

THE WILLIAM PETSCHER  
NATIONAL

JEWISH FAMILY CENTER



**American Jewish  
High School Students  
A National Profile**

James L. Peterson and  
Nicholas Zill

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Library of Congress catalog card number 84-72249  
ISBN 0-87495-065-1

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## FOREWORD

Very little is known about the identity and aspirations of Jewish young people. Demographic surveys and attitude studies of the Jewish community have for the most part concentrated on adults, especially on heads of households. Whatever information we have about the younger generation usually must be inferred from data provided by parents and other adults.

The American Jewish Committee's William Petschek National Jewish Family Center, concerned with strengthening the Jewish family, has begun to address this information gap through a series of studies concentrating on unattached Jews. Jewish Campus Life by Rela Geffen Monson, which probed attitudes of college students toward marriage and the family, has already been published. Two other research projects, one on unmarried adults between the ages of 25 and 40, and the other on divorced singles, are nearing completion.

This survey of Jewish high school youth focuses on the age when young people begin to formulate their perceptions, values and expectations. While there are no guarantees that the adolescents will carry out their plans, the attitudes they express provide some insight into their Jewish involvement and some hints about the future of the Jewish community.

The study highlights several significant findings:

1. The family still exerts the most important influence in shaping the attitudes, goals and values of young people, Jewish and non-Jewish.
2. Jewish adults (the parents of the teenagers studied) are better educated than non-minority whites in America.
3. Respect for knowledge and scholarship, an essential Jewish value, is transmitted from parents to children. Overwhelmingly, the Jewish high school students surveyed plan to pursue graduate studies and professional careers.

4. Jewish fathers are more involved than their non-Jewish counterparts in monitoring schoolwork and encouraging their children's education.

5. The overwhelming majority of Jewish youth consider marriage and family life as paths to happiness.

6. Plans for graduate and professional education imply the postponement of marriage and raising a family, which will probably perpetuate the low birthrate currently prevailing in the Jewish community.

7. Jewish students place career and personal achievement highest on their scale of values, and rank community leadership at the very bottom of that scale.

8. Jewish high school girls tend to have somewhat lower educational aspirations than Jewish boys, and tend to choose traditionally female vocations.

9. Like older-age cohorts studied, Jewish high school students, too, tend to be less religious than their non-Jewish counterparts. At the same time, the more religious respondents expect to marry earlier and have larger families.

These findings have broad implications for Jewish communal and educational institutions. Most notably, they point to a need to clarify Jewish values regarding equality of the sexes in education and professional roles, to counter the pervasive emphasis on self-centered materialism, and to encourage communal involvement and social responsibility.

We hope Jewish agencies will find this report useful in evaluating their policies and practices, and in setting their priorities for the months and years ahead.

Yehuda Rosenman, *Director*  
William Petschek National Jewish Family Center

## INTRODUCTION

In this era of rapid social change, many parents and educators are troubled by the impact some of the changes may have on the development and well-being of the younger generation. Concern is often voiced about the possible effects of the high rate of divorce on families with children and the fact that a large proportion of mothers reenter the labor force while their children are still quite young. Much public attention has been devoted recently to the apparent erosion of standards of achievement and conduct in the public schools. Moreover, parents feel uneasy about the great deal of unsupervised time their children spend looking at television, and are disturbed by the vulgarity and commercialism evident in most films and programs.

Such concerns are shared by adults from a wide variety of ethnic and religious groups. In addition, however, there are several specific questions Jewish parents and professionals might want to raise concerning their own offspring.

The first question is whether the young Jews of today will live up to the high standards of intellectual, professional, and economic achievement set by earlier generations of American Jews. Are they as motivated as their parents were to excel in school, in their careers and in the marketplace? Might not the diminished quality of education in the schools and the anti-intellectualism that pervades so much of American popular culture undermine their accomplishments?

Another question is whether these young Jews will lead in the effort on behalf of social justice, and against racial and religious discrimination, as their parents and grandparents did. Will they perpetuate the traditional Jewish commitment to equity and opportunity for all groups, or might their commitment be weakened by the self-involvement and concern for one's own economic well-being that seem to be on the rise among the younger generation throughout the country today? Might not the Jewish commitment to the advancement of racial equality be further eroded by fears that affirmative action programs entailing ethnic quotas will result in fewer opportunities for Jews in the colleges, the graduate schools and the professions, where they are today represented far above their proportion in the population?



A third question is whether there may not be a gradual erosion of Jewish identity, or a reduction in the size of the population that considers itself Jewish, because of relatively high rates of inter-marriage, smaller family sizes, and what is widely believed to be a long-term trend toward less frequent and less intense religious observance among Jews in the United States.

This study provides at least some tentative answers to such questions by drawing a profile of Jewish youth of high school age in the United States, of whom there are an estimated 275,000 out of a total high school enrollment of about 14 million. It documents the differences between Jewish and non-Jewish youth in terms of their aspirations, achievements, attitudes and values with respect to school, family and religion, and explores characteristics in their family background that may account for some of these differences. In addition, to broaden the context and provide an interesting comparison group, the report highlights some similarities and differences between Jewish and Japanese American youth.

## METHOD

Although a substantial portion of the social science literature in the United States deals with the status and characteristics of significant minority groups, the emphasis has been mostly on communities that are at a relative disadvantage in our society, such as blacks and, increasingly, Hispanics. Much less attention has focused on Jews, Japanese Americans and other minorities whose levels of achievement appear especially high.

