

JEWISH TEENAGERS AND THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH JCCs

A study commissioned by
The Merrin Center for Teen Services



JCC
association
MERRIN CENTER
FOR TEEN SERVICES

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JCCs of North America
מרכזים קהילתיים יהודיים בצפון אמריקה



The Background

Jewish Community Centers in the United States and Canada make a significant investment in engaging Jewish (and other) teenagers in a variety of activities, programs and venues. The diverse points of engagement between teenagers and JCCs include the following:

- Day and residential camps, with about one hundred thousand campers and staff members, many of whom are teens
- Year-round sports and fitness activities, both organized and individual
- The JCC Maccabi Games, which attract roughly five thousand teen athletes and reporters and an unknown number of teen volunteers and observers and their families
- The JCC Maccabi ArtsFest, which attracts approximately three hundred and fifty teen artists and an unknown number of teen volunteers and observers and their families
- JCC Maccabi Israel programs that bring nearly two hundred teens to Israel in a variety of frameworks
- Jewish youth groups that meet in JCCs, be they sponsored by the JCCs themselves or others (e.g., BBYO, Young Judaea, NCSY, USY, NFTY, others)
- JCC teen programs entailing the professional involvement of JCC teen workers, many of whom devote all their time to teens and adolescents
- In addition, JCCs sponsor community service programs, cultural events, social events, theatre productions, classes and other programs.

For its part, JCC Association - beyond its program and consulting services - sponsors the Merrin Center for Teen Services. This department, funded with a grant from the Merrin Family Foundation, provides expertise and services to all JCC personnel working with teens to help them provide more and better services to the teens in their respective communities. The Merrin Center also administers the Merrin Teen Professional Fellows Program, which supports and trains JCC professionals working with teens.

One overarching objective of this considerable investment in Jewish adolescents is simply to serve their cultural, recreational and social needs, and to enrich and enhance their development as adults and contributing members of their communities. In addition to this interest in promoting the generalized well-being of Jewish teenagers in the United States and Canada, JCC teen programs aim to promote teenagers' Jewish educational advancement and identity development. Over the years, leaders of organized Jewry, including the JCC Movement, have expressed mounting concern over intermarriage and diminished Jewish engagement among younger Jews. Both historically and today, JCCs have seen working with teens as mission-relevant, even as they recognize the limited immediate institutional benefit such work entails.

Accordingly, as part of their increased emphasis on their Jewish educational mission, JCCs have also intensified efforts to “Jewishly engage” teenagers. This emphasis has been marked by such recent developments as the vastly expanded JCC Maccabi-sponsored programs and the Merrin Teen Professional Fellows, an effort to enhance the professional skills of JCC teen workers throughout North America.

Understanding Jewish teens, and in particular those teens with whom the JCC Movement has contact, is critical to any effort to serve and engage them. Understanding these teens is no simple matter, as Jewish teens constitute a diverse population (surely as diverse as their parents). Like their parents, Jewish teens reflect both the influences of the larger society as well as the special patterns and characteristics distinctive to American and Canadian Jews. In simple terms, American Jewish teenagers are American and Jewish and teenagers, and each of these group identities comes into play in shaping who our teens are, how they vary, and how they develop.

In recent years, a small collection of social science literature has begun to delve into questions surrounding Jewish teenagers. Most notable are the contributions by Kadushin, Kelner, and Saxe (2000), and those by Keysar, Kosmin, and Scheckner (2000). Inter alia, this literature shows us a group of young people who are heavily influenced by their parents and their non-Jewish peers. These teens respond to both groups by caring about their Jewish identity but not participating in activities that set them too far apart from the mainstream culture in which they are trying to fit. As Kadushin, Kelner and Saxe write, “Judaism is important to them, but only as it coheres or coexists with their aspirations for academic success, financial security, and social belonging.” Today’s Jewish teens are trying to balance their Jewish identity with their goals for future success.

With respect to teens connected with JCCs, the most notable research was undertaken by Amy Sales (1994). Like the wider group of teens studied by Kadushin, Kelner, and Saxe, this group of teens was found by Sales to be “highly motivated to achieve. They place the greatest importance on the development of skills and abilities, and they express the greatest concern over their personal future (college and career) and academic performance.”

With this said, though, significant questions remain with respect to Jewish teenagers in North America generally, and with respect to those connected to JCCs in particular.

The Questions

The intensified interest and efforts in the domain of Jewish teenagers on the part of JCCs immediately raises a host of questions. In the grand scheme, one would want to know how the many potential points of involvement with JCCs shape and influence the Jewish identities of teenagers, as well as the manner and the extent they do so - and for whom. As valuable as such an ambitious inquiry may be, its proper undertaking lies beyond the available resources. However, we can (and do) address several critical questions, and the answers can at least indirectly contribute to understanding the effectiveness of JCC programming for North American Jewish teenagers, as follows:

1. Which teens are engaged with JCCs? Who are they with respect to their socio-demographic and Jewish identity characteristics, as well as in terms of their tastes, interests and concerns?
2. How do they engage with JCCs? Which activities and programs are more, or less, appealing?
3. Who are the more frequent and less frequent users of JCCs?
4. What are the implications of these patterns for:
 - a. Practice and programming for the already engaged?
 - b. Reaching and recruiting the under engaged or the nonengaged?

To elaborate, JCC teen workers and their supervisors face two distinct challenges. One objective entails serving the teen population that heavily frequents the JCC. The other objective is to expand the population of users by attracting teenagers who are identifiable, but who hardly use JCC facilities. Insofar as the two populations (frequent users and non-users) share similar characteristics, we can presume that similar policies and programs can serve both constituencies. But insofar as the two populations differ, JCC teen workers and their supervisors will need to think of ways to program differently for different audiences.

The Respondents: JCC Maccabi Games Teen Participants, and Others

The sample for this study consists of 1,136 Jewish teenagers in North America. All are in some way in contact with Jewish Community Centers: the vast majority (83%) participated in the JCC Maccabi Games in 2006 if not earlier. The sample is almost evenly balanced between boys (49%) and girls (51%). While they range in age from 13 through 18 years old, the median age is 16, with the vast majority between the ages of 15 and 17. They reside in all parts of the continent. About two-thirds (65%) attend public school, and the rest are almost evenly divided between private schools (15%) and Jewish day schools (19%). The vast majority are in 9th, 10th and 11th grades, with just a few in 7th, 8th and 12th grades. They claim to do well academically, with average grades ranging from B+ to A.

The respondents completed a Web-based questionnaire (see Appendix) in April of 2007. We sent invitations to participate in the survey to 4,575 teenagers on lists provided by the JCC Maccabi Games, ArtsFest, and Israel staff and a few JCCs; in all, 944 JCC Maccabi Games participants responded, for a response rate of 25%. Eighty-four teens who had previously attended JCC Maccabi ArtsFest responded (52% of all past attendees), and 78 JCC Maccabi Israel participants responded (13% of possible respondents from the program). In addition, we elicited the cooperation of a small number of JCCs that sent invitations to participate in the study to an unknown number of teenagers on their mailing lists. Only a small (and unknown) number of such teens responded. In all, over 90% of respondents had participated in JCC Maccabi Games, JCC Maccabi ArtsFest or JCC Maccabi Israel, suggesting that only a small number of respondents derived solely from the individual JCCs, as contrasted with those who responded from the continental activities' lists maintained by JCC Association or who were included on both the continental and individual lists. In contrast with the prospective respondents who were invited just once by individual JCCs, the JCC Maccabi programs respondents received three invitations (an initial e-mail invitation and two reminders), accounting in large part for the apparently different response rate.

