

“Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam...”

Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices

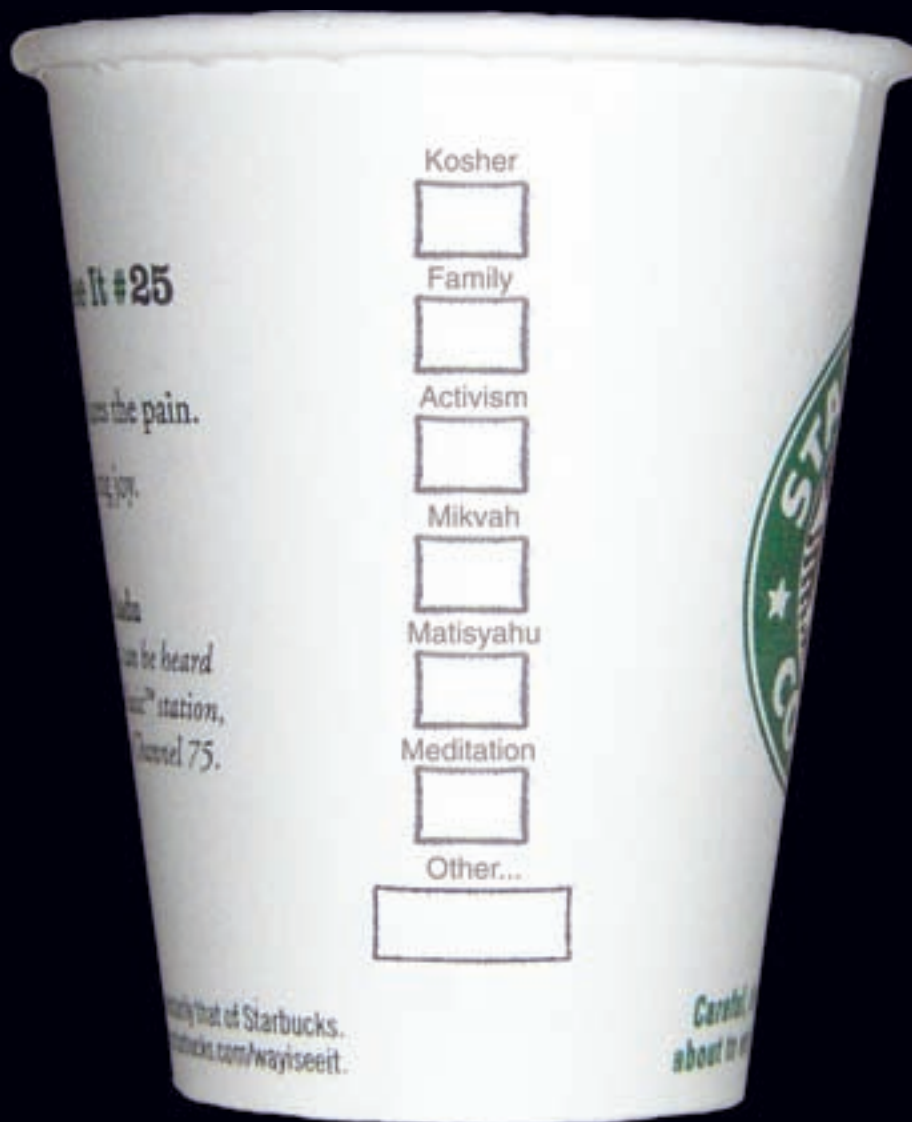


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Introduction

This study builds on our national report published in 2005, *OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era (OMG!)*. *OMG!* looked at religious identity, practice and civic engagement among 18–25 year-old Catholics, Protestants, Muslims and Jews, as well as among African Americans, Latino Americans and Asian Americans.¹ We discovered in *OMG!* that the Jewish cohort was very much a symbol of their generation. The vast majority of them fell under a category called the “Undecided;” they were largely positive about their Jewish identities but were unsure as to how their religious identities played out in their daily lives. We commissioned this second study to delve more deeply and to listen more carefully to this Jewish cohort, not with the idea of looking for absolute answers but rather to have a chance to glimpse the seeds of the future.

We release this report with a sense that there is much to be positive about; the enormous self-confidence young Jews express about their Jewish identity is remarkable. It is a “stop the presses” finding that cuts across study after study in the wake of a continuity crisis that has created a grey picture of the Jewish future and of young Jews’ place in it. Indeed, we release this report at a time when there has been a veritable explosion of young Jews organizing Jewish projects and programs on an unprecedented and well-documented scale across the country. One can hypothesize the connection between the two.

The findings of this report are not without their challenges however, and here is where a connection to Starbucks comes in. Many of the key findings from this report can be symbolized by the success of the national chain that, love it or hate it, revolutionized the “cup of joe” in America.

Changing Identities

First, standing in line by the battery of “baristas” behind the counter at the ubiquitous coffee house is the quickest way to realize that we are living in an era where the possibility to have it “your way” rules. The desire and ability of the individual to mix and match the contents of his or her Grande cup translates into the power to choose the way he or she defines personal identity in America. While some see this mix and match quality as a negative, this is the reality we face when listening carefully to young American Jews talking about their identities in general and their religious identities in particular.

The Need for Community Redefined

Secondly, one of the strategies that sociologists have pinpointed as key to Starbucks’ success is that it offers a “good Third Place,”² a place that is neither home nor work, where an individual finds comfort and company — in other words, “community.” Starbucks’ success comes at a time when there is a decline of more traditional forms of community. Many of the more traditional communities built in the twentieth century were local and based around a sense of shared space, typified by a time in which “all Catholics live around the parish church.” These spatial communities, however, do not easily translate to the current social reality where social and professional circles are incredibly mixed. Nor do they translate from a local level to a national, let alone global scale. For example, the vast majority of young Jews interviewed were unable to recognize the names of major Jewish organizations, never mind have an opinion of them. It is one thing to reject an institution; it is entirely another to not even know it exists.

Bold Vision

Finally, while issues of identity and community are complex, and the questions they pose offer great challenges to all of us who care about the Jewish future, the enormous success of the original concept behind Starbucks — that people may want more from their daily dose of coffee than a 50-cent cup from a convenience store — is a testament to the rewards available to those who have the vision to think differently. Howard Schultz saw a vacuum and, in filling it with Starbucks, revolutionized the way an entire system operates. To be clear, we are not comparing the future efforts of Jewish organizations with the building of a coffee house into a juggernaut brand. But what is interesting in the Starbucks story is the process by which a creative team developed a vision and possessed the courage to depart from the tried and true; they saw things differently and developed a new, highly successful way.

We issue this study with the hope that it sets out a challenge to all of us who care deeply about the future of Jewishness, organized Judaism, and young Jews in North America. We believe that some of the seeds of the future are contained within these pages. How will we meet young Jews' lack of interest in denominationalism and the inarticulate way they approach even the notion of community, Jewishly or not? To what extent can we develop creative approaches to support young Jews' self-confidence about their Jewishness, their desire to talk about and explore their religious identities informally? How can we use the power of culture as a disseminator of values?

We would be remiss if we did not suggest that many effective examples of what *does* work and what *could* work may already be around us. By way of example, we draw strength from organizations such as JDub, which uses music to disseminate values, and Progressive Jewish Alliance, which uses organizing for social change; artists like Sandi Dubowski, who uses documentary film to grapple with issues of inclusiveness; new experiments like Ikar, which fuses spirituality and social justice to build a Jewish community; and our own project, *Guilt & Pleasure*, a magazine that provides salons across the country with a supply of intelligent yet accessible material on everything from history and ritual to spirituality and values.

We end this introduction in the same way we did the last report: we are even more convinced that this generation presents an extraordinary opportunity for all those who care about the Jewish future to contemplate. The demand for meaning is there. Whether this turns out to be a time of loss or a time of creative reinvention may ultimately be decided by the energies we direct into providing innovative messengers, messages, and mechanisms that offer meaning and community on our audience's terms.

Reboot is an organization based on the knowledge that Jewish life in America is always changing. Our work is grounded in the writings of historian Dr. Jonathan D. Sarna and his belief that "...over and over again for 350 years one finds that Jews in America rose to meet the challenges both internal and external that threaten Jewish continuity — sometimes, paradoxically, by promoting radical discontinuity. Casting aside old paradigms, they transformed their faith, reinventing American Judaism in an attempt to make it more appealing, more meaningful, more sensitive to the concerns of the day."³

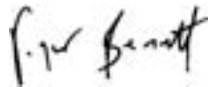
We believe deeply in the power of Jewishness as a remarkably intelligent tradition that has offered thousands of years of community and meaning to generation after generation. We also believe in the ability of young Jews to discover this in their own place and time.

We are indebted to Rebooters Anna Greenberg and Sharna Goldseker who have poured their energies into the research and report from start to finish. We hope this study is a means to an end and can serve as a call to action for all denominations in all parts of the country. Please do not treat this as another document to read, digest and consign to the shelf. We hope this research and its findings can inspire the culture of experimentation, trial and error, and bold innovation that this generation of Jews desperately deserves. We look forward to collaborating with any institution, project or network of any denomination that feels the same. Be in touch with us at info@rebooters.net.

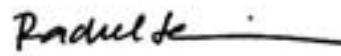
Best,



Erin Potts
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Executive Summary

We undertook the current study to delve more deeply into the path-breaking research detailed in *OMG!* and to explore how the findings relate specifically to Generation Y Jews between the ages of 18 and 25. While the *OMG!* data on young Jews were consistent with data on young people from other religious and ethnic backgrounds, we wanted to paint a more detailed portrait of the Jewish subset.

Findings in the current report are drawn from qualitative research, including one-on-one interviews and focus groups with 18–25 year-old Jews across the country.⁴ It should be emphasized that the opinions expressed in these focus groups and interviews are not necessarily indicative of the views of all Jewish youth in Generation Y. Qualitative data cannot be generalized to the total population in the same way as quantitative, probability based data. To support our qualitative findings, this report draws from the quantitative *OMG!* study on Generation Y and also cites relevant supportive literature.

What we learned from this study:

- **Multiple Identities: Judaism as One of Many**⁵

For American Jews in Generation Y, being Jewish is not their sole identity. This generation has unlimited access to American society, therefore Generation Y Jews behave much like all other Generation Y Americans, regardless of religion. Today's young Jews have multiple identities shaped by many factors, including intermarriage in their families, diverse social networks, and dynamic boundaries around geography and other identity characteristics such as gender and sexual orientation. Being Jewish is part of a larger identity mosaic for today's Jews.

We know from previous research that earlier generations of Jews felt a need to maintain tight connections as they experienced anti-Semitism, workplace discrimination and other challenges. But unlike Jews in the pre- and post-World War II era, this generation is fully integrated and does not need close communal cohesion in order to survive in a hostile society.⁶ Generation Y Jews no longer personally experience anti-Semitism or exclusion from the opportunities society has to offer; therefore, they are similar to their non-Jewish peers in that they worry about getting good grades, finding jobs and socializing with friends more than they worry about their religious identities.

- **Jewish Self-Confidence**

Despite their integrated appearance, we find that Generation Y Jews feel incredibly self-confident about their Jewish identities. In contrast to the survival ethic of many of their grandparents' Jewish journeys, and contrary to the continuity fears of the 1990s, Generation Y Jews are very positive about being Jewish. This is particularly important because members of Generation Y are in stages of adolescent development where self-confidence and building self-esteem is critical to their adult identity formations. There are limits to their self confidence, however; young Jews in this study do not claim to have a depth of knowledge about Jewish rituals, liturgy and text. Being Jewish remains a complicated and often inarticulate tangle of spiritual, cultural, historical and ethnic dimensions, but their Jewish self-confidence may be an important factor in their personal development and in the communal evolution of Jewish identity.

- **Inarticulate About “Community;” Connected to a People**

Participants in this study struggle to define a meaningful concept of “community” in general and a Jewish community in particular. They find it difficult to talk about what it means to belong to a community, and when asked, they instead refer to the neighborhoods where they grew up, the friendship circles they have at school, or the towns where they work.