A number of factors may account for this situation. First, as a great deal of research is directed to the study of social problems, there is a natural tendency to concentrate on disadvantaged groups. Second, the size of most of the high-achieving minority populations is relatively small, so that too few are included in most national surveys to support any meaningful generalizations.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, these minorities are difficult to identify for sampling purposes. For example, Jews are not visually recognizable, and their residential patterns are not as highly segregated as those of some other groups. Therefore, straight area probability sampling methods are prohibitively expensive.

Despite the sampling difficulties, several recent studies have provided a better national picture of the demographic and social characteristics of the Jewish population than was previously available.<sup>2</sup> However, such studies have not usually included children or youth.<sup>3</sup>

The data presented here were derived from the 1980 High School and Beyond survey of a national sample of high school sophomores and seniors, commissioned by the National Center for Education Statistics. Over one thousand high schools were selected, representing a wide spectrum of public and private institutions of varying ethnic and racial composition. Weights were developed to adjust the different sampling rates among the types of schools and the varying response rates of schools and of students. The overall response rates were 91 percent for schools and 84 percent for students. In all, over 30,000 sophomores and 28,000 seniors from 1,015 high schools participated in the survey.

As implied in the title of the study, "High School and Beyond," the objective was to identify and describe those factors that predict the course of major life events, especially educational and occupational attainment, in the years immediately following high school departure. Accordingly, a second wave of the survey was conducted in the Spring of 1982; and a third wave was planned for 1984. Information was collected not only from the students themselves but also, for small sub-samples, from their parents and teachers. Likewise, data describing characteristics of the schools were obtained to complete the picture.

The information gleaned from the High School and Beyond study was very useful for describing the characteristics of Jewish youth. The total sample of 58,270 students was large enough to yield a reasonably large sample of 1,072 Jews, allowing for reliable estimates of the distribution of Jewish youth on a variety of items as well as for more detailed analyses within the Jewish group. The questionnaires covered a broad range of variables, focusing especially on educational and career aspirations, expectations and experiences. As data were available both on religion and on ethnic/racial origin, it was possible to compare Jewish students with those from other religious and ethnic groups.

The data do have significant limitations, however. Being school-based, the sample did not include dropouts, most of whom would already have left by the time they reached senior year. Since Jewish youth probably drop out less than others, comparisons between them and other ethnic or religious groups may be somewhat skewed.

While the present report is mindful of these and other limitations, it provides a profile of an important segment of the Jewish population about which little is known and whose impact will certainly be felt on the American Jewish community in the years ahead.

## THE FINDINGS

### Background Characteristics

Jewish high school students differ from other American students in a number of ways. Understanding the disparities in their respective social, economic and family circumstances will help interpret the other findings.

Jewish youth (high school sophomores and seniors) were compared with non-minority white youth (neither Jewish nor Hispanic) and with all youth (including Jewish) in relation to four variables: family composition, parents' education, family income and mother's employment outside the home (Table 1).

Despite the higher incidence of divorce now than in the past, the great majority of the young people in the survey lived with both their parents, Jewish students somewhat more than the others. Jewish students were also more likely to come from well-educated families. More than twice as many had at least one parent who graduated from college; a mere two percent had parents who did not complete high school. The difference in family income was almost as dramatic. Nearly three-quarters of the Jewish students had families with an annual income of \$25,000 or more, as compared with 50 percent of non-minority white youth. And while nearly a fifth of the total sample came from families with incomes under \$12,000, only eight percent of the Jews fell in that category.<sup>4</sup>

Jewish mothers were less likely than mothers of other young people to have had full-time employment while their children were growing up. This was the case especially during the pre-school and elementary school years. By the time the youngsters reached high school, the gap had narrowed, but Jewish youth still reported fewer of their mothers working full time than did other students.<sup>5</sup> As yet no firm conclusions may be drawn about the benefits, if any, to Jewish youth. Certainly, the opportunity is there for these mothers to devote more time to their children.

**Table 1**  
Students' Basic Family Characteristics

	Jewish Students	Non-Minority White Students	Total Sample
	Percent		
<u>Family Composition</u>			
Two parents in the home	77	75	70
Mother only	13	11	14
<u>Parents' Education</u>			
At least one a college graduate	59	27	25
Neither a high school graduate	2	10	13
<u>Family Income</u>			
Annual income \$25,000 or more	74	50	45
Annual income less than \$12,000	8	14	19
<u>Mother's Employment</u>			
Full time before student started elementary school	12	21	25
Full time during student's elementary school years	21	31	35
Full time during students high school years	40	44	46

## Aspirations and Expectations

Jewish sophomores and seniors differed most from their counterparts with regard to their educational, occupational, and family goals and expectations (Table 2).

Differences in educational expectations develop early. In answer to a specific question, the overwhelming majority of Jewish youth, in contrast to only half of the others, said that when they were in the eighth grade, they expected they would go to college after completing high school. A similar difference became apparent when they were asked about their current educational plans, a difference underscored by the higher proportion of Jewish students who were enrolled in a college preparatory program while attending high school.

Not only did a larger percentage of Jewish youth plan to go on to college, but half of them, in contrast to only 18 percent of non-minority white youth, also intended to continue their education beyond the undergraduate level. By the same token, a much higher percentage of Jewish youth expected to be older than 21 by the time they finished their education.

