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ma'yan

A Ma'yan Research Report
December 2008



Pretty
soon,
we'll be
taking
over.

Voices and Perspectives of
American Jewish Teenage Girls

For girls, adolescence is a very confusing period. Balancing our academic and social lives is a constant struggle, and often religion is lost in the mix.... When asked (to name) one thing they wished adults understood about girls their age, many said that they wanted freedom, and they felt enough stress without parental pressure. This could be a great opportunity for the Jewish educator: if youth groups, Hebrew schools, and camps allowed Jewish teenagers to feel comfortable being who they were and didn't push them into being one way, they could be an indispensable resource for the Jewish community.

**—Natasha Bernstein Bunzl,
Ma'yan Research Training Intern**

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Introduction

What do we know about the experiences and attitudes of girls coming of age in today's Jewish community? By many measures, we observe that the girls commonly served by Jewish communal institutions—many of them socially, economically, and racially privileged—are thriving. We see these “alpha girls” all around us: leading their extracurricular activities, bettering the world around them, excelling in sports, and matriculating to elite universities. And yet, these same girls report feeling intense pressure to accrue academic and extracurricular distinctions and fulfill the expectations of parents, friends, community leaders, media images, and more. As young women, they are surrounded by mixed messages about femininity and ambition, anger, affluence, and more. In our roles as Jewish youth professionals, as parents, as teachers, as members of extended families and close communities, we have seen ample evidence of these challenges and these strengths in the girls in our own lives.

At Ma'yan, we hear these stories frequently from the concerned adults in Jewish girls' lives. But our mission—to help girls grow into critical, curious, and committed global citizens—demands that we ground our advocacy in something more substantive than anecdote. To serve Jewish girls, we need to know more: what moves and inspires and worries them, where they excel and where they are struggling, what they say they want from the adults who care for them. Remarkably little research has looked specifically at this population, and virtually none has involved girls in framing the questions the research pursues. The Ma'yan Research Training Internship, a research team designed as a collaboration between Ma'yan staff and Jewish teen girls, was created to do just that.

In the spring of 2007, Ma'yan was organizing our first training institute for Jewish youth professionals, “Strong Voices, Critical Choices,” to be held on October 28th of that year. Because the conference focused on identifying and addressing the needs of girls in the Jewish community, we were committed to including girls' voices directly in the day's program. Rather than inviting a group of girls to speak from their own experiences, however, we chose the model of a *participatory action research* project, through which girls would work with Ma'yan staff to create an original research study examining the experiences of their Jewish American teen girl peers, and would report their findings on a panel at the conference.

With this, the Ma'yan Research Training Internship (RTI) was born. In March, a call went out inviting girls who had been involved in programming through The Jewish Community Center in Manhattan (JCC) to apply for this selective internship program. From the applications we received, seven girls from high schools in the New York City metropolitan area were chosen. The girls were offered a stipend to compensate them for their work, and they agreed to meet a minimum of six times as a group (three in the spring, three in the fall), to complete homework assignments and collect research data on their own time between meetings and over the summer, and to present the results of their research as panelists at the Strong Voices, Critical Choices training institute.

This report examines the key findings of our collaborative research. The data, collected between June and September, 2007, come from two original surveys designed by our research team, known collectively as the Ma'yan Surveys: a longer, mostly multiple choice survey (the "main survey") and a brief survey that encouraged more detailed, narrative responses (the "short-answer survey"). As you will find, our data document and affirm the complexity and contradiction we have witnessed in the lives of young Jewish women. These girls exhibit remarkable strengths and advantages: strong connections to parents and peers, meaningful ties to Jewish community and identity, ambitious professional aspirations and expectations for personal achievement, and social capital gleaned from material privilege. At the same time, girls' comments reveal deep ambivalence and confusion around material consumption, describing feelings of envy and competition with wealthy peers, and yet harsh judgment of the superficiality and materialism of other girls. Our data reveal a persistent drone of pressure for girls to meet others' expectations: to excel in school, to please and support their friends, to satisfy their parents' expectations regarding Jewish life and identity, to serve others and make a better world.

Ma'yan believes that documenting the lives of Jewish girls is a necessary tool to enable our community to better serve their needs and interests. We offer this report as a resource to Jewish communal institutions, youth professionals, parents, and others committed to making the Jewish community a place where the next generation of Jewish women leaders can grow and thrive. As always, we welcome your feedback at info@mayan.org.

In this report, we focus on four main findings that emerged from our data:

1. Girls are experiencing intense pressures to achieve and to meet others' expectations.
2. Girls are engaged in Jewish life and are actively exploring their Jewish identities.
3. Girls are committed to repairing the world and expect to play a leading role in shaping their generation's future.
4. Economic and material privilege exerts a powerful but often silent influence in many Jewish girls' lives.

Survey Participants

Our Surveys were distributed to self-identifying Jewish American teen girls; those between the ages of 13 and 19 were eligible to participate. Participants were recruited via the Research Training Interns' social networks (local and virtual), through Interns' summer programs such as camps and Israel trips, and through the Ma'yan advisors' networks of Jewish youth professionals and the girls with whom they interact.

Responses

On the short-answer survey, respondents were asked to imagine that someone they've just met for the first time asks them, "So what are you?" Responses were meant to highlight the core categories by which these girls define their individual identities. Predictably, as the survey explicitly targeted "American Jewish teen girls," many responses included references to Judaism, nationality, and to being a girl. Some respondents, perhaps spurred by the surveys' focus on Jewish identity, included details regarding their personal relationships to Judaism: "Agnostic but my mother is Christian and my father and stepmother are Jewish," explained one, "Conservative/ Reform Jewish," wrote another. Many others added references to racial or ethnic identity (e.g., "I am a Jewish Iranian American") or to geographic location (e.g., "I am a teenage girl growing up in New York City"; "Hi, I'm Rachel, I'm from AZ, I'm Jewish, I'm 16, and I love life"). Some responses highlighted physical appearance ("Female 5'8 Brown Red w. blonde") while others focused on girls' interests and passions ("I enjoy performance and visual art. I'm a bit of a dork, and do very well at school").

Finally, many respondents answered this question in terms of personal qualities or virtues, highlighting their friendliness or kindness, or expressing their desire to make a better world. As with this simple question, the vibrancy of girls' responses on our surveys revealed tantalizing sparks of insight into their lives and experiences. The four findings discussed in detail in this report represent some of the richest and most intriguing results – and, we believe, the most important for concerned adults in Jewish girls' lives to understand.

THE SURVEY

304

total responses were received between the two (online and paper-and-pencil) forms. Due to the nature of the web-based survey administration service, however, several of these online responses turned out to be partly or largely blank. Surveys determined to be incomplete were deleted, along with the two surveys that indicated the respondent was male.

227

responses were included in the analysis. The vast majority (85%) were 15-17 years of age; roughly the same percentage (89%) were entering the 10th-12th grade in school.

102

short-answer surveys were collected. Again, all blank surveys were deleted, along with those missing responses to half or more of the survey items.

85

responses were included in the analysis of the short-answer survey, and 15-17 year-olds predominated within this sample as well. While additional demographic data was not collected for the short-answer survey, the two populations overlapped greatly: although participation was anonymous, 73% of respondents on the short-answer survey indicated that they had also completed the main survey.

Findings

The four findings discussed in detail in this report represent some of the richest and most intriguing results—and, we believe, the most important for concerned adults in Jewish girls' lives to understand.

1. Girls are feeling intense pressure to achieve and to meet others expectations.

Among girls' responses on the Ma'yan Surveys, concerns and frustrations about perceived pressures—both internal and external—represented a consistent theme. For parents, teachers, youth professionals, communal leaders, and certainly for Jewish teen girls themselves, this can hardly come as a surprise. Schools and media outlets warn that admission to selective colleges and universities is growing more competitive every year, and seniors are frequently advised to apply to upwards of a dozen schools. While girls' educational advances have been depicted as coming at the expense of their male peers, there is in fact evidence that admission may be especially restrictive for white, middle class girls, as colleges opt to maintain an even gender balance despite a disproportionate percentage qualified female applicants (Britz, 2006).