If connected to any Jewish community, young Jews in the study see themselves as tied to a global Jewish community, where they feel broadly connected to an abstract feeling of a people, more than a localized community or institution. For most, being Jewish starts with “family” and radiates outward to include a people who share a “culture,” a history of “oppression,” “language,” and “humor.”

- **Decreasing Institutional Awareness**

The Generation Y Jews in our study think back positively, almost nostalgically, to the synagogue and Jewish Community Center experiences of their childhoods. The majority, however, are not familiar with Jewish institutions as adults. When asked to identify AIPAC, the UJC and AJC,⁷ they neither know what the letters stand for nor understand how to differentiate one organization from another. Institutional Jewish life appears virtually irrelevant to those in our study, confirming the earlier findings of *OMG!*

The few who have had adult experiences with Jewish institutions are often left with negative impressions. Respondents from interfaith households, in particular, feel judged for “not being Jewish enough,” and feelings of intimidation create a barrier to participation. But even those who grew up in households with two Jewish parents feel disconnected from institutional Jewish life and harbor a range of feelings encompassed by the thought that Jewish organizations are “not for me.” They are not turned off by the non-profits’ missions, rather by the type of people they associate with belonging to those Jewish institutions who are either “not like me,” or who seem singularly focused on fund raising goals.

- **Denominational Identification on the Decline; Informal Expression on the Rise**

In *OMG!* we found that informal expressions of Jewishness are more prevalent than denominational identification, and we were able to inquire more specifically about that in this qualitative study. Again we discovered that respondents feel no sense of obligation to identify themselves as “Reform” or “Conservative,” no matter what sort of upbringing they experienced. Furthermore, most participants celebrate important holidays with their families and friends in some manner, but beyond these core traditions, only a minority observes religious laws or practices rituals at all. In fact, most young Jews do not spontaneously bring up the subject of religion unless asked directly about it. When asked about religious practices, it seems that traditional synagogue worship feels like something people do while growing up — and possibly something to return to after having one’s own family — but it is not perceived as something that one does by choice as a single adult.

Instead of formal religious practice, there is more resonance with informal experiences of Jewishness. That does not mean religious practice or Jewish education ends after they leave home, but conversations with friends, a Jewish book club, a college class on Jewish history and other less structured events are the visible articulations of their engagement with Jewishness. Among

the range of options available to Generation Y, these young Jews are exploring how they want to express their Jewish identities and are picking and choosing more informal means.

- **American and Jewish Values Indistinguishable**

To Generation Y Jews, American and Jewish values are indistinguishable. The young Jews in our study have values that they can articulate and prioritize, but they do not see them as necessarily *Jewish* values; instead, they categorize them as familial or American values. Many appear to be intrinsically, but not explicitly, Jewish, such as a commitment to “social justice.” We also find an individualism and self-directed focus in our respondents’ answers. When asked to prioritize their values, they highlight “achievement,” “personal growth,” “health,” “love,” and “humor,” as opposed to values that connect them to others and the world beyond themselves.

- **Culture as Convener, Communicator and Catalyst**

In this study, culture, especially popular culture (film, music, television, books and magazines), emerges as a powerful and flexible force in the lives of this audience. For this generation, popular culture is experienced through the consumption of cultural products and events and through personal networks as opposed to institutional memberships. Whether young people gather to hear a concert, view a film, or create other cultural forums, cultural mechanisms are primary portals for experiencing connectedness and meaning with peers. In these cases, culture acts as a convener of like-minded people, a communicator of meaning and value, and a catalyst for conversation. All three of these functions reinforce identity in Generation Y Jews in that they create a common language and experience for the audience.



Methodology

Interview and Focus Group Methodology

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Inc. designed and administered in-depth interviews of 35 Jewish youth between the ages of 18 and 25, interviewing both Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews as part of this study.⁸ The interviews were conducted June 27–August 11, 2005 and lasted about 45 minutes. We recruited participants from several sample frames. First, we re-interviewed young people who had taken part in the first round of survey research. Second, we called from a database maintained by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research of previous survey participants. Third, we purchased sample from Survey Sampling, Inc. (SSI), which maintains a database of interested survey participants recruited from mail surveys distributed to the general public. Finally, we sent out announcements to Craig’s List, targeting cities in the West and Midwest.

In order to ensure geographic and attitudinal distribution across Jewish youth throughout the country, we created quotas for region and religiosity. In total, we interviewed 9 people who live in Northeastern states, 11 from the Midwest, 8 from the South, and 7 from the West. In order to obtain a mix of young people with various levels of Jewish identification, during the screening process respondents were asked a series of questions including: how often they attended synagogue, whether they participated in any community service or volunteer activity associated with the Jewish community, and how important being Jewish was in their lives.

Additionally, focus groups were conducted with 37 Jewish young people between the ages of 18 and 25. Six focus groups were distributed across three locations: New York, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. These group interviews were conducted June 7–July 26, 2005 and each lasted approximately 120 minutes.

OMG! Methodology

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Inc. designed and administered this telephone survey conducted by professional interviewers. The survey was conducted August 7–November 18, 2004 and reached 1,385 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25. The data were weighted by race, education, region and religion to ensure an accurate reflection of the population.⁹

The nationally representative sample of young people was supplemented with oversamples of 200 Jewish respondents, 97 African American respondents, 93 Hispanic respondents, 75 Asian respondents, and 125 Muslim respondents. Race oversamples were drawn from areas of high race densities, overlapped by surname samples for the Asian and Hispanic groups. The Jewish oversample used a multi-tiered methodology: we drew samples from areas of high household ethnic density, supplemented by both a surname sample and a sample drawn from zip codes of universities with high Jewish enrollment. The Muslim oversample was also drawn from a multi-tier methodology: volunteer participants from Muslim Student Associations were invited to complete the survey by phone or over the Internet, and we conducted survey intercepts of Muslim youth in universities, community centers and malls in the Detroit Metropolitan area.



Multiple Identities: Judaism as One of Many

For American Jews in Generation Y, being Jewish is not their sole identity. This generation has unlimited access to American society, therefore Generation Y Jews behave much like all other Generation Y Americans regardless of religion. Today’s young Jews have multiple identities shaped by many factors, including intermarriage in their families, diverse social networks, and dynamic boundaries around geography and other identity characteristics such as gender and sexual orientation. Being Jewish is part of a larger identity mosaic for today’s Jews.

Their notions of identity lie in the complex interplay between cultural upbringing, family structure and religious, institutional experiences during childhood; experiences with Jewish life in college and post-college; adult friendship circles and adult hobbies; and their own personal searches for meaning. As the core elements such as family structure and friendship circles change over time, so do the identities of the Jewish people also evolve.

Identity Groups

(Percent Responding “Very Important” or “Somewhat Important”)

	Total	Jewish	Urban White	Suburban White	Asian American	African American	Hispanic
Your family	74	69	69	70	69	80	79
Your gender	50	54	47	51	54	58	54
Your religion	53	51	45	44	43	66	57
Your job	42	50	42	45	33	32	54
Your school	39	50	36	35	45	48	49
Political beliefs	40	47	42	40	31	40	42
Your generation	45	42	43	41	43	60	54
Sexual preference	52	40	48	43	47	63	51
Where you live	34	39	30	31	28	41	37
Your ethnic origin	35	39	27	22	34	60	48
Your race	30	25	23	11	33	61	47

“There are many ways that people could describe themselves including what they do for a living, their religion, and where they are from. For each of these phrases please tell me if it is extremely important, very important, important, somewhat important, or not important at all to how you describe yourself?” (OMG!, May 2005)

Your Family

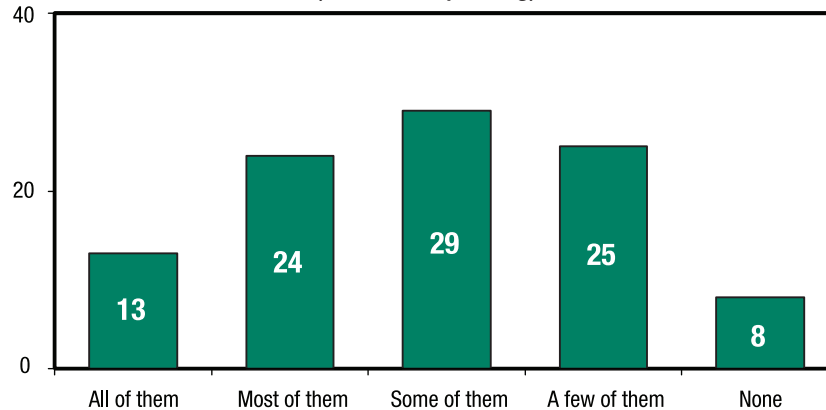
Family is central to young people’s conception of self. Nearly three out of four young Jews (69 percent) believe that their family is important to how they describe themselves, and over half (55 percent) feel it is very important. For the young people in this qualitative study, family is also integral to their Jewish identities; they learn religion from their families, and they connect being Jewish with holidays and seminal moments of growing up.

Changes in family structure lead to changes in young Jews’ identities. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) documented a notable increase in intermarriage that occurred during the 1980s. Twenty years later, the young adults produced by those intermarriages are entering adulthood. According to the

2000–2001 NJPS, approximately 366,000 people between the ages of 18 and 29 grew up with one Jewish and one non-Jewish parent.¹⁰ Within their nuclear families alone, young Jews are experiencing multiple religious identities represented by each of their parents. In addition, traditional Jewish family structures are also experiencing changes in their racial, gender and sexual orientation compositions. All of these dimensions lead to multiple identities within Generation Y Jews.

Your Generation

Circle of Friends Not Homogenous Among Young Jews
(Percent Responding)



“How many of your friends would you say are the same religion as you – All of them, most of them, some of them, a few of them, or none?” (OMG!, May 2005)

Many Jewish young people have a wide circle of friends coming from various periods of their lives, past and present, including primary or Hebrew school, high school, college and work. These circles are often religiously and ethnically diverse, as young people experience and express their own interests and personal histories through relationships with friends. This finding emerged in *OMG!*, where we found that one in three Jews (37 percent) say that all or most of their friends share their religion, while one in three (33 percent) move in circles where only a few or none of their friends are Jewish. The data reflect that Generation Y Jews no longer have homogeneous friendship circles, and we suspect this is a combination of demographic changes as well as the open mindedness of this generation. When we probed into the question of mixed friendship circles in this qualitative study, our findings paralleled those of *OMG!*

I've got two really good friends. One of them is Jamaican and the other is Persian, Iranian. So there's a Christian and Jew and a Muslim. (Man, Atlanta)

It's like a melting pot. (Man, Los Angeles)

[My friend] comes from a different culture, a different country, a different religion. We have a lot in common, obviously, or else we wouldn't be friends. (Woman, New York)

Many of the young people in the qualitative study (as well as 39 percent of Jews in the *OMG!* study) talked about the neighborhoods where they grew up, the college towns where they live, or the new locales where they have relocated after university as defining aspects of their multiple identities, expressed through the relationships developed in each area. Paradoxically, while young Jews do not limit themselves to Jewish friends, they do appear to note if they are the only Jew in a group and sometimes even seek out other Jews with whom to make a connection. For example, if they land in a community where they are a clear minority,

they may seek out other Jews through Internet social networking sites such as the Facebook or MySpace, suggesting a bond with other Jews but not an exclusive mindset on having Jews as friends. This implies that being Jewish is an important — albeit not the predominating — part of their multiple identities.