How can this be explained? Clearly the family is a major source of advice and guidance, perhaps the most important one. In this respect, not only did the Jewish parents themselves attain high achievement levels, but they also had high aspirations for their children's education. Thus, over 90 percent of both Jewish mothers and fathers wanted their children to go on to college, while only about two-thirds of the parents of non-minority whites had such aspirations. The plans of both the Jewish and non-Jewish youth fell short of their parents' wishes, but those of the Jewish students matched them more closely. The same contrast between Jews and non-Jews held for parents' expectations for their children's post-college education.

Since an important element of education is preparation for occupational roles, it is not surprising that there were striking differences in the career aspirations of Jewish and non-Jewish youth. Jews were more likely than others to aspire to managerial and administrative occupations, but the difference was even more marked in relation to the professions (accounting, clergy, dentistry, engineering, law, medicine, academia and so on). Nearly twice as many Jewish youth (67 percent, as opposed to 38 percent of the others) planned to have professional careers.

Plans for family formation were closely related to those for education and career. In particular, Jewish youth intended to have their own residences and start families at a later age than the other students.

**Table 2**  
**Educational, Occupational and Family**  
**Aspirations and Expectations**

	Jewish Students	Non-Minority White Students	Total Sample
	Percent		
<u>Educational Plans</u>			
Father wants student to attend college right after high school	91	60	61
Mother wants student to attend college right after high school	91	65	66
Friends and relatives want student to attend college right after high school	76	45	46
Student plans to attend college right after high school	85	53	53
As an 8th grader, student expected to attend college	83	50	51
Student is enrolled in a college preparatory program in high school	65	37	36
Mother wants student to pursue graduate work	47	18	19
Student plans to pursue graduate work	50	18	19
Student plans to extend education beyond age 21	54	26	28
<u>Occupational Plans</u>			
Student expects to get first regular job before age 22	42	73	73
Student plans professional career	67	38	38
<u>Family Plans</u>			
Student expects to have own residence before age 22	55	73	70
Student plans to marry after age 25	28	12	13
Student expects to have first child after age 25	57	33	33
Student hopes to have three or more children	37	32	33

Despite expectations of marrying and having children later, Jews planned to have slightly larger families than the rest.<sup>6</sup> Yet the data indicated that Jewish youth came from smaller families. Their expectations to have larger families themselves may conceivably represent a generational change in the relationship between ethnicity and family size. But a more likely explanation is that current aspirations and eventual family size are related in different ways for Jews than for others. Women who begin childbearing early tend to have more children, perhaps even more than they initially planned. Since Jewish youth expect to start families at a later age, they may be more likely than others to have no more, or even fewer, children than they originally intended. Non-minority whites, on the other hand, may be more likely to exceed their original intentions because they usually begin to bear children at an earlier age.

### Performance in School

Achievement test scores. The higher aspirations of the Jewish students and the greater expectations of their families were accompanied by higher achievement in school. Whether achievement was measured by standardized test scores, by placement in advanced classes or by grades, Jewish students attained levels that were markedly above average. Of the ethnic and religious groups examined in the national sample, only Japanese Americans performed at average achievement levels nearly comparable to those of the Jewish students (see p. 27).

On three achievement tests -- vocabulary, reading and mathematics -- Jewish students performed well above the mean and better than non-minority white students (Table 3). Scores on these tests were standardized to an overall mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. On this scale, the Jewish students in the sample scored more than 7 points above average on the vocabulary test, nearly 5 points above average on the reading test, and more than 6 points above average on the mathematics test.

A closer look at the distribution of test scores for Jewish students in comparison with the distribution for all students reveals just how sizable these differences are. On the vocabulary test, for example, more than half of the Jewish sophomores scored in the top 25 percent of the test score distribution for all sophomores; 30 percent scored in the top 10 percent of the overall distribution. As far as math scores were concerned, 40 percent of the Jewish sophomores scored in the top quartile of the overall sophomore distribution, and 22 percent in the top decile. The higher achievement of the Jewish students was also reflected in the larger percentage of Jews enrolled in advanced English and advanced math classes, and who had obtained mostly As and Bs in their courses (Table 4).

Socioeconomic factors. Students' scores on aptitude and achievement tests are known to be related to family background variables, such as the educational attainment and occupation of the parents and



**Table 3**  
Average Achievement Test Scores\*

	Jewish Students		Non-Minority White Students		Total Sample
	Unadjusted	Adjusted**	Unadjusted	Adjusted**	
Vocabulary	57.4	53.8	51.2	50.0	50.1
Reading	54.6	51.6	51.2	50.0	50.0
Math	56.3	52.8	51.3	50.1	50.0

\*The scores are standardized to a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10.  
 \*\*Adjusted for SES (socioeconomic status), maternal employment and family structure, and also for grade in school.

**Table 4**  
Grades and Advanced Placement

	Jewish Students	Non-Minority White Students	Total Sample
	Percent		
Above-average high school grades (As and Bs)	46	32	30
Enrolled in advanced English class	38	24	24
Enrolled in advanced math class	37	24	23

the family's income level. As indicated earlier, today's American Jewish families tend to be well above average on these socioeconomic variables. Thus, the question arises: To what extent can the superior achievement of Jewish students be attributed to the relatively advantaged family backgrounds from which many of them come?