Outside the academic arena, as well, adolescent development brings the keen awareness of others' expectations and judgments. Girls perceive themselves as constantly scrutinized by adults and peers alike: for their appearance, their generosity and "niceness," their academic achievements, their performance of Jewish identity. In what Girls

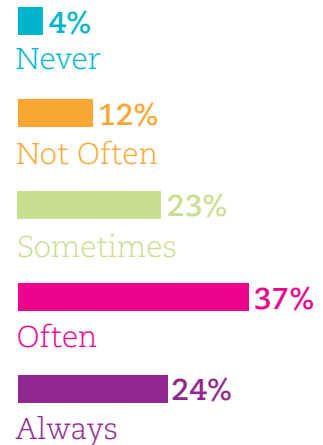
Incorporated calls "the Supergirl Dilemma," girls feel pushed to meet these expectations in every arena, and all at the same time (Girls Incorporated, 2006).

While we did not inquire specifically about girls' school performance, results indicate that Ma'yan Survey participants place a high value on education and hold ambitious achievement expectations. They also perceive these expectations as being reinforced by their parents. More than three-quarters of girls surveyed (84%¹) report worrying about being admitted into a highly-ranked college; one quarter (24%) report that they are "always" worried about college admissions.

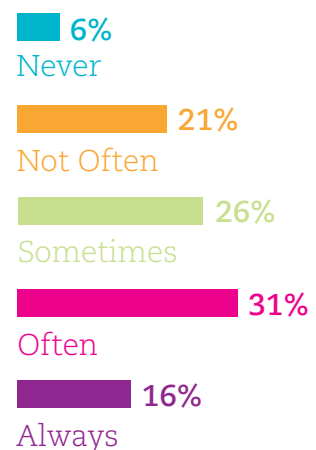
Correspondingly, the girls are conscious about how their current activities may impact their future opportunities. Responding to the statement "When I choose an extracurricular activity, I think about how it will look on my resume or college applications," nearly half of the girls (47%) reported that they always or often do, while an additional 26% sometimes do. This focus on academic achievement and concern about college admission is consistent with the high value the Jewish community places on schooling and the disproportionate educational attainment of American Jews (United Jewish Communities, 2001). It is also consistent with research on social class privilege and secondary

THE SURVEY

I worry about getting into a highly-ranked college



When I choose an extracurricular activity, I think about how it will look on my resume or college applications



¹ Collapsing "always," "often," and "sometimes" on a five-point scale

“My parents want me to go to an Ivy League college while saving third-world countries all summer”

Girls in the Ma’yan surveys attest to the profound impact—both positive and negative—of their parents’ expectations and aspirations.

education (e.g. Pope, 2004) which has argued that schooling in middle class and affluent communities has come to focus increasingly on credentialing, geared toward gaining students entry into elite universities.

Several open-ended questions on the short-answer survey prompted references to achievement pressures, both internal and external. In response to the question, “*What is one thing you wish adults understood about girls your age?*,” girls argued that their parents do not appreciate how busy and widely committed they are, how intensely they feel pressure to achieve and distinguish themselves. “I wish adults understood that we don’t always deserve pressure and aggravation from them because we give it to ourselves,” wrote one. “That it’s tough being a teenage girl,” stated another, “There’s a lot of pressure coming from all around us.” One girl illustrated her point by naming a litany of her commitments: “We’re incredibly busy!! I have lots to do on a daily basis: 6 classes, Amnesty International, environmental club, Vice President of my BBYO region, and a job.”

One of the strongest influences on adolescent identity, of course, is a teen’s relationship with her parents. Girls in the Ma’yan surveys attest to the profound impact—both positive and negative—of their parents’ expectations and aspirations. When asked to describe “*the person your parents want you to be,*” short-answer survey respondents offered both praise and critique

for their parents’ ideals. Many wrote emphatically of their parents’ appreciation for their individuality and self-determination, stating, “They want me to be happy!,” or, “Whoever I turn out to be is fine.” Others identified particular values or character traits (e.g., “happy, educated, Jewish, good person, kind, charitable,” “a kind, smart, athletic, loving, caring, nice girl”) as key to their parents’ aspirations for them.

Frequently, however, responses to this question conveyed girls’ acute awareness of their parents’ expectations in a range of arenas. Reflecting girls’ own achievement expectations, many respondents identified their academic and professional success as priorities for their parents. One response included three variations on this theme: describing the person her parents want her to be as “smart, go to a very good college, successful.” For other participants, parents’ expectations for their engagement in Jewish life were paramount. Some girls claimed simply being “a good Jew” as their parents’ key desire, while others elaborated (“marry a Jew,” “go to *shul*, *daven*, wear *tzniut* clothes”).

Certainly girls are aware of their parents’ desires. But how do girls *feel* about their parents’ expectations? Many girls’ depictions of their parents’ ideals suggested that girls feel supported and valued by their parents. Others, however, expressed a palpable sense of frustration and resentment towards perceived parental pressure. Respondents often used

humorous exaggeration to prove this point. “My parents want me to go to an Ivy League college while saving the world in third-world countries all summer,” wrote one. “A divorce lawyer with a neurologist for a husband with kids and a nice house in Sands Point,” answered another, referencing a tony Long Island, NY suburb. While many girls seem to chafe at their parents’ vicarious aspirations, they do not necessarily rebel substantially against them. One respondent appeared resigned to pleasing her parents even as she found fault with their expectations:

My parents want me to be a responsible young girl who only does things if it's been approved by every organization in the U.S. They want me to study and be smart and respectful, and the few times that I'm not all of these things, they act like I'm a terrible person. But for the most part, I maintain their standards.

In their report on “the Supergirl Dilemma,” Girls Incorporated found that 74% of girls in high school, 56% in middle school, and 46% in third through fifth grades say they “often feel stressed” (Girls Inc., 2006). Sizeable minorities also reported “often feel[ing] sad and unhappy” (42%, 32%, and 23%, respectively). Girls—and we suspect, middle class and more privileged girls in particular—have translated their parents’ invitation

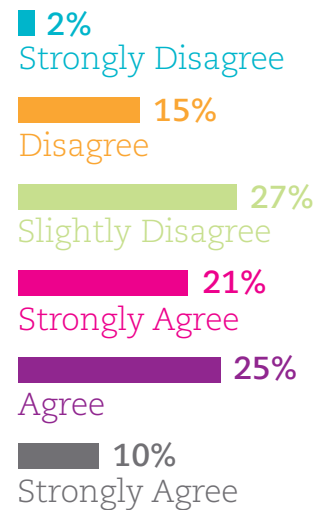
to “be anything you want to be” as an exhortation to “be the best at everything” (Martin, 2007). To the girls, this means not only excelling in school and cultivating extracurricular passions, but also cultivating a perfect appearance...and making it all appear effortless, to boot.

For teen girls, same-sex friendships have long been identified as a source of tremendous support and intimacy, but also as a site of intense conflict and indirect aggression (what is often termed “mean girl” behavior) (Brown, 2003; Simmons, 2002; Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Our research contains evidence of both aspects of girls’ peer relationships, and demonstrates—perhaps not surprisingly—that girls are keenly aware of their friends’ desires and expectations for their appearance, demeanor, and attitudes.

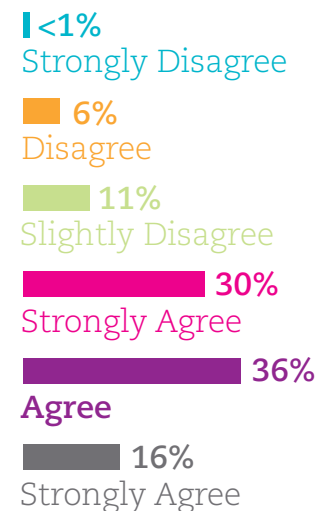
Our surveys did contain some indication of girls’ positive capacity to maintain their sense of self within close friendships. On items drawn from the Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale (AFIS), an existing measure of adolescent girls’ internalization of feminine gender-role assumptions, more than half of girls reported agreeing at least “slightly” that 1) they usually tell a friend when that person hurts their feelings (68%), 2) they would not change the way they do things to please someone else (56%), and 3) they tell their friends what they honestly think even when it is an unpopular idea (82%). Less than a third of girls

THE SURVEY

I would not change the way I do things in order to please someone else²



I tell my friends what I honestly think even when it is an unpopular idea³

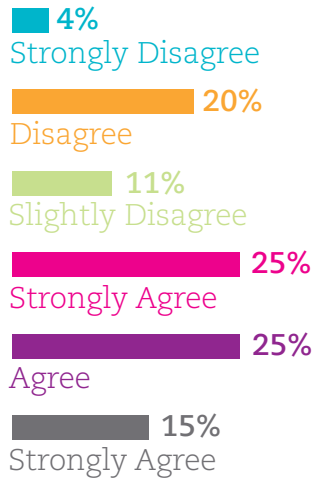


² Items taken from the Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale (AFIS) (Tolman and Porche, 2000).

