey in late June and early July.

Under these circumstances, interpretation of Question G6, “What grade are you currently in?” became problematic. Some teenagers who responded in the summer reported the grade they would be entering in September rather than the grade they had just completed in June. Even more than age, grade in school is a primary structuring element in the lives of youth. Each grade is typically composed of people from two birth-year cohorts. For each birth-year cohort, respondents who returned their questionnaire in July, August and September were more likely to report being one grade higher than those who responded in May, before the school year ended. The pattern for June respondents falls somewhere in the middle.

To correct the problem, self-reported grade was cross-checked with the grade reported by the synagogue in our sampling frame. In cases where the adolescents responded before June 10, or where the teenager’s report and the synagogue’s report matched, these reports were taken. In the cases of teenagers who responded after June 10 and for whom corroborating information could not be obtained from the synagogue lists, we called the families of 131 summer respondents to confirm that the reported grade was in fact the grade that had been completed in June. Speaking with either the teenagers or their parents, it was determined that 32 had reported the grade they would soon be entering. This information was used to clean the data used for analysis to ensure that all grade reports reflect the 1998-1999 academic year.

**Table A-1: Towns Included in the Study (by Jewish Population Density Region)**

Region	Total Population <sup>1</sup>	Total Jewish Population <sup>2</sup>	Jewish Density
High	82,585	28,120	34.0%
Moderate	100,354	26,522	26.4%
Low	333,613	10,662	3.2%

<sup>1</sup> 1990 US Census 5% PUMS

<sup>2</sup> 1995 CJP Demographic Study

**Table A-2: Synagogues Asked to Participate (by Region and Denomination)**

Region	Participant	Affiliation					Total
		Reform	Conservative	Reconstructionist	Orthodox	Independent	
High	Y	1	2	2	1	-	6
	N	-	-	-	1	-	1
Moderate	Y	3	1	-	-	2	6
	N	-	1	-	-	1	2
Low	Y	4	4	-	-	-	8
	N	1	1	1	4	3	10
Total		9	9	3	6	6	33

**Table A-3: Response Rate by Region**

	PARENTS		Valid HH N	TEENS	
	Consent Rate	Interview Rate		Response Rate	Received Questionnaire
<b>Overall</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>87%</b>	1532	<b>82%</b>	1573
<b>Hi Dense</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>84%</b>	566	<b>90%</b>	449
<b>Mid Dense</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>86%</b>	627	<b>83%</b>	665
<b>Low Dense</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>86%</b>	247	<b>85%</b>	284
<b>JDS Over-sample</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>94%</b>	159	<b>81%</b>	125

Note: Rates calculated for non-Orthodox institutions only