When the family's socioeconomic level and its ethnic or religious affiliation were used simultaneously to predict student test scores, the socioeconomic variable was found to be the stronger predictor of achievement. Moreover, when the test scores were statistically adjusted to take into account differences in socioeconomic level and other family characteristics, the differences between Jewish students and others were substantially reduced (see "adjusted" columns in Table 3). Yet even with these adjustments, some differences in achievement persisted. After controlling for socioeconomic level, family structure and maternal employment, as well as for whether the student was a sophomore or senior, the Jewish students in the national sample still scored nearly 4 points above average on the vocabulary test, nearly 2 points above average on the reading test, and nearly 3 points above average on the math test.

It should be noted, however, that socioeconomic advantages cannot account for the superior accomplishments of the American Jewish population in the long run. When the forebears of today's Jewish students arrived in the United States, many of them did not have more years of education, better occupations or greater wealth than the resident population at the time. Quite the contrary. It would seem, therefore, that some cultural factors must be invoked to explain the remarkable record of Jewish intellectual and economic achievement. The test scores of today's American Jewish high school students suggest that this record of achievement will continue at least into the next generation of adults.

Study habits. The higher achievement levels of Jewish students seem to be supported by study habits conducive to better performance (Table 5). Jewish students were three times as likely as non-minority white students to spend more than ten hours per week doing homework. They were also considerably more likely than others to watch television less than one hour a day, read a newspaper almost every day and read for pleasure almost every day.<sup>7</sup> Attitudes toward schoolwork also showed ethnic differences, though of lesser magnitude -- slightly more Jewish students reported that they were interested in school or liked to work hard in school.

School attendance and behavior. A mixed picture emerges from a series of items relating to school behavior and attendance (Table 6). Jewish students reported committing somewhat more minor infractions of school rules -- cutting classes, arriving late or being absent for non-medical reasons. Yet fewer of them reported having had more serious disciplinary problems. Such a pattern may reflect Jewish

**Table 5**  
Habits Relating to Schoolwork

	Jewish Students	Non-Minority White Students	Total Sample
	Percent		
More than 10 hours of homework weekly	18	6	6
Less than one hour of TV daily	19	12	11
Newspaper reading almost daily	56	41	41
Reading for pleasure almost daily	26	20	19

**Table 6**  
School Attendance and Behavior

	Jewish Students	Non-Minority White Students	Total Sample
	Percent		
Missed at least one day of school for reasons other than illness in last semester	74	69	69
Arrived late at school in last semester	65	58	60
Has cut classes	43	37	37
Had disciplinary problems in school in last year	12	15	17
Was ever suspended or on probation	7	12	12

parental permissiveness regarding "less important" rules and regulations, combined with strictness about what they consider more consequential matters.

### **The Home Environment**

Jewish youth differed from others on certain aspects pertaining to their home environment (Table 7). Whereas these differences were not as significant as those regarding aspirations and expectations, they did indicate that, on the whole, Jewish students enjoyed a more favorable home environment. All of the students in the sample reported a great deal of parental monitoring of their schoolwork, with mothers being more involved than fathers (in part because more mothers were reported to be at home). While very little difference was reported in the percentage of mothers of Jewish and non-Jewish students who monitored their children's work, the rate of involvement of Jewish fathers was higher than that of others.

Jewish homes also seemed to provide slightly more study resources, such as reading and reference materials, and mechanical equipment such as a typewriter or a pocket calculator. In general, only about half of the students reported having a specially designated study area in the home, but again, a higher proportion of Jewish students had access to such a facility.

### **Self-Conceptions**

The survey questionnaire included two sets of items tapping students' conceptions about themselves. One measured their self-esteem (Table 8), the other their perceived ability to control the environment and their destiny, a concept labeled locus of control (Table 9). Jewish students ranked slightly higher on both self-esteem and locus of control, although the differences between them and the others narrowed when scores were adjusted for differences in socioeconomic status, maternal employment and family structure (Table 10).

Of all ethnic groups examined in the study, black students scored highest on self-esteem, but lowest on locus of control. In contrast, Japanese American students scored about average on self-esteem and high on locus of control. Since Japanese Americans, along with Jews, do relatively well in school, whereas black students do relatively poorly, this suggests that a feeling of being in control is more clearly linked to school performance (either as cause or as effect) than is self-esteem.<sup>8</sup>

### **Values**

The questionnaire included a series of statements designed to measure the importance accorded by the students to various social and economic values (Table 11).

Table 7  
Home Support for Schoolwork

	Jewish Students	Non-Minority White Students	Total Sample
	Percent		
<u>Parental Involvement</u>			
Mother monitors progress in school	87	85	85
Father monitors progress in school	79	72	69
<u>Academic Resources Available at Home</u>			
Encyclopedia or other reference books	93	90	88
More than 50 books	94	88	86
Daily newspaper	91	84	82
Pocket calculator	89	86	82
Typewriter	91	79	76
Special study area	60	48	48

Table 8  
Self-Esteem

	Jewish Students	Non-Minority White Students	Total Sample
	Percent		
Strong Agreement			
"I am a person of worth, on an equal plane with others"	45	28	30
"I am able to do things as well as most other people"	44	28	30
"I take a positive attitude toward myself"	35	26	29
"On the whole, I am satisfied with myself"	27	19	21

Table 9  
Locus of Control

Strong Disagreement	Jewish Students	Non-Minority White Students	Total Sample
	Percent		
"Planning only makes a person unhappy, since plans hardly ever work out anyway"	34	26	25
"Good luck is more important than hard work for success"	29	30	28
"Every time I try to get ahead, something or somebody stops me"	23	11	12
"People who accept their condition in life are happier than those who try to change things"	22	13	13

Table 10  
Self-Concept Scores\*

	Jewish Students		Non-Minority White Students		Total Sample
	Unadjusted	Adjusted**	Unadjusted	Adjusted**	
Self-esteem index	52.2	51.1	49.7	49.6	50.0
Locus of control index	53.7	51.8	51.3	51.0	50.0

\*Indices formed by averaging several self-concept items and standardizing to a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. Higher scores indicate greater self-esteem and a greater sense of personal control over events.