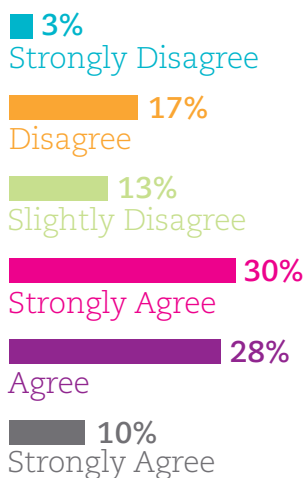
³ Ibid.

THE SURVEY

Often I look happy on the outside in order to please others, even if I don't feel happy on the inside⁴



I usually tell my friends when they hurt my feelings⁴



(29%) agreed or agreed strongly that they worry about being popular, though this may be related to the mean age of the survey samples (popularity is often seen as a greater concern for early adolescent girls, easing for many in high school [Eder, 1985]). To the extent that the girls' responses are a true reflection of their behavior, this should be welcome news. Researchers have long described how social pressure for girls to "be nice" can result in their avoidance of direct conflict in relationships with peers and adults. Brown and Gilligan (1992) describe a "tyranny of nice and kind" dictating girls' (especially white, middle class girls') public behavior. In addition to girls' careful monitoring of each other, they find that adults invoke this "injunction to 'be nice'" (p. 52) as a constraint on girls' expression of anger or other 'not nice' thoughts and feelings.

Nonetheless, other items on the AFIS raise some doubts about girls' comfort being forthright or tolerating conflict in their close relationships. Close to two-thirds of respondents (65%) agreed at least "slightly" with the statement, "Often I look happy on the outside in order to please others, even if I don't feel happy on the inside." The same proportion (66%) similarly agreed at least "slightly" with the statement, "I wish I could say what I feel more often than I do." These contradictory results may speak to girls'

underlying ambivalence and uncertainty around the experience of peer conflict. Brown and Gilligan (1992) have observed that at the edge of adolescence, girls begin to edit their feelings and desires out of their closest relationships, concerned that honesty will breed conflict, and that conflict will lead to isolation and abandonment. Girls may see honesty and forthrightness as desirable traits that they aim to embody, and yet they also acknowledge a tendency to edit negative, potentially conflict-provoking feelings out of their close relationships.

Responses on the short-answer survey further illustrate the complexity of adolescent girls' experiences with friends. Similar to the short-answer survey item asking girls to describe "the person [their] parents want them to be," survey respondents also described "the person your friends want you to be." Responses ranged from effusive praise ("They like me the way I am now;" "Whatever makes me happy") to angry denunciation:

My friends want me to go along with everything they do and if I have an opinion, it goes un-noticed. They want me to be what I'm not, and I won't be what they want me to be because I am my own person. I'm planning on making friends that accept me more.

⁴ibid.

At the least, these statements indicate girls' keen awareness of their friends' expectations for them, whether or not they feel pressure to comply. "A silly and quirky person who'll go out and have fun at a moment's notice," was one respondent's description of her friends' ideal, while another listed "cool and confident and well dressed and pretty." Others were more explicitly critical, as girls acknowledged—however tacitly—that their friends wish them to be, in some way, different than they are. "Who I am but sometimes not as loud," wrote one survey respondent. "They want me to be more interested in things like fashion, less judgmental, and less nerdy," answered another.

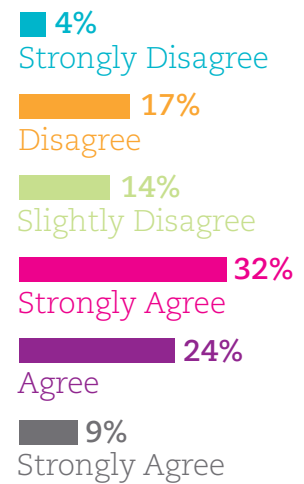
Some girls depicted their friends as encouraging them to develop confidence or overcome shyness ("Exactly who I am now, if not more outgoing around boys;" "My friends want me to be the constant friend who will gain a little more self-confidence"). One offered a recent incident as evidence: "Recently after switching schools I was really quiet and they were like come on!! Be yourself. You're so funny – show some of that." Others described their friends' desire for them to be good listeners, advice givers, and shoulders to lean on. "They want me to be considerate to their feelings," wrote one. "Someone who can empathize with them," articulated another, "and someone

who they can lean on when they are struggling." One respondent apparently felt compelled to assert that her friends' expectations are not burdensome for her ("I think my friends sometimes want me to be an ear to listen to, or someone who can give advice. I am more than willing and love to do both of these things"), perhaps sensing that the question itself pulled for conflict.

A certain amount of pressure, research shows, can be a positive. Mild anxiety, for instance, has been associated with positive performance on exams, while "positive peer pressure" can encourage teens to engage in pro-social rather than risk-taking behavior. But beyond a certain threshold, pressure often results in undue stress and anxiety. Ma'yan Survey data support existing evidence that girls face and are aware of intense pressures—to achieve and to conform to the expectations of important others in their lives. The fact that our respondents so frequently and emphatically volunteered comments about their experience of external and internal pressures is reason enough for concerned adults to pay this topic some heed.

THE SURVEY

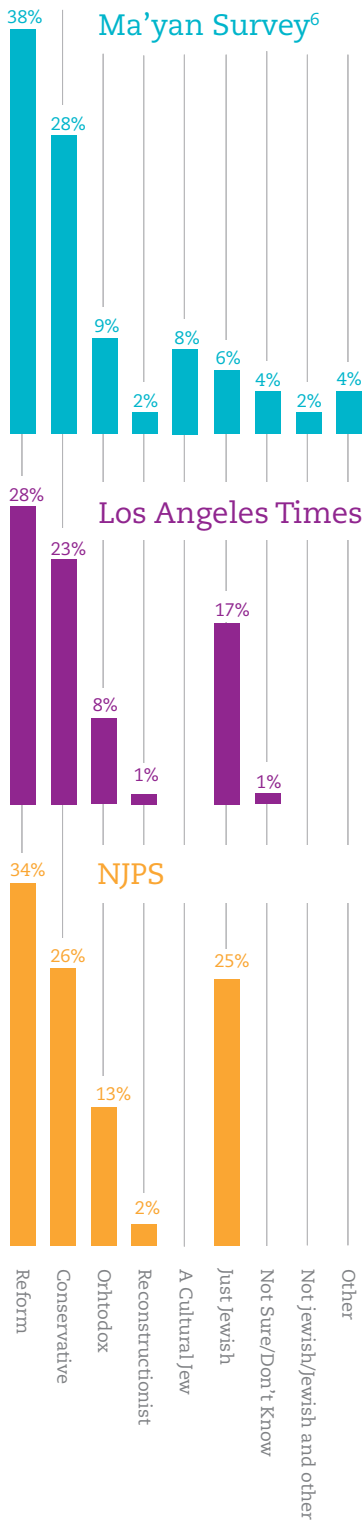
I wish I could say what I feel more than I do⁵



⁵ Ibid.