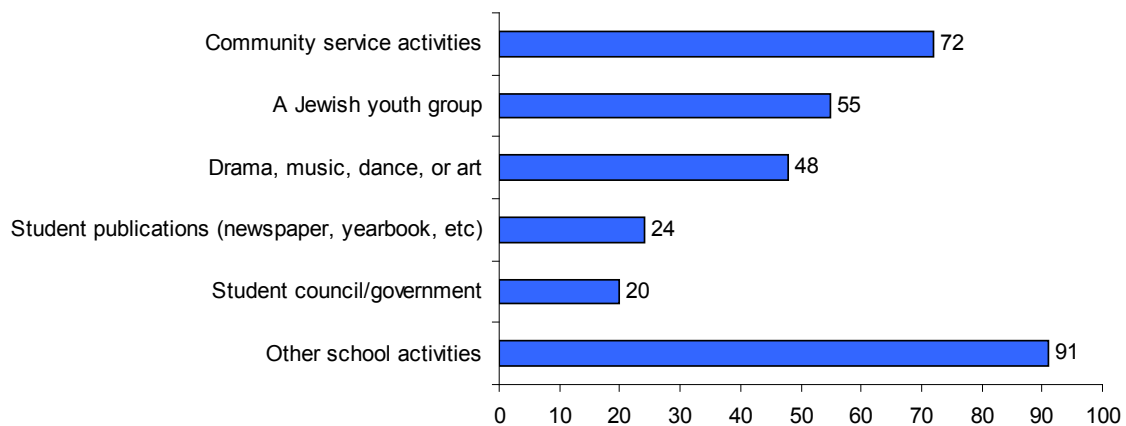
As with many other samples in Jewish (and other) social survey research, this sample is not fully representative, and is “biased” (to use the technical term) in certain ways. For example, given the large number of participants in the JCC Maccabi Games, we can readily assume that, as compared with other teens associated with JCCs in North America, these particular teenagers exhibit greater interest in sports and athletics. On the other hand, since the sample was not selected on the basis of involvement with activities structured around explicitly Jewish educational purposes, we have little reason to believe that this sample over-states levels of Jewish engagement, relative to the entire universe of teens served by JCCs. In fact, relative to the universe of JCC-affiliated teens, this survey may well under-represent levels of Jewish educational background and Jewish involvement. As we shall see, this understanding is, in fact, crucial for lending credibility to one of the central findings of this study.

Less than fully representative samples can yield valuable findings, provided that researchers understand the biases and how they may affect the findings. In this case as well, recognizing how these teens differ from the universe of teens in contact with JCCs helps place the findings in context, and may actually be useful for understanding the results. In fact, given the particular findings presented below (of high levels of Jewish background and engagement) the particular biases in the sample actually lend some credibility to the findings.

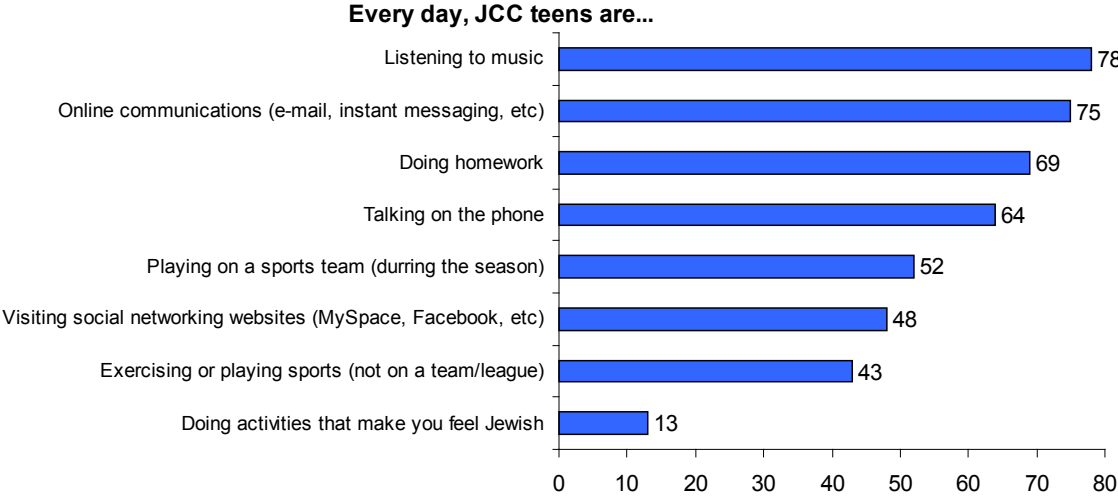
Teen Interests and Concerns

JCC teens are socially involved and are very active in their schools and other programs; nearly every single teen in the survey reported being involved in some kind of extracurricular activity. The specific types of activities vary widely, and many teens participate in multiple programs at once. Over 70% of teens participate in community service activities, most of them addressing poverty, hunger, and children’s services. While some of this service might be performed due to school requirements, the vast majority of teens have something to do with community service. Other popular activities are participating in Jewish youth groups (55%), and in the creative arts such as drama, music, dance and fine art (48%). Further, when a sport is in-season, 52% of teens participate in that sport on a daily basis, suggesting that for many of them, team sports are not to be taken lightly, but are major commitments. (Undoubtedly, that so many teens in this sample participated in the JCC Maccabi Games is part of the reason so many in this sample participate in team sports during the year.)

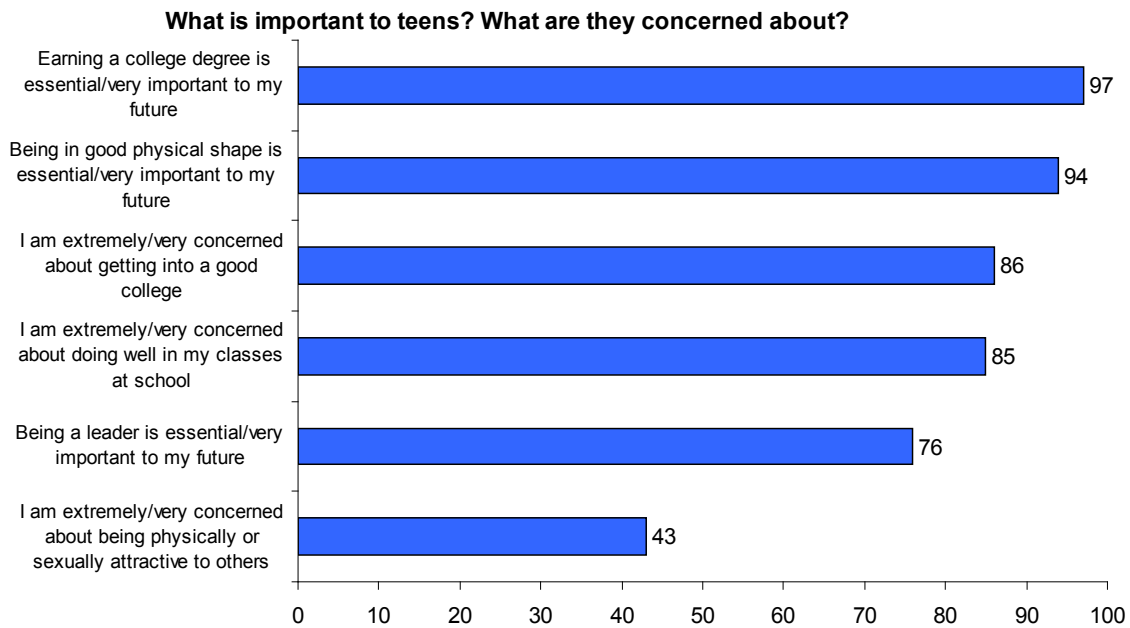
What activities do JCC teens choose to participate in?