\*\*Adjusted for SES, maternal employment and family structure.

Table 11  
Social and Economic Values Rated  
"Very Important"

	Jewish Students	Non-Minority White Students	Total Sample
	Percent		
"Being successful in my line of work"	90	87	87
"Having strong friendships"	90	85	82
"Being able to find steady work"	85	85	84
"Finding the right person to marry and having a happy family life"	83	83	82
"Having leisure time to enjoy my own interests"	83	71	70
"Being able to give my children better opportunities than I've had"	58	67	70
"Having children"	46	41	40
"Having lots of money"	42	30	33
"Working to correct social and economic inequalities"	13	11	14
"Being a leader in my community"	11	11	10

Most striking was the fact that Jewish and non-minority white students ranked the statements in almost identical order of importance, both giving the highest priority to "success in my line of work," and placing "working to correct social and economic inequalities" and "being a community leader" at the bottom of the list. Family-related values tended to range from high to middle rank for both Jews and non-Jews.

Differences between Jewish youth and non-minority white youth were minimal on many of the items, but some were significant. More than others, Jews valued "having leisure time to enjoy my own interests" and "having lots of money." However, they placed less stress than blacks and Hispanics on the desire to give their children "better opportunities" than they themselves had received. Indeed, the responses to this item tended to correlate with the students' family background; the gap became somewhat narrower when the figures were adjusted for differences in socioeconomic status. Another explanation for the lower Jewish rating may be that this value reflects the Jewish students' perception (dealt with earlier) that they can control their own destiny rather than feeling limited by external circumstances.

### Religious Involvement

All the students (including those who reported they were not raised in any religion) were asked how religious they considered themselves and how frequently they attended religious services. These two items were combined to form a scale of religious involvement (Table 12). On this scale, those who said they were very religious and who attended services once a week or more were rated "high"; the very religious who attended less regularly, and the somewhat religious who attended once a month or more were classified as "moderate." The somewhat religious who attended less frequently than once a month, and those who said they were not at all religious but attended at least occasionally, were ranked "low"; those who never attended were listed as "none."

The students showed considerable variations in religious involvement, in accordance with their religious backgrounds. Catholics, mainline Protestants and black Baptists ranked about average in religious involvement, with eight to nine percent classified as "high." White Baptists ranked "high" on religious involvement (14 percent); the categories "other Christian" and "other religion" ranked the highest (19 and 21 percent, respectively).<sup>9</sup>

Jewish youth were the least religious among students brought up in some religious faith. Only five percent ranked "high," and only 23 percent (compared with a range of 42 to 55 percent for the other religious groups) ranked "moderate" on the religious involvement scale. This suggests that many young Jews may consider their affiliation in ethnic or cultural rather than religious terms.



**Table 12**  
 Level of Religious Involvement, by Religion in Which  
 Students Were Raised

	High	Moderate	Low	None	Total
	Percent				
Jewish	5	23	50	22	100
Catholic	8	55	30	7	100
Mainline Protestant	9	46	36	9	100
Baptist					
White	14	46	33	7	100
Black	8	54	34	4	100
Other Christian	19	42	30	8	99*
Other Religion	21	43	29	7	100
No Religion	1	9	39	50	99*
All	10	46	33	11	100

\*Does not add up to 100 because individual totals have been rounded off.

Within the Jewish group itself, differences in degree of religious involvement were closely related to several variables explored earlier -- future aspirations, and social and economic values -- as well as political beliefs. Jewish students with moderate and low levels of religious involvement had higher educational and professional aspirations than either the highly religious or those with no religious commitment at all (Tables 13 and 14). But the highly religious students were planning to marry earlier and have their first child at an earlier age than their less religious counterparts. And many more of these highly religious students (almost three-quarters) planned to have three or more children than either the moderately religious (40 percent) or the non-religious (30 percent).

Some of the attitudinal variables indicated a positive relationship between degree of religious involvement and family values. While the great majority of all Jewish youth considered "finding the right person to marry and having a happy family life" to be "very important," 95 percent of the highly religious students thought so as compared with 76 percent of the non-religious. Even more striking, the proportion who thought that "having children" was "very important" rose from 34 percent for the non-religious to 72 percent for the highly religious.

In contrast to their lower educational and career aspirations, the highly religious valued professional success as much -- if not more -- as other Jewish youth. Thus, even if they differed in their choices of occupational goals, they were no less committed to doing well in their line of work.

A somewhat paradoxical finding emerged with regard to social and political beliefs. Among both Jewish and non-Jewish students, the highly religious were more likely to describe their outlook as conservative than the less religious. Yet in most groups, the highly religious were also more apt to be politically involved; that is, the percentage who reported no political orientation, or who did not know their orientation, declined as their level of religious involvement rose. The opposite was true of the Jews: their level of political engagement declined with a rise in their level of religious involvement (Table 15). Even so, for Jewish youth as well as for others, the level of religious involvement related positively to the stress they placed on "working to correct social and economic inequalities," a goal often associated with a more liberal outlook.