I have had Jewish friends when I'm not living here, but I definitely don't go seeking them out. I don't go, '...I'm going to make friends with this person because they are Jewish.' (Man, New York)

My school is basically dead smack in the middle of Georgia. And there's maybe all of 10 Jews in the entire city. It's impossible. There's not a synagogue. If we want to go to synagogue we have to go all the way to Macon. So it's really hard. The few students who are down there, which I did meet through Facebook actually, I mean we don't really meet up or anything. We just kind of know that we're all there. (Woman, Atlanta)

Your Religion

“Religion” is one of the top few markers that Jewish young people consider very or somewhat important to who they are as individuals (51 percent), but it ranks comparably with their jobs (49 percent), political beliefs (48 percent), and gender (54 percent).¹¹

[Being Jewish] is important. We still have family get-togethers at the holidays. Friday night dinner, I still go to my parent's house. Especially dealing with the family, it's so important. Judaism always is important to me in everyday life. (Man, New York)

When I was a kid I really grew up in Hebrew school and got bar mitzvah, the whole nine yards. The whole schlep. I have a couple friends that are Jewish, but we all kind of share the same attitude about it. It's like we're American first, Jewish second. (Man, Los Angeles)

List of Worries¹²

Employment, STDs and Grades Top List of Worries

(Percent Responding “Very or Somewhat Worried”)

	Total	Jewish	Urban White	Suburban White	Asian American	African American	Hispanic
Finding a job when you get out of school	60	61	53	54	74	62	70
Making sure you are contributing to your community	51	55	50	49	50	53	58
Getting a sexually transmitted disease	48	50	40	37	60	58	65
Your grades at school	51	50	47	46	64	51	64
Maintaining good relationships with your friends	47	46	49	51	62	39	56
Finding a spouse	29	40	27	27	40	28	31
Finding a boyfriend or girlfriend	21	39	22	18	35	14	23
Deciding who to vote for	41	30	34	37	56	49	49
Getting along with your parents	18	26	35	30	50	46	51
Your relationship with God	38	25	27	29	44	47	52

“Now, I am going to read you a list of items. For each one, please tell me how worried it makes you. Does it make you very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried or not worried at all?” (OMG!, May 2005)

Being Jewish does not exist separately from other influences of American life for these young Jews, and what concerns them is similar to what concerns their non-Jewish peers. We know from previous research that earlier generations of Jews felt a need to maintain tight connections as they experienced anti-Semitism, workplace discrimination and other challenges. But unlike Jews in the pre- and post-World War II era, this generation is fully integrated and does not need close communal cohesion in order to survive in a hostile society.¹³

Generation Y Jews no longer personally experience anti-Semitism or exclusion from the opportunities society has to offer. Instead, Jewish identity competes with the daily grind in these young people's lives: leaving home for the first time for school, starting their first jobs and struggling to figure out what it means to be an adult. Young Jews share the concerns other young people have about finding a job, establishing a career and ensuring that they are integrated into diverse friendship networks. These concerns take top priority over worries about being Jewish.

Professional Concerns

Jewish young people are very concerned about what they will do with their lives. Consistent with the findings of other studies, we find that young Jews show a motivation toward achievement and success.¹⁴ *OMG!* data show that achievement and professional outcomes rank among their leading worries: 61 percent of young Jews worry about finding a job when they get out of school, and 50 percent worry about their grades at school — a notable proportion especially because some 18–25 year-olds are no longer in school.

Far more than other whites, Jews attach importance to their schools as sources of identity, consistent with literature demonstrating significant Jewish investment in educational achievement. But in general, their worries are similar to those of other young Americans: 54 percent of young, suburban whites and 53 percent of young, urban whites worry about finding a job, and 47 percent of young, suburban whites and 46 percent of young, urban whites worry about their grades.

Relationship Concerns

Although it is not a concern for a majority, Generation Y Jews are somewhat more worried about dating and finding someone with whom they can share their lives than are other young people. Young Jews are more likely than other members of Generation Y to be worried about finding a spouse (40 percent versus 27 percent of urban and suburban whites) or a boyfriend/girlfriend (39 percent versus 22 percent of urban whites and 18 percent of suburban whites). Throughout the interviews for this study, we heard college underclassmen talk about how they will change in the years to come, and worry whether they will be able to return home and still have anything in common with their friends. Participants who are college graduates also worry what their social lives will be like without the fraternity or sorority house or the time they had to socialize in college.

This has been a bad transition time because a lot of my friends are kind of spread out now, especially since we graduated. (New York)¹⁵

Most of my friends are going to Georgia, and I'm going to St. Louis. And I'm scared that they're all going to become closer, and then when I come home and visit it's like, 'Oh, who's Olivia?' (Woman, Atlanta)



Jewish Self-Confidence

Despite their integrated appearance, we find that Generation Y Jews feel incredibly self-confident about their Jewish identities. In contrast to the survival ethic of many of their grandparents' Jewish journeys, and contrary to the continuity fears of the 1990s, Generation Y Jews are very positive about being Jewish. This is particularly important because members of Generation Y are in stages of adolescent development where self-confidence and building self-esteem is critical to their adult identity formations. There are limits to their self confidence, however; young Jews in this study do not claim to have a depth of knowledge about Jewish rituals, liturgy and text. Being Jewish remains a complicated and often inarticulate tangle of spiritual, cultural, historical and ethnic dimensions; however, their Jewish self-confidence may be an important factor in their personal development and in the communal evolution of Jewish identity.

Identity Groups

(Percent Responding "Very Important" or "Somewhat Important")

	Total	Jewish	Urban White	Suburban White	Asian American	African American	Hispanic
Your family	74	69	69	70	69	80	79
Your ethnic origin	35	39	27	22	34	60	48
Your race	30	25	23	11	33	61	47

"There are many ways that people could describe themselves including what they do for a living, their religion, and where they are from. For each of these phrases please tell me if it is extremely important, very important, important, somewhat important, or not important at all to how you describe yourself?" (OMG!, May 2005)

Quite surprising, and significant, is that young Jews attach more importance to "your religion" than do other young whites, whether in the cities or suburbs. One might think that with their low rates of attendance at worship services, Jews would rank religion lower in importance than other whites. We cannot be sure, but the importance attached to "your religion" may reflect a group attachment to being Jewish; that is, Jewish responses to this question may reflect not a surplus of religious piety but a presence of strong group identity.

Support for this interpretation comes in Jews' relatively high levels of attachment expressed for "your ethnic origin" (39 percent versus 27 percent for urban whites and 22 percent for suburban whites — where about two-thirds of American Jews live). In other words, the gap between Jews and non-Jewish whites in regard to the importance of their ethnic origin is even greater than the gap between them with respect to religion. Both findings point to a relatively strong group identity among American Jews, stronger than among the several groups subsumed under the rubric of "white" or even under the rubric of "Asian American," which is all the more striking given the more recent arrival of Asian American families in the United States.

It is important to note the paradoxical nature of this finding, which is why it is a remarkable new articulation. While *OMG!* discussed the individualism of Generation Y, and this study echoes young Jews' competing concerns — such that religion is on par with finding a job and getting good grades — we find that young Jews nonetheless have a strong and positive sense of group identity.

We find that young people's Jewish identity is fundamental; it is deeply held and a given. It is simply "who they are." Few can imagine not feeling Jewish, and nearly every participant in this study evinces a sense of pride about being Jewish, regardless of its intensity or dimension. Some respondents struggle to articulate what exactly they are proud of about being Jewish, however, other respondents are able to describe a self-confidence in feeling somehow special and different or feeling tied to a people who have overcome adversity. Regardless of if they can articulate its origins, this notion of Jewish self-confidence is strong and quite consistent among participants in the study.

It means a lot to who I am. It's my culture, my background. It kind of shaped me into what I am now. (Woman, Michigan)

I'm proud of it. If somebody ever asks, and I can't think of a situation, but, 'Who is Jewish?,' I'll be the first one to raise my hand and say that I am. I'm not ashamed of it. (New York)

I am proud to tell someone, 'Hey, I'm Jewish,' regardless of what you want to say or think about it. (Man, Atlanta)

Many participants use broad brushstrokes to describe why being Jewish is important to them. They are proud of who they are, and they know that their Jewishness is important to their identity, even though many have trouble articulating the ways in which being Jewish influences who they are as individuals.

It was probably more a part of my identity, even so much as to say that I didn't even think about it. That's just who I was. (Woman, Missouri)

I have grown up in a Jewish lifestyle and culture that has always been part of my identity. It's just... it's something I consider to be important to me. (Man, New York)

It adds to my own identity. I'm not sure exactly in what way, but it just feels like it's my history. (Woman, Louisiana)

At the same time, many are quick to point out that there is much more to who they are than just being Jewish. Young Jews believe they can accommodate their Jewishness quite comfortably with other identities and allegiances. In this stage of identity formation, young Jews are interested in learning more about themselves, and one way they do this is by continuing to explore their cultural heritage, a quality that distinguishes them from others.



Inarticulate About “Community;” Connected to a People

Participants in this study struggle to define a meaningful concept of “community” in general and Jewish community in particular. It is a difficult concept behaviorally and attitudinally for this cohort. They find it difficult to talk about what it means to belong to a community and instead refer to the neighborhoods where they grew up, the people with whom they spend most of their time, such as family and close friends, and the people with whom they go to school.

This more circumscribed definition of “community” — though very real to young people — is important to the question of defining a “Jewish community” as well. When we asked young Jews whether or not they feel part of a “Jewish community,” most were unclear about what it means to “belong” to a Jewish community. Many associate the Jewish community with growing up, their parents, and childhood, which was usually centered on a synagogue or community associations. It is something they associate with the past and not something that is particularly relevant to them at this stage of their lives. Many participants think they will return to the Jewish community when they have their own families, but there is no way to know if this will prove to be true, particularly given current intermarriage rates and the relatively open attitude towards intermarriage among this cohort.

I don't really know what it means to be part of the Jewish community. I guess a lot of my friends are Jewish, but I think that has a lot to do with the fact that I grew up in New York. I went to Jewish school for nine years of my life, and I don't necessarily keep in touch with any of those people... I guess back then I would have associated myself with the Jewish community specifically because of that, but now it's family, it's culture, it's not necessarily the community. (New York)

At one point, I think [I did feel part of the Jewish community], but then I went away to college, and then I came back. At college, I'm busy with classes 14 hours a day and working the other two days of the week. So not really. I mean occasionally I'll begin to feel a part of it, like, if I go back to synagogue, but then once I'm outside that environment... (Woman, Atlanta)

I always think of community as a kind of network of people that you can always... I don't know. I always thought of it as a group that you are part of, and you identify yourself as part of that group. But then I always think of community as... when people ask me, 'Do you live in a very Jewish community?...' I don't know. (New York)

Being Jewish for most starts with “family” and radiates outward to include a people who share a “culture,” a history of “oppression,” “language,” and “humor.” Even though few in the study have had direct experiences with anti-Semitism, they take pride in being part of a people that has survived.

Family

Family helps provide the link with Jewish heritage, as an historic people and a culture that explains who they are and where they came from. For some, this involves family trips to Israel as kids and learning the stories of holidays. For others, it is learning about the Holocaust and a history of oppression. And for others still, the inculcation of Jewish values such as *tzedakah* and social justice takes center stage; although, as we will discuss later, it is generally difficult for young Jews to separate “Jewish values” from the values they learn from their families.

My mom was definitely the one that taught me. I went to Hebrew school and everything, but I can't say that I took anything from there. What I took was more like during the holidays celebrating, just the importance of being with friends and family and just rejoicing how lucky we are with, like, the Holocaust. (Woman, Nevada)

I'm sure my family and my religion [both taught me about social justice]. I have a sense of what it should be... and also because I was raised very well. I expect that. And when I do see that it's not like that, it's just so wrong. In America, everyone should have an equal opportunity. (New York)

Even as young adults, most Jews in this study say they are very close to their families. Some have not strayed far from home, either in their choices for higher education or post-graduation, and many return home for holidays. A number describe very close relationships with their parents — attending professional basketball games with a father or continuing to talk to a mother for advice — and many find themselves becoming closer to siblings as they mature.

A People: Its History, Language, Humor and Culture

If connected to any Jewish community, young Jews in the study see themselves as tied to a global Jewish community, where they feel broadly connected to an abstract feeling of a people more than a localized community or institution. Rather than including specific people or places, their Jewish community is theoretical, populated by people they have not met. In some cases, it manifests itself when they meet other Jews and discover they have a common shorthand, easy conversations and shared childhood experiences to talk about. In other cases, it is an ephemeral tie reflecting their pride in a common heritage, culture and history of oppression, and a feeling that Jews are “in it together.”