2. Girls are engaged in Jewish life and are actively exploring their Jewish identities.

Affiliation Rates



Ma'yan/RTI Survey of Jewish American Teen Girls, 2008
Based on a poll by The Los Angeles Times, 1998
2001 National Jewish population study, Ament, 2005

Respondents to the main survey demonstrated high rates of religious and ethnic Jewish affiliation. Perhaps not surprising for a survey that marketed itself to “American Jewish teen girls,” 93% of participants reported being raised Jewish; only 3% report either being raised Jewish and another religion, or not being raised in any religion.⁷ In terms of movement affiliation, more than a third of girls (38%) identified as Reform, more than a quarter (28%) as Conservative, and just under a tenth (9%) as Orthodox. The remaining respondents were divided amongst additional categories: A Cultural Jew; Reconstructionist; Just Jewish; Not Jewish or Jewish and Something Else; Not Sure, and Other. The affiliation rates for the three major movements are roughly proportional to those found in existing Jewish population estimates (see table to left for comparison summary). Such comparisons must be taken with caution, however, as existing surveys and studies have used dissimilar categories (e.g., the L.A. Times poll included Hasidic and Non-Jewish designations; the National Jewish Population Study

[NJPS] collapsed responses such as cultural, secular, humanistic, and ethnic Jew into the category Just Jewish).⁸ Synagogue membership was also high in our sample, with 89% of respondents’ families belonging to a synagogue, compared to 49% of Jewish families in the general population (Keysar, Kosmin, & Scheckner, 2000).⁹

In terms of personal observance and participation, the vast majority of girls surveyed (93%) had become bat mitzvah or planned to in the next year. This is a far higher percentage than observed in studies of the general American Jewish population, but it does reflect a consistent trend: the younger a Jewish woman is, the more likely she is to become bat mitzvah. For instance, research by Keysar, Kosmin, and Scheckner (2000) showed that among Jewish women 65 years of age and older, only seven percent had become bat mitzvah. For women between 45 and 64, the percentage doubled to 14%. When the youngest women studied—ages 18-29—came of age, more than half (56%) became bat mitzvah. For young men and women alike, b’nai mitzvah has become for many, the centerpiece of (and frequently, their graduation from) Jewish education. Though bat mitzvah is considered a modern invention, its breadth and centrality within

⁶ Total is 101% due to rounding.

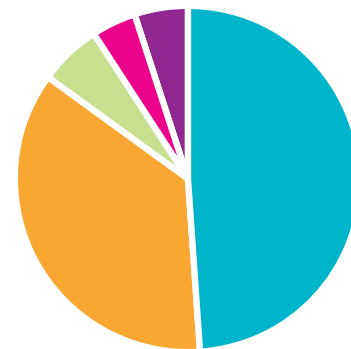
⁷ None reported being raised solely in a different (non-Jewish) religious tradition.

⁸ As reported in Ament, 2005.

⁹ The national family synagogue membership estimate (49%) is based on families with two Jewish parents, each of whom falls into one of the following categories: born Jews who affiliate; Jews by choice who affiliate; or born Jews who consider themselves secular.

Families have different rules and expectations about their Jewish rituals and observances, and kids have different feelings about those expectations. Which of the following statements is closest to your own relationship to your family's Jewish observance?

- I choose to participate in my family's observances because I want to 49%
- My parents require me to participate, but I would choose to do so anyway 36%
- My parents require me to participate, but I would prefer not to 6%
- I choose not to participate even though my parents would like me to 4%
- I choose not to participate and my parents support my choice 5%



modern American Judaism is striking (Oppenheimer, 2005).

Not only do these girls participate in Jewish ritual and communal life, they find participation and identification as Jews to be generally positive and valuable. The vast majority of Ma'yan survey respondents (85%) claimed that they participate in their families' Jewish observances out of their own desire (even if their parents also expect them to do so); only 15% claimed (cumulatively) that they choose not to participate or would prefer not to if permitted by their parents. Consistent with their high degree of Jewish involvement, survey respondents expressed a broad sense of ease and comfort with being identified as Jewish. Roughly 80% reported generally feeling proud to be Jewish. Contrastingly, 80% stated that they never or rarely feel self-conscious about being Jewish or wish they belonged to a different religion.

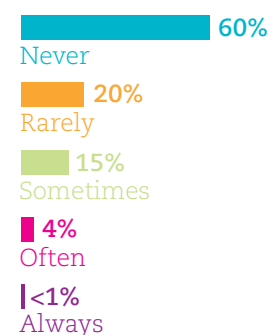
Girls' salient memories of Jewish life include experiences both solitary and communal. On the short-answer survey, several cited experiences during prayer as their most memorable or as times when they

feel the most Jewish. Yet community was also a distinct thread in girls' fondest Jewish memories. Whether traveling, surrounded by family at a seder table, or amongst friends at camp or youth group, girls' pleasure in and identification with Judaism is closely tied to their experience of connection with other Jews. The bat mitzvah experience, in particular, was nominated by the greatest number of girls as their fondest Jewish memory. Many others cited camp, travels to Israel, and joyful or humorous holiday observances (e.g., "dressing up as a latke for Purim;" "finding the matzah in the washing machine one year").

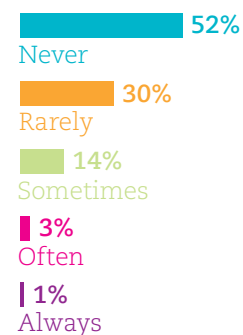
Another important facet of girls' Jewish experiences seems to be a sense of mastery, often in relation to ritual observance. As one girl recalled,

I have a very fond memory of chanting Torah during Yom Kippur and thinking the entire time that I was going to make a huge mistake and have to stop in the middle, but I surprised myself by performing (what I considered) flawlessly.

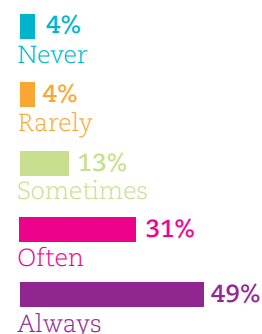
I wish I belonged to a different religion



I feel self-conscious about being Jewish



I feel proud to be Jewish



THE SURVEY

Do you follow all the Jewish rituals and observances that your parents practice?

Yes (72%)

No (28%)

Do you follow any Jewish traditions or practices that your parents do not?

Yes (20%)

No (80%)

Do you pray on your own?

Yes (35%)

No (65%)

Do you believe in God?

Yes (48%)

No (12%)

Maybe (41%)

20% of girls stated that they follow some Jewish practices or traditions independent of family custom, while roughly 1/3 (35%) report that they pray on their own.

Similarly, others described their sense of accomplishment and pleasure in leading services or learning songs at camp. The bat mitzvah, of course, was frequently cited in this manner, with many girls expressing a sense of pride in their performance on the *bimah*: “I recited all my prayers beautifully,” said one, while another remembered, “I finally showed my friends and family just what I could achieve.”

Perhaps not surprisingly, given girls’ pride in their mastery of Jewish observance, nearly three quarters (72%) stated that they follow all the Jewish rituals and observances that their parents practice. In addition, 20% of girls stated that they follow some Jewish practices or traditions independent of family custom, while roughly 1/3 (35%) report that they pray on their own. The most common of these independent practices included attending services more often than family, reciting prayers such as the *shmah* and *birkat*, and observing dietary rules. Some responses, however, reflected a broader conception of personal observance, including wearing a Star of David and affiliating with Jewish organizations. For these girls, however, active participation in ritual life did not imply spiritual faith. Just under half (48%) of respondents claimed to believe in God; while only 12% claimed not to believe in God, 41% responded that they were not sure.

In addition to examining girls’ experiences in the Jewish community, we also designed the survey to elicit insight into girls’ *internal*

experience of Jewishness. On the short-answer survey, we asked whether particular times of year or specific activities make girls feel “especially Jewish.” We imagined that these questions would elicit experiences and traditions that create a strong Jewish identity and sense of belonging and affiliation among girls. Some responses, certainly, conveyed deep pleasure in being Jewish (e.g., “Identifying with a Jewish community that is thousands of years old;” “I go to yeshiva and I love Israel so much”). Some girls, meanwhile, linked the salience of Jewishness to the awareness of being different than other people, whether that means “being the only Jew among gentiles” or “being the most observant Jew in the group.” In another variation, girls report feeling especially Jewish when they display their identity symbolically, through clothing and jewelry (such as wearing a skirt or *tzniut* clothing, wearing a *hamsa* or Star of David). From these brief comments alone, it was impossible to discern whether this experience of difference was viewed positively or negatively.

Responses to other items on the short-answer survey, however, do suggest that awareness of being different from non-Jews can be an uncomfortable experience for girls, in part because it may generate a social distance from peers that researchers have argued adolescent girls find difficult to tolerate (Simmons, 2000; Brown & Gilligan, 1992). One respondent lists the High Holy Days and Passover as “the times when I feel mad about being Jewish,” while another

comments that she feels especially Jewish at “the Christian new year because I feel like it’s not my holiday to celebrate.” Another girl states that attending a Jewish school and wearing skirts make her feel Jewish, but she notes that she does these things not of her own desire but “because of my parents.” This awareness of difference also emerges through girls’ interactions with their peers: “I sometimes use Yiddish words that my non-Jewish friends laugh at me for;” a reference to “holidays when I can’t go out with friends and watch tv.”