JCC teens are also socially engaged in less structured ways. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of teens maintain some sort of “Web presence” such as a website or a MySpace or Facebook profile. The vast majority of teens also engage in online communications such as e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, or Internet chat rooms (75%) or talk on the phone (64%) on a daily basis. Using technology to interact with their friends has become a regular practice for the vast majority of JCC teenagers.



When asked about their concerns and future goals, school and college quickly rise to the top of the teens' lists. Earning a college degree is essential or very important to 97% of teen respondents. Further, 86% of these teens are extremely or very concerned with getting into a good college, and accordingly, 85% are concerned with doing well in their classes at school. Education is closely followed by physical activity both as a value and a concern of JCC teens. As many as 94% feel that being in good physical shape/physically active is essential or very important to their future. However, teens seem to differentiate being in good physical condition from being physically or sexually attractive to others, as this issue is a reported concern of only 43% of teens. Another common goal among teens is leadership, as 60% say that being a leader is essential or very important in their future.

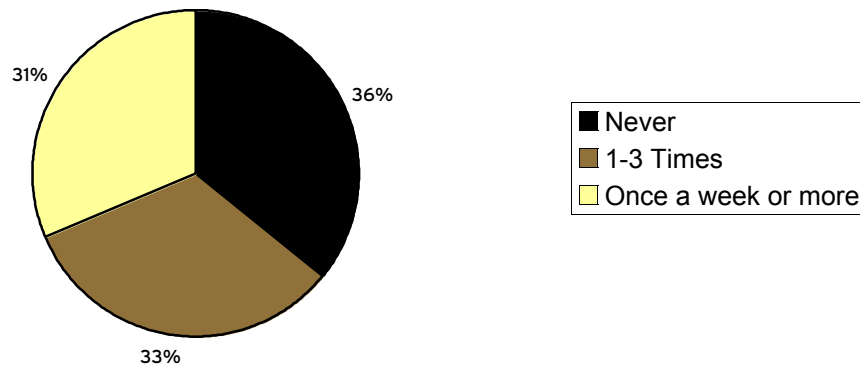


While teenagers are working hard to define themselves, achieve their goals, and establish their independence, only 36% of them both drive and have access to a car. Thus, however independent teens may want to be, we must realize that families and friends still play a large role in how active a teen can be at the JCC.

Wide Variations in Using JCC Facilities: The Nonmembers and Nonusers

While almost all these teenagers participate in continent-wide JCC-sponsored activities, not all are particularly attached to their JCCs. Not all derive from member-families, as just 62% could report that their families are JCC members. Moreover, a substantial number hardly set foot within their JCCs. We asked respondents, "In the last month, how many times, if at all, have you been inside your JCC or used your JCC's outdoor facilities?" While almost a third of the teens used their local JCCs weekly in the past month, somewhat more never entered their JCCs in the past month, and another third used the facilities one to three times. To be clear, those who did not use the JCC in the past month were not totally devoid of contact with their JCCs; many, in fact, used the JCC for one purpose or another during the year, just not in the month prior to the survey.

In the last month, how many times, if at all, have you been inside your JCC or used your JCC's outdoor facilities?



These variations enable us to use these data to explore at some depth below two complementary questions: Who uses the JCC frequently, and who makes little to no use of JCC facilities? Throughout our analysis we contrast frequent users (those who find themselves inside JCC facilities monthly or more) and infrequent users (those who never used the JCC in the month before they completed the survey).

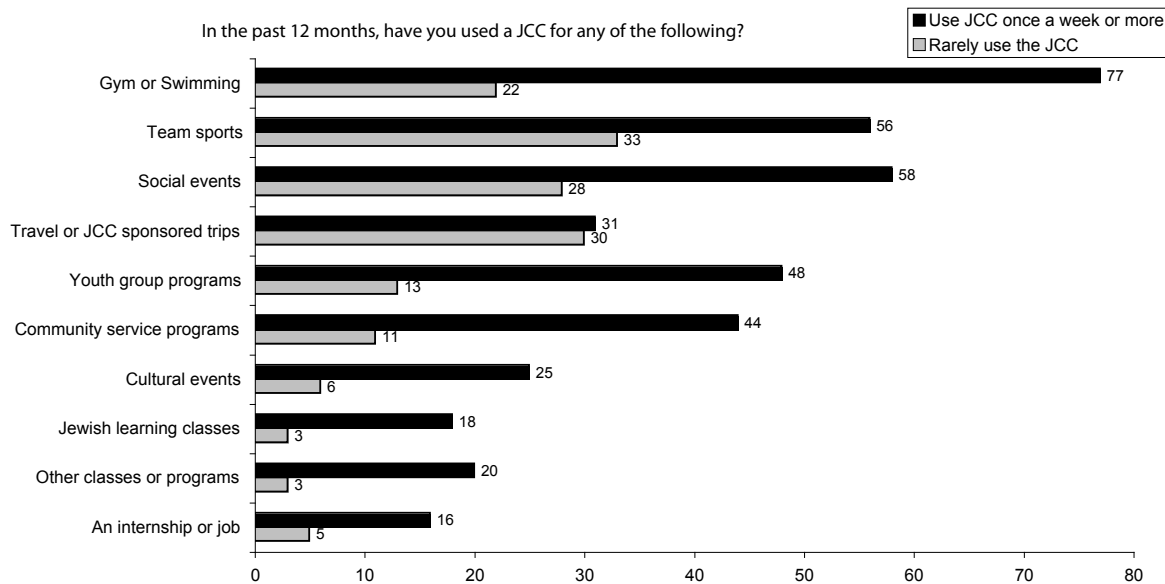
Variations in Patterns of Use

We asked the teenagers in which of several ways they may have used the JCC in the prior 12 months. Consistent with the sports-orientation of this sample, leading the list were gym/swimming and team sports, reported by a slim majority of respondents, as were social events. About a third reported participating in JCC sponsored trips. This high percentage may be a function of their counting their travel to the JCC Maccabi Games as qualifying as a JCC sponsored trip- this study did not collect specific information on trip types or locations. Equal numbers report taking part in Jewish youth group programs and community service programs. Only small numbers could report participation in cultural events, Jewish classes, jobs, or other classes.