I just consider every Jew in this world part of the Jewish community. I don't consider it my Jewish community; I consider it the Jewish community. (Man, Los Angeles)

It is like you belong to a club in a way. Maybe it is because Jews aren't alike; we're not the biggest religion. It is cool because anywhere you go, if you are in college, and you are like, 'Oh, you're Jewish? Cool, I'm Jewish too!' And then you have something to talk about. (Woman, Minnesota)

I feel very lucky to have Jewish roots. I feel like I'm connected to something that is millennia old. I think it's amazing. I'm lucky to feel like this is a culture that I belong to by birth. (Woman, California)

I was actually thinking that the other day because I was on the train and heard people talking Hebrew, and I was like... you feel, like, a little bit of a connection. (New York)

Many participants say they have training in Hebrew, and a few in Yiddish, a fact that not only bonds them with other Jews but also sets them apart from their non-Jewish peers. “Jewish humor,” often self-deprecating, observational and irreverent, finds a common voice among these young people. Nonetheless, it is also now true that this once characteristic brand of humor has so deeply penetrated the American mainstream, it may no longer be recognized as distinctively Jewish.

Underneath the comedy, however, is an element of tragedy. These observations about being Jewish are also laced with a common and tragic history that binds these young people and helps them build a broader Jewish identity. Few young people in this study have experienced overt anti-Semitism in their lives, especially if they live in New York, but the pogroms of the past, particularly the Holocaust, are hardly forgotten, and this common remembrance adds an important layer to their definition of being Jewish. These young people take pride in being part of a people that has survived and has been able to overcome adversity.

You feel closer to somebody knowing that you’ve been through something. It’s durability. We are a surviving people, and that’s pretty incredible, considering what we’ve faced throughout time. (New York)

Being a minority and reading and knowing that there’s anti-Semitism and experiencing... I’ve never really experienced it per se in America, but like, being abroad and having people tell you that Jews are evil. (New York)

My grandfather’s [friends] would come over sometimes with numbers on their arms and bruises on their bodies, which had been scars from the Nazis. I pretty much knew right from the beginning what it was to be Jewish. (Woman, California)

We observed these same dimensions in the *OMG!* study, although we provided the categories for young people rather than allowing them to discuss their ideas of community in an open ended format.

What It Means to Be Jewish

(Percent Responding)

	A Lot	A Lot / Some
Remembering the Holocaust	73	89
Making the world a better place	64	82
Leading an ethical and moral life	63	80
Understanding Jewish history	58	84
Learning about Jewish culture	57	83
Caring about Israel	54	80
Feeling part of the Jewish people	54	76
Donating money to help those less fortunate	52	77
Believing in God	50	72
Dietary restrictions, such as avoiding pork, not mixing milk and meat, or keeping Kosher	33	43
Having Jewish friends	32	58
Attending synagogue	30	57

“For you personally, how much does being Jewish involve each of the following? Would you say a lot, some, a little, or none at all?” (OMG!, May 2005)

Being Jewish is in part belonging to a religious group, but only in part. Young Jews think of being Jewish largely in terms of Holocaust memory (73 percent “a lot”), a vague sense that they should work to improve the world (64 percent “a lot”), living an ethical life (63 percent “a lot”) and understanding Jewish history (58 percent “a lot”) and culture (57 percent “a lot”). Less than a third (30 percent) say that attending synagogue is important to being Jewish. Belief in God ranks as a far less important part of being Jewish than ethnically based memories, and Generation Y Jews believe it is far less important to being Jewish than do young members of most other religious groups in America.

Again, it is important to note that we provided these categories in the quantitative study, and it is likely that selecting “remembering the Holocaust” comes from the absence of more relevant definitions. In fact, few young Jews interviewed in the qualitative study mentioned the Holocaust explicitly, although they often talked about a history of “oppression.”

Israel

Inarguably, this generation of young people does not have the same ideological loyalty to Israel as the post-war generation of American Jews. Many cannot identify AIPAC or understand the precise contours of the conflict in the Middle East. Still, many have personal connections and extended family that tie them to the country. According to the 2000 National Jewish Population Survey, while only 23 percent of young people 18–24 have been to Israel, 54 percent have family or friends there. Among our respondents, Israel represents at least one potential bridge to connect them (or reconnect them) with their Jewish identities.



Decreasing Institutional Awareness

The Generation Y Jews in our study think back positively, almost nostalgically, to the synagogue and Jewish Community Center experiences of their childhoods. The majority, however, are not familiar with Jewish institutions as adults. When asked to identify AIPAC, the UJC or AJC, they neither know what the letters stand for nor understand how to differentiate one organization from another. As we will discuss in more detail later, institutional Jewish life appears virtually irrelevant to those in our study, confirming the earlier findings of *OMG!* Furthermore, where some do have experiences with Jewish organizations, there are frequently significant negative or cynical feelings associated with those experiences.

Jewish institutions¹⁶ have historically filled a number of roles for its members, and one important role was to protect and provide alternative resources in a society where access was closed to them. Previous generations felt a need to maintain tight connections as they experienced anti-Semitism, workplace discrimination and other challenges, and they looked to the Jewish agencies for social support and services. Because of educational, economic and social integration, Jews today do not depend upon Jewish institutions for the same scope of benefits as did previous generations.¹⁷ Today, attraction and retention of young people by these institutions is a challenge; regular involvement in Jewish organizations wanes as young people exit educational institutions and begin their adult lives.

Involvement in Community Organizations Varies By Type

(Percent Responding)

	Total	Jewish	Mainline Protestant	Evangelical Protestant	Catholic	African American
Buying products that are environmentally friendly	49	57	51	44	49	51
A civic or community organization involved in health or social services. This could be an organization to help the poor, elderly, homeless or a hospital	40	48	41	43	39	40
A civic or community organization involved with youth, children or education	44	46	44	42	41	56
A religious group at your school or college	20	34	23	33	20	24
A sports team	28	30	28	29	33	30
Protesting in your community or school	17	29	14	18	12	13
A religious group at your local place of worship, including choir and church youth groups	35	26	43	65	28	46
Working to get someone elected to public office	12	21	11	9	11	19
Taking part in a theater or music group	22	20	23	19	17	21
A community organization associated with religion or ethnicity, but not affiliated with your local place of worship or your school	17	20	17	29	15	16
Participating in an online community or discussion forum that shares your cultural, religious, or ethnic background	19	13	16	19	13	32

"Now, I will read you a list of the different kinds of things people volunteer for or participate in. As I read each one, please tell me if you have volunteered for this type of group or participated in this activity within the last 12 months." (OMG!, May 2005)

Young Jews tend not to be involved in programs that are attached to religious institutions. In some respects this is typical of other Generation Y Americans; however, in comparison with other groups, Jewish involvement is particularly low. For example, while only 26 percent of Jews say they have volunteered for a religious group through their local place of worship, nearly half (46 percent) of African Americans and two-thirds (65 percent) of Evangelical Protestants say the same. The one exception is at school; young Jews report being involved in a religious group through their schools at the same rate as Evangelical Protestants (34 percent and 33 percent respectively).

To explain young Jews' lack of involvement, one hypothesis is that Jewish organizations do not employ as many people to reach out to this younger population; the Jewish community employs fewer rabbis and community workers per capita for teenagers and young adults than it does for any other age range in the life course of Jews.¹⁸ This could have an impact on young Jews' rate of involvement in those institutions, but it was not commented on directly by the participants in this study.

Participation in Activities as a Child Among Young Jews

(Percent Responding)

	Yes
Had a bar or bat mitzvah	85
Attended religion classes	58
Attended religious camp	54
Went to Israel	43
<i>"Now I am going to read you some things that people do as part of their religious life. Please tell me if you have done any of these activities." (OMG!, May 2005)</i>	

The low rate of institutional affiliation in the Jewish community is particularly striking considering that, overall, the young Jews in our study report a significant amount of childhood involvement in Jewish organizations. This is consistent with other studies that note an increase of Jewish schooling over the past 15 years. For example, the 2000 National Jewish Population Survey shows that 80 percent of Jews 18–34 had some sort of Jewish education, which is 5–10 percentage points higher than adults in any older age group.¹⁹ In *OMG!*, 54 percent of Jewish young people reported attending religious camp,²⁰ and 43 percent described traveling to Israel.²¹

In this current study, many young people discuss some sort of Jewish education in a positive or even nostalgic manner, including Hebrew school, day school and synagogue experiences. For most, their bar or bat mitzvah rites of passage feel like important accomplishments in their lives. Yet except for Orthodox and the other more observant among them, Jewish life clearly changes after these ritual events. For many, education and participation in Jewish life serves as the lead up to this symbolic, transitional moment to adulthood. After this ceremony, the need for Jewish education seems less clear, and many younger Jews in our study move on to more typical teenage pursuits.

Why the Disconnect from Institutions as Adults?

Most participants harbor a certain feeling that Jewish institutions are “not for me” at this time in their lives. Some young people are simply indifferent to Jewish institutions because they have different priorities.

The reason why I don't go more [to synagogue], it's probably the same reason why I don't do more community service. Partially it's selfishness and putting more of a premium on other ways of spending my time, now that it's kind of limited. (Man, New York)

Many other young Jews are critical of the types of people that get involved in Jewish life as young adults.

I went to a few Jewish meetings around Boston, but I never had the feeling like it was something that I would do on my own. It was just a different interaction than I had with my regular friends. It was never something that was a huge issue, for me not to be a part of the Jewish community, but I was always conscious of it. (Man, Washington)

I see at synagogues, it's a fashion show. People wear their big hats and their suits. (Woman, Atlanta)

A few respondents go one step further and voice cynical attitudes about the purpose of Jewish organizations. Some view the groups as obsessed with their own propagation, looking only to cultivate future donors. Others cannot justify getting involved with organizations that cater to small, elite groups of people who may have specialized political goals that they do not personally support.

It's all about money, and I don't have any. That's their role, and I think it's an important role. But all of their young people events are young professionals events designed, in my opinion, to train future donors. (Woman, Illinois)

I think Jewish organizations unfortunately, this is just my perspective, have kind of been polarized. I'm a Reform, and I feel that my values system and my politics when it comes to Israel or even within the United States are vastly different from some of the Orthodox ideas or opinions. So therefore to join a national or a worldview Jewish organization, to me, is just too general because the politics or the money or the funds may be going to issues or groups that I do not agree with. (New York)

Most frequently, however, some have had negative experiences with the people involved in Jewish organizations, who they feel have judged them for “not being Jewish enough.” This is a generation that wants to make their own choices and wants those choices validated as part of their personal growth and development. To these young people, there is nothing more abhorrent than “being judged,” particularly when they are growing up in a world in which the Jewish experience is so diverse.

I don't get along with the people there very well. They are always up in my face telling me what I need to be doing with my life, and I really don't like that. I never really appreciate that. (Man, Virginia)

Respondents from interfaith households, in particular, feel judged for “not being Jewish enough,” and feelings of intimidation create a barrier to participation. Some are intimidated by the barriers around not knowing the language and liturgy involved in Jewish life, and therefore when they do attempt participation, it feels quite foreign. For some, this experience of discrimination alienates them from Jewish life and reinforces the relatively small role being Jewish plays in their lives. At the same time, they remain proud of their heritage and continue to identify themselves as Jewish, even if they are ambivalent about what this means to them.

I don't know. They believed in it at a level that I just couldn't understand, and there was condescension. It was kind of like, 'You shouldn't be here. You don't speak Hebrew...' These were all the people who knew every single line, knew how to sing every song, could read it all. There's nothing wrong with that, my girlfriend speaks Hebrew, but it was like a hierarchy, and, 'You are not Jewish enough to be here.' (New York)

If you're being closed minded about it and shutting people off who aren't Jewish, I think that's no good at all. I met a guy a while ago who was 100 percent Jewish and really, really liked me a lot, and I kind of liked him. But he told me, 'Well this could never work because you're only half Jewish.' I can't stand attitudes like that. I think it's ridiculous. You close such huge windows because of that, and I think that's wrong. (Woman, Massachusetts)

In Their Futures?