Girls’ high levels of engagement with Jewish identity should be welcome news to concerned adults. Across a variety of faiths, religiosity (as defined by participation in religious activities, placing a high value on religion, and a history of involvement in religious organizations such as youth groups) has been identified as a powerful protective factor in the lives of adolescents. Religious 12th graders, for instance, are less likely than non-religious peers to smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol, to get in trouble with police, or to get in trouble at school. They are simultaneously more likely to engage in myriad positive activities: to wear seatbelts, to exercise or play sports, to volunteer in their communities, and to participate in student government (Smith & Faris, 2002). In addition, girls’ wrestling and experimenting with various levels and types of Jewish involvement and identification is a perfect illustration of a central developmental task of adolescence: identity formation.

3. Girls are committed to making a better world and expect to play a leading role in shaping their generation’s future.

Girls who participated in the Ma’yan Surveys are deeply and consistently engaged in community service activities. Ninety-one percent reported having engaged in volunteer or community service activities in the past year. Only 41% stated that they received school credit for their service work, suggesting that most girls’ involvement is not primarily driven by school requirements or similar external motivation. Indeed, 79% of respondents agreed or agreed strongly that they have a duty as citizens to be involved in community service or activism. (Girls were, incidentally, evenly divided as to whether they had a particular duty “because of being Jewish.” This may represent an opportunity for Jewish youth professionals and parents to bring a Jewish lens to adolescents’ explorations of social justice issues.)

Survey respondents were asked to identify the social issues addressed by their service and activist work from a list of fifteen common topic areas. The results indicate that girls’ concerns and passions are wide-ranging. While more than half (54%) have worked to address issues of poverty and hunger (the most common response), more than a fifth of girls surveyed have also volun-

Participants in the Ma’yan Surveys are deeply and consistently engaged in community service activities. Ninety-one percent reported having engaged in volunteer or community service activities in the past year.

THE SURVEY

In the past year, have you participated in any volunteer work or community service?

Yes (91%) No (7%) Not Sure (2%)

If yes, did you receive school credit for this work??

Yes (46%) No (45%) Not Sure (9%)

In the past year, have you participated in any political activism (e.g., working on a political campaign, lobbying legislators, organizing or attending a protest)?

Yes (31%) No (67%) Not Sure (3%)

Nearly all girls surveyed agreed that it is important for teenagers to be informed about politics and world events (98%).

teered for causes related to disaster relief (22%), diseases or illnesses (36%), children’s services (48%), literacy or academic tutoring (21%), environmental protection and global warming (35%), the elderly (32%) and/or peace or anti-war advocacy (35%). Of particular interest to Ma’yan, 19% of respondents report involvement in volunteer or activist work around reproductive rights and/or women’s rights. Additionally, 45% have been involved in organizations or activities related to Israel. Consistent with their activities, when asked to nominate which three of these same issues they are “most concerned about,” the most frequent responses were environmental protection/global warming (42%), poverty/hunger (39%), peace/anti-war (38%), and Israel (36%).¹⁰

Girls’ engagement in politics and activism was less widespread than for community service or volunteerism generally. Compared to their near-universal participation as community volunteers, a much smaller percentage of respondents—31%, or slightly less than one third—reported engaging in political activism. Nearly all girls surveyed, however, agreed that it is important for teenagers to be informed about politics and world events (98%). The largest group of respondents identified their political affiliation as Democratic (43%), followed by “None/Not Sure” (31%) and Liberal (16%). Only 4% of respondents identified as Republican.

Reflecting the nearly one-third of girls who were uncertain of their political affiliation, respondents’ passion for their political views varied widely, with more than half of respondents (56%) stating that they feel “very” or “moderately” strongly about their politics, while the remaining responses were divided similarly among “a little,” “not at all,” and “I don’t know.” The most common source of information about politics and world events cited was girls’ parents (86%), compared with smaller percentages receiving information from friends (63%), in school (73%), and from formal news sources (e.g., magazines [49%], the internet [64%], and newspapers [68%]). Not surprisingly, given the predominance of parents as an information source, most girls stated that their political beliefs are “very” (32%) or “moderately” (32%) similar to their parents, with “I don’t know” as the only sizeable dissenting response (20%).

On the short-answer survey, girls were asked to comment on any differences between their politics and their parents’. While most stressed their commonalities (“I agree with everything my parents believe,” read one emphatic response), others felt that their lack of political knowledge and conviction distinguished them from their parents. “I don’t care as much as they do,” wrote one; “They know more about politics than I do,” explained another. A smaller cohort of respondents expressed greater awareness of differences between their views

¹⁰ In cases where respondents erroneously supplied more than three selections, a random number generator was employed to determine which three selections to include in the analysis.

and their parents', often focused on particular political and social issues. One explained that her political optimism distinguishes her from her parents:

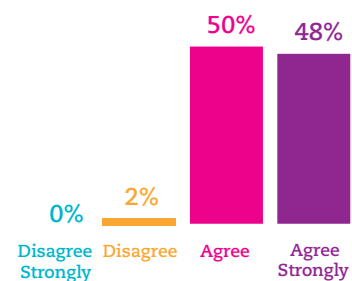
We have the same ideals for the world and standards for people, but my parents do not believe that they are possible and doubt the use of fighting for big changes. I believe that big changes are possible.

Another specified that she “feel(s) strongly about some topics that they don’t as much i.e., global warming.”

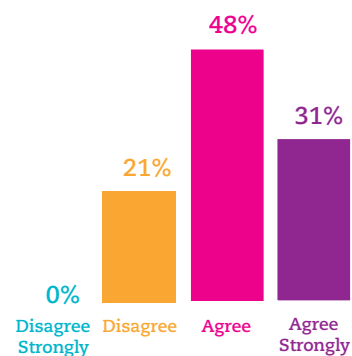
While some girls argue that political engagement or activism should be each girl’s individual choice, based on her own interests (e.g., “If they want to, fine, I’m just not into that stuff”), others indicate a strong sense of social responsibility on their collective horizon. Asked on the short-answer survey whether teens should be involved in politics or activist work, many responded with clear conviction. “Politics is really about the things that are important to the whole world,” stated one thoughtful response; “I understand why some people are more interested in other things, but I think it’s important to learn about and have opinions on controversial issues.” Another explained, “We’re old/responsible enough to observe the world beyond MTV and already have the power to improve it.” Some rationalize being educated and involved as key to making “informed deci-

sions.” Others, however, frame their conviction in terms of an approaching future in which the exercise of global power will rest with their own generation. “Teens need to be prepared for the years to come in which they will be running the world,” stated a typical response. “We are the next leaders,” characterized another, asking “If we don’t try to help, who will?” As with the title of this report, “Pretty soon, we’ll be taking over” (another respondent’s take on this same question), these statements imply a strong sense of responsibility and an expectation of future leadership. Strikingly, they also convey a sense of social power and authority that may reflect the impact of growing up with social and economic privilege. Would a teen girl raised in public housing, attending an underfunded, overcrowded school, for instance, carry the same expectation that her peers will soon inherit the power to shape their world so directly? Social class and socio-economic status are potent forces shaping girls’ experiences, expectations, and opportunities. This issue is examined in greater detail in the following section.