In contrast with these overall patterns of participation, frequent users and infrequent users differed in the extent to which they made use of JCC facilities. For the frequent users, the most frequent types of JCC use centered on sports facilities, social events, and youth group and community service programs. However, these frequent JCC users also report significant minorities participating in almost all other ways we presented in the survey (altogether, there were 10 possibilities). Accordingly, as many as 15% of frequent JCC users attend cultural events and 16% report holding a JCC job or internship.

The infrequent users report very different patterns of use, as they could name just four types of participation with significant levels of magnitude: team sports (33%), JCC-sponsored travel (30%), social events (28%), and gym or swimming (22%). Hardly any participated in other ways. Overall, the frequent users reported 3.9 types of participation in the past year and the infrequent users only 1.5 types of activities.

The contrasts in types of usage between frequent and infrequent users were especially striking with respect to youth groups, community service, cultural events, and classes, Jewish or otherwise. In all these areas, the rates of participation by frequent users reached at least four times the rates reported by infrequent users of the JCC.



These findings suggest a differentiation between gateway activities and more specialized activities. Sports and social events seem to constitute the entry ways into JCC participation. Youth groups, community service, cultural events, classes, and jobs are reserved for those more deeply tied to the JCC, and, for many, may well follow upon initial entry by way of sports and social events. If these inferences are accurate, then JCC teen professionals may do well to focus upon sports and social events as ways to draw teens in, who may then move on to broader participation.

The Context: High Levels of Jewish Engagement among Adult Members

Communal observers, and JCC leaders themselves, often cast JCCs as “gateway” institutions, by which they mean that JCCs serve as the entry point for less engaged Jews to enter Jewish institutional life, and proceed on journeys to more intensive Jewish involvement. Moreover, JCC leaders pride themselves on the extent to which JCCs can appeal to Jews of all denominational niches, bringing together Jews from all manner of ideological persuasion and levels of Jewish commitment. In like manner, they also take pride in how low entry barriers at JCCs theoretically permit those with little prior Jewish background or low levels of prior Jewish commitment to engage in JCC activities, be they preschools and day camps for the children, fitness facilities for the adults, or a wide array of social, cultural, and educational programming aimed at the broader Jewish (and, often, non-Jewish) population.

Notwithstanding these images, earlier examinations of JCC members have shown that, in relative terms, JCC members report moderate to high levels of Jewish involvement, especially when compared with the unaffiliated population. They display patterns of Jewish identity and communal involvement that very closely resemble the larger “affiliated” Jewish population in the United States, of which JCC members are part. (The affiliated are defined as those who belong to any Jewish institution, be it a congregation, JCC, or a Jewish organization.) Predictably and understandably, the affiliated as a group is much more intensely involved in conventional Jewish life than their counterparts – the unaffiliated, and this pattern extends to JCC members as well. Most simply, on all measures of Jewish involvement, JCC members are substantially more engaged than the unaffiliated. Moreover, JCC members even surpass the otherwise affiliated (those who belong to other institutions but not JCCs) in almost all available indices of Jewish involvement. Because of the high percentage of current or past day school students in this study, it appears that in addition to JCCs seeing themselves as a gateway to Jewish involvement, they should also see themselves as constituting an important component in the ecology of Jewish communal opportunities available to today’s Jewish teenagers. JCCs work in complement with congregations, Jewish schools, youth groups, camps, Israel travel, and other endeavors to provide an array of possibilities for Jewish involvement.

To illustrate this seemingly paradoxical state of affairs, we may take one highly emblematic indicator of Jewish engagement: intermarriage. In an earlier analysis of the 2000-01 National Jewish Population Survey, we found that among the unaffiliated adult Jews in the United States, under half (46%) of those married are married to Jews. In contrast, 87% of the affiliated (but not JCC members) are in-married, and even more (91%) of JCC members are in-married. Clearly, despite efforts to reach out to the intermarried, JCCs have remained much more attractive to the in-married, and JCCs are even more attractive (relatively) to in-married Jews than are other institutions in Jewish life. JCC members also report high levels of friendship with other Jews. In essence, JCCs attract those Jews who, in particular, seek to socialize with other Jews, or at least in environs where most other people are Jewish.

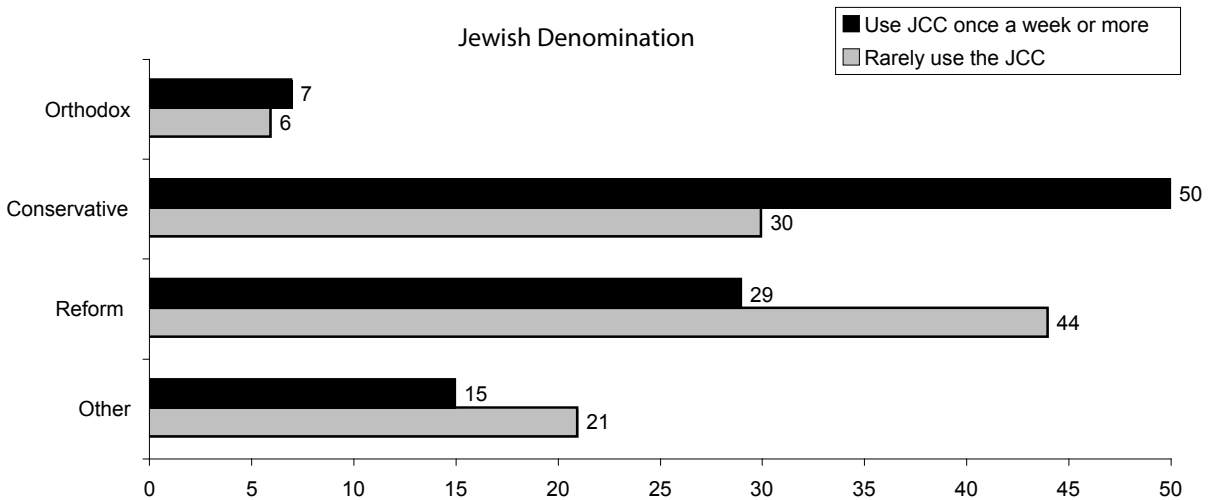
Other indicators tell a similar story. Fully 80% of JCC Jewish adult members belong to congregations, and 58% belong to other Jewish organizations (e.g., Hadassah, B'nai B'rith, etc). Forty percent of JCC members have had an adult Jewish educational experience. The vast majority of JCC members attend High Holiday services (87%), and 36% attend Sabbath services at least once a month. Most JCC members also celebrate the two most popular Jewish ritual practices- attending a Passover Seder (93%) and lighting Hanukkah candles (92%). Over three-quarters (77%) of JCC members fast on Yom Kippur, and almost half (48%) said that they usually light Sabbath candles. Over half of JCC members have been to Israel (55%), and 30% have visited more than once. Notwithstanding the now-outdated impression of JCCs as secularist institutions, JCC members report attitudes toward religion and God that indicate as high rates of religiosity as that expressed by otherwise affiliated American Jews, almost all of whom are affiliated by way of congregational belonging.

As these findings from previous analysis underscore, among adults, JCC members clearly score relatively high on all measures of Jewish engagement. JCCs are places that attract connected Jews and, undoubtedly, foster, sustain, and enhance their connection. In fact, JCC members constitute about a third of all affiliated Jews in the United States, making the JCCs the largest single institutional form of affiliation, followed in turn by Reform congregations.