Moving forward, many young Jews can see themselves volunteering for organizations in the future, provided that the non-profits are working toward goals with which they agree, and that involvement is easy and convenient.

If [two organizations] had the two exact goals, I'd probably work with the Jewish organization just because I already feel like the Jewish community is a minority community. I guess this is like my rabbi preaching, like, you need to stay close and keep the Jewish community strong and encourage it and let it grow. (New York)

I think it's important to [work] in a Jewish context. You can get people together, talking shorthand, and get something done. I mean, there are definitely Jewish groups I like and Jewish groups I don't. (Man, California)

On the other hand, some Jews in this study are hesitant to “discriminate” by getting involved in an organization that serves only Jewish interests. These Jews believe community service should help all people, regardless of religion or culture, and they feel people should be motivated to help others because it is the right thing to do, not because they are Jewish.

I don't want to be involved in anything religious because to me it seems like it really limits you. Like, why can't you be involved in the general community, for the general cause of society? (Man, Atlanta)

I would never pick a Jewish organization that does volunteer type stuff over a non-Jewish one right now. I think it's really great that there are Jewish organizations, and it makes me happy that there are Jewish people doing great things, but it wouldn't matter to me. (Woman, New York)

What stops young Jews from greater participation in Jewish institutions runs the gamut, as we see above. But to be clear, their lack of involvement is not because of a weak Jewish identity. Young Jews do not lack self-confidence about their Jewishness, nor do they lack connection to their families or the values with which they grew up, nor do they feel disconnected from Jewish peoplehood. Rather, in their views, the institutionalized Jewish community does not meet their needs or speak to their interests as young people. Children of intermarried parents especially feel that the community is either not interested in them because of their one non-Jewish parent or that the community is constantly trying to change them. But even with young people from families where both parents are Jewish, there is frequently either an indifference to or a negative association with Jewish institutions and the social cultures that surround them.



Denominational Identification on the Decline; Informal Expression on the Rise

In *OMG!* we found that informal expressions of Jewishness are more prevalent than denominational identification, and we were able to inquire more specifically about that in this current study. Again we discovered that respondents feel no sense of obligation to identify themselves as “Reform” or “Conservative,” no matter what sort of upbringing they experienced. Furthermore, most participants celebrate important holidays with their families and friends in some manner, but beyond these core traditions, only a minority observes religious laws or practices rituals at all. In fact, most young Jews do not spontaneously bring up the subject of religion unless asked directly about it. When asked about religious practices, it seems that traditional synagogue worship feels like something people do while growing up — and possibly something to return to after having one’s own family — but it is not perceived as something that one does by choice as a single adult.

When it comes to “religion,” the concerns of younger Jews are not all that different from other young, white people. Consistent with most urban and suburban whites (Evangelical Protestants excepted²²), young Jews do not feel that religion is a particularly important part of their lives: only 39 percent of Jews and 42 percent of non-Jewish urban and suburban whites *strongly* agree with the statement “religion is an important part of my life.” Young Jews are also less likely to be religious than other American minority groups. For example, African Americans are nearly twice as likely as Jews to say that religion is an important part of their lives (71 percent versus 39 percent, respectively). Furthermore, among other whites, young Jews are among the least likely to worry about their relationships with God (Orthodox Jews, of course, are a notable exception). In our focus groups, the topic was hardly ever raised spontaneously.

Attendance at formal religious services in houses of worship is low among this cohort.²³ Roughly one in five (22 percent) Jewish young people say they regularly attend synagogue, and one third (31 percent) say they hardly ever or never attend. Compared with other religious and ethnic groups, young Jews are less likely to attend services regularly: 22 percent attend weekly versus 36 percent of young people overall, 36 percent of Mainline Protestants, 71 percent of Evangelical Protestants, 36 percent of Catholics, and 39 percent of African Americans. Jews are also less likely than other white groups to attend services regularly: 22 percent attend weekly versus 30 percent of urban, non-Jewish whites and 32 percent of suburban, non-Jewish whites.

Among young Jews, there is a resonance with informal experiences of Jewishness rather than with formal religious practice. This is a period of identity formation and exploration for them, and peer influence is important, as young people experience new events together and bounce new ideas off their friends. Many participants in this study are happy to talk about religion or holiday practices with their friends. Some have incorporated their favorite rituals into activities with their friends, creating improvised seders or hosting dinners on Friday nights with their own versions of the traditional prayers. Immigrant youth and those most politically engaged talk about Israel. Others take classes on Jewish subjects at college or occasionally pick up books to learn about Jewish history.

In *OMG!*, we found that a plurality (42 percent) of Jews talk about religion with their friends at least once a week. This should not be underestimated. While it is less than Evangelical Protestants, who are explicitly called to proselytize and witness, it is more than Mainline Protestants or Catholics. Compared with other white groups, Jews talk about religion about as much as urban, non-Jewish whites (37 percent of whom talk about religion at least once a week) and more than suburban, non-Jewish whites (29 percent of whom talk about religion at least once a week). Some of these conversations are deep heart-to-hearts with friends, while others are more light-hearted quips where they joke about themselves.

A number of participants framed their “Jewishness” in terms of explaining their faith to non-Jewish friends and associates. This experience is particularly common among socially isolated young people; some even suggest feeling the burden of representing the entire Jewish people.

With my non-Jewish friends, sure, we talk about [being Jewish]. They ask questions and try to understand how we do things. I have no problem explaining these things to them. (Woman, New York)

It's kind of hard being the only Jew with my friends. I took a class where religion came up all the time, and it was kind of like, 'Oh, well, let's ask Erin what Jews think.' It's very hard to be categorized and to have to speak for the entire Jewish religion when that doesn't make sense rationally. (Woman, Atlanta)

For some participants in this study, Jewish education does not end when they move away from their parents. More than a few respondents take part in on-going, “adult” education, sometimes involving formal, college classes in Jewish history or philosophy and at other times comprising less structured education, such as ad hoc lectures, reading groups or simply reading books on their own.

You are learning about your roots and where you come from. And you want to just learn more and constantly keep learning more. (New York)

I took religious classes — there weren't specifically Jewish classes. And that furthered my knowledge of all religions, including Judaism. And it really helped me see how Judaism fit in with all the other religions. (Woman, Massachusetts)

Some young people in the study find more satisfying expressions of their Jewishness through informal group events. This can include a group of friends attending Jewish events or lectures, forming a study group, or even joining a Jewish book club. These informal articulations of “being Jewish” often involve specific, organized, broadly sectarian events or gatherings, but not formal ceremonies at synagogues. Arguably, these events, while rare, comprise the most visible articulations of engagement with Jewishness among Jewish youth outside of the family, and importantly, they do not occur at synagogues or other Jewish institutions.

My friends and I started a group, I guess two years ago now. We were getting together once a month and doing Shabbat dinners and services. None of us have really found a synagogue that we like, so [that's what we] have created. (Woman, Illinois)

I started a club called Jews on Catholic Properties. I found that there were six Jews that go to my Catholic school, and now we all talk regularly. (Woman, Minnesota)

Clearly, religious practice and Jewish exploration do not end after young Jews leave their family homes, but less structured events become manifestations of their engagement with Jewishness. Conversations with friends, dinners, Jewish book clubs, college classes on Jewish history and other cultural experiences (which we will discuss in a later section) take precedence over formal religious participation. Given that Generation Y Jews have multiple options made available to them by their full integration into American society, they are exploring how they want to express their Jewish identities and are picking and choosing these informal means from unlimited choices.



American and Jewish Values Indistinguishable

To Generation Y Jews, American and Jewish values are indistinguishable. The young Jews in our study have values that they can articulate and prioritize, but they do not see them as necessarily *Jewish* values; instead, they categorize them as familial or American values. Many appear to be intrinsically, but not explicitly, Jewish, such as a commitment to “social justice.” We also find an individualism and self-directed focus in our participants’ responses. When asked to prioritize their values, they highlight “achievement,” “personal growth,” “health,” “love,” and “humor,” as opposed to values that connect them to others and the world beyond themselves.

In particular, it is very difficult for the young Jews in the focus groups to articulate a sense of Jewish “values” without being prompted with words like “*tzedakah*,” although they have a vague sense that there is a value system associated with being Jewish. In fact, when asked about values, they tend to associate the idea with “family,” as it is difficult for young Jews in the study to separate “Jewish values” from the values they learn from their families.

I’m sure it’s the values that my parents taught us, but I think they are pretty universal values. I mean, if we weren’t Jewish, I’d like to think they would be the same. (Man, Florida)

*I was raised with the idea that you should give some of your wealth and time to those who are less fortunate — not just Jewish people but everyone — to make the world a better place. That’s the concept of *tzedakah*. (Man, District of Columbia)*

Social Justice

A few young people in this study — more women than men, interestingly — indicate a commitment to social justice. A fair percentage of these young people involve themselves in issues or groups that fight discrimination, help the poor or feed the hungry, among other socially progressive causes. In the *OMG!* study, one in four Jewish young people (27 percent) said they volunteer at least once or twice a month to help the disadvantaged, such as by working in a soup kitchen, being a Big Brother or Sister, or volunteering for Habitat for Humanity. Even more young people, while not being directly involved, profess a commitment to social justice.

Ideally I would find some organization that really mixes Judaism, education, and social justice. (Woman, Illinois)

I have always believed that things come back to you. If you are just holding your money tight, give to poor people, give to organizations that help poor people because you might be that poor person one day. Nothing is set in stone. (New York)

The exceptional few in this study feel driven “to do good,” and some even find work in the non-profit world. Many participants articulate a more general need to give something back and to help others. This is not something they see as a particularly Jewish value, but they like the way it makes them feel about

themselves, and they see it as something they were taught, something they were encouraged to do, and something they know is right.

Social justice [is] something I'm really passionate about, and I can't even say why. But I know when I see social injustice, I try to keep my eyes open, and it's something that makes me really angry and motivates me. (New York)

I just want to be compassionate towards everything and everyone; like, to show caring towards people even if they're not your best friend or someone you are very close with. Just to show someone that you care. (Woman, Atlanta)

Political Values

Importance of Politics to Young People

(Percent Responding: "Politics is an important part of my life")

	Strongly Agree	Total Agree
Total	32	76
Jewish	43	80
Urban White	38	81
Suburban White	36	77
Asian American	29	77
African American	33	76
Hispanic	29	72
<small>"Now, I will read you some statements. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each statement – strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree?" (OMG!, May 2005)</small>		

Young Jews are quite likely to think politics, in general, is important. Like other groups who have been taught to vote as a bloc as a means to empower the group, young Jews are politically attentive. For example, in late August and early September 2004, two months before the presidential election, young Jews were more likely than many other racial and ethnic groups to feel that politics was important in their lives: 43 percent of Jews strongly agreed, versus 33 percent of African Americans, 29 percent of Asians, and 29 percent of Hispanics.

Moral Values

Moral Values Separate from God

(Percent Responding)

	It is not necessary to believe in God to be moral and have good values.	It is necessary to believe in God to be moral and have good values.
Total	51	47
Jewish	66	32
Mainline Protestant	51	47
Evangelical Protestant	33	67
Catholic	46	51

*"Now I am going to read you a pair of statements. Please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views, even if neither is exactly right."
(OMG!, May 2005)*

While many young Jews disagree about whether or not Jews need to believe in God, most separate ethics and their moral values from a belief in God. In the *OMG!* study, two-thirds (66 percent) of young Jews stated that they believe "it is not necessary to believe in God to be moral and have good values." In this respect, Jews are distinct from Generation Y as a whole, this view being expressed by 51 percent of young people overall, 51 percent of Mainline Protestants, 33 percent of Evangelical Protestants, and 46 percent of Catholics.