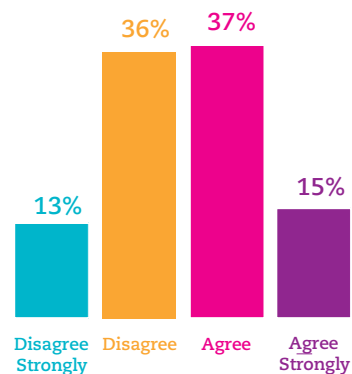
THE SURVEY



It’s important for teenagers to be informed about politics and world events



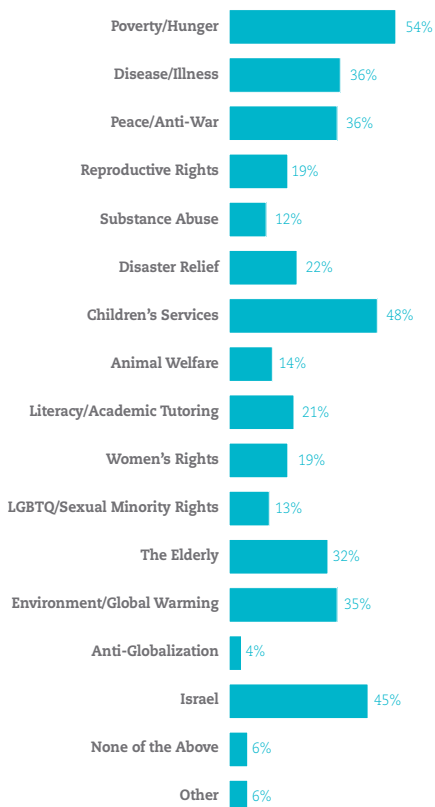
I believe it is my duty as a citizen to be involved in community service or activist work



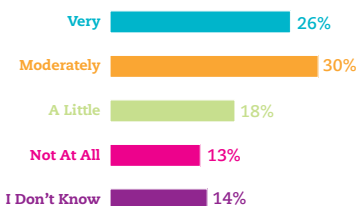
I believe I have a particular responsibility to be involved in community service or activism because of being Jewish

THE SURVEY

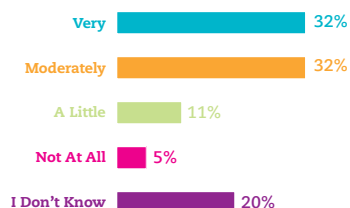
Which of these issues have you addressed in your service or activist work?



How strongly do you feel about your political beliefs?



How similar are your political beliefs compared to your parents?



4. Affluence and material privilege exerts a powerful but often silent influence in many Jewish girls' lives.

Social class—and class *privilege* in particular—can be difficult to track or even define. Americans generally prefer to think of themselves as classless, to view advantages as earned, not inherited, and thus many resist speaking in classed terms or acknowledging its force in their lives. In polls, the vast majority of Americans identify themselves as “middle class,” despite representing a wide range of incomes, occupations, personal wealth, and educational level. For those with greater means, identifying as middle class may reflect underlying anxiety about one’s financial security (Ehrenreich, 1989), or it may represent a desire to downplay one’s advantages and distinguish oneself from the opulence and excesses of the wealthy (Stuber, 2006). Due to such discomfort, the topic of class privilege or advantage is rarely discussed openly among those who possess it. For the Ma’yan Surveys, we chose to pursue this issue both directly and indirectly—asking specific questions about girls’ experiences across economic disparity, while also looking for class-related themes in responses to questions where class was not named as a topic.

While the Jewish community encompasses the full range of American class experience, American Jews are, on average, better-off economically compared to the American population at large. More than a third (34%) of Jewish households report annual income of over \$75,000,¹¹ compared to less than a sixth (17%) of all U.S. households; fewer Jewish households, meanwhile, report income below \$25,000 a year (22% vs. 28%, respectively) (United Jewish Communities, 2001). Based on survey respondents’ home zip code, we used 2000 U.S. Census data to determine the median household income for each girl’s local community.¹² The median household incomes in participants’ local communities covered a range of nearly \$150,000. Yet the vast majority of survey participants come from communities where affluence is the norm.

Income distribution is often measured in terms of quintiles: 20% increments, each of which represents 1/5 of households. In its recent investigative series on social class in America, *Class Matters*, *The New York Times* utilized household income quintiles as a rough estimate of class (Correspondents of *The New York Times*, 2005). The designations from lowest to highest were: Bottom Fifth, Lower Middle, Middle, Upper Middle, and Top Fifth. Girls in our study came overwhelmingly from communities

¹¹ In our study, \$75,377 was the average (mean) median household income for girls’ home communities.

¹² The U.S. Census makes available demographic data for individual zip codes, accessible via the Census Bureau website: http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en.

with a median household income in the 4th or 5th quintile, placing them in the Upper Middle or Top Fifth (which we might also call the upper class). While this does not specifically document the girls' own familial wealth or class status, it does suggest that for these girls, affluence is a normative communal and developmental context.

Privilege, however, depends on much more than simple income. It is by nature an elusive and often invisible force in the lives of those who possess it, making it difficult to recognize its presence and its influence. The majority of Ma'yan survey respondents (52%) did perceive their families as being better-off financially than "most Americans" (compared with 44% who felt they have "about the same amount of money" as most Americans, and 4% who feel they have less money). Compared to their friends' families, however, girls perceive themselves as standing on more even footing: 62% believe their families have about the same amount of money as their friends' families, with the remaining respondents evenly divided between those who believe their families have more or less money. To be aware of class disparity in the wider society, but to be shielded from contact with those with significantly different economic resources (if, indeed, the girls' perceptions are accurate) has significant implications for what these girls understand about social responsibility and the influ-

ence and impact of social class privilege and disadvantage.

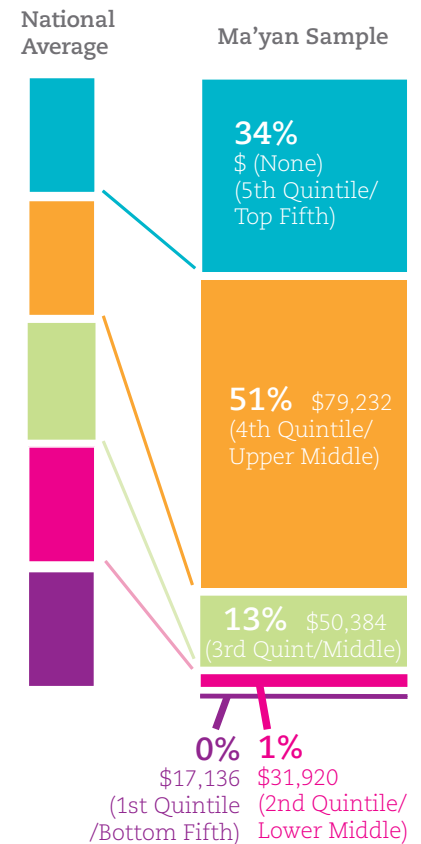
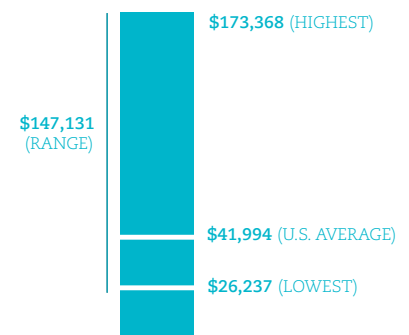
Case in point: girls generally disagreed with the idea that money or economic disparity made any difference in their friendships. Seventy percent of respondents on the main survey disagreed with the statement, "I feel pressure to keep up with my friends' wealth or possessions." Roughly 80% disagreed¹³ that it is difficult to be friends with someone who has either more or less money than one's self. The majority of comments on the short-answer survey suggested that girls' rejection of any class dynamic in their friendships is, essentially, a rejection of class bias (the same way that the attitude of "colorblindness" is often invoked as a rejection of race bias or racism). "I accept anyone and everyone and would never base a friend on how much money they do or do not have," is a typical response. These responses are emphatic and steeped in moral language (e.g., "should" and "shouldn't"), which may indicate that girls' comments represent their convictions or ideals more than a reflection of their actual experiences (an interpretation supported by the minority of critical comments, below).

As noted previously, it can be difficult to talk honestly about privilege for two reasons: 1) it's difficult for those who have it to see it, and 2) there's a strong middle class/affluent prohibition

THE SURVEY

Median Household Income

(For girls' home zip code)

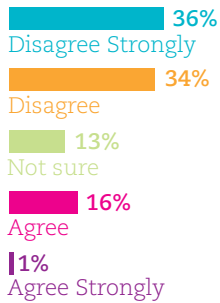


NOTES: Each quintile represents 20% segments of median U.S. household incomes. The dollar amounts represent the upper limit of each quintile. The "class" labels ("Middle," etc.) come from The New York Times. These percentages based on the Ma'yan survey sample.

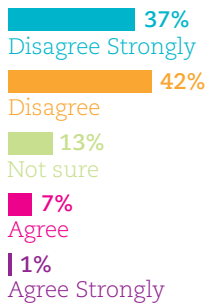
¹³ Collapsing "disagree" and "disagree strongly."