Against this background, it comes as no surprise that the teenagers report high levels of Jewish engagement, but the levels of Jewish engagement reported below may still surprise even the closest observers of JCCs in North America today. As we demonstrate presently, the teenagers in our sample, largely participants in JCC Maccabi Games and other continent-wide programs, score relatively high on several key indicators of Jewish involvement.

High Levels of Jewish Engagement among the Teenagers

Few Orthodox, Many Conservative or Reform: Over three-quarters of these youngsters are Conservative (41%) or Reform (35%), while hardly any are Orthodox (7%), and even fewer are Reconstructionist (1%). One-sixth (17%) have no denominational identity.

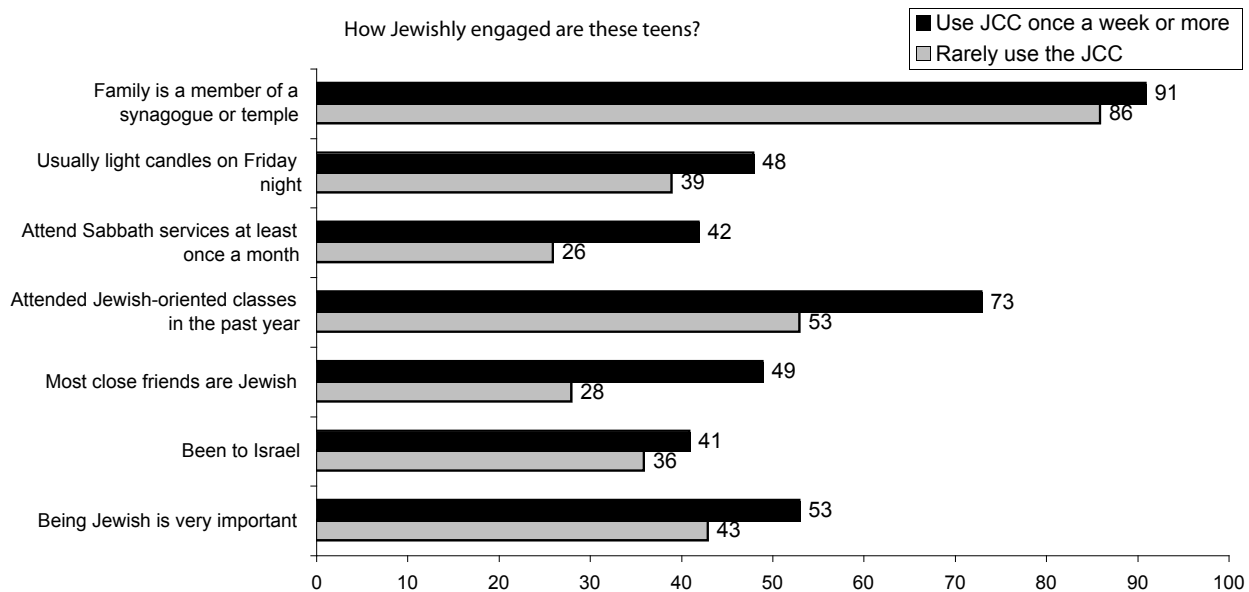


As compared with American Jews generally, about twice as many JCC teens identify as Conservative, and just over half identify with no denomination (the Canadian numbers differ somewhat). Of interest as well is how these teens compare with JCC adult members. Compared with the adults, the teenagers' proportions for Reform, Reconstructionist and non-denominational affiliations are about equivalent. But, relative to the adults, far more teens are Conservative and far fewer (about half) are Orthodox. By inference, Orthodox JCC member families are under-participating in JCC Maccabi events. One explanation is that these programs occur outside of Orthodox supervision, and they entail significant and prolonged interaction with non-Orthodox youth. The Orthodox commitment to securing a religiously traditional and intensive lifestyle often demands avoidance of spaces and places, especially for the young, where significant Orthodox presence cannot be assured.

By inference, the data also point to the relative over-participation of Conservative Jews. Relative to the number of Conservative families in JCCs, Conservative teenagers more frequently participate in JCC Maccabi programs. This tendency may well reflect the general tendency of Conservative Jews to out-score all other denominations (save Orthodoxy) on most measures of Jewish engagement. And, as we demonstrate, Jewish engagement levels strongly differentiate these teenagers from their counterparts in the larger Jewish population, if not, perhaps, in JCCs as well, and the Conservative teens' over-participation may well derive from their relatively high levels of Jewish engagement.

High Engagement Levels: Evidence for the high rates of Jewish engagement for these teenagers connected with JCC programs emerges in several ways. They report that:

- 91% attend High Holiday services
- 89% of their families belong to congregations
- 87% are children of two Jewish parents (or, only 13% have intermarried parents)
- 85% fast on Yom Kippur at least part of the day
- 65% have been to a Jewish sleep-away camp
- 64% attend Jewish classes, such as supplementary Jewish high school
- 46% live in homes where Shabbat candles are usually lit
- 38% have been to Israel (18% twice or more)
- 36% have mostly Jewish close friends
- 35% attend Sabbath services monthly
- 32% have been to day school (most to non-Orthodox schools)
- 19% currently attend day school



By any reckoning or standards of comparison, these levels must be seen as relatively high for North American Jewish teenagers today. They are even more impressive when we consider that the teenage years are thought to be years of youthful rebellion and differentiation from parents, the period of life where religious involvement of all sorts, including that of Jewish adolescents, enters decline. Yet the Jewish identity indicators presented above describe a population that is far more engaged in Jewish terms than are even American Jewish adults, let alone other Jewish teenagers. The high levels for these indicators are even more notable in light of the relatively small number of Orthodox teenagers in the sample. In other words, they arrive at their high levels of engagement without the “help” of a large Orthodox component (as many as 93% are non-Orthodox).

As high as these indicators are, they reach even higher levels for those teens whose parents are JCC members than for those in this sample in non-member families. Quite striking are the differences between teens who are frequent users and infrequent users of JCC facilities.

Frequent Users, Even More Jewishly Engaged

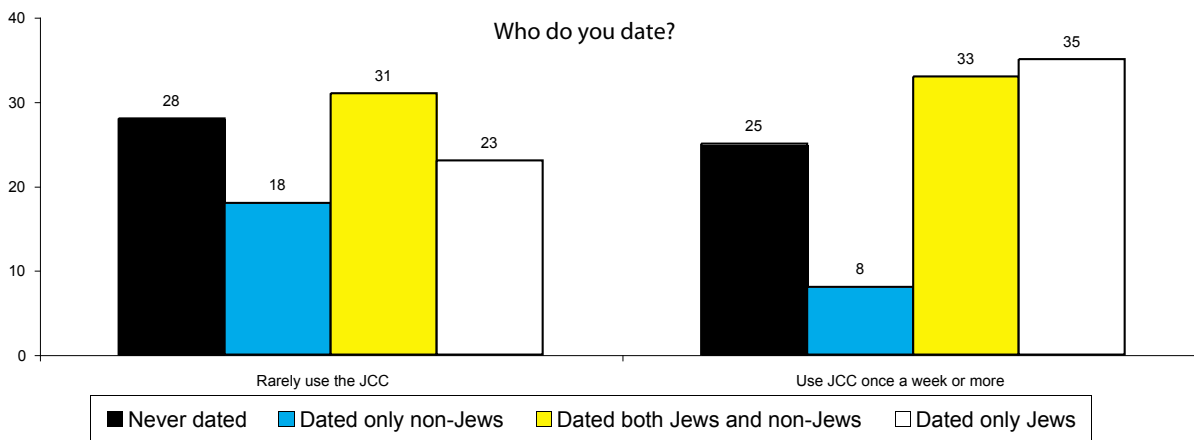
As demonstrated above, teenagers associated with JCCs are more active in Jewish life than their unaffiliated counterparts. And among the JCC teen population, the more frequent users of JCC facilities score substantially higher than infrequent users with respect to a wide variety of measures of Jewish engagement.