Similarly, among participants in the current qualitative study, there is little agreement whether belief in God, is a sine qua non of Jewish values. The question provoked a debate among participants in our focus groups without consensus. The major exception, of course, comes from Orthodox participants, who maintain that a belief in God is an essential part of Jewish identity.



Culture as Convener, Communicator and Catalyst

In this study, culture, especially popular culture (film, music, television, books and magazines) emerges as a powerful and flexible force in the lives of our Generation Y audience. This generation experiences popular culture through personal networks and the consumption of cultural products and events, as opposed to through institutional memberships.

Whether the young people in this study gather to hear a concert, view a film, or create other cultural forums, cultural mechanisms are primary portals for connectedness and meaning.

I go to a lot of music events and see three or four movies a month. I like hip hop, rock. I have a lot of friends who perform and make music, so that kind of fills that portion also, seeing other people I know. (New York)

I'm in a comedy troupe... And other people in the comedy troupe are the most brilliant, funny people I've met, and I love working with them. We've been working together for about three years now. (Woman, Massachusetts).

Cultural performances and programs play a number of complicated yet connected roles for Generation Y audiences. First and foremost, they **convene an audience that allows for an experience of community** in the sense that individuals attend concerts or performances not only to watch the show, but also to connect with like-minded individuals. For example, individuals attending a concert by the band Radiohead expect to enjoy and connect with their fellow audience members, with whose world view they agree, as much as to watch the act on stage. The same could be said for those who attend book readings or stand up comedy shows.

Secondly, the content of the cultural products and events further **communicates values** and creates a common language among the audience members. As an example, the often political causes promoted by the band Coldplay have become as beloved by their fan base as the music that engaged them in the first place.

Thirdly, cultural performances and cultural products, like DVDs, books, magazines, music and other media, act as a **catalyst for must-have conversation**. They provide friends who experience the performance, product or event in real time or in parallel play with content for extended discussion. This could include anything from a DVD produced by the political organization Moveon.org to a magazine created by the literary collective McSweeney's.

All three of these functions reinforce identity in Generation Y Jews in that they create a common language and experience for the audience. And in this sense, young Jews are like all other Generation Y, middle- to upper-class Americans.



Conclusion

This study is an exercise in listening. It offers a glimpse into the hearts and minds, likes and dislikes, hopes and fears of the young Jewish audience. It does not tie everything together, nor does it offer an easy answer or a silver bullet action step that should be undertaken communally as a result. We release this report not with the assumption that there is one such silver bullet, but rather in the hope that this publication will trigger a variety of responses.

To put it another way, remember this: coffee had been sold as an inexpensive “cup of joe” for decades before Howard Schultz thought differently and developed Starbucks. In the same way, we hope this report acts as a catalyst that will allow practitioners and philanthropists to *think* differently, to organize differently, and to fund differently. Whether we bemoan the inarticulate nature of young Jews’ sense of community, or feel despair at their inability to recognize the very names of the communal organizations we have built, the seeds of a meaningful, ever strengthening Jewish future can also be seen here through:

- The emergence of a self-confident Jewish identity;
- The sense of connection to a global Jewish people;
- A continuing emphasis on informal practice, celebration and ritual, despite the lack of interest in the formal and institutional;
- An articulation of a need to give something back and to help others, which alludes to the potential of social justice;
- The remarkable (and relatively untapped, and vastly under-funded) power of culture as a conveyor of meaning, informer of values, catalyst for conversation, and convener of an episodic community.

Our challenge now is to determine to what lengths we are willing to go to support the projects that fit this mold and the leaders who create them. To what extent are we willing to acknowledge that life has changed at a rapid pace in the past two decades and that new ways must be found to reinforce Jewish identity, community and meaning; new ways that augment, but do not replace, those that worked for our grandparents and parents? What resources are we willing to invest? What experiments are we willing to nurture? And whose visions are we willing to support?

We end this report with a quotation from Dr. Jonathan D. Sarna that draws from the experience of Jewish history in order to inspire and guide our future direction:

Continuity may depend upon discontinuity. Some of the late nineteenth-century Jews’ most successful and creative innovations, notably their emphasis on religious particularism and on Zionism, turned past wisdom on its head. New historical conditions created new movements, new emphases, and new paradigms — the very opposite of the tried and true. Today, we, too, must be willing to challenge some of our most basic assumptions. Even as we support, and must support, the so-called “community agenda,” it bears remembering that discontinuities — at least the right sort — may have a greater impact still.²⁴



Appendix A: Methodology

Interview and Focus Group Methodology

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Inc. designed and administered in-depth interviews of 35 Jewish youth between the ages of 18 and 25. The interviews were conducted June 27–August 11, 2005 and lasted about 45 minutes. Participants were given an incentive of \$50.

We recruited participants from several sample frames. First, we re-interviewed young people who had taken part in the first round of survey research. Second, we called from a database maintained by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research of previous survey participants. Third, we purchased sample from Survey Sampling, Inc., (SSI) which maintains a database of interested survey participants recruited from mail surveys distributed to the general public. Finally, we sent out general announcements to Craig's List. We targeted cities in the West and Midwest.

In order to ensure geographic and attitudinal distribution across Jewish youth throughout the country, we created quotas for region and religiosity. In total, we interviewed 9 people who live in Northeastern states, 11 from the Midwest, 8 from the South, and 7 from the West. In order to obtain a mix of young people with various levels of Jewish identification, during the screening process respondents were asked a series of questions including: how often they attended synagogue, whether they participated in any community service or volunteer activity associated with the Jewish community, and how important being Jewish was in their lives.

Additionally, focus groups were conducted with 37 Jewish young people between the ages of 18 and 25. Six focus groups were distributed across three locations: New York, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. These group interviews were conducted June 7–July 26, 2005 and lasted approximately 120 minutes.

OMG! Survey Methodology

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Inc. designed and administered this telephone survey conducted by professional interviewers. The survey reached 1,385 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25. The survey was conducted August 7–November 18, 2004. The data were weighted by race, education, region and religion to ensure an accurate reflection of the population.²⁵

The nationally representative sample of young people was supplemented with oversamples of 200 Jewish respondents, 97 African American respondents, 93 Hispanic respondents, 75 Asian respondents, and 125 Muslim respondents. Telephone numbers were generated by a list-assisted sample with an age predictor that a person of appropriate age resided in the household. The sample was stratified by county within state. Race oversamples were drawn from areas of high race densities, overlapped by surname samples for the Asian and Hispanic groups. The Jewish oversample used a multi-tiered methodology: we drew samples from areas of high household ethnic density, supplemented by both a surname sample and a sample drawn from zip codes of universities with high Jewish enrollment. The Muslim oversample was also drawn from a multi-tier methodology: volunteer participants from Muslim Student Associations were invited to complete

the survey by phone or over the Internet, and we conducted survey intercepts of Muslim youth in universities, community centers and malls in the Detroit Metropolitan area.

Additional subgroup analysis was conducted between young Jews and other ethnic and religious subgroups. Jewish identity is a complicated mix of religion, ethnicity and culture, so we attempted to make comparisons that would be sensitive to these distinctions. Data on religious engagement compared Jews to other religious subgroups. However, data on identity formation and volunteerism compared young Jews to other racial and ethnic groups. We separated non-Jewish whites by urbanicity to better understand cultural distinctions among white groups. Among Jews, 47 percent live in urban areas, while 46 percent live in suburban areas. Among non-Jewish whites, 16 percent live in urban areas, and 20 percent live in suburban areas.

Unweighted and Weighted N Sizes of Key Comparison Groups

	Unweighted N	Weighted N
Total	1,385	971
Jewish	200	19
White, urban, non-Jewish	110	92
White, suburban, non-Jewish	133	113
African American	140	136
Asian	126	39
Hispanic	170	165
Mainline Protestant	247	208
Evangelical Protestant	215	185
Catholic	216	197
<i>(OMG! 2005)</i>		

Jewish Oversample

We used multiple approaches to reach a diverse selection of young Jews in the oversample. First, we called into areas with known high Jewish population density. Because the U.S. Census bureau does not ask questions of religion, other information like Census tract density is not available. However, the American Jewish Yearbook maintains information on Jewish population, so we were able to identify the Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) with the largest Jewish populations. We then drew an age-listed sample of cases within these MSAs.

Second, we attempted to locate youth away at school. According to the 2000–1 National Jewish Population Survey, over half (53 percent) of Jewish youth 18–24 are at universities and away from home. To compensate for this large population of students, we created a list of universities that have high Jewish populations. Hillel maintains a list of universities with the estimated Jewish populations. We selected universities where at least 20 percent of the student population was Jewish, located the zip codes for these universities, and then sampled randomly among these zip codes.

Finally, we used surname samples to locate study participants. Although not everyone with a Jewish surname is actually Jewish, and not all Jews have Jewish surnames, the likelihood of reaching a Jewish household is increased by a surname sample. The Jewish surname sample, maintained by SSI, is a list of 2,070,394 listed telephone records that have a Jewish surname.

This method produced data comparable to other national sample studies, such as the NJPS. Our data was more concentrated in the Northeast, but it produced distributions of gender and denomination that are within the margin of error.

Comparison of Key Demographics

	<i>OMG!</i> (18–25 year-olds) (n =2 00)	NJPS (18–24 year-olds) (n =4 50)
Denomination		
Orthodox	18	15
Conservative	24	20
Reform	25	29
Just Jewish	23	26
Cultural / Secular	8	8
Region		
Northeast	60	40
Central	8	13
South	17	19
West	15	28
Gender		
Male	51	44
Female	49	56
<i>(OMG! 2005 and NJPS 2000)</i>		



Appendix B: Interview Recruitment Script

Hello. My name is _____ and I'm calling from North American Surveys, a research firm based in Fargo, North Dakota. May I please speak to _____?

[To respondent:] May I please verify your name?

What is your age?

We are conducting a study on identity and community involvement. *[IF FIRST ROUND PARTICIPANT]* We are talking to those young people who agreed they might like to take part in future research during a survey conducted last year. *[IF NAME GIVEN FROM OTHER SOURCE]* We would like to interview you by phone for 20 minutes at your convenience in the next couple of weeks. *[BOTH]* Let me assure you, I am NOT selling anything, and you will NOT be asked for a donation. For your time, we will compensate you *[\$50]*, or if you would prefer, we will make a donation of *[\$50]* to the charity of your choice. I can also assure you that the interview will be confidential. Can I schedule the interview at this time?

[If no:] May I ask what your reservations are? *[Use the additional information below to answer questions.]*

[If their questions or concerns are not addressed below] I do not have that information in front of me, but I can obtain it and get back to you tomorrow.

[If no again:] Thank you for your time. *[Go to the next call.]*

[If unsure:] Would it be helpful to have one of our executives call you *[OR INSERT NAME OF POSSIBLE INTERVIEWEE]* to discuss the project?

[If concerned about the time:] We understand that you are very busy. We can guarantee you that the interview will not take longer than 20 minutes and will be at your convenience. We can talk to you at home, at lunch, whatever time works best for you.

[If will not schedule:] When would be a good time for me to check back with you? *[Schedule follow-up call.]*

[Follow-up three times. If still will not commit to the interview:] I'm sorry you don't think this will work. Thank you for your time.

[If yes:] *[Schedule interview]*

[CONFIRM OR OBTAIN NAME OF PERSON SCHEDULING INTERVIEW, INTERVIEWEE'S ADDRESS, PHONE NUMBER, EMAIL ADDRESS, AND SPELLING OF NAME. RESTATE THE DATE AND TIME OF THE INTERVIEW.]

We will call you prior to the interview to confirm. If you have any questions, please call _____ at _____.

[If difficulty scheduling the interview:] Can you give me three times and dates between ____ and ____ that you would be available, and I will get back to you.

Additional Information

What is the study about?

The study is about identity and community involvement. I can't provide you with specific questions prior to the interview. However, I can tell you that the interviewer will ask you for your views on a variety of issues dealing with your experience and identity as a young person.