THE SURVEY

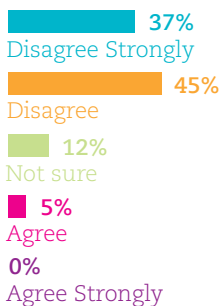
I feel pressure to keep up with my friends' wealth or possessions.



It is difficult to be friends with someone who has more money than I have



It is difficult to be friends with someone who has less money than I have



“I don’t think money has anything to do with who I am or what I do.”

against speaking publicly or directly about it (Ehrenreich, 1989; Kenny, 2000; Ostrander, 1984). Though girls by and large disagreed with our prompts about the difficulties of cross-class friendship (example: “I don’t think money has anything to do with who I am or what I do”), we remain unconvinced that they are, in fact, as unaffected by financial disparities among their peers as they claim to be. Comments from a minority of respondents lend credence to this interpretation. “I get jealous sometimes if people have things that I want,” admits one girl; “I tend to show off new things that I get and I try to keep up with those who have more things than I do,” writes another. Such responses convey an underlying competition among girls played out through material consumption, and a persistent awareness of the potential status conferred by one’s possessions.

Some girls’ short-answer responses acknowledged—at least tentatively—the ways that economic inequality constrains their choices despite their best efforts to avoid personal bias. In most of these cases, respondents’ comments focus on the challenges of relating to more affluent peers (and in some instances, their relative lack of contact with those less well-off). “I would not intentionally not befriend someone with less money, but I am put in situations with kids mostly with either the same or more money than I have,” explains one respondent in a double-negative that may speak to her discomfort exploring this topic. “I don’t care how much

money my friends have, and I have friends on both sides of the spectrum,” writes another, “but a few of my richer friends, since they do things I can’t like shop in designer stores and have experiences I don’t like summer in the Hamptons, find it hard to relate some and the other way around.” Another response suggests that navigating a friendship with a less-affluent peer is largely a matter of tact, explaining “I know how to control what I say to someone who I know either won’t know what I’m talking about because it is expensive or whatnot.” Yet, this same girl’s own experience of friendships where she herself has been less affluent belies a difficult and persistent sense of disparate power and the potential for shame, as she continues: “But if someone has more money than me, I feel that they will always be looking down on me, instead of at eye level.”

Our examination of girls’ attitudes towards Jewish stereotypes and popular images also revealed the salience of economic privilege in girls’ understanding of what it means to be (and to be seen as) Jewish. When asked about their attitudes towards stereotypes associated with Jews, a slight majority of girls (54%) affirmed that there are stereotypes about Jews that they find offensive, or that make them uncomfortable being identified as Jewish. Among those who volunteered examples, many focused on money, i.e. that Jews are: “cheap”, “spoiled”, “stingy”, “obsessed with money”, or as one girl put it, “the fact that my friends assume I’m rich really

upsets me.”

At the same time, however, roughly the same percentage of respondents (53%) indicated that there are stereotypes about Jews that they agree with or find some truth in. Some of the examples offered constituted “positive” stereotypes (e.g., that Jews are smart and successful and invested in education), but others found truth in the same images around money and physical appearance that had been cited as offensive in the previous question. This widespread endorsement of stereotypes, whether citing Jews’ overrepresentation in the professions, neurotic anxiety or the Jewish mother/ bubby, is both understandable and troublesome. Within common stereotypes, there is often a kernel of truth; for instance: the educational attainment of American Jews is, in fact, markedly higher than for Americans generally. A majority of Jewish adults in the U.S. (55%) have earned at least a bachelors degree, while a quarter (25%) have completed graduate degrees. Among the U.S. adult population, only 29% have earned a bachelors degree and 6% a graduate degree (United Jewish Communities, 2001). However, the endorsement of stereotypes may also indicate internalized oppression, a process of coming to see one’s self in the ways one’s group is depicted in the broader culture. This process can result in self-hatred and a sense of constrained options for individual and group identity.

Moreover, responses asserting girls’ agreement with stereotypes about Jews and money were often structured to explain and justify Jews’ professional and financial achievements. One respondent wrote:

As bad as it is, I agree with Jews being successful and having a lot of money. We put an importance on education and being successful no matter what it is at. That is why we overflow the entertainment, medical, and law businesses, because we have passions and we act on them and therefore we are rewarded with money and a comfortable life. I don’t see us as being greedy or cheap, we work for our money just the same as anyone else.

Similarly, another response stated, “I DEFINITELY agree with the stereotype about education. Jews are definitely more willing to spend money on education, so they tend to achieve higher positions,” adding a capitalized caveat, “SOMETIMES” (emphasis original). If Jews are relatively successful and affluent, the girls’ statements suggest, they have come by it honestly, earning their successes through diligent effort and ambition. This rationalization echoes a broader research finding about middle class adolescents’ (and perhaps especially girls’) deep faith in meritocracy: the idea that success is the natural conse-

If Jews are relatively successful and affluent, girls suggest, they have come by it honestly, earning their successes through diligent effort and ambition.

THE SURVEY

Are there stereotypes associated with Jews that you find offensive or that make you uncomfortable being identified as Jewish?

No (46%)

Yes (54%)

Are there stereotypes associated with Jews that you find some truth in, or that you agree with?¹⁴

No (48%)

Yes (53%)

¹⁴ Total is 101% due to rounding.

THE SURVEY

Below are several questions about the term “Jewish American Princess” or “JAP.”

Are you familiar with this term?

No (2%) Yes (98%)

Do you ever use this term yourself?

No (18%) Yes (82%)

Do your friends ever use it?

No (16%) Yes (84%)

Respondents defined “jappiness” largely in terms of materialism, shallowness, and a lack of appreciation for one’s privilege.

quence of playing by society’s rules (Brown, 1999). “But merit,” Janny Scott and David Leonhardt explain in *The New York Times*, “is at least partly class-based. Parents with money, education and connections cultivate in their children the habits that the meritocracy rewards. When their children then succeed, their success is seen as earned” (2005, p. 4).

Survey data related to the term “JAP” (Jewish American Princess) were particularly intriguing. Virtually all respondents (98%) were familiar with the term, and more than three-quarters (82%) use the term themselves and/or state that their friends use it (84%). Asked to define the term “JAP” or its adjectival form, “jappy,” girls’ responses demonstrated a strong general consensus, typically focused on the “princess” aspects of the moniker. Jappiness was defined largely in terms of materialism, shallowness, and a lack of appreciation for one’s privilege. Common descriptors included “spoiled,” “flaunting” wealth and possessions, “snobby,” “obsessed” with designer clothing, “shallow,” and “bitchy.” One respondent typified such depictions: “Someone who is spoiled and rich and cares too much about showing it off, through clothes and other ways of making herself visible and hopes to be envied by her peers.” Some also related the term to a kind of class-based geography, identifying the JAP as a suburbanite or as hailing from Long Island, NY, a well-known suburban, middle class enclave.

From a gender perspective, it is interesting to note that several girls’ definitions referred to the JAP’s relationship with her father. Almost all of these references focused on the financial relationship between the JAP and her father, in that the money supporting her material consumption is specified as coming from, for instance, “daddy’ who is a doctor [or a] lawyer.” Though references to fathers constituted a very small minority of overall responses, there were no equivalent references to mothers and only one to parents generally (again, mentioned as the source of the JAP’s spending power), leading to the consideration of these responses as a limited but meaningful theme.

In defining “JAP,” respondents expressed differing opinions as to whether the term is specific to Jews or has come to represent a broader, class-centered phenomenon. Many definitions explicitly related the term to (a certain stripe of) Jewish girls, and some even directly tied it to a girl’s level of Jewish observance (e.g., “just a spoiled, obnoxious person—usually one who is less religious on the orthodox spectrum,” or someone who “cares more about what they look like than concentrating on their Judaism”). Others, meanwhile, challenged or denied the essential Jewishness of the JAP. One conceded that Jewishness is part of the definition, but downplayed its relative significance (or perhaps its causality), defining a JAP as a “rich spoiled American girl who happens to be Jewish.” Another group of respondents

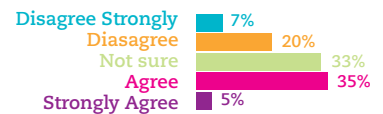
noted that they and their peers use the term to refer to non-Jews as well as Jewish girls; some even specify that JAP has been appropriated to apply to Asian girls, as in “Japanese American Princess.” One notes that in her experience, “the term has nothing to do with religion, and very few people actually connect Judaism to this term. It usually offends Asians more than Jews.” Girls also disagreed about the valence of the term; while most agreed that it is inherently negative (“The only people I use it with are my best friends and my family and it is used when we think the other person is being superficial or ‘prissy’”), some protested this association: “Sometimes it can be used in a derogatory way,” one wrote, “but I mostly use it as a positive or neutral word.”