To illustrate: As compared with infrequent teenage users of JCCs, the frequent users report higher levels of ...

- Identification with Orthodoxy or Conservatism (57% vs. 36%)
- Attending Jewish classes (73% vs. 53%)
- Day school attendance (28% vs. 12%)
- Day school attendance, now or in the past (39% vs. 24%)
- Sabbath service attendance monthly (42% vs. 26%)
- Most close friends are Jewish (49% vs. 28%)

Other indicators point in the same direction. To convey these patterns even more vividly, we constructed a Jewish engagement index that consists of several indicators. These reflect aspects of belonging to Jewish networks (having mostly Jewish friends, feeling part of a Jewish community, listening to Jewish music, talking about Jewish topics with friends, and taking Jewish classes). Using the combined scores, the index yielded three levels of Jewish engagement overall - low (26%), moderate (44%) and high (30%). Among the infrequent users of their JCCs, those with low levels of Jewish engagement were nearly twice as numerous as those with high levels (37% vs. 19%). In sharp contrast, the frequent users consisted of more than three times as many of those with high levels of engagement as those with low levels of engagement (44% vs. 13%).

Dating patterns also support the main finding. Of those who have dated, among frequent JCC users, 46% have dated only Jews; for the infrequent users, the figure drops to 32%. Among frequent JCC users who have dated, just 10% have dated only non-Jews; but among the infrequent users, the figure leaps to 25%. To some extent JCC use appeals to the in-dating population; and to some extent, JCC use may well promote in-dating by reinforcing Jewish social networks among JCC users.



In short, even with the circumscribed population of teenagers who participate in JCC Maccabi events (and some others), Jewish engagement plays a major role in predicting, if not determining, who is active in JCC activities and who is absent. Frequent participants in JCC programs come disproportionately from the most Jewishly engaged population, even when Jewish engagement is measured in terms of ethnic belonging rather than religious involvement. Similarly, those who are relatively inactive in JCC activities are also those for whom Jewish belonging figures less prominently in their lives and their consciousness.

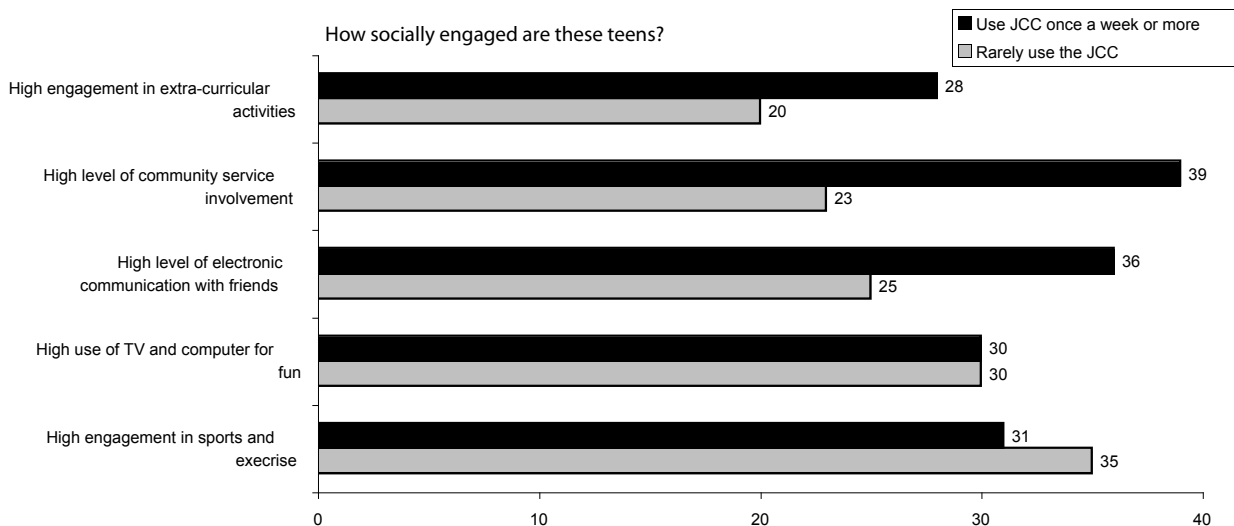
JCC Users: Socially Connected and Socially Active

The survey we fielded asked about a wide variety of activities, interests and concerns. Several are closely related to frequency of use of JCC facilities, while others are not.

Among those aspects of adolescent life that are associated with more frequent use of JCCs are the following:

- Number of extracurricular activities (e.g., drama, music or art groups; student publications, student government)
- Concern for community service issues (e.g., poverty, children, elderly, environment, anti-war, etc.)
- Level of electronic communication with friends (talking on the phone, e-mail, text messaging, etc.)

The common theme running through these features is social engagement. Those teens active in JCCs are active in other parts of their lives. They take part in extracurricular activities at school (and receive slightly higher grades), they are socially conscious and they are “plugged in” to their friends.



The veracity of these inferences is underscored by those aspects of teens' lives that emerge as fairly irrelevant to whether they participate in JCC activities. The dimensions that lack any predictive power in this regard are the following:

- Use of the computer and TV for recreational purposes
- Engagement in sports and exercise
- "Risky behaviors" (drinking alcohol, smoking pot, sexual intimacy)

None of these behaviors are either more or less predictive of using JCC facilities. In other words, frequent users and infrequent users are just as likely to watch TV, or engage in sports, alcohol drinking, pot-smoking, or sexual intimacy.

Conclusions

The Jewish teens who are involved with JCCs differ from their non-involved peers in several ways. Essentially, these differences can be summarized with two broad characterizations:

- They are more socially engaged - with their friends, schools, and larger society.
- They are more Jewishly engaged - in terms of belonging, behavior, and commitment.

Moreover, just as JCC teens differ from others, so too do the teens who are more active in JCC life differ from those who are less active in JCC activities, and maintain only a nominal involvement with JCC-sponsored programs and activities. Some JCC-connected teenagers make extensive use of JCC services, attend a wide range of programs, and attend those programs frequently. These “high-end users” report higher levels of Jewish engagement than their non-attending peers. For the most part, the frequent-users’ families are committed Conservative and Reform (and some Orthodox) Jews, and a large minority of the JCC activists have been to day school as well as other intensive Jewish experiences.