The pattern of aspirations, values and political attitudes of the highly religious young Jews, who constituted only five percent of the Jewish student population sample, distinguished them from the majority. A possible explanation is that they were perhaps recent immigrants or children of recent immigrants, and that their attitudes and expectations reflected those of their cultures of origin. The High School and Beyond study did not explicitly determine immigrant status, but an analysis was made of the responses to questions asking whether

Table 13  
Aspirations and Attitudes of Jewish Students,  
by Level of Religious Involvement

	High	Moderate	Low	None
	Percent			
<u>Aspirations</u>				
Plans to pursue graduate degree	37	56	51	45
Plans to have professional occupation	47	70	70	61
Plans to marry before age 25	88	48	45	49
Plans first child before age 25	72	25	17	20
Plans three or more children	74	40	35	30
<u>Attitudes</u>				
Rates as "very important"				
"Being successful in my line of work"	94	85	92	90
"Finding the right person to marry and having a happy family life"	95	88	84	76
"Having children"	72	51	46	34
"Working to correct social and economic inequalities"	18	17	13	9
<u>Political beliefs liberal, very liberal, or radical</u>	17	23	35	38

**Table 14**  
**Career Goals of Jewish Students by Level of Religious Involvement**

	High	Moderate	Low	None
	Percent			
Professional, higher level	28	46	34	29
Professional, lower level	19	25	36	32
School teacher	11	*	2	3
Manager, administrator	8	3	9	5
Proprietor, owner	*	6	5	2
Technical	*	5	4	8
Clerical, sales	*	7	5	7
Service	*	*	1	4
Operative, craft	*	*	1	6
Homemaker	15	3	1	*
Other	<u>9</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>
Total	90**	98**	101**	101**

\*Number of cases too small for reliable estimate.

\*\*Does not add up to 100 because individual totals were rounded off, and percents that could not be reliably estimated were not included.

**Table 15**  
**Political Beliefs of Jewish Students**  
**by Level of Religious Involvement**

	High	Moderate	Low	None
	Percent			
Conservative or very conservative	18	14	7	9
Moderate	17	33	29	18
Liberal	15	20	29	28
Very liberal or radical	2	3	6	9
None	6	2	4	9
Do not know	<u>41</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>
Total	99*	100	100	99*

\*Figures do not add up to 100 because individual totals have been rounded off.

**Table 16**  
**Residence Outside the U.S. by Jewish Students**  
**and Their Parents, by Level of Religious Involvement**

	High	Moderate	Low	None
	Percent			
Student has lived outside the U.S.	32	10	4	5
Student has not lived outside the U.S.				
Both parents have lived outside the U.S.	18	8	4	3
One parent has lived outside the U.S.	11	8	8	12
Neither parent has lived outside the U.S.	<u>39</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>79</u>
Total	100	101*	100	99*

\*Does not add up to 100 because individual totals have been rounded off.

the students or their parents had lived outside the United States (Table 16). The highly religious students were more than three times as likely as others to have lived abroad. And if they themselves had not, their parents were about twice as likely as others to have lived elsewhere.

### Gender Differences

Differences in the attitudes, aspirations and experiences of boys and girls develop at an early age and are reinforced by societal mores and beliefs concerning appropriate male and female roles.

The findings regarding gender differences among Jewish youth generally paralleled those for the community at large (Tables 17 and 18). Although an equal number of Jewish boys and girls aspired to professional occupations, boys were more likely to opt for higher status professions, girls for the lower status ones. Girls were also more likely to look to traditionally female roles, such as teaching and homemaking, while boys were more likely to want to be business proprietors (Table 17).

About half the Jewish students of both sexes set their sights on a graduate degree, but there seemed to be a difference in what they reported as their mothers' aspirations for them (Table 18). Forty-nine percent of the boys, compared with only 43 percent of the girls, said their mothers wanted them to pursue a graduate degree. As these data were gathered from the students and not from their parents, it is not clear whether the difference was real or reflected the students' perceptions of their parents' expectations. Moreover, the disparity might have been considerably larger had the analysis focused on an earlier cohort of Jewish students.

Jewish students of both sexes rated occupational success as highly important, the girls even outranking the boys by three percent. Similarly, boys and girls attached equal importance to having children and a happy family life, but girls were somewhat more likely to want three or more children, and considerably more likely to want to enter marriage and begin childbearing earlier than boys. These findings are consistent with a relatively stable and longstanding difference between American males and females at the age of first marriage -- on average, women tend to be about two years younger.

**Table 17**  
**Career Goals of Jewish Students by Gender**

	Male	Female	All
	Percent		
Professional, higher level	40	31	36
Professional, lower level	28	36	32
School teacher	1	4	2
Manager, administrator	7	7	7
Proprietor, owner	7	2	4
Technical	5	6	5
Clerical, sales	5	6	5
Service	2	1	1
Operative, craft	3	1	2
Homemaker	*	4	2
Other	4	4	4
Total	102**	102**	100

\*Number too small for reliable estimate.

\*\*Does not add up to 100 because individual totals have been rounded off.