The disputes and disagreements about the meaning and ethics of the JAP stereotype that emerged in our surveys echo a similar debate that has unfolded in recent years in the Jewish press. As with efforts to reclaim labels that have been used to denigrate and disempower marginalized groups (e.g., “dyke,” “bitch,” “chick”), some contemporary Jewish feminists have documented their own decisions to own and embrace their jappiness. Writing in *Lilith* magazine, Miriam Stone argues that Jewish women’s discomfort with the term stems in part from their ambivalence about claiming political, commercial, and

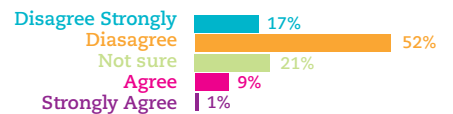
economic power: “As Jewish women...have settled into wealth, the word JAP has come to life again in our everyday vocabulary, illuminating not only the discomfort of broader society with Jews’ new-found status, but also our own” (Stone, 2005, p. 31). Others, however, reject this stance as self-hating, the perpetuation of an inherently damaging and derogatory image of Jewish women. One sign that the term may not be as neutral or benign as some girls argue: most girls surveyed (63%) agreed¹⁵ that it would be fair to characterize their friends as JAPs or “jappy”; only a small minority¹⁶ (15%), however, felt the term was a fair description of themselves. The girls’ comfort with applying the term to others, their conviction that as a stereotype it holds some kernel of truth, and yet their reluctance to associate it with themselves conveys (at the least) some fundamental ambivalence about its implications and possible impact.

THE SURVEY

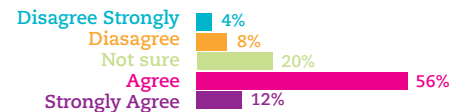
I think describing someone as a “JAP” or “jappy” can be funny



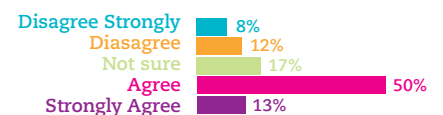
I’m offended when I hear someone referred to as a “JAP” or “jappy”



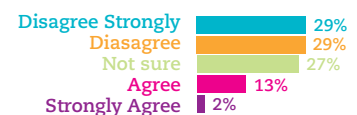
I think there is actually some truth to the “JAP” stereotype



It would be fair to describe some of my friends as “JAP”s or “jappy”



It would be fair to describe me as a “JAP” or “jappy”



¹⁵ Collapsing “agree” and “strongly agree”

¹⁶ Collapsing “agree” and “strongly agree”

Conclusion

The American Jewish teen girls who participated in the Ma'yan Surveys appear, in many ways, to be thriving. They're active and ambitious, engaged in the Jewish community and the wider world, cared for and appreciated by family and friends. Yet they also face considerable challenges that, as adults, we would be wise to examine and address.

Implications and Recommendations

The American Jewish teen girls who participated in the Ma'yan Surveys appear, in many ways, to be thriving. They're active and ambitious, engaged in the Jewish community and the wider world, cared for and appreciated by family and friends. Yet they also face considerable challenges that, as adults, we would be wise to examine and address. Girls' ratings and narrative responses demonstrate that they experience acute pressure to excel academically and to conform their behaviors and attitudes to others' expectations. They attribute these pressures to parents, schools, and peers, but the influences are likely much broader (including, for instance, the potent impact of the media and popular culture). This issue must be addressed in families, schools, and the Jewish community, in order to support girls' healthy physical and psychological development while also supporting their ambitions and pursuit of excellence. Girls need opportunities to develop skills as critical consumers of media so that they might understand who benefits from marketers' proffered images of "perfect" girls and women. They also deserve to have their concerns aired and addressed by the adults in their lives. We, as adults, need to reckon with our role in the external pressures (especially achievement pressure) the girls in our study describe. Although we want the girls in our lives to succeed, although we worry about increasing competition for college admission, we must also be prepared to advocate for and with girls when they tell us that the pressures are too much. Parents and educators can start by speaking with their own peers and making space for critical public conversations about what responsibility our schools, synagogues, and other institutions bear in protecting teen girls' wellbeing as well as their achievement.

It is quite possible—even likely—that our study sample is distinct in some ways from the general population of American Jewish teen girls. The high level of Jewish engagement and affiliation among our research participants may represent just such an anomaly. But what can we learn from those who are choosing to remain actively engaged in the Jewish community? Many of the girls we surveyed described relating to Judaism as a communal or collective experience. We should not be surprised to find these adolescents, with their growing critical faculties, actively engaged in questioning faith and tradition, nor to hear some express frustration over parental or religious strictures and constraints. A community (not to mention a parent) that creates space for teen girls to air their grievances without judgment, to wrestle with how they wish to see themselves and how they wish to be seen by others, may be in the strongest position to retain their involvement and allegiance. More importantly, insofar as adults create safe spaces for Jewish teens—girls

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Help girls resist pressure to attain social status through buying the right "stuff." Teach them to be critical consumers of media and advertising, draw their attention to marketers' methods (airbrushing models, targeting girls' insecurities) and their motives (to get girls to spend money!).

2 To moderate the achievement pressures girls experience, start by speaking with your own peers—other parents and educators—about your concerns and your shared commitment to support girls' wellbeing.

3 Create safe spaces for girls to flex their growing critical faculties by reflecting on their Jewish identities. Share your own values and stories with them, but focus on listening. Cultivate an attitude of curiosity rather than judgment.

4 Build girls' leadership capacities with opportunities for them to practice crucial skills: voicing disagreement, exercising authority, delegating responsibility, negotiating conflict. Make time to process these experiences, so girls understand why such skills are challenging and important.

5 Resist the urge to provide quick fixes to girls' dilemmas. Empower them, instead, to tolerate complexity and work towards their own solutions.

and boys alike—to wrestle with these identity issues, it will increasingly act as a true resource and refuge in their lives. Jewish youth professionals and community-based programs have great potential to reach and affect teen girls.

Girls in the Ma'yan Surveys are deeply invested and widely involved in service to others, and they expect to take leadership roles in the public and professional spheres in their adult lives. To become effective leaders, girls need opportunities to develop relevant skills, such as voicing disagreement, budgeting, delegating responsibility, motivating others, time management, etc. In particular, they need opportunities to practice exercising power and authority in the service of a shared goal – an uncomfortable experience as many girls would prefer to remain quiet and appear indifferent, rather than risk being seen as conceited, competitive, or openly disagreeing with a friend. Overcoming girls' relational fears around the power and authority that leadership demands is crucial work for adults who work with adolescent girls, and a key to enabling them to complete the good work they envision continuing into their adult lives.

Socioeconomic privilege—and the ways it intersects with Jewish identity and with femininity—is a thorny and difficult subject for Jewish teen girls. Yet, whether they are able to acknowledge the

impact or not, this issue is clearly affecting girls' lives. A lack of vocabulary and a sense of moral judgment for even broaching the topic ultimately threatens to stifle girls' growing engagement with social justice issues and their ability to work effectively towards progressive social change. Adults can help by beginning to speak with girls about their own awareness of privilege, of inequality, about their own compromises and uncertainties as well as their values and commitment to *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. All adults—whether youth professionals, parents, teachers, or clergy—can act as allies by keeping an ear tuned to recognize girls' moral dilemmas when they surface. They can then demonstrate the courage to join them in the midst of the discomfort and doubts such dilemmas present; not with the goal of neatly resolving girls' concerns, but of helping these future leaders learn to work out their own nuanced solutions.

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Ma'yan is a nonprofit think tank focused on the cultural challenges and identity issues that Jewish teenage girls face in contemporary society.

Through research and community events, we work with these girls, their parents, and educators to provide resources that help girls grow into critical, curious, and committed global citizens.

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