For the teen population that is already engaged, the data suggest that JCC program professionals may need to capitalize on opportunities to provide truly enriched informal Jewish educational experiences, such as cultural events, community service opportunities, Israel travel, and classes. For the teen population that is not as heavily engaged or not especially active in JCC life, the results point to recruitment opportunities. In particular, they point to those realms where socially engaged teenagers are found and could be enticed, like many of their socially engaged counterparts, to make the JCC yet another item in their busy list of social activities.

The research then also delineated a group with little readiness to engage in JCC activities. These are the more solitary sorts with average to low levels of Jewish involvement. On the rare occasion that these teens visit the JCC, it tends to be to play team sports, participate in a JCC-sponsored trip, or participate in social events.

In short, JCC programmers ought not to underestimate the Jewish commitment and background of the more active teenagers, but neither should they ignore the potential to recruit teens who are already busily engaged in cultural, social, service, athletic, and recreational arenas.

In programming for teens, several features of JCC-affiliated teens, and several policy implications, need to be borne in mind:

- As many as two-thirds rely on someone else (or public transportation, depending on the city) to get them to the JCC; only one-third drive and have access to a car.
- Even among those with contact with JCCs (as defined by their appearance at JCC Maccabi Experience programs or other such contact), nearly one-third have not been to their JCC in the past month. How can JCCs induce these teens to participate more extensively year-round?
- Many teens in contact with JCCs use the gym/pool and participate in team sports and social events; a slightly smaller number come to the JCC for Jewish youth groups or community service programs, and an even smaller number engage in the cultural events, Jewish programs, jobs, or other classes offered by the JCC.
- Among the most frequent users of JCCs, 32% have attended a Jewish day school (19% currently attend Jewish day schools) and 48% identify as Conservative or Orthodox.
- JCC use appears to promote in-dating by reinforcing Jewish social networks and providing teens with opportunities to engage with other Jewish teens outside of school.
- Regardless of grade-level, JCC teens are overwhelmingly concerned with doing well in school and getting into a good college; college is not just a concern for juniors and seniors.

Surely, many of these observations comport with widely shared views of the Jewish teens who participate in JCC-sponsored programs. Just as surely, some findings vary with the conventional wisdom. Whether familiar or not, these findings suggest possibilities for reflection and re-thinking, both with respect to serving the current frequent users of JCCs, and with respect to reaching the many teens whose lives fall outside the orbit of JCCs and, for that matter, other possibilities for Jewish engagement in the adolescent years.

APPENDIX

All numbers are % of those who answered the question and represent those saying "yes."

The 2007 Study of Teenagers in North America

You and the Jewish Community Center (JCC)

Are you or your family currently a member of a JCC?

Yes
62

In the last month, how many times, if at all, have you been inside your JCC or used your JCC's outdoor facilities?

Never	36
1-3 times	33
About once a week	16
Twice a week or more	15

In the last 12 months, have you used a Jewish Community Center (JCC) for any of the following?

Gym/swimming	54
Team sports	51
Social events	51
Travel/JCC sponsored trips	37
Youth group programs	36
Community service programs	32
Cultural events	19
Jewish learning classes/programs	13
An internship or job	12
Other classes or programs	12

Have you ever attended...

JCC Maccabi Games	89
JCC Maccabi ArtsFest	10
JCC Maccabi Israel Programs	10

Which of the following would make the JCC more appealing to you?

Having friends who are also involved	82
More sports activities	57
More social activities	47
More travel activities/trips	37
More community service/volunteer activities	27
More arts activities	16
More educational activities	7

School & Fun

What type of school do you currently attend?

Public school	65
A Private School	15
Jewish Day School	19
Other private religious school	1

What grade are you currently in?

7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	College
2	15	28	29	22	4	0

Which of the following best describes your average grade over the past year in school?

A or A+	35
A-	30
B+	21
B	8
B-	3
C+	2
C or lower	1

Below is a list of some activities people participate in. For each, have you participated in this activity in the last 12 months?

	Yes, I participate but am not a leader	Yes, I'm a leader here
Community service activities	56	16
A Jewish youth group	39	16
Drama/ Music/ Dance/ Art	32	16
Student publications (newspaper, yearbook, etc)	18	6
Student council/ government	13	7
Other school activities	57	34

If answered "yes" to participating in or leading community service activities, what issues or concerns did your service work seek to address? (check all that apply)

Poverty and hunger	43
Children's services	41
The elderly	28
Diseases or medical conditions	28
Environmental protection	26
Peace/anti-war	20
Disaster relief	18
Literacy and academic tutoring	15
Animal welfare	12
Substance abuse	11
Gender equity and sexual minority/LGBTQ rights	7
Reproductive rights	5
Other	39

When you choose an extracurricular activity, how much do you think about how it will strengthen your college application/resume?

Not much	Some	A Lot
19	57	24

Do you drive and have access to a car?

Yes
36

In a given month, how many times do you do the following activities?

	Daily
Listening to music	78
E-mail, instant messaging, text messaging or Internet chat rooms	75
Doing homework	69
Talking on the phone	64
Spending time on the Internet (everything except e-mail)	61
Playing on a sports team (during the season)	52
Watching TV	50
Visiting social networking websites (i.e.: My Space, Facebook, etc...)	48
Exercising or doing sports (not on a team/league)	43
Housework/chores	29
Playing computer or video games	21
Doing activities that make you feel Jewish	13
Working at a job for pay	1

Being Jewish

Some of the remaining questions are about your parents. If appropriate, feel free to answer with respect to someone other than your biological mother or father, such as a step-parent or other caregiver in your life. If you have no such person in your life, then just skip the question.

Are you...

Jewish	Jewish and something else	Not Jewish	Not sure
94	6	0	0

Are you being raised Jewish, converted to Judaism, or are not Jewish? What about your parents?

	Raised Jewish	Converted to Judaism	Not Jewish
You	99	1	0
Your mother	87	8	5
Your father	88	4	8

As far as you can tell, how important is being Jewish in your life and in your parents' lives? (If deceased, how important was it?)

	You	Mother	Father
Very important	48	59	52
Fairly important	42	34	34
Not Important	6	4	5
Not sure	4	1	3
Not Jewish	0	3	7

Which one of the words below best describes your kind of Judaism?

Orthodox	7
Conservative	41
Reform	35
Reconstructionist	1
A cultural Jew	6
Just Jewish	9
Jewish and something else	2
Not Jewish	0

What was the main type of Jewish education you received as a child?

Sunday school or other 1 day a week school	22
2 day a week part time Jewish school	26
3 day a week part time Jewish school	12
An Orthodox Yeshiva or day school	12
A non-Orthodox day school	20
Private tutoring	2
None	3
Any other type	3

	Yes
Do you usually attend services on the High Holidays?	91
Is your family currently a member of a synagogue or temple?	89
During the last Yom Kippur, did you personally fast all or part of the day?	85
In the last year, have you listened to any kind of Jewish or Israeli music?	74
Did you ever attend a Jewish sleep-away or day camp during the summer?	65
Are you planning to visit Israel in the next 3 years?	61
Do you frequently talk about Jewish matters with your Jewish friends?	49
Does your household usually light candles on Friday night?	46
Do you attend Sabbath services at least once a month?	35
Do you maintain some sort of “web presence,” such as a website, or a profile on MySpace.com, Facebook.com, or AOL?	74
Did you ever have boyfriend/girlfriend who is Jewish?	58
Did you ever have a boyfriend/girlfriend who is not Jewish?	46

Among the people you consider your closest friends, would you say that

None are Jewish	Some are Jewish	About half are Jewish	Most are Jewish	All or almost all are Jewish
4	32	20	26	19

How important is each of the following to you?