**Table 18**  
Aspirations and Attitudes of Jewish Students by Gender

	Male	Female
	<u>Percent</u>	
<u>Aspirations</u>		
Student plans to pursue graduate degree	50	49
Mother wants student to pursue graduate degree	49	43
Student plans a professional career	67	67
Student plans to marry before age 25	40	58
Student plans first child before age 25	18	26
Student plans three or more children	35	40
<u>Attitudes</u>		
Rates as "very important":		
"Being successful in my line of work"	89	92
"Finding the right person to marry and having a happy family life"	84	83
"Having children"	45	46



**Table 19**  
Comparison Between Jewish and Japanese American Students

	American Jews	Japanese Americans	Total Sample
	Percent		
<u>Family</u>			
At least one parent a college graduate	59	37	25
Annual family income \$25,000 or more	74	63	45
<u>Aspirations and Expectations</u>			
Student plans to pursue graduate work	50	43	19
Plans professional career	67	60	38
Plans to marry after age 25	28	29	13
Plans three or more children	37	31	33
<u>Academic Supports in Home</u>			
Encyclopedia or other reference books	93	95	88
More than 50 books	94	93	86
<u>School Performance and Behavior</u>			
Vocabulary test (mean score)	57.3	54.6	50.1
Reading test (mean score)	54.6	54.4	50.0
Math test (mean score)	56.3	57.4	50.0
Above-average high school grades (As and Bs)	46	49	30
Spends more than 10 hours a week on homework	18	14	6
Watches TV less than 1 hour daily	19	13	11
Missed at least one day of school for reasons other than illness in last semester	74	66	69
Has cut classes	43	32	37
Has had disciplinary problems in school in last year	12	7	17
<u>Self-Concept Measures</u>			
Self-esteem index (mean)	52.3	49.5	50.0
Locus of control index (mean)	52.8	53.3	50.0

## A COMPARISON BETWEEN JEWISH AND JAPANESE AMERICAN STUDENTS

As Japanese Americans, too, are a minority group known for high achievement, a comparison between young people of Jewish and Japanese origin may highlight some common factors (Table 19).

The findings showed that both groups came from families with high education and income, the Jewish students more than the Japanese Americans. The students' own educational and career aspirations were especially high, with those of Jewish youth slightly higher.

Scholastically, the two groups excelled, surpassing all others. In prevalence of A and B grades, and mean score on the mathematics achievement test, Japanese Americans ranked somewhat higher. Jewish students scored slightly higher on the vocabulary test.

Both groups enjoyed more academic support at home (books and reference materials). Japanese American students spent more time on homework and watched less television than others but did not rank as high as Jews in study habits. However, the Japanese American students reported the fewest infractions of school regulations, which may be explained, in part, by the emphasis that Japanese culture places on conformity.

As noted earlier, both the Japanese American and the Jewish students scored relatively high on the locus-of-control index, but Japanese Americans scored lower on self-esteem. Again, this difference may be related to the tendency of Japanese to teach children to be self-effacing.

Finally, a smaller percentage of Japanese American than Jewish students expected to have three or more children.

### SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The conclusions from this study of the aspirations, academic achievement, attitudes and values of a large national sample of Jewish high school students in the United States give rise to a variety of implications. Some of these are reassuring in that they do not support certain longstanding apprehensions. The others are a bit more sobering and may serve as a springboard for new communal policies.

For the most part, the results should be encouraging to those who are concerned about continuing the Jewish tradition of academic excellence and vocational success. The study found that, in comparison with most other groups, Jewish students in the survey had extremely high aspirations with respect to both educational and occupational attainment. These aspirations were characteristic of females as well as males.

The families and home environments of the Jewish students encouraged educational achievement. Jewish mothers and fathers had high expectations for their sons and daughters, and were closely involved in monitoring their progress in school. Jewish homes were most likely to provide material supports for learning, such as books, mechanical equipment and a specific study area.

By various measures of academic achievement, Jewish high school students did better in school than students from the non-Jewish white majority and than virtually all other major ethnic or religious groups in the United States. (Of the groups examined in the study, only the achievement levels of Japanese Americans were nearly comparable to those of the Jewish students.) The superior achievement of Jewish students may be credited only in part to the above-average socio-economic situation of their parents.

A disquieting note in the findings pertaining to academic performance is that none of the young people surveyed seemed particularly studious, even if Jewish students seemed to spend comparatively more time with their books and less time before the television set than their counterparts from other ethnic or religious groups. These data suggest that concerns about the failure of many high schools in the U.S. to challenge and stimulate their most able pupils are well justified.

Given their relatively high levels of academic achievement, it is perhaps not surprising that Jewish high school students expressed more positive attitudes about themselves than the others did. They scored above average in tests measuring their sense of worth and ability (self-esteem) and their sense of being able to take charge of their own destinies (locus of control).

Those who would like to see Jewish young people in the forefront of the struggle for greater social and economic equality in this country may be disheartened by some of the study's findings. The priorities expressed by the Jewish students were not very different from those of the non-Jewish white majority. Both groups seemed far more concerned with their own career success and economic security than with the welfare of disadvantaged minorities. In fact, Jewish students were more likely to endorse "me generation" goals, such as "having leisure time to enjoy my own interests" and "having lots of money." Like other whites, only a small minority of Jewish students considered the redress of social and economic inequities as an important life goal. Moreover, the findings concerning above-average Jewish test scores serve to highlight the conflict many Jews must face when they work to promote greater representation for other ethnic minorities in higher education and the professions. In giving a place to a black or Hispanic young person who would otherwise not "make the grade," they are likely to be depriving one of their own.