[If interviewee persists on knowing specifics about the subject matter:] I'm sorry but I cannot be more specific than that. It is important to us that you do not have any preconceived notions about the interview, and so we do not want to you have any specific information before the interview occurs.

Who will conduct the interview?

A professional moderator will conduct the interview.

Who is the client?

Reboot, the network for Jewish innovation, is sponsoring this research. I can assure you this is a legitimate research project.

How long will the interview take?

The interview will last no longer than 20 minutes after it starts. We understand your time is valuable, and the interview will not run longer than 20 minutes.

Where will the interview occur?

It will be scheduled at your convenience at a place you choose. We would like to hold the interview in the next 2 weeks.

Is the interview really confidential?

Yes. Your name will not be released to the public without your permission. In fact, the client will not be given your name. Instead, we will describe you in general terms, such as by your age and gender.

Where did you get my name?

[IF FIRST ROUND PARTICIPANT] We retained your name from a survey we conducted last year in which you agreed that you may be interested in participating in future research projects.

[IF RECRUITED FROM ANOTHER PLACE] From one of two places: your name came recommended to us from another participant in the survey or because you have indicated an interest in participating in focus groups.

Is the research independent?

Yes. Our purpose is to evaluate the input of young people from a wide variety of perspectives.



Appendix C: Interview Guide

[INSTRUCTIONS TO INTERVIEWER: START OFF WITH THE QUESTION, BUT PLEASE LET THEM VOLUNTEER AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE, PROBE FOR STORIES, FOR A NARRATIVE. USE PROBES TO STRUCTURE THE CONVERSATION.]

First of all, thanks for agreeing to participate in this interview. Just a word about the project: we're looking at how folks get to be interested in community life and politics, so we're looking at people's backgrounds, how that shapes their value systems, and ultimately, the impact it has on community involvement. To do that, we're collecting a series of life histories.

FAMILY

1. So I wonder, to begin with, if you could tell me a little bit about your family and where you grew up. Tell me a story about an important event in your family's life.

PROBES:

- What was the neighborhood like?
- Are you close to your family?
- What were the most important values you learned from your family?
- Tell me about a holiday you spent with your family that was significant or meaningful to you. How did that make you feel?

[NOTE TO INTERVIEWERS: ASK THIS ONLY IF BEING JEWISH COMES UP IN PREVIOUS SECTION, OTHERWISE MOVE THIS QUESTION TO AFTER ALTRUISTIC LIFE]

GROWING UP JEWISH

2. What kind of role did being Jewish play in your life growing up?

PROBES:

- Who taught you about being Jewish, and what did you learn from him/her?
- Did you ever go to any kind of Jewish school, be it for a few hours a week or full-time? Was that a positive or negative experience? Can you give me an example of what made it a [positive/negative] experience? How did that make you feel?
- How involved were your parents in your Jewish community?
- Once you graduated high school, did you do anything on your own to learn more about being Jewish, such as taking classes at college, going to museums, going to Israel...? Tell me about that.

FRIENDS

3. Tell me about a close friend. How did you meet him or her? Tell me a story about something you and a *close* friend have done together that was meaningful to you in some way. What about your other friends? Where do they live? Who do you hang out with? How did you meet them? What kinds of things do you do? What kinds of things do you talk about?

PROBES:

- Do you have more than one social circle of friends? Who are in your circles — what's the common tie? *[PROBE: make sure to explore if any of their social circles are based on culture or politics such as musical groups, hobbies, or activism]*
- What kind of backgrounds do they have? *[PROBE: on class, gender, race/ethnicity of friends]*
- Do your circles overlap or have people in common?
- How often do you do stuff with people from more than one of your social circles? *[PROBE FOR EXAMPLES: What kinds of things do you do when they mix?]*

DAILY LIFE

4. Now I want to shift gears a little and ask you a bit about how you spend your free time now. Tell me about the stuff you do for fun, why you enjoy it, who you go with, how you find out about it, things like that.

PROBES:

- Make sure to probe on latest music, concerts, books, movies, TV shows, and sports. *Where do you get your info? Where do you learn about entertainment?*
- Where you do get your news from?

ALTRUISTIC LIFE

5. Tell me about a volunteer experience you had — this could be something you did with an organization or just something you did to help out someone in need.

PROBES:

- How did you get involved with that?
- How did it make you feel?
- Did it make you feel like you were part of a community? Tell me about that.

6. Tell me a bit about the kinds of organizations you participate in or belong to and what you do for them.

PROBES:

- Are any of them Jewish?
- *[IF NONE JEWISH]* Why do you think you have not been involved in any Jewish organizations? Do you think you might join a synagogue, JCC, or a Jewish organization sometime later in your life?

JEWISH IDENTITY

7. So, thinking about growing up, and thinking about your life, what does being Jewish mean to you today?
[NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: we are looking for ways in which Jewishness is expressed as a culture or ethnic identity]

PROBES:

- How important is being Jewish when it comes to how you see yourself?
- Do you ever talk about being Jewish with your friends? The last time you talked about being Jewish with your friends, what did you talk about?
- Do you do anything in your daily life to learn more about, or maybe even just express yourself, as being Jewish? *[For example, books or newspapers you might read, or even just having a mezuzah on your door]*
- Is your Jewishness different from your parents' Jewishness? What does it feel like to be Jewish?

THE FUTURE

8. So thinking about how you grew up, do you see yourself doing anything differently when you have your own family?

PROBES:

- Do you think it is important to marry someone who is Jewish, or does it not matter to you?
[PROBE: Why / Why not?]
- Does it matter to your parents if you marry someone who is Jewish? What do they tell you?
- If you intend to have children, is their Jewish identity important to you?
- What will your Jewish life be like if you have a family?
[PROBE: holidays, education, community involvement, giving to charity]

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

9. Do you know what these acronyms stand for?

PROBES:

- ADL
- UJC
- AIPAC [pronounced AY-PAHK]
- AJC

10. How familiar are you with the work they do? How about your local Jewish Community Center, are you familiar with the work they do? Tell me about that.

- Do you have positive impressions of these groups? Do you have negative impressions of these groups?

- What about the people your age who are involved with these groups? Do you have positive or negative impressions of these people?
- **[IF NEGATIVE]** What could they differently that would make you like them better?

SNOWBALL

Finally, just one last question. Because we are trying to talk to a large group of Jewish young people like yourself, would you be willing to give us phone numbers of any friends you might have who are also Jewish and between the ages of 18 and 25? Just like you, they'll also get \$50 if they complete this interview. Please let me assure you that we will not share their phone number with anyone else, and the interview will remain confidential.

[IF YES] [COLLECT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER]

[PROBE: Are there other Jewish friends that we can contact?]

[COLLECT AS MANY NAMES AND NUMBERS AS RESPONDENT IS WILLING TO GIVE]



Appendix D: Focus Group Guide

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Confidentiality
- Mirrors, audio and videotapes
- Respondent introductions; tell me what you like to do for fun.

II. Daily Life (10 minutes)

Let's start off by talking a little bit more about daily life:

- What do you like to do with your free time? If you had 2 more hours to spend each day, what would you do with it?

Let's turn to Handout #1. Handout #1 asks some questions about some stuff you might do for fun, such as going to concerts, going to movies, listening to music. Answer the questions as well as you can — don't spend too much time on it, and then we'll come back around and discuss. After you've gone through, put a STAR next to the one you enjoyed the most.

HANDOUT #1

What was the last movie you saw in a theater?
How did you find out about it?
Who did you go with to see it?

What was the last CD you bought/music you downloaded?
How did you find out about it?
Did you talk about it with anyone? If so, whom?

What was the last music concert you saw?
How did you find out about it?
Who did you go with to see it?

What was the last book you read for fun?
How did you find out about it?
Did you talk about it with anyone? If so, whom?

What was the last sporting event you attended?
How did you find out about it?
Who did you go with to see it?

GO AROUND THE ROOM AND HAVE EACH PERSON TALK ABOUT THE ONE WITH THE STAR. PROBE FOR THE STORY (e.g. How long did it take for you to read the book? How was the game/concert?, etc.) What was it that you liked so much? How did you find out about it?

Thinking about the things you watch, the music you listen to, the books you read, is it just about the entertainment for you or do you like to be forced to think? When you watch a movie or listen to a CD that gets you thinking, what kinds of things do you learn about?

III. Direction of Personal Life (5 minutes)

- How are things going for you personally?
- What things are going right? What achievements have you made recently that you're really proud of?
- What things do you wish were going better? What's the one thing you are most worried about in your life right now?

IV. Values (15 minutes)

Now for something that will probably require a fair bit of thought. I want you to think about the things you value most in life, for example, integrity, respect, maybe a career. I am going to give you a handout that has some possible values just to help you along, but if there's something that's not on it, it's fine to add something of your own. I want you to think about these, **circle the five** that are most important to you, and we'll talk about them afterwards. After this, I want you to write positive, clarifying statements about what the value means to you. For example, to you "integrity" might mean "I am always honest and trustworthy," but to someone else it might mean "I do not tell lies." When writing these statements, try to phrase them positively, using positive terms like "I am," "I do," or "I will."

HANDOUT #2 [Written exercise]

PART 1: CIRCLE FIVE VALUES THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU IN YOUR LIFE.

- | | | |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| • Achievement | • Family | • Responsibility |
| • Adventure | • Gratitude | • Security |
| • Authenticity | • Health | • Social justice |
| • Balance | • Humor | • Spirituality |
| • Beauty | • Love | • Success |
| • Community | • Loyalty | • Teamwork |
| • Compassion | • Opportunity | • Tolerance |
| • Courage | • Patience | • Working hard |
| • Curiosity | • Personal growth | • Something else? _____ |
| • Education | • Religion | |
| • Equality | • Respect | |

PART 2: PICK TWO VALUES AND WRITE CLARIFYING STATEMENTS ABOUT THEM. This will help you clarify what the value means to you. When you write your clarifying statement, be sure to use positive terms like “I am,” “I do,” or “I will.”

VALUE 1: _____

VALUE 2: _____

GO AROUND THE ROOM, WRITE TOP TWO VALUES (not clarifying statements) ON EASEL.

- Why is this quality important to you?
- Where do you think this came from? [**PROBE**: *family, friends, school, travel, reading, religion*]
- How good are you at living up to this value?

V. Family (10 minutes)

Next, I'd like to ask each of you to describe your family.

- What did your family look like when you were growing up? Are your parents still together? Do you have any sisters or brothers?
- Are your parents from this country?
- Are you close to your family? What does that mean, to be close to your family?
- What do you value most about your family life?
- What holidays did you celebrate with your family growing up?
- What are the most important things your family taught you when you were growing up?

VI. Community (15 minutes)

- Tell me about one of your close friends [make them choose one if they say more than one]. How did you meet him/her? What do you have in common with him/her? Who do you have on your IM list? Who do you text message?
- What about your other friends? [**PROBE** on *class, gender, race/ethnicity of friends, very important to understand if there is diversity in their circles*] Would you say that you are like your friends in most respects or different? How are you different [e.g. different class, racial or ethnic backgrounds]? Do they share your worldview, your outlook on life? Explain that to me.
- What kinds of things do you do with your friends? [**PROBE** for *examples. What did you do the last time you went out with your friends?*]
- When you think of your social circles, do you have just one, or do you have many social circles?

Do they overlap or have people in common? Do any of your social circles include more people than just your friends? [If yes, what do you have in common with them?] How often do you do stuff with people from more than one of your social circles? [**PROBE:** make sure we explore if any of their social circles are based on culture or politics, such as musical groups, hobbies, or activism]

- Are any of your social circles virtual or online? [**PROBE:** explore Friendster, the Facebook, JDate, sites of some sort of interest — are these communities or just a tool?]
- Where do you meet new people?
- What does it mean to be connected to other people? What kinds of connections are most important to you?

Please turn to Handout #3. I want to talk a little bit more about your social circles and the kinds of people you feel connected to. Please go through the list and circle all the ones you feel connected to. If there's something that's not on the list that should be, please feel free to write that in too.

HANDOUT #3

Who do you feel connected to? Circle all that apply.