	Extremely important	Very important
Raising your children as Jews	51	28
Marrying a Jewish person	33	25
Dating a Jewish person	10	19

Do you agree or do you disagree with each of the following statements?

	Agree Strongly	Agree
It is cool to be Jewish	40	43
Caring about Israel is a very important part of my being a Jew	39	41
I feel part of a Jewish community	36	47
It is important to me to have friends who are Jewish	30	47
Religion is an important part of my life	30	46
I have a special responsibility to take care of Jews in need around the world	26	46
I have a Jewish responsibility to care for people in trouble (as with Darfur or Katrina)	26	42
I look at the Jewish people as my extended family	12	35
Overall, the fact that I am a Jew has very little to do with how I see myself.	6	16
Most synagogue services are not interesting to me	15	32
Jews should marry whoever they fall in love with, even if they're not Jewish	27	28

Israel & You

Have you been to Israel?

No, never	Yes, once	Yes, 2 times or more	Yes, I have lived in Israel
62	21	15	3

How emotionally attached are you to Israel?

Very	Somewhat	Not Very	Not at all
28	40	23	9

Your Life & Beliefs

You are ...

Male	Female
49	51

In what year were you born? Mean: 1991

What is your race?

Caucasian	African-American	Asian	Mixed	Other
92	1	0	2	5

Which of the following people live in the same household with you?

Mother	Father	Siblings or step-siblings	Stepfather	Stepmother	Other guardian
98	89	82	4	1	1

Thinking ahead, how important is each of the following to you in your future?

	Essential	Very important
Earning a college degree	79	18
Being in good physical shape/physically active	61	33
Raising a family	63	27
Getting married	60	30
Finding purpose and meaning in my life	46	38
Having plenty of time for relaxation and recreation	28	48
Being a leader	17	43
Working to correct social problems and economic inequalities	13	38
Being artistic, musical, or creative	17	29
Finding purpose and meaning in my life through my Jewishness	14	32

All of the remaining questions are optional. This last section deals with drugs, sex, and other private issues. If you wish to skip the questions on these topics, you are now done with the survey; please scroll down to the bottom of the page and hit submit.

There is a lot of talk these days about these subjects, but very little accurate information. We all have a lot to learn about the actual experiences and attitudes of people your age. We hope that you can answer all of the questions; but, if you find some which you feel you cannot answer honestly, we would prefer that you leave them blank. Remember that your answers will be strictly confidential; they will never be connected with your name.

Continue?

Yes	No
69	31

How concerned are you about each of the following personal problems or issues?

	Extremely concerned	Very concerned
Getting into a good college	52	34
Doing well in your classes at school	48	37
Being physically or sexually attractive to others	15	28
Being a victim of violence	16	19
Your relationship with God	10	21
Pressure to use substances like alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs	8	12
Pressure to be sexually active	7	12

Have you ever smoked a cigarette? (Check up to 2 options (past and currently) if needed)

Never	Once or twice, in the past	A few times, in the past	Many times, in the past	Regularly, in the past
89	6	4	1	0
		A few times, currently	Many times, currently	Regularly, currently
		2	1	0

On how many occasions have you been drunk or buzzed from drinking alcoholic beverages...

	Never	1	2	3	4	5-7	8+
In your lifetime	55	12	7	4	5	4	13
During the last 12 months	60	13	8	4	4	3	9
During the last 30 days	79	11	5	2	1	1	0

On how many occasions have you used marijuana (grass, pot) or hashish (hash, hash oil)...

	Never	1	2	3	4	5-7	8+
In your lifetime	84	4	2	2	0	2	6
During the last 12 months	85	5	2	1	1	2	3
During the last 30 days	93	3	1	2	0	1	1

Are you sexually attracted to...

Males	Females	Both	Neither
51	47	2	1

If you ever participated in one of the following activities, how old were you?

	Never	Grade 7 or below	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Kissed/made out	24	27	25	15	8	2	0
Sexual touching (breasts, genitalia)	51	7	16	14	8	4	0
More intimate sexual activity (oral sex, intercourse, etc...)	81	1	4	4	6	3	1

For boys only - For the following statements, indicate how much you agree or disagree.

	Agree a lot	Agree	Disagree	Disagree a lot
It's important for a guy to act like nothing is wrong, even when something is bothering him	4	18	63	15
In a good dating relationship, the guy gets his way most of the time	2	11	66	22
I can respect a guy who backs down from a fight	25	62	12	1
It's ok for a guy to say no to sex	24	67	7	3
Guys should not let it show when their feelings are hurt	3	23	62	12
A guy never needs to hit another guy to get respect	29	50	17	4
If a guy tells people his worries, he will look weak	4	18	65	14
I think it's important for a guy to go after what he wants, even if it means hurting other people's feelings	3	21	58	19
I think it is important for a guy to act like he is sexually active even if he is not	1	13	62	24
I would be friends with a guy who is gay	16	64	14	5
It's embarrassing for a guy when he needs to ask for help	2	21	57	21
I think it's important for a guy to talk about his feelings, even if people might laugh at him	14	57	25	4

For girls only - For the following statements, indicate how much you agree or disagree

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I would tell a friend she looks nice, even if I think she shouldn't go out of the house dressed like that	2	11	25	19	30	13
I express my opinions only if I can think of a nice way of doing it	7	26	22	17	22	6
I worry that I make others feel bad if I am successful	3	14	22	11	35	16
I would not change the way I do things in order to please someone else	16	30	21	20	10	3
I tell my friends what I honestly think even when it is an unpopular idea	18	44	25	8	3	1
Often I look happy on the outside in order to please others, even if I don't feel happy on the inside	15	26	24	13	18	5
I wish I could say what I feel more often than I do	16	22	24	13	17	9
I feel like it's my fault when I have disagreements with my friends	6	13	24	18	29	11
When my friends ignore my feelings, I think that my feelings weren't very important anyway	6	11	11	14	36	23
I usually tell my friends when they hurt my feelings	11	34	26	16	11	3
The way I can tell that I am at a good weight is when I fit into a small size	5	17	21	16	25	16
I often wish my body were different	17	23	26	12	15	8
I think that a girl has to be thin to feel beautiful	3	7	14	12	29	35
I think a girl has to have a light complexion and delicate features to be thought of as beautiful	1	3	8	10	29	50
I am more concerned about how my body looks than how my body feels	5	8	15	18	27	27
I feel comfortable looking at all parts of my body	15	25	19	19	13	9
I often feel uncomfortable in my body	8	14	17	15	29	17
There are times when I have really good feelings in my body	19	44	26	6	3	2
The way I decide I am at a good weight is when I feel healthy	20	38	24	9	6	4
I decide how much to eat by how hungry I am	18	43	19	9	7	4

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