For those who worry about the decline of Jewish identity and Jewish religious tradition in the United States, the results of the study are mixed. On the positive side, Jewish students seemed just as committed as others to getting married, leading a happy family life and bearing children. Indeed, slightly more Jews thought that having children was "very important," and eventually expected to have three or more children. However, since most Jewish students planned to continue their education beyond the college level, to pursue professional careers and to begin forming families at a relatively advanced age, it seems likely that many would have fewer children than they intended. The net result may well be a continuation of the present pattern of family size, with Jews having somewhat smaller families than others.

Less comforting was the finding that the religious involvement of Jewish students was lower than that of any other group with a specific religious affiliation. It is perfectly possible, of course, that at least some Jewish young people will increase their religious commitment and affiliation as they get older and begin to rear families of their own.

Within the Jewish group, a definite correlation existed between a student's degree of religious involvement and his or her family plans and attitudes. The greater the degree of religious involvement, the more likely the student was to believe in the importance of having children and to plan on having three or more children. The five

percent who scored high in religious involvement were especially likely to want children, to plan to start having them at a relatively early age, and to expect to have many of them. They were also more likely than other Jews to adhere to traditional gender roles for males and females, and to espouse more conservative political beliefs. There also were indications in the survey data that the majority of the highly religious Jewish students were recent immigrants or the children of recent immigrants. Thus, it is not unlikely that as they spend more time in the United States and rear children of their own, their attitudes and fertility patterns will more nearly approximate those of the settled Jewish community.

While this study of 1,072 Jewish high school students in the United States does not purport to speak for Jewish young people of all ages, the findings point to certain trends that should not be ignored.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Jews constitute less than three percent of the U.S. population; Asian Americans make up just over one percent. By contrast, blacks comprise 12 percent and Hispanics nearly six percent. For the Jewish population figures see Alvin Chenkin, "Jewish Population in the United States, 1983," American Jewish Year Book: 1983 (New York and Philadelphia: The American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982). The figures for the other groups are from recent reports of the U.S. Bureau of the Census.
- <sup>2</sup> The National Jewish Population Study (1970-1971) was based on a combination of list sampling and area probability sampling. See Bernard Lazerwitz, "An Estimate of a Rare Population Group: The U.S. Jewish Population," Demography 15, no. 3 (August 1978): 389-94. For information on the more recent National Survey of American Jews, which made use of distinctive Jewish names, see Steven Martin Cohen, "The 1981-1982 National Survey of American Jews," American Jewish Year Book: 1983, pp. 89-110. Differences between attitudes and behaviors of Jewish and non-Jewish families were examined by Andrew Cherlin and Carin Celebuski in "Are Jewish Families Different? Some Evidence from the General Social Survey," Journal of Marriage and the Family 45, no. 4 (November 1983): 903-909.
- <sup>3</sup> The only major national survey of youth to report data on Jews was Youth in Transition, a longitudinal study of adolescent boys for which the first wave of data was collected in 1966. Yet even here very little information was reported by religion. See J.G. Bachman, Youth in Transition, Vol. II: The Impact of Family Background and Intelligence on Tenth-Grade Boys (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Institute for Social Research, 1970).
- <sup>4</sup> It should be noted that these findings are based on the students' own reports of the education and income of their parents. When they were compared to the parents' reports received for the sub-sample, there was reasonably good, though not perfect, correlation. The discrepancy was due to the fact that students' estimates tended to concentrate toward the middle income range, leading to under-representation of both low and high income levels. Yet there was little evidence of systematic differences in the accuracy of these

reports for three ethnic groups -- whites, blacks, and Hispanics -- according to J. Owings of the National Center for Education Statistics.

- 5 The effect of maternal employment on the children has been the subject of much debate among social scientists, as well as among the public and institutions serving the needs of children. Most recent research evidence seems to indicate that maternal employment per se does not have any adverse effects. Some studies did find small but statistically significant differences in the achievement test scores of students whose mothers worked full time, as opposed to those whose mothers did not work outside the home during the pre-school and early elementary years. These differences favored the children whose mothers were not employed outside the home. However, only a few studies of maternal employment have examined the effects of part-time work. Many mothers have part-time employment and manage their schedule to eliminate or minimize times when they are at work while their children are not in school or with the other parent. This is especially so when the children are younger. Some negative effects have also been suggested in cases where the motivation for maternal employment is economic necessity, but these may be due to the economic situation of the family rather than to the fact that the mother is working.
- 6 Expectations of American Jewish college students were analyzed by Rela Geffen Monson, Jewish Campus Life: A Survey of Student Attitudes Toward Marriage and Family (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1984).
- 7 Despite these differences, American high school students (Jews included) are not particularly studious: the great majority do not even spend two hours per school day on homework. The salient reason, of course, may be that teachers do not demand more of their students.
- 8 Note that these findings seem to contradict the popular notion that if parents set very high standards for their children and push them to achieve, the latter may develop feelings of inadequacy and self-hatred. On the contrary, it would appear that many Jewish parents are able to motivate their children to achieve, while also fostering feelings of mastery and self-worth.
- 9 Although the data do not offer a breakdown of the last two categories, it may be assumed that the first comprises Moslems and various Eastern faiths, and that the second includes a number of minor sects and fundamentalist denominations. (It is not clear how Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists would classify themselves.) Since most of these groups, with the exception of some of the Eastern religions, are indeed characterized by high levels of religious observance and devotion, it is not surprising to find high levels of religious involvement among them.

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