Your close family
(parents, brothers/sisters)

Your extended family
(grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins)

Your roommates/housemates

Your neighbors

Your close friends

Your coworkers

People who went to your high school

People who went or go to your college

Members of your church or synagogue

People you play sports with

Members of your book club

People who share your hobbies

People who care about the same political causes as you

People you volunteer with

People who post to the same Internet bulletin boards as you

People who watch the same movies or television shows as you

People who go to the same concerts as you

People with the same ethnicity as you

People of the same religion as you

People from the neighborhood where you grew up

People with the same political interests as you

Fans of your favorite sports team

Someone else? _____

[GO AROUND THE ROOM, GET HAND COUNT FOR EACH.] How are these connections different from one another? How are they similar?

- Do you consider yourself part of a Jewish community? How? Why? What does that look like? Describe that to me.

VII. Jewish Community (10 minutes)

- Some folks tell me that they like to try to do things in their life to help other people. Do you do anything like that? What kind of things do you do in your life to help other people? [**PROBE FOR EXAMPLES**, emphasize that it doesn't have to be part of organization work] Why do you do that?
- Do you participate in any organizations? Do you do any volunteer work for any organizations? [If not self-evident, ask if any of them are Jewish organizations] What sort of things do you do? Why do you do it? Are there obstacles to getting more involved (besides time)? [**PROBE: Volunteer work/Direct Service? Community groups? Civic groups? Community organizing? Political work? Advocacy?**]
- Is it something you do on your own or with a group of friends, colleagues or others? What kind of role does volunteer work play in your life? Can you imagine doing more when you are older?
- Is the volunteer work you do related at all to being Jewish? When you hear the word “tzedakah,” what does that mean to you? Do you feel you have a responsibility to heal the world?
- Do you participate in any Jewish organizations? Do you ever do any sort of volunteer work for any Jewish organizations? [**IF YES**] Tell me about that. [If mostly Jewish or mostly non-Jewish, have them explain their choice] [**IF NO**] Why do you think you have not been involved in any Jewish organizations? Do you think you might join a synagogue, JCC, or Jewish organization sometime later in your life?
- What Jewish organizations do you know about? [**HAVE PEOPLE GO AROUND THE ROOM AND NAME THEM**] What's your opinion of them? Do you have positive impressions of these groups? Do you have negative impressions of these groups? [**IF NEGATIVE**] What could they do differently that would make you like them better?
- When you think of the phrase “Jewish community” what sort of things come to mind? What kinds of people are most involved in a Jewish community? Are any of your friends involved in a Jewish community? Are you different from them? In what ways?
- Do you have a positive or negative impression of a Jewish community?
- What do you think are the biggest problems facing a Jewish community today?
- Do you spend any time working on these issues?

VIII. Civic Life and Politics (15 minutes)

- In general, how interested would you say you are in politics? How important is it to you, in your life? Do you do anything about it [e.g. vote, activism, persuade people]?
- How often do you talk about politics with friends and family?
- What are the biggest problems you think the world is facing right now? Do you spend any time working on these issues?
- How does being Jewish relate here? Does it?

IX. Jewish as Identity (15 minutes)

Let's talk a little bit more about being Jewish.

- When you say you are Jewish, what does that mean to you?
- Thinking back to the beginning of the focus group when you talked about how you see yourself as a person — how important is being Jewish when it comes to how you see yourself? Do you like being Jewish? What do you not like about being Jewish? Is it hard or easy to be Jewish?
- Is it important to you to be connected in some way to Jewish people? Do you think your future is tied in any way to other Jews or the Jewish people?
- How many of your friends are Jewish? Is it important to you to have Jewish friends?
- What kind of role did being Jewish play in your family life growing up? What sort of things did you do? [**PROBE:** *did you ever go to any kind of Jewish school, be it for a few hours a week or full-time?*] Were they positive or negative experiences?
- Who taught you about being Jewish?
- Are both your parents Jewish? [**IF NO,** *how did that work in your home?*] Do you see yourself doing anything differently when you have your own family? Do you think it is important to marry someone who is Jewish, or does it not matter to you? [**PROBE:** *Why / Why not?*] Does it matter to your parents if you marry someone who is Jewish? [**PROBE:** *Why / Why not?*]
- Do you think it is different to be Jewish in America? In what ways? [**PROBE, IF NECESSARY:** *Is it different from being Christian, or Italian American, or African American, or belonging to some other group, or just being American?*] Have you ever felt like an outsider? Tell me about that.

X. Judaism as Practice and Belief (10 minutes)

Now I want to shift gears a bit and talk a little bit more about being Jewish.

- First of all, would you be more likely to describe yourself as “a religious person” or “a spiritual person” or neither or both? What other words would you use, or do you just not think about it much? Rather than “religious” or “spiritual,” are you an “observant” person?
- How important is believing in God as part of your being Jewish? Can you be Jewish and not believe in God or feel spiritual? How does that work?
- Outside of perhaps going to synagogue or participating in Jewish organizations, how else might you express your connection to being Jewish? I'm thinking about listening to music or concerts, books, films, travel to Israel or other places of Jewish interest, or anything else that may come to mind. [**PROBE:** *books, films, film festivals, concerts, museums, travel, courses, talking to friends about being Jewish*] Did anyone ask you to get involved or tell you about it? [**PROBE:** *With whom did you do this? Did you like it? Would you do it again? Is it something you want to do more of? Do you like it better than going to synagogue or participation in Jewish organizations?*]
- When it comes to following the rituals and practices of being Jewish, how observant would you say you are? What sorts of things do you do? Why? What do you like about it? Anything else?

XI. Final Exercise (5 minutes)

Thanks for participating in tonight's group. I have one final exercise. Please turn to Handout #4. Thinking about everything we've discussed today, I'd like for you to describe your ideal "Jewish community."

HANDOUT #4

Describe your ideal "Jewish community."



Notes

1. See Appendix A for details of this study and where to find it.
2. Oldenburg, Ray. *Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories About the "Great Good Places" at the Heart of Our Communities*. New York: Marlowe & Company, 2002.
3. Sarna, Jonathan D. *A Great Awakening: The Transformation that Shaped Twentieth Century American Judaism and its Implications for Today*. New York: Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, 1995.
4. See Methodology and Appendix A for descriptions of recruitment strategy and methodology.
5. There are many definitions of identity. For this project, we define identity as people's self-understanding, conceptions of "who they are," or the "labels people assign themselves." See Taylor, Charles. *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992; or Laitin, David. "Identity Choice Under Conditions of Uncertainty." *Competition and Cooperation: Conversations with Novelists About Economics and Political Science*. Eds. James E. Alt, Margaret Levi, and Elinor Ostrom. New York: Russell Sage, 1999.
6. Cohen, Steven M. and Arnold Eisen. "The Sovereign Self: Jewish Identity in Post-Modern America." *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints*, 453, May 1, 2001.
7. These acronyms stand for American Israel Public Affairs Committee, United Jewish Communities, and the American Jewish Committee.
8. A majority of Jews in the United States are Ashkenazi; the 2000 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) estimates that 58 percent of Americans consider themselves to be Ashkenazi, while 8 percent self-identify as Sephardic. The remaining 34 percent self-identify as neither or describe themselves in some other way.
9. For additional sub group analysis, see Appendix A. The full *OMG!* report is available at <http://www.rebooters.net/poll.html>.
10. As cited in Beck, Pearl. "A Flame Still Burns: The Dimensions and Determinants of Jewish Identity Among Young Adult Children of the Intermarried." Jewish Outreach Institute, sponsored by the Crown Family Foundation and the Toledot Foundation, June 2005.
11. In the *OMG!* survey, "religion" was not defined for the respondents. Thus it is not entirely clear if respondents were all thinking about the term in the same way when they answered the question. For example, some might reject the term "religion," but if we had offered them the category "being Jewish," it might have ranked higher in their conception of who they are.

12. Throughout the report, we will compare young Jews to other “ethnic” groups, including urban, non-Jewish whites; suburban, non-Jewish whites; African Americans; Asian Americans; and Hispanics. *OMG!* data did not include country of origin information, so white ethnicities are fairly limited. We choose to break out non-Jewish whites into suburban and urban categories to better offer contrasts and similarities between these groups and Jews. Suburban, non-Jewish whites are somewhat different from urban, non-Jewish whites in that urban whites are more likely to be evangelical and to live in the South. In the *OMG!* study, young Jews are evenly distributed across urban and suburban areas. Please refer to Appendix A for sample size information for all groups.
13. Cohen, Steven M. and Arnold Eisen. “The Sovereign Self: Jewish Identity in Post-Modern America.” *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints*, 453, May 1, 2001.
14. See Glazer, Nathan and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. *Beyond the Melting Pot*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1963.
15. Gender and region are specified with the quotes whenever possible. However, focus groups in New York had male and female participants, so it is unclear whether the person who said this was male or female.
16. Because of the way young people talked about the Jewish community, traditional institutions are defined narrowly for the purposes of this report and include organizations like synagogues, Federations and non-profit groups.
17. Solomon, Jeffrey R. “Reinventing North American Jewish Communal Structures: The Crisis of Normality.” Paper presented at the Arnulf Pins Memorial Lecture, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, March 5, 2000.
18. Chazan, Barry and Steven M. Cohen. “What We Know About American Youth and Young Adults: Some Implications for Birthright Israel.” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Winter 2000: 76–82.
19. “The National Jewish Population Survey 2000–01: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population.” Research report. New York: United Jewish Communities, September 2003.
20. Because the term “religious camp” was not defined in the survey, this term could apply equally to camps sponsored by JCCs and Jewish Federations, which, for the most part, are not religious, and to camps sponsored by Union for Reform Judaism, or Ramah or Orthodox camps, which tend to be more religious.
21. This may overestimate the number of Jews who have been to Israel. Because *OMG!* primarily surveyed areas with high levels of Jewish density, it is possible that they have closer ties to Israel than Jews who live in areas of the United States with smaller Jewish populations. In contrast, the NJPS estimates that only 23 percent of Jews 18–24 have ever been to Israel (“National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01: Jewish Adults Ages 18–29.” Paper presented to the Jewish Education Leadership Summit, February 2004).

22. For example, 82 percent of white, Evangelical Protestants strongly agree with the statement “religion is an important part of my life.”
23. Previous studies using a life course perspective on church attendance suggests that attendance is typically low in the early adult years and that it increases as people age. It remains an open question whether this generation will follow a similar pattern. What makes this problem distinctive for Jews is that they are likely to delay marriage and intermarry, which suggests that they will be distanced from religious institutions for a potentially longer period of time.
24. Sarna, Jonathan D. *A Great Awakening: The Transformation that Shaped Twentieth Century American Judaism and its Implications for Today*. New York: Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, 1995.
25. The full report is available at <http://www.rebooters.net/poll.html>.



Acknowledgements

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Anna Greenberg, Vice President and Partner of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, advises U.S. political campaigns, issue campaigns, non-profits and foundations. She has worked closely with organizations involved in the 2004 presidential campaign, including MoveOn.org, The Media Fund, Human Rights Campaign, NARAL Pro-Choice America, Women's Voice Women's Vote, and the League of Conservation Voters, helping them develop messages, advertising and targeting strategies.

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Advisory Committee

This report has been a collaborative effort driven by a multi-disciplinary advisory committee who adopted a hands-on approach throughout the qualitative phase of research. From the outset, they participated in refining the recruitment script, interview and focus group guides, and the report's analysis, based on their expertise and different vantage points. We are grateful to the team members for their support, counsel, creativity and patience.

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Our Partners

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Reboot is an emerging movement of ever-widening local and national networks of culturally influential young Jews, many of whom would initially consider themselves unlikely to participate in organized Jewish life. Reboot provides an open space for participants to question, explore and reclaim identity and community on their own terms, and fosters collaborations that create books, records, films, salons, events, and other organizing strategies to engage their peers, the larger Jewish community, and the world, in a similar pursuit.

For more information visit www.rebooters